

ISSN 1750-8916 (PRINT)  
ISSN 1750-8924 (ONLINE)

# The Chinese Journal of International Politics

<https://academic.oup.com/cjip>

## Chinese Scholars Debate World Politics: a Reader

Edited by

Feng Huiyun  
He Kai  
Liu Feng



**OXFORD**  
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Reader  
**2018**

# The Chinese Journal of International Politics

The Institute of International Relations  
Tsinghua University

## Editor-in-Chief

Yan Xuetong, Tsinghua University

## Executive Editor

Sun Xuefeng, Tsinghua University

## Editors

Cao Wei, University of International Relations

Chen Qi, Tsinghua University

M. Taylor Fravel, Massachusetts Institute of Technology

He Kai, Griffith University

Liu Feng, Nankai University

Pu Xiaoyu, University of Nevada, Reno

Qi Haixia, Tsinghua University

Xu Jin, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences

Zhou Fangyin, Guangdong University of Foreign Studies

## Editorial Board

**Barry Buzan**, London School of Economics and Political Science

**Paul Evans**, University of British Columbia

**G. John Ikenberry**, Princeton University

**Takashi Inoguchi**, Chuo University

**Igor Ivanov**, Russian International Affairs Council

**Jia Qingguo**, Peking University

**Alastair Iain Johnston**, Harvard University

**Peter Katzenstein**, Cornell University

**Yuen Foong Khong**, University of Oxford

**John Mearsheimer**, University of Chicago

**Chung-in Moon**, Yonsei University

**Christian Reus-Smit**, University of Queensland

**Varun Sahni**, Jawaharlal Nehru University

**Shen Dingli**, Fudan University

**Javier Solana**, ESADEgeeo-Center for Global Economy and Geopolitics

**Akihiko Tanaka**, University of Tokyo

**William Tow**, Australia National University

**Yan Xuetong**, Tsinghua University

**Zhang Yuyan**, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences

## Editorial Team

Pamela Lord (English language editor), Beijing

Elisabeth Waelkens (production editor), Oxford

The *Chinese Journal of International Politics* aims to advance the systematic and rigorous study of international relations. Besides the papers based on modern methodology, this journal also publishes research products of historical studies and policy-oriented research. This journal is committed to providing a forum for academic papers and articles on problematic issues. Most of its articles are either related to China or have implication for Chinese foreign policy. Manuscripts should be submitted online at <http://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/cjip>.

The opinions expressed in the *Chinese Journal of International Politics* are those of authors and contributors, and do not necessarily reflect those of the editors, the editorial board, Oxford University Press or the organization to which the authors are affiliated.

The *Chinese Journal of International Politics* is covered by the following abstracting and indexing services: SSCI, EBSCO, Scopus, and The Standard Periodical Directory.

© Oxford University Press 2018.

---

## Notice to Contributors

---

The *Chinese Journal of International Politics* (CJIP) aims to advance the systematic and rigorous study of international relations. The journal is committed to publishing academic work that explores such issues as international security, China's foreign policy, international relations theory, international politics and international political economy. Manuscripts on other related areas are also welcomed.

The CJIP is open to all schools of thought and methodological approaches. We encourage and seek innovative work that focuses on research questions, literature reviews, theoretical explanations and empirical verifications. A small number of academic reviews and book reviews are also printed.

Manuscripts must be original and not currently under review elsewhere. If an article is scheduled for publication elsewhere, the author should clearly indicate this at the time of submission. The editors suggest 10 000–20 000 words (including references) as the preferable length. CJIP advocates strong referencing standards and asks authors to pay particular attention to the accuracy and correct presentation of all references. (See Note Format online at [https://academic.oup.com/cjip/pages/General\\_Instructions](https://academic.oup.com/cjip/pages/General_Instructions)).

Manuscripts must be accompanied by an abstract of between 120 and 150 words and a 50 to 100 word biographical note introducing the contributor's education background, current affiliations, research interests, recent publications and full contact details (email, phone, fax and postal).

All manuscripts will be subject to anonymous peer review. Submissions will be processed swiftly and the editors aim to communicate a first decision to the contributors within two months.

Manuscripts should be submitted online at <http://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/cjip>. Full instructions on submitting your manuscript online can be found on the journal home page or at the online submission site.

# **Chinese Scholars Debate World Politics: a CJIP reader**

Edited by

Feng Huiyun

He Kai

Liu Feng

The contents of this reader were first published in the *Chinese Journal of International Politics*, which is edited by Institute of Modern International Relations, Tsinghua University and published by Oxford University Press.

Qi Haixia, "Disputing Chinese Views on Power," 10(2), 2017; Li Mingjiang, "China debates soft power," 2(2), 2008; Pu Xiaoyu, "Controversial Identity of a Rising China," 10(2), 2017; Liu Ruonan, Liu Feng, "Contending Ideas on China's Non-Alliance Strategy," 10(2), 2017; Chen Zheng, "China Debates the Non-Interference Principle," 9(3), 2016; Weizhun Mao, "Debating China's International Responsibility," 10(2), 2017; Xu Jin, Zheyuan Du "The Dominant Thinking Sets in Chinese Foreign Policy Research: A Criticism," 8(3), 2015; Qi Hao, "China Debates the 'New Type of Great Power Relations'," 8(4), 2015; Xu Jin, "Debates in IR Academia and China's Policy Adjustments," 9(4), 2016.

Any citation of these articles should reference the page number(s) from the original CJIP article. All rights reserved; no part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without prior written permission of the Publisher or a licence permitting restricted copying issue in the UK by the Copyright Licensing Agency Ltd, 90 Tottenham Court Road, London W1P 9HE, or in the USA by the Copyright Clearance Center, 222 Rosewood Drive, Danvers, MA 01923.

# Contents

## Editors' Note

*Feng Huiyun, He Kai and Liu Feng*

## Part I China's Power and Identity

Disputing Chinese Views on Power

*Qi Haixia*

Vol. 10, No. 2, pp. 211–239

China debates soft power

*Li Mingjiang*

Vol. 2, No. 2, pp. 287–308

Controversial Identity of a Rising China

*Pu Xiaoyu*

Vol. 10, No. 2, pp. 131–149

## Part II China's Foreign Policy Principles

Contending Ideas on China's Non-Alliance Strategy

*Liu Ruonan and Liu Feng*

Vol. 10, No. 2, pp. 151–171

China Debates the Non-Interference Principle

*Chen Zheng*

Vol. 9, No. 3, pp. 349–374

Debating China's International Responsibility

*Mao Weizhun*

Vol. 10, No. 2, pp. 173–210

## Part III Scholarly Debates and Making Foreign Policy in China

The Dominant Thinking Sets in Chinese Foreign Policy Research:

A Criticism

*Xu Jin and Du Zheyuan*

Vol. 8, No. 3, pp. 251–279

China Debates the 'New Type of Great Power Relations'

*Qi Hao*

Vol. 8, No. 4, pp. 349–370

Debates in IR Academia and China's Policy Adjustments

*Xu Jin*

Vol. 9, No. 4, pp. 459–485

Please visit the journal's website at:  
[www.cjip.oxfordjournals.org](http://www.cjip.oxfordjournals.org)



Scan to view this journal  
on your mobile device



---

# Chinese Scholars Debate World Politics

Feng Huiyun, He Kai, Liu Feng

---

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.

With generous support from the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation (Grant No. 16-1512-150509- IPS), the Griffith Asia Institute is able to collaborate successfully with Tsinghua University's Institute of International Relations to carry out a research project, entitled, "Understanding the Rise of China through the Eyes of Chinese IR Scholars." 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. It is also intended to bridge the perception gap between China and the outside world.

This Reader, "Chinese Scholars Debate World Politics," features nine exemplary works that have been published in the *Chinese Journal of International Politics*. Four papers are drawn from a special issue published in 2017, supported by the MacArthur grant. We hope that these papers as well as our ongoing project will shed some new light on understanding Chinese IR scholars, especially regarding how they perceive world politics and how they can influence Chinese policy making via their internal debates.

# **Part I**

## **China's Power and Identity**



Article

# Disputing Chinese Views on Power

Qi Haixia<sup>†,\*</sup>

<sup>†</sup>Qi Haixia is Associate Professor at the Department of International Relations, Tsinghua University

\*Corresponding author. Email: qihaixia@mail.tsinghua.edu.cn

## Abstract

The concept of power, a keyword in International Relations (IR) theory, has long polarized academic attention in China. In the 1990s and early 21st century, many Chinese academics concentrated their energies on gauging the comprehensive national power of major world powers. But, in contrast to their foreign peers, Chinese scholars have tended to underestimate China's comprehensive national power. In the first decade of the 2000s, soft power superseded comprehensive national power as a main focus of attention in China's academia, and variations in China's foreign policy accompanied this shift of scholarly focus. Traditional policies such as 'keeping a low profile' and 'never seek hegemony' were questioned, while new slogans, such as 'be a responsible great power' and 'peaceful rise' gained more support. The study of Chinese scholars' perception of power is helpful for understanding China's foreign policy choices.

## Introduction

China's rapid development and persistent but peaceful rise has caused wide public concern in recent years. How to interpret correctly China's foreign policy and predict accurately China's strategic choice are the questions that scholars now address. The debate on whether China is a status quo state or an assertive power has become a hot topic.<sup>1</sup>

- 1 Kai He and Huiyun Feng, 'Debating China's Assertiveness: Taking China's Power and Interests Seriously', *International Politics*, Vol. 49, No. 5 (2012), pp. 633–44; Alastair Iain Johnston, 'How New and Assertive Is China's New Assertiveness?', *International Security*, Vol. 37, No. 4 (2013), pp. 7–48; Thomas Christensen, 'The Advantages of an Assertive China: Responding to Beijing's Abrasive Diplomacy', *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 90, No. 2 (2011), pp. 54–67; Alastair Iain Johnston, 'Is China a Status Quo Power?', *International Security*, Vol. 27, No. 4, (2003), pp. 5–56; David Shambaugh, 'China or America: Which is the Revisionist Power?', *Survival*, Vol. 43, No. 3 (2001), pp. 25–30; Nicholas Taylor, 'China as a Status Quo or Revisionist Power? Implications for Australia', *Security Challenges*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (2007), pp. 29–45; Feng Huiyun, 'Is China a Revisionist Power?', *Chinese Journal of International Politics*,

A study of scholars' opinions on power may help to predict China's future foreign policy strategy.<sup>2</sup> Li Mingjiang introduces Chinese scholars' debate on soft power, and finds that their understanding of this concept is not limited to the scope of Joseph Nye's framework.<sup>3</sup> In his studies on China's recognition of soft power, Young Nam Cho proposes that soft power might promote China's leadership in Asia.<sup>4</sup> James Paradise has discussed the relationship between China's emphasis on soft power and its setting up of Confucius Institutes overseas.<sup>5</sup> Although such findings are helpful for our understanding of the Chinese view on soft power, these scholars overlook the fact that Chinese scholars' perception of power has evolved from comprehensive national power to soft power. One can hardly grasp the essence of China's foreign policy without making a thorough comparison of Chinese scholars' understanding of comprehensive national power and of soft power.

Power, as one of the core concepts of international relations, has without doubt garnered enormous attention in China. After thoroughly analysing Chinese scholars' interpretation of the concept of power since 1980, one finds that Chinese academia has undergone a transition from an emphasis on the importance of comprehensive national power to concentrating on soft power. From 1980 to 2000, many Chinese scholars carried out research on the implications of comprehensive national power. In the 21st century, it becomes clear that many Chinese scholars have begun to analyse the significance of soft power. What is the real reason for Chinese scholars' shift of focus? Is a careful study of expert opinion helpful for understanding Chinese governmental decisions? The purpose of this article is to answer these questions.

In tandem with China's rise, China becomes socialized by the outside world.<sup>6</sup> The impact of China's socialization can be clarified through a systematic study of the process of Chinese scholars' adoption of foreign concepts and theories. Although Chinese scholars may not have direct impact on the policymaking process, their consensus is undoubtedly helpful to explain certain perennial Chinese foreign policies such as 'keep a low profile' and 'never seek hegemony'. China's preference for certain choices over others may correlate with scholarly bias. If a certain policy gains the support of both China's government and academia, it may be influential and long lasting. Therefore, the study of Chinese scholars' understanding of comprehensive power and soft power is the starting point for us to grasp the key points of China's foreign policy. It should be noted that this article does not try to

Vol. 2, No. 3 (2009), pp. 313–34; Scott L. Kastner and Phillip C. Saunders, 'Is China a Status Quo or Revisionist State? Leadership Travel as an Empirical Indicator of Foreign Policy Priorities', *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 56, No. 1 (2012), pp. 163–77; Brantly Womack, 'China and the Future Status Quo', *Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol. 8, No. 2 (2015), pp. 115–37.

- 2 Deborah Welch Larson, 'Will China be a New Type of Great Power?', *Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol. 8, No. 4 (2015), pp. 323–48.
- 3 Li Mingjiang, 'China Debates Soft Power', *Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol. 2, No. 2 (2008), pp. 287–308.
- 4 Young Nam Cho and Jong HoJeong, 'China's Soft Power: Discussions, Resources, and Prospects', *Asian Survey*, Vol. 48, No. 3 (2008), pp. 453–72.
- 5 James Paradise, 'China and International Harmony: The Role of Confucius Institutes in Bolstering Beijing's Soft Power', *Asian Survey*, Vol. 49, No. 4 (2009), pp. 647–69.
- 6 Cameron G. Thies, 'China's Rise and the Socialisation of Rising Powers', *Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol. 8, No. 3 (2015), pp. 281–300.

prove a causal link between scholars' discussions and China's policy, but is limited to summarizing Chinese scholars' understanding of both comprehensive national power and soft power. By probing scholars' academic inclinations and biases, we can grasp both the academic consensus and divergences and successfully analyse China's foreign policies.

The main content of this article is as follows: the first section analyses Chinese scholars' world ranking of major states' comprehensive national power compared with that of Western scholars. The main difference between Chinese scholars and foreign scholars' estimations is that former gives China a lower ranking than does the latter. The second section concentrates on Chinese scholars' research on soft power. The third section analyses the transition of scholars' interest from comprehensive national power to soft power. The conclusion discusses the article's findings and implications.

## Chinese Scholars' Debate on Comprehensive National Power in the 1990s

Since the 1990s, many Chinese scholars have displayed a keen interest in measuring and ranking major states' comprehensive national power. After introducing their operationalization and ranking of comprehensive national power, and comparing Chinese and foreign scholars' opinions on this topic, we may discern Chinese scholars' preferences and biases.

### The Operationalization of Comprehensive National Power

Since first introduced, the topic of comprehensive national power has gained enormous attention and been thoroughly studied in China's academic circle in recent decades. However, although Chinese scholars have reached the consensus that measuring comprehensive national power is helpful for judging the status of major powers, their conclusions seem to differ from those of foreign scholars.

Many scholars in China have readily accepted the concept of comprehensive national power since the 1990s, and carried out research on it. Among them, Huang Wang Songfen's work has been among the most influential. He selects 17 countries and divides them under the three headings of Western, namely, the United States, Japan, Germany, France, Italy, the UK, and Canada; developed, namely, Russia (or the Soviet Union), South Africa, and Australia; and developing countries, namely, India, Indonesia, South Korea, Brazil, Mexico, and Egypt.<sup>7</sup> According to Wang Songfen's assessment, in 1970, China ranked 10th in comprehensive national power, while the United States held pole position and Japan was eighth. Ten years later, in 1980, China was still 10th and the United States was still first, but Japan had risen to fifth place. And finally, in 1990 China remained 10th, the United States maintained pole position, and Japan rose to fourth place.<sup>8</sup>

Some Chinese scholars calculated each state's comprehensive national power in the 1990s. Huang Shuofeng, a researcher at the China's People's Liberation Army Academy of Military Sciences, measured the overall ranking of major states' comprehensive national power in 1996, and reached the conclusion that China was seventh, and the United State

7 Wang Songfen, 'Shijie zhuyao guojia zonghe guoli de shice ji fenxi (1970-1990nian)' ('Measurement and Analysis of the Comprehensive National Power of the World's Major Countries (1970-1990)'), *Shijie jingji yu zhengzhi (World Economics and Politics)*, No.7 (1997), p. 13.

8 *Ibid.*, p. 15.

was the strongest. To my surprise, however, Huang ranked Japan as the second strongest.<sup>9</sup> International Relations (IR) scholars at the Chinese Institute of Contemporary International Relations have also estimated and compared the comprehensive national power of the major states. They declared that, in 1998, the United States was the world's strongest state and Japan the second strongest. China is seventh here, as they were not optimistic about China's future due to the difficulty in maintaining high speed long-term economic growth.<sup>10</sup>

Some scholars have studied major states' comprehensive national power post 2000. Researchers at the Chinese Academy of Sciences released *China's Sustainable Development Strategy Report*, which measured China's comprehensive national power from 1990s to 2000s. It states that China rose from eighth place in 1990 to seventh in 2000.<sup>11</sup> Li Shenming and Wang Yizhou, researchers at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, also released a report on the international political environment which evaluated the comprehensive national power of major states. According to this report, in 2006 the United States possessed an absolute advantage over other countries as the world's sole superpower state; the UK, Russia, France, Germany, China, Japan, and Canada were in the second echelon,<sup>12</sup> and China was sixth.<sup>13</sup> In the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences report evaluating the comprehensive national power of the major states in 2010, China had fallen to seventh place. The results this time were: the United States was first, Japan was second, Germany was third, Canada was fourth, France was fifth, Russia was sixth, and China was seventh.<sup>14</sup>

Table 1 shows different Chinese scholars' evaluation results. Although their conclusions with regard to China's comprehensive national power in different periods seem to differ, we can see that all regard China as a developing state far behind the great powers, and whose status has dropped from fifth to 10th place. Table 1 not only shows China's ranking, but also that of the United States and Japan. The United States is undoubtedly the strongest in the eyes of Chinese scholars. To my surprise, however, most scholars believed that, from 1970 to 2010, China's strength fell below that of Japan, whose military force was limited after WWII.

- 9 Huang Shuofeng, *Zonghe guoli xinlun (New Study on Comprehensive National Power)* (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 1999), p.199.
- 10 Zhongguo xiandai guoji guanxi yanjiusuo zonghe guoli ketizu (the China Institute of Modern International Relations Comprehensive National Power Research Group), 'Shijie zhuyao guojia zonghe guoli pinggu' ('An Assessment of World Major States' Comprehensive National Power'), *Kexue xinwen zhouban (Science News Weekly)*, Vol. 32 (2000), p. 8.
- 11 Zhongguo kexueyuan kechixu fazhan zhanlue yanjiuzu (China's Sustainable Development Strategy Research Group of the Chinese Academy of Sciences), *Zhongguo kechixu fazhan yanjiu baogao (Report on China's Sustainable Development)* (Beijing: Zhongguo kexue chubanshe, 2003), p.115.
- 12 Li Shenming and Wang Yizhou eds., *2006: quanqiu zhengzhi yu anquan baogao (2006: Global Politics and Security Report)* (Beijing: Shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe, 2006), p. 240.
- 13 *Ibid.*, p. 265.
- 14 Li Shenming and Wang Yizhou, eds., *2010: quanqiu zhengzhi yu anquan baogao (2010: Global Politics and Security Report)* (Beijing: Shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe, 2010), pp. 273–75.

**Table 1.** Ranking by Chinese Scholars of China's Comprehensive National Power

Scholar or Institute	China's ranking	US's ranking	Japan's ranking	Number of states compared in the study	The year of the ranking in the study	Ranking results
Wang Songfen	10	1	8	17	1970	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. United States</li> <li>2. Soviet Union</li> <li>3. Canada</li> <li>4. Australia</li> <li>5. Germany</li> <li>6. France</li> <li>7. UK</li> <li>8. Japan</li> <li>9. Italy</li> <li>10. China</li> <li>11. Brazil</li> <li>12. Mexico</li> <li>13. India</li> <li>14. South Africa</li> <li>15. South Korea</li> <li>16. Egypt</li> <li>17. Indonesia</li> </ol>
Wang Songfen	10	1	5	17	1980	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. United States</li> <li>2. Soviet Union</li> <li>3. Canada</li> <li>4. Germany</li> <li>5. Japan</li> </ol>

(continued)

Table 1. (continued)

Scholar or Institute	China's ranking	US's ranking	Japan's ranking	Number of states compared in the study	The year of the ranking in the study	Ranking results	
Wang Songfen						6. France	
						7. Australia	
						8. UK	
						9. Italy	
						10. China	
						11. Brazil	
						12. South Korea	
						13. Mexico	
						14. South Africa	
						15. India	
						16. Indonesia	
						17. Egypt	
		10	1	4	17	1990	1. United States
							2. Russia
							3. Canada
							4. Japan
							5. Germany
						6. France	
						7. Australia	
						8. UK	
						9. Italy	
						10. China	
						11. South Korea	

(continued)

**Table 1.** (continued)

Scholar or Institute	China's ranking	US's ranking	Japan's ranking	Number of states compared in the study	The year of the ranking in the study	Ranking results
Huang Shuofeng	7	1	2	12	1996	12. Brazil 13. Mexico 14. India 15. South Africa 16. Indonesia 17. Egypt 1. United States 2. Japan 3. Germany 4. Russia 5. France 6. UK 7. China 8. Canada 9. Italy 10. Australia 11. Brazil 12. India
China Institute of Contemporary International Relations	7	1	2	7	1998	1. United States 2. Japan 3. France 4. UK 5. Germany

(continued)

Table 1. (continued)

Scholar or Institute	China's ranking	US's ranking	Japan's ranking	Number of states compared in the study	The year of the ranking in the study	Ranking results
Chinese Academy of Sciences	8	1	2	13	1990	6. Russia 7. China
						1. United States 2. Japan 3. Germany 4. Canada 5. France 6. UK 7. Russia 8. China 9. Italy 10. Australia 11. India 12. Brazil 13. South Africa
						1. United States 2. Japan 3. Germany 4. Canada 5. France 6. UK 7. China 8. Russia
Chinese Academy of Sciences	7	1	2	13	1995	1. United States 2. Japan 3. Germany 4. Canada 5. France 6. UK 7. China 8. Russia

(continued)

**Table 1.** (continued)

Scholar or Institute	China's ranking	US's ranking	Japan's ranking	Number of states compared in the study	The year of the ranking in the study	Ranking results
Chinese Academy of Sciences	7	1	2	13	2000	9. Australia 10. Italy 11. India 12. Brazil 13. South Africa
						1. United States 2. Japan 3. Canada 4. Germany 5. France 6. UK 7. China 8. Russia 9. Australia 10. Italy 11. India 12. Brazil 13. South Africa
						1. United States 2. UK 3. Russia 4. France 5. Germany
Li Shenming and Wang Yizhou	6	1	7	10	2006	

(continued)

Table 1. (continued)

Scholar or Institute	China's ranking	US's ranking	Japan's ranking	Number of states compared in the study	The year of the ranking in the study	Ranking results
Li Shenming and Wang Yizhou	7	1	2	10	2010	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>6. China</li> <li>7. Japan</li> <li>8. Canada</li> <li>9. South Korea</li> <li>10. India</li> <li>1. United States</li> <li>2. Japan</li> <li>3. Germany</li> <li>4. Canada</li> <li>5. France</li> <li>6. Russia</li> <li>7. China</li> <li>8. UK</li> <li>9. India</li> <li>10. Italy</li> </ol>

To judge whether or not Chinese scholars' conclusions bear any similarity to those of Western scholars, Table 2 compares their results. Wilhelm Fucks, Robert Cox, and Ray Cline represent foreign scholars, and Huang Shuofeng and Wang Songfen Chinese ones. At the same time, Table 2 also shows the ranking of major states such as the United States, Soviet Union (Russia), Japan, China, and the Federal Republic of Germany (Germany).

**Table 2.** The Ranking of China's Comprehensive National Power by Chinese and Foreign Scholars

Scholar's formula	Year	Number of indexes	Ranking of major states				
			United States	Soviet Union (Russia)	Japan	China	Federal Republic of Germany (Germany)
Wilhelm Fucks' National Power Equation	1970	3	1	2	3	5	4
	2000	3	1	2	4	3	5
Robert Cox's Equation	1950	5	1	2	9	5	7
	1958	5	1	2	10	4	7
	1967	5	1	2	5	5	7
Ray Cline's Equation	1978	44	2	1	5	7	4
Huang Shuofeng's Equation	1986	150	1	2	3	4	5
	1989	150	1	2	3	6	4
Wang Songfen's Equation	1970	85	1	2	8	10	5
	1980	85	1	2	5	10	4
	1990	85	1	2	4	10	5

Source: Wang Songfen, *Measurement and Analysis of the Comprehensive National Power of the World's Major Countries (1970–1990)*, p. 16.

Based on both Table 1 and Table 2, it is clear that China's comprehensive national power may seem less strong to Chinese scholars than to foreign scholars. Chinese scholars' underestimations may possibly be attributable to their operationalization, because in Table 2 Chinese scholars use far more indexes than foreign scholars.

### Chinese Scholars' Conceptualization of Comprehensive National Power

The difference between Chinese and foreign scholars' assessments appears to lie in the former's underrating of China's comprehensive national power and in the complexity of their indicators. Underestimations can thus be explained not only by Chinese scholars' preference, but also by the way they define and measure the concept.

According to Wang Songfen's definition, comprehensive national power is the sum of all kinds of strengths a sovereign state possesses in a certain period of time,<sup>15</sup> and includes eight factors: resources, domestic economy, foreign economic and trade development, scientific and technological capability, social development, military capability, governmental capability, and diplomatic capability.<sup>16</sup> In Wang Songfen's eyes, China's resources and military strength are strong, close behind those of the United States and the Soviet Union, but China's capabilities as regards science and technology and social development are weak, and far behind other major states.<sup>17</sup>

The China NBS (National Bureau of Statistics) research group's evaluation of the comprehensive national power of the world's major countries defines comprehensive national

15 Wang Songfen, *Measurement and Analysis of the Comprehensive National Power of the World's Major Countries (1970-1990)*, p. 13.

16 *Ibid.*

17 Wang Songfen, *Measurement and Analysis of the Comprehensive National Power of the World's Major Countries (1970-1990)*, p.16.

power as the ability of a sovereign state to survive, to develop, and to affect the outside world in a certain period. Here, the ability to survive is the fundamental force safeguarding a country's security; the ability to develop provides the impetus for a country's sustainable development; and the ability to affect the outside world can enhance a country's international status and expand its international influence.<sup>18</sup>

Huang Shuofeng, a researcher at the Chinese People's Liberation Army Strategic Research Department of the Academy of Military Science, believes that a country's comprehensive national power encompasses all kinds of strength, both material and spiritual.<sup>19</sup> Indicators of comprehensive national power thus include political power, economic power, science and technology capabilities, national defence force, cultural and educational capability, diplomatic capability, and total resources.<sup>20</sup>

Chinese Academy of Sciences' researchers regard comprehensive national power as encompassing not only such factors as governmental capability, economic development, and social progress, but also ecological systems. The emphasis on ecological systems may represent a unique strand of scientists' understanding.<sup>21</sup> Researchers at Chinese Academy of Social Sciences hold that comprehensive national power includes three factors: national resources (including capabilities with regard to science and technology, human capital, capital resources, information resources, and natural resources), governmental control capability, and national power (including military, diplomatic, and economic strength).<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, Wu Chunqiu holds that comprehensive national power should at the very least include land area, geographical location, natural resources, weather and terrain, population, national production, science and technology capabilities, cultural and educational capabilities, transportation capability, defence capability, ideology, political systems, political principles and foreign policy, leadership and courage, and allies and international aid.<sup>23</sup>

With regard to an explanation for Chinese scholars' underestimation of China's power, the measurement criteria might offer three possible reasons. First, Chinese scholars are inclined to use more indexes than foreign scholars when evaluating comprehensive national power. For example, Huang Shuofeng includes 150 indicators in his report, while in the famous Cline formula, comprehensive national power is the product of hard power and

18 Guojia tongjiju shijie zhuyao guojia zonghe guoli pingjia ketizu (the National Bureau of Statistics Research Group on the Evaluation of the Comprehensive National Power of the World's Major Countries), 'Shijie zhuyao guojia zonghe guoli pingjia yanjiu' ('Research on the Evaluation of Comprehensive National Power of the World's Major Countries'), *Zhongguo xinxi bao* (*Chinese Information News*), January 23, 2015, Version 1, p. 1.

19 Huang Shuofeng, *New Study on Comprehensive National Power*, p. 5.

20 *Ibid.*, p.13.

21 China's Sustainable Development Strategy Research Group, *Report on China's Sustainable Development Research*.

22 Li Shenming and Wang Yizhou eds., 2006: *Global Politics and Security Report*, p. 240.

23 Wu Chunqiu, 'Zonghe guolulun jiqi dui woguo fazhan zhanlue de qidi' ('On Comprehensive National Strength and Its Enlightenment on China's Development Strategy'), *Guoji jishu jingji yanjiu xuebao* (*Journal of International technical and Economic Research*), No. 4 (1989), pp. 1-7.

soft power, and includes only 44 indexes.<sup>24</sup> It is thus clear that these different results are attributable to different evaluation systems which use different indexes and evaluation methods. The different factors of national power do not have equal functions; some are of key importance, others are irrelevant. The inclusion of so many indexes, therefore, may weaken the key factors. It is thus clear that including such an abundance of factors in this concept may blunt accuracy when assessing comprehensive national power. The choice of indexes may also relate to the background of the scholars carrying out such evaluations. The foreign researchers tackling this topic are mainly realists, so their indexes largely consist of material factors. However, Chinese scholars in this field generally have a professional background in natural science. For example, Huang Shuofeng graduated from the department of mathematics, and Wang Songfen majored in statistics. Therefore, they may have been influenced by their particular majors, and so inclined to employ indexes that they regard as non-negligible, but which are of low importance in IR.<sup>25</sup>

Secondly, Chinese scholars stress the importance of per capita Gross Domestic Product (GDP), and always use it as an index, which invariably results in an underestimate China's economic strength.<sup>26</sup> For example, Wang Songfen holds that the reasons for China's lower command of national power than other major powers are: limited per capitare sources, low efficiency, and imperfect economic institutions.<sup>27</sup> Huang Shuofeng lists four economic factors: gross index, per capita index, industrial system, and people's living standards.<sup>28</sup> Western scholars, however, tend to focus on total amounts. For example, in the COW National Material Capabilities Data Documentation, the Composite Index of National Capability (CINC) score is measured according to concrete indicators, such as military expenditures, military personnel, primary energy consumption, and total population.<sup>29</sup> China has the world's largest population, but Chinese scholars regard this fact as a burden when calculating national power. Zhou Fangyin consequently holds that the measuring of comprehensive national power should entail a comprehensive assessment rather than just that of per capita GDP.<sup>30</sup> This difference may be rooted in the purpose of research. Many foreign scholars emphasize the importance of factors relating to military ability, such as

24 Ray S. Cline, *World Power Trends and U.S. Foreign Policy for the 1980s* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1981), p. 13.

25 The analysis here is based on an interview with Professor Zhou Fangyin, a former expert in the Comprehensive National Power Research Group of China Institute of Modern International Relations.

26 Zhou Fangyin, 'Zonghe guoli shiyexia de jingji shili hengliang' ('The Measurement of Economic Strength in Comprehensive National Power'), *Taipingyang xuebao* (*Journal of the Pacific*), No. 5 (2005), p. 28.

27 Wang Songfen, *Measurement and Analysis of the Comprehensive National Power of the World's Major Countries (1970-1990)*, p. 17.

28 Huang Shuofeng, *New Study on Comprehensive National Power*, p. 98.

29 J. David Singer, Stuart Bremer, and John Stuckey, 'Capability Distribution, Uncertainty, and Major Power War, 1820-1965', in Bruce Russett ed., *Peace, War, and Numbers* (Beverly Hills: Sage, 1972), pp.19-48; J. David Singer, 'Reconstructing the Correlates of War Dataset on Material Capabilities of States, 1816-1985', *International Interactions*, Vol.14 (1987), pp.115-32. <http://correlatesofwar.org>.

30 Zhou Fangyin, 'The Measurement of Economic Strength in Comprehensive National Power', p. 32.

**Table 3.** Major States' Comprehensive National Power in Different Fields in 1998

Indicators	United States	Japan	China	Russia	Germany	France	UK
Economic	8924	6670	2511	2424	5143	4820	4850
Science and technology	9492	8641	1337	3124	6276	6904	6077
Military	9503	1338	1068	3172	1222	2085	2183
Natural resources	3330	1401	4621	5210	1289	1918	1792

Source: Wang Zaibang et al., 'Shijie zhuyao guojia zonghe guoli pinggu' ('The Evaluation of World Major States' Comprehensive National Power'), *Guoji ziliao xinxi (International Information)*, Vol.7 (2000), p. 2.

military spending and iron and steel, because they are most concerned about a state's performance in war. Chinese scholars' study of comprehensive national power, however, is under the background of reform and opening up, where both the Chinese government and individuals regard economic development as the central task. Therefore, the Chinese measurement of comprehensive national power also includes certain economic and social factors.<sup>31</sup>

Thirdly, Chinese scholars' lack of self-confidence may partly explain their undervaluation. With regard to details of operationalization, Table 3 shows one Chinese scholar's evaluation of the power of different states in different fields.

In Table 3, Wang Zaibang compares national power in four fields: economic, science and technology, military, and natural resources. China's capabilities in science and technology and military power appear in Table 3 as the lowest, and its economic power as surpassing only that of Russia, and far less than that of other major states'. Natural resources are shown as China's sole advantage. Wang Zaibang's low estimation of China's science and technology capabilities and military power may be partly due to Chinese scholars' lack of self-confidence. Whoever in academia holds the opinion that China has sufficient military strength can expect severe criticism from other scholars. A case in point is Professor Li Shaojun, a researcher at China's Academy of Social Sciences. Li suffered icy disapproval in 2006 for holding the opinion that China has the world's second strongest military.<sup>32</sup> This phenomenon may be the result of long-term social unrest and academic reflection. Since the late Qing Dynasty, China has experienced many failures in battles with Western states. As a result, the Chinese have questioned and criticized aspects of their traditional culture, such as Confucianism, turning instead to Western science and technology. China's military power is hence questioned by Chinese scholars, even though China fought the United States, South Korea, India, and Vietnam in the Cold War.

### Chinese Scholars' Debate on Soft Power

Before the 21st century, Chinese scholars exhibited great interest in studying comprehensive national power, but after the year 2000 their focus seemed to shift to soft power. What caused this transition? To find out, we need make a thorough analysis of the related materials.

31 Interview with Professor Zhou Fangyin.

32 *Ibid.*

### Transition from Comprehensive National Power to Soft Power

Underestimation of China's comprehensive power did not constitute the mainstream in the 2000s. In the late 1990s, certain Chinese scholars started to espouse the view that China's comprehensive power is the second strongest in the world. Hu Angang, a professor at Tsinghua University, may have been the first Chinese scholar in this regard. He maintained that China's comprehensive national power had developed rapidly in 1998 to achieve a world second ranking.<sup>33</sup> In the early 2000s, this was an opinion highly unlikely to gain support from other Chinese scholars. In view of China's speedy rise, however, more Chinese scholars now realize that China is in fact stronger than they may have expected. Professor Yan Xuetong adopted a power-class approach to evaluate China's national power, and arrived at the conclusion that China ranked second in the world in 2005 by virtue of its military, political, and economic power.<sup>34</sup> Tang Yanlin, meanwhile, has proposed that China's comprehensive national power in 2010, was second strongest in the world.<sup>35</sup> But in the eyes of Hu Angang, China's comprehensive national power surpassed even that of the United States to become the world's strongest in 2013.<sup>36</sup>

Although underestimation was no longer the mainstream thinking, there occurred in the 2000s a clear shift in Chinese scholars' interest from comprehensive power to soft power. Joseph Nye had highlighted the importance of soft power in 1990, defining it as 'the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than through coercion'.<sup>37</sup> At that time, however, the main academic focus was on comprehensive national power, and the importance of soft power was barely acknowledged. In 1993, Wang Huning, a former professor at Fudan University, was perhaps the first Chinese IR scholar to introduce to China the concept of soft power,<sup>38</sup> but it drew scant academic attention. It is thus strange that soft power should be such a source of concern in the 2010s, to the extent of supplanting 'comprehensive power' as a main IR topic.

To present detailed evidence of this transition of Chinese scholars' attention, Figure 1 shows the amount of articles appearing in academic journals from 2000 to 2015 whose

- 33 Hu Angang and Men Honghua, 'Zhong mei ri e yin zonghe shili de guoji bijiao (1980-1998)' ('International Comparisons of the Comprehensive National Powers of China, United States, Japan, Russia and India(1980-1998)'), *Guoqing baogao (National Report)*, Vol. 5 (2002), p. 77.
- 34 Yan Xuetong, 'The Rise of China and its Power Status', *Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol. 1 (2006), p. 21.
- 35 Tang Yanlin and Wu Zhikun, 'Shijie zhuyao guojia zonghe guoli fenxi: jiyu SPSS shuli tongji fenxi' (The Analysis of Major states' Comprehensive National Power: Based on the Statistic Analysis by SPSS), *Gaige yu zhanlue (Reformation and Strategy)*, Vol. 30, No. 8 (2014), pp. 28–31.
- 36 Hu Angang, Zheng Yunfeng and Gao Yuning, 'Dui Zhong mei zonghe guoli de pinggu (1990-2013)' (The Measurement of the Comprehensive National Power of China and the U.S.), *Journal of Tsinghua University (Philosophy and Social Sciences)*, Vol. 30, No. 1 (2015), pp. 26–39.
- 37 Joseph Nye Jr., *Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power* (New York: Basic Books, 1990).
- 38 Wang Huning, 'Zuowei guojia shili de wenhua: ruanquanli' ('Soft Power: the Culture as the Strength of the Country'), *Fudan xuebao shehui kexue ban (The Social Science Edition of the Fudan University Journal)*, No. 3 (1993), pp. 91–96.

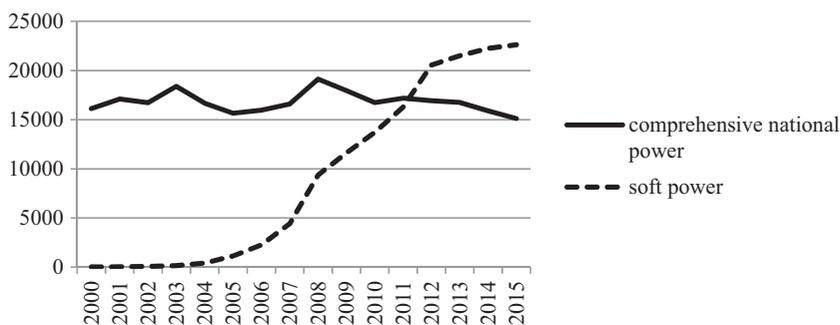


Fig. 1. The Amount of Articles in Chinese Academic Journals about Power since 2000.

abstracts featured the phrases ‘comprehensive national power’ and ‘soft power’.<sup>39</sup> The data source is the China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI) database, the largest for Chinese journals, and which many scholars use for findings from Chinese academia.<sup>40</sup> Figure 1 shows the interesting phenomenon of a more rapid rise in articles relating to ‘soft power’ than to ‘comprehensive national power’. The period from 2008 to 2012 appears to encompass the turning point wherein attention to ‘soft power’ surpassed that to ‘comprehensive national power’.

When giving due consideration to the Chinese understanding of comprehensive national power, this transition is not entirely unexpected. As earlier mentioned, when measuring comprehensive national power, Chinese scholars are inclined to include indexes such as culture and values in the index as a whole. Chinese scholars focus not only on material factors, but also emphasize subjective ones, such as institutions and culture. For example, Huang Shuofeng divides elements of national power into two categories: physical and spiritual forces.<sup>41</sup> Wu Chunqiu’s indicators of national power include such factors as ideology, leadership, and courage, which are subjective elements.<sup>42</sup> In Wang Songfen’s study, subjective factors like governmental capability and diplomatic ability are among the indexes of national power.<sup>43</sup> Jia Haitao holds that comprehensive national power is composed of five basic factors: resources, military power, economic power, cultural power, and soft power.<sup>44</sup> Li Zhongjie holds that comprehensive national power encompasses natural, social,

39 Data source: <http://www.cnki.net/>.

40 Li Mingjiang, ‘China Debates Soft Power’, *Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol. 2, No. 2 (2008), pp. 287–308.

41 Huang Shuofeng, *New Study on Comprehensive National Power*, pp. 162–65.

42 Wu Chunqiu, ‘On Comprehensive National Strength and Its Enlightenment on China’s Development Strategy’, pp. 1–7.

43 Wang Songfen, *Measurement and Analysis of the Comprehensive National Power of the World’s Major Countries (1970-1990)*, p. 13.

44 Jia Haitao, ‘Zhongguo zonghe guoli pinggu ji shijie paiming: lilun, xianshi ji ceping gongshi’(The Assessment and Ranking of China’s Comprehensive National Power: Theory, Reality and Assessment Formula’), *Nanjing ligong daxue xuebao shehui kexue ban (Journal of Nanjing University of Science and Technology)*, Vol. 25, No. 5 (2012), p. 13.

physical, and mental factors.<sup>45</sup> That Chinese scholars welcome and accept the concept of soft power, therefore, is unsurprising.

The next question is, why did Chinese scholars not embrace the concept of soft power until the beginning of the 21st century? The answer also relates to the tendency, earlier mentioned, to underestimate China's national power. The huge status gap in the eyes of Chinese scholars between China and other major states remained until the turn of the 21st century. The year 2008, when China hosted the Beijing Olympic Games, was a watershed in this, and many other respects. Before 2008, far fewer articles were written on soft power than on comprehensive national power, and at the beginning of the 21st century, negligible articles appeared on the former. In 2008, however, the amount of academic papers on soft power rose to more than 1000, and in 2011 surpassed those on the topic of comprehensive national power. The Olympic Games and the world financial crisis brought China's rise to the domestic and international forefront. The tendency in academia to underestimate China's comprehensive national power, therefore, lost popular support. When estimations of comprehensive national power no longer fit the current environment, scholars tend to choose new concepts.<sup>46</sup>

What's more, the concepts of comprehensive national power and soft power were both introduced in China in the 1990s. The reason for Chinese scholars' adoption of the former and disinterest in the latter may have been the popularity of realism in Chinese academic IR circles at that time. Similar to Marxism, which regards economic factors as the substructure that determine the super structure of a society, which includes its ideology and culture, realism also emphasizes the importance of material factors. In the 1990s, therefore, Chinese scholars could easily accept the function of comprehensive national power as superior to that of soft power. Since 2008, however, China has contended with enormous external pressure, notably America's rebalancing strategy and the South China Sea dispute. Chinese scholars have consequently realized that improvements in comprehensive national power may not necessarily achieve China's peaceful rise. To improve China's international status, therefore, they turned to the study of soft power.

### Chinese Scholars' Conceptualization of Soft Power

The concept of soft power has only recently become popular in China. Zheng Yongnian has observed the interesting phenomenon whereby a Western concept or theory such as soft power, which has obvious defects and had little impact in Western academic circles, has spread so quickly in China in recent years and had such far-reaching impact.<sup>47</sup> But the definition of soft power is to some extent ambiguous; Chinese scholars differ as to whether soft power is essentially a cultural or political force.

45 Li Zhongjie, 'Zenyang renshi he duidai zonghe guoli de jingzheng: zenyang renshi he bawo dangjin de guoji zhanlue xingshi zhiqi' ('How to Understand and Deal with the Comprehensive National Power Competition: the 7th Piece on How to Understand and Grasp the Current International Situation'), *Liaowang xinwen zhouban (Outlook News Weekly)*, July 15, No. 29 (2002), p. 22.

46 Yan Liang, 'Renjun GDP zhibiao de wuyong' ('The Misuse of the GDP Concept'), *Guoji zhengzhi kexue (Science of International Politics)*, No. 3 (2007), pp. 65–90.

47 Zheng Yongnian and Zhang Chi, 'Guoji zhengzhi zhongde ruanlilang yiji dui woguo ruanlilang de guancha' ('The Soft Power in International Politics and the Observation of China's Soft Power'), *Shijie jingji yu zhengzhi (World Economics and Politics)*, No. 7 (2007), p. 7.

According to Nye's definition:

Soft power is not merely the same as influence ... and soft power is more than just persuasion or the ability to move people by argument ... soft power is attractive power ... soft power resources are the assets that produce such attraction ... The soft power of a country rests primarily on three resources: its culture (in places where it is attractive to others), its political values (when it lives up to them at home and abroad), and its foreign policies (when they are seen as legitimate and having moral authority).<sup>48</sup>

Since both cultural and political factors are included in this definition, they are the focuses of Chinese scholars' debate.

The first school regards culture as the core of soft power. Wang Huning, former professor of Fudan University and the first Chinese scholar to introduce the concept of soft power to China, holds that culture and values are the essence of soft power.<sup>49</sup> Professor Yu Xintian also believes that culture is the core of soft power, and that political activities should be guided by correct values.<sup>50</sup> Another school of Chinese scholars hold that political factors play a decisive role in soft power. For example, Professor Yan Xuetong holds that political power is the operational force, while culture is just a resource.<sup>51</sup>

Chinese scholars' definitions of soft power thus differ. The definition of those who stress the importance of culture relates to values. Wang Huning holds that soft power includes a country's national morale, economic system, political system, science and technology, ideology, and other factors.<sup>52</sup> Zhu Feng, a professor at Peking University, defines soft power as a country's ability to attract or persuade other countries.<sup>53</sup> Professor Pang Zhongying perceives soft power as moral strength and moral prestige.<sup>54</sup> Zhang Xiaoming, a professor at Peking University, holds that soft power can, through ideological and cultural attraction, indirectly influence others' determination of their particular preferences, or induce other states to follow and obey rules voluntarily.<sup>55</sup>

- 48 Joseph Nye Jr., *The Paradox of American Power: Why the World's only Superpower Can't Go It Alone* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 8–12.
- 49 Wang Huning, 'Soft Power: The Culture as the Strength of the Country', pp. 91–96.
- 50 Yu Xintian, 'Ruanshili jianshe yu zhongguo duiwai zhanlue' ('The Construction of Soft Power and China's Foreign Strategy'), *Guoji wenti yanjiu (Study of International Issues)*, No. 2 (2008), p.16.
- 51 Yan Xuetong, 'Ruanshili de hexin shi zhengzhi shili' ('The Core of Soft Power is Political Power'), *Huanqiu shibao (Global Times)*, May 22, 2007; Yan Xuetong, 'Wenhua ziyuan xuyao zhengzhi yunyong: dui zhengzhi shili shi ruanshili hexin taolun zhong mouxie wenti de jieshi' ('Cultural Resources Need Political Operation: Explanation of the Discussion of Whether Political Power is Core of Soft Power'), *Huanqiu shibao (Global Times)*, August 2, 2007.
- 52 Wang Huning, 'Soft Power: Culture as the Strength of the Country', pp. 91–96.
- 53 Zhu Feng, 'Qianyi guoji guanxi lilun zhong de ruanshili' ('Soft Power in the Theory of International Relations'), *Guoji luntan (International Forum)*, No. 2 (2002), pp. 56–62.
- 54 Pang Zhongying, 'Zhongguo ruanlilang de neihan' ('The Connotation of the Soft Power in China'), *Liaowang xinwen zhoukan (Outlook Newsweek)*, November 7, 2005, p. 62.
- 55 Zhang Xiaoming, 'Yuesefunai de ruanshili sixiang fenxi' ('Analysis of Joseph Nye's Idea about Soft Power'), *Meiguo yanjiu (The Studies on the United States)*, No.1 (2005), pp. 22–23.

For those who stress the importance of political factors, the definition obviously relates to a country's political system and ability. Professor Yan Xuetong regards soft power not as a material resource but as the ability to use resources and strength.<sup>56</sup> Professor Chu Shulong believes that soft power includes science and technology, management ability, cultural attraction, and national competitiveness. In his eyes, the importance of soft power lies in the attractiveness of a country's values, cultural creativity, and innovation ability.<sup>57</sup>

The first school initially held the dominant position, but in 2007 was challenged by the second. The two schools have hotly debated the functions of political and cultural factors. Yan Xuetong holds that while greater political power can accelerate cultural development, the development of culture cannot promote political power. What's more, strategic reputation is the core of political power.<sup>58</sup> Lu Gang disagrees with Yan Xuetong, insisting, according to an historical study of the Soviet Union's experience, on the central role of culture and values in soft power. Without cultural attraction, Lu maintains, political reputation can hardly promote the rise of a major power.<sup>59</sup> Wu Xu holds that the positions of both schools are valid in certain circumstances, and that the crux of the debate lies in the ambiguity of the meaning of soft power.<sup>60</sup> Finally, Yan Xuetong responds by clarifying political power and cultural power. According to his explanation, the right to vote at the UN is political power, while Kung fu films constitute cultural power.<sup>61</sup>

Thus, although Chinese scholars' understanding of soft power comes from Joseph Nye, their differing definitions of the concept demonstrate that Chinese scholars have not yet reached consensus on it. Wang Hongying has made a summary of the discussion of soft power in China, and finds that the concept is widely used by Chinese scholars. In her view, Nye's concept of soft power is mainly aimed at international relations, while Chinese scholars apply it to foreign policy and also to domestic issues. Nye's understanding of soft power is that it is mainly a popular culture and political mode, while Chinese scholars' focus is on traditional culture and mode of economic development.<sup>62</sup>

### Chinese Scholars' Measurement of Soft Power

Chinese scholars have paid considerable attention to the measurement of different states' soft power. Wang Jingbin carried out research at Osaka Sangyo University, comparing the soft power of Japan and China through a sample survey questionnaire. His conclusions are

56 Yan Xuetong, 'Zhongguo ruanshili youdai tigao' ('China's Soft Power Needs to be Improved'), *Zhongguo yu shijie guancha* (*China and the World Review*), No. 1 (2006), p. 5.

57 Chu Shulong, *Guoji guanxi jiben lilun* (*The Basic Theory of International Relations*) (Beijing: Qinghua daxue chubanshe, 2003), pp. 74–76.

58 Yan Xuetong, 'The Core of Soft Power is Political Power'.

59 Lu Gang, 'Wenhua shili ruo rang zhongguo shi fen' (Weak Culture Hurt China's Image), *Huanqiu shibao* (*Global Times*), June 19, 2007.

60 Wu Xu, 'Zhongguo ruanshili buneng chilaoben' ('Chinese Soft Power Cannot Rest on Past Experience'), *Huanqiu shibao* (*Global Times*), June 19, 2007.

61 Yan Xuetong, 'Cultural Resources Need Political Operation'.

62 Wang Hongying and Lu Yeh-Chung, 'The Conception of Soft Power and Its Policy Implications: A Comparative Study of China and Taiwan', *Journal of Contemporary China*, Vol. 17, No. 56, 2008, pp. 428–30.

based on the subjective judgment of students at Osaka Sangyo University.<sup>63</sup> In his eyes, popular culture is not the source of soft power, because popular culture cannot become a social norm, whereas traditional culture, which has had obvious impact on social norms, is part of soft power.<sup>64</sup> He finds that the image of political leaders in China and Japan has great influence on soft power.<sup>65</sup>

Professor Yan Xuetong measures soft power according to three elements: international attraction, international mobilization, and internal mobilization.

International attraction includes cultural attraction and the attractiveness of a state's mode, while international mobilization includes strategic relations and international rule-making ability. Internal mobilization includes the mobilization capability within the two domestic social sectors of the elite and grass roots.<sup>66</sup> According to Yan Xuetong and Xu Jin's measurement, China's overall soft power is only one-third that of the United States. When comparing the three indexes, China's international attraction and international mobilization are far lower than the United States', but China's internal mobilization capability is better than that of the United States.<sup>67</sup> Using Yan Xuetong's model, Zhong Zhen and Wu Wenbing measure and compare the soft power of China and India. They find that although China's soft power is stronger than that of India, India's soft power has risen more rapidly than China's since 2005.<sup>68</sup>

Fang Changping compares Chinese opinion on and American attitudes towards soft power. He finds Americans believe that the US social system and political values are universal, and should be spread to other states. China, on the other hand, accords with soft power's acknowledgement that the world abounds in various cultures, and that states should respect each other. Therefore, China need not overbearingly export its culture, social system, and development model to other states.<sup>69</sup> Fang Changping also found that the United States regards the government and non-governmental organizations as equally important in the implementation of soft power. For example, the US government has many agencies directly involved in the overseas promotion of democracy, and the majority of non-governmental organizations taking part in the external promotion of democracy play an irreplaceable and important role in this respect. China, on the contrary, promotes soft

63 Wang Jingbin, 'Zhongri ruanshili fenxi: dui daban chanye daxue daxuesheng wenjuan diaocha jiegou de kaozheng' ('Empirical Analysis of the Soft Power of China and Japan: Research on the Survey of College Students in Osaka Industry University'), *Shijie jingji yu zhengzhi* (*World Economy and Politics*), No. 7 (2007), pp. 28–36.

64 *Ibid.*, pp. 28–36.

65 *Ibid.*, p. 31.

66 Yan Xuetong and Xu Jin, 'Zhongmei ruanshili bijiao' ('The Comparison of the Soft Power of China and the United States'), *Xiandai guoji guanxi* (*Modern International Relations*), No. 1 (2008), p. 26.

67 *Ibid.*, p. 28.

68 Zhong Zhen and Wu Wenbing, 'Zhongyin ruanshili bijiao yanjiu (2000-2010)' ('A Comparative Study of the Soft Power of China and India From 2000 to 2010'), *Guoji zhengzhi kexue* (*The Scientific Study of International Politics*), No. 1 (2012), p. 14.

69 Fang Changping, 'Zhongmei ruanshili bijiao jiqi dui zhongguo de qishi' ('Comparison of the Soft Power of China and America and its Lessons for China'), *Shijie jingji yu zhengzhi* (*World Economics and Politics*), No. 7 (2007), p. 22.

power only through a strong government, without the help of non-governmental organizations.<sup>70</sup>

Notwithstanding the huge divergence between Chinese and foreign scholars, they have similar opinions on the measurement of soft power. In April 2008, the United States Congress released a report which stated that although America's soft power is declining, this is partly due to the rise of China's soft power.<sup>71</sup> The Chicago Council on Global Affairs measured soft power through a sample survey of 6000 people in China, the United States, Japan, South Korea, Indonesia, and Vietnam. Survey results show that China's soft power ranks third, after that of the United States and Japan, and that the economic and military power of China has not yet been conveyed totally to soft power.<sup>72</sup> According to the CSIS report, China is now debating soft power, but lacks the strategy to use it. The country's utilization of soft power is defensive and passive, because China's soft power is mainly used to subdue threats from other countries.<sup>73</sup>

The comparison of Chinese and foreign scholars reveals that the difference between the two groups' measurements of soft power is not as great as that between their measurements of comprehensive national power. An interesting phenomenon is how Chinese scholars' underestimation of traditional culture ceased after 2000. It can be explained by China's considerable and rapid economic development due to the reform and opening policy of the 1980s, which many scholars attribute to China's native culture.

## Chinese Scholars' Debate on Power and China's Foreign Policy

A thorough study of the Chinese perception of comprehensive national power and soft power may help our understanding of China's peculiar policies. From comprehensive national power to soft power, Chinese scholars' understanding of power has undergone a long process of discussion and debate. Although there is controversy among them with regard to the measuring and ranking of comprehensive national power and soft power, Chinese scholars are unanimous on the importance of these two concepts.

### Transition of Scholars' Foreign Policy Focus

From the 1990s to the 2010s, profound changes in China's foreign policy accompanied the transition of Chinese scholars' focus from comprehensive national power to soft power. At the end of the Cold War, China held to such policies as 'keep a low profile' and 'never seek hegemony'. But recently the Chinese government has frequently voiced such slogans as 'responsible great power' and 'peaceful rise'.

70 Fang Changping, 'Comparison of the Soft Power of China and America and its Lessons for China', p. 23.

71 Thomas Lum, Christopher M. Blanchard and Nicolas Cook, *Comparing Global Influence: China's and U. S. Diplomacy, Foreign Aid, Trade, and Investment in the Developing World*, CRS Report for Congress, August 15, 2008.

72 The Chicago Council on Global Affairs, East Asia Institute, *Soft Power in Asia: Results of a 2008 Multinational Survey of Public Opinion*, 2008, [https://www.brookings.edu/~media/Files/events/2008/0617\\_asia/0617\\_east\\_asia\\_report.pdf](https://www.brookings.edu/~media/Files/events/2008/0617_asia/0617_east_asia_report.pdf).

73 Carola McGiffert, *Chinese Soft Power and Its Implication for the United States-Competition and Cooperation in the Developing World: A Report of the CSIS Smart Power Initiative*, Center for Strategic & International Studies, Washington, D.C., 2009.

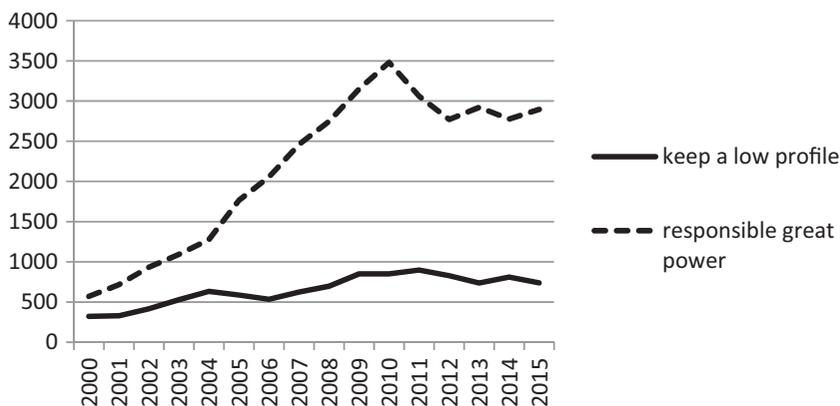


Fig. 2. Chinese Articles on Foreign Policy since 2000.

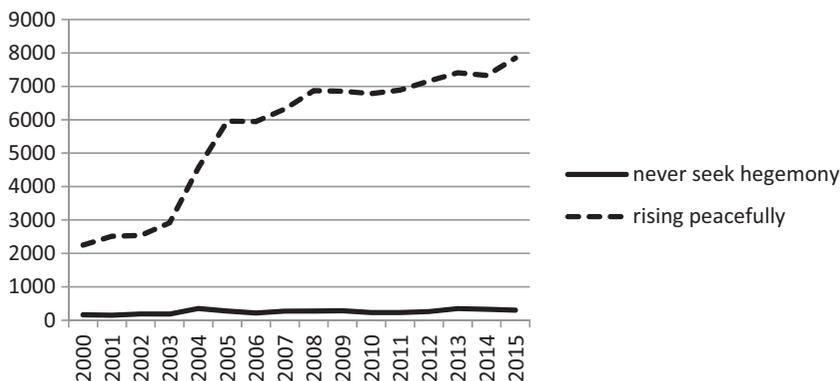


Fig. 3. Chinese Articles about China's International Role since the Year 2000.

To provide data relating to Chinese scholars' focus on these slogans, Figure 2 and 3 show the amount of articles whose abstracts included these phrases.<sup>74</sup>

Figure 2 shows the Chinese articles relating to the two foreign policies, 'keep a low profile' and 'responsible great power'. The two curves show the obvious difference in these trends, evident in the rapid rise of the line relating to 'responsible great power' and the comparatively slow and shallow ascent of the 'keep a low profile' line. It appears clear that, since the year 2000, more and more Chinese scholars have been inclined to envision an influential China in world affairs, and that their preference is for China as a 'responsible great

74 Data source is <http://www.cnki.net/>.

power'. In practice, China's contributions to the UN peacekeeping budgets are increasing.<sup>75</sup> At the same time, China's involvement in peacekeeping operations is expanding.<sup>76</sup>

In Figure 3, the rapid increase of articles about China's 'peaceful rise' clearly denote Chinese scholars' view of China's prospective world role. By contrast, in view of the paucity of articles relating to the line, 'never seek hegemony' its influence would appear negligible. Chinese scholars have regarded hegemony as a derogatory term since the Cold War, when both the United States and the Soviet Union were regarded as hegemons.

A comparison of these concepts and policies would suggest that this shift of policy focus seems linked to the shift of attention within scholarly research on power. This article will try to analyse China's preference for certain policies since the advent of this inclination.

### Recognition of Comprehensive National Power and China's Foreign Policy

It is interesting to note that most Chinese scholars rank China's comprehensive national power lower than foreign scholars. This underestimation is helpful for an understanding of China's foreign policy.

First, along with Chinese scholars' underestimation of national power, Chinese people also generally regard China as a developing country. Both Chinese leaders and the public believe that China is a state of dual-identity: a developing country and a major power.<sup>77</sup> Even in 2011, when China experienced long-term rapid economic development, a Chinese government White Paper declared that 'for China, the most populous developing country, to run itself well is the most important fulfilment of its international responsibility'.<sup>78</sup> This self-identity cognition is in accordance with scholars' underestimation of China's strength. A case in point is the UN climate conference, when Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao stressed China's status as a developing country, and pinpointed the principle of 'common but differentiated responsibilities' as the core of international cooperation on climate change.

Secondly, Chinese scholars' underestimation of China's comprehensive national power may also relate to Deng Xiaoping's grand strategy, 'observe coolly (*lengjingguancha*), hold the line (*wenzhuzhenjiao*), deal calmly (*chenzhuoyingdui*), keep a low profile

75 'Assessment of Member States' Contributions to the United Nations Regular Budget for the Year 2011', December 28, 2010, [http://www.un.org/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=ST/ADM/SER.B/824](http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=ST/ADM/SER.B/824).

76 [http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/resources/statistics/contributors\\_archive.shtml](http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/resources/statistics/contributors_archive.shtml); Bates Gill and Chin-Hao Huang, 'China's expanding Peacekeeping Role: Its Significance and the Policy Implications', SIPRI Policy Brief, February 2009, <http://books.sipri.org/files/misc/SIPRIPB0902.pdf>; Zhao Lei, 'Two Pillars of China's Global Peace Engagement Strategy: UN Peacekeeping and International Peacebuilding', *International Peacekeeping*, Vol. 18, No. 3 (2011), pp. 344–62; Courtney J. Richardson, 'A Responsible Power? China and the UN Peacekeeping Regime', *International Peacekeeping*, Vol. 18, No. 3 (2011), pp. 286–97.

77 Xinbo Wu, 'Four Contradictions Constraining China's Foreign Policy Behaviour', *Journal of Contemporary China*, Vol. 10, No. 27 (2001), p. 293.

78 'China's Peaceful Development', Information Office of the State Council of the People's Republic of China, September 6, 2011, [http://www.china.org.cn/government/whitepaper/node\\_7126562.htm](http://www.china.org.cn/government/whitepaper/node_7126562.htm).

(*taoguangyanghui*), guard weaknesses (*shanyushouzhuo*), never take the lead (*juebudang-tou*), and play a role (*yousuozuowei*), raised at the beginning of the post-Cold War era, when Western states imposed a blockade on China.<sup>79</sup> Deng Xiaoping's directives constitute fundamental guidelines on China's diplomacy.<sup>80</sup> The logic of Deng Xiaoping's 'keep a low profile' strategy is consistent with Chinese scholars' underestimation of China's comprehensive strength, and therefore easily accepted by them. Professor Ye Zicheng observed in 2002 that Chinese scholars have generally accepted the 'keep a low profile' strategy, and that it has played an important guiding role in the academic consensus.<sup>81</sup> Wu Jianmin, former Chinese Ambassador to France, said in September 2005 that the 'keep a low profile' policy had been proposed by Deng Xiaoping and that his judgement was wise, and hence that the Chinese government would not change it in the short term.<sup>82</sup>

Thirdly, Chinese scholars began asserting in the year 2000 that China's comprehensive national power maybe second in the world, and the strategy of peaceful rise also drew considerable attention at that time. It was in November 2003 at the Boao Forum that Zheng Bijian first introduced the term 'peaceful rise', and it garnered enormous attention. Shortly afterwards, in December 2003, Chinese leader Hu Jintao first introduced the phrase 'peaceful rise' in an official speech.<sup>83</sup>

But the term 'peaceful rise' was widely questioned in the early 2000s. Both Chinese scholars and the government worried that acknowledging China's actual national power as second in the world and adopting the term 'peaceful rise' might prompt the United States to treat China as a major rival, as it did the Soviet Union during the Cold War. To escape the fate of the Soviet Union, therefore, the Chinese opted to underestimate China's comprehensive national power.<sup>84</sup> China's government, therefore, preferred the 'keep a low profile' policy.<sup>85</sup> In April 2004, at the Boao Forum, Chinese President Hu Jintao expressed the

79 Qian Qichen, 'Shenru xuexi Deng Xiaoping waijiao sixiang, jinyiu zuohao xinshiqi de waijiao gongzuo' ('Thoroughly Study Deng Xiaoping's Foreign Policy Thinking, Practice Diplomacy Fit for a New Era') in Wang Taiping, ed., *Deng Xiaoping waijiao sixiang yanjiu lunwenji* (A Compilation of Essays on Deng Xiaoping's Theory of Diplomacy) (Beijing: Shijie zhishi chubanshe, 1996), pp. 6-7.

80 Shaun Breslin, 'China and the Global Order: Signaling Threat or Friendship?', *International Affairs*, Vol. 89, No. 3 (2013), pp. 615-34.

81 Ye Zicheng, 'Guanyu taoguang yanghui he yousuo zuowei: zailun zhongguo de daguo xintai' ('A Study on "Keep a Low Profile and Play a Certain Role": China's Great Power Mentality'), *Taipingyang xuebao* (*Journal of the Pacific*), No.1 (2002), p. 63.

82 'Wu Jianmin, 'Zhongguo yao changqi jianchi taoguang yanghui yousuo zuowei fangzhen' ('China Should Continue to Follow the Principle of "Keep a Low Profile and Play a Certain Role" Over the Long Term'), July 24, 2005, <http://www.chinanews.com/news/2005/2005-09-27/8/631955.shtml>.

83 Hu Jintao, 'Zai jinian Mao Zedong tongzhi danchen 110 zhounian zuotanhui shang de jianghua' ('Speech at the Conference on the 110th Birthday of Comrade Mao Zedong'), *Renmin ribao* (*People's Daily*), December 26, 2003, p. 2.

84 Yan Xuetong, 'The Rise of China and its Power Status', *Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (2006), p. 8.

85 Ma Zhengang, Zhou Gang, Chen Feng and Gong Li, 'Zhengque gujia zhongguo shili' ('Assessing China's Power in a Correct Way'), *Renmin ribao* (*People's Daily*), December 3, 2004, p. 7.

concept ‘peaceful development’ rather than ‘peaceful rise’.<sup>86</sup> In December 2005, the White Paper *China’s Path to Peaceful Development* expressed the Chinese intention to rise by peaceful means.<sup>87</sup> It is obvious that ‘peaceful development’ then became China’s new strategic concept.<sup>88</sup>

After the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games, China’s leaders acknowledged that China’s rise was generally recognized, and were concerned about possible rivalry between China and the United States. In 2014, Chinese President Xi Jinping referred to the ‘Thucydides trap’ to describe the difficulty confronting China. One year later in 2015, when Xi Jinping visited the United States, he mentioned the ‘Thucydides trap’ twice, and tried to allay the US’s suspicions about China.<sup>89</sup> Along with the exhortation to ‘keep a low profile’, Chinese policy-makers started to consider the possibility of rise. But it is obvious that they are less optimistic now about a ‘peaceful rise’.

To sum up, we find that scholars’ evaluation of comprehensive national power is helpful for our understanding of China’s foreign policy choices. Since China regarded itself as a developing country even after the Cold War, it is easy to understand why China preferred to keep a low profile and avoid the leadership role. With the collapse of the Soviet Union at the end of the Cold War, China’s ‘never seek hegemony’ (*buchengba*) policy helped China to allay Western states’ worries.

### Recognition of Soft Power and China’s Foreign Policy

Since the year 2000, the concept of soft power has gained the attention of Chinese scholars, and also been noted by the Chinese government. In January 2006, Chinese President Hu Jintao pointed out at the Central Foreign Affairs Leadership Group meeting that China’s heightened international status and influence would rely on both hard power—the economy, science, and technology, and on soft power—culture.<sup>90</sup> In October 2007, Hu Jintao included the phrase ‘soft power’ in the official report of the 17th National Congress of the CPC, so signifying that soft power had gained official government support.<sup>91</sup> The Chinese

86 Hu Jintao, ‘Zhongguo de fazhan, yazhou de jiyu: zai boao yazhou luntan 2004 nianhui kaimushi shang de yanjiang’ (‘China’s Development, Asia’s Opportunity: Speech at the Opening Ceremony of the 2004 Annual Meeting of the Asia Boao Forum’), *Renmin ribao* (*People’s Daily*), April 25, 2004, p. 1.

87 Information Office of the State Council, ‘White Paper: China’s Peaceful Development 2011’, September 6, 2011, [http://www.gov.cn/english/official/2011-09/06/content\\_1941354.htm](http://www.gov.cn/english/official/2011-09/06/content_1941354.htm).

88 Bonnie S. Glaser and Evan S. Medeiros, ‘The Changing Ecology of Policy-Making in China: The Ascension and Demise of the Theory of Peaceful Rise’, *The China Quarterly*, Vol. 190 (2007), pp. 291–310.

89 Shen Mengzhe, ‘Daguo ruhe bimian “Xiuxidide xianjing”?’ (‘How to Avoid the ‘Thucydides Trap?’), *Renmin Ribao* (*People’s Daily*), November 27, 2015, p. 16.

90 Ma Lisi, ‘Guanyu woguo jiaqiang ruanshili jianshe de chubu sikao’, (‘Preliminary Thoughts on Accelerating China’s Soft Power Building’), *Dang de wenxian* (*Literature of Chinese Communist Party*), No. 5 (2007), pp. 35–38.

91 Hu Jintao, *Gaoju zhongguo tese shehui zhuyi weida qizhi, wei duoqu quanmian jianshe xiaokang shehui xinshengli er fendou: zai zhongguo gongchandang di shiqici quanguo daibiao dahui shang de baogao* (*Hold the Flag of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics to Win the New Victory of Building a Well-off Society: Report at the 17th National Congress of the Communist Party of China*) (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 2007), p. 33.

government regards culture as the core of soft power. In 2010, the Communist Party of China declared that China would promote cultural prosperity and enhance its national soft power resources.<sup>92</sup> In 2011, China's central government stressed once more the importance of cultural values and set out to enhance national soft power and the influence of Chinese culture.<sup>93</sup> It is clear that the Chinese government does not regard the political system as a part of its soft power.

China's foreign policy also experienced changes along with the shift of scholarly focus from comprehensive national power to soft power.

First, the emphasis on soft power and waning attention to comprehensive power seemed to generate challenges to the 'keep a low profile' policy. At the beginning of 2000, although the situation then differed from that of the 1990s, China nevertheless maintained the 'never seek hegemony' policy, because at that time Chinese scholars regarded China as a developing country. China's long-term economic development and changed environment, however, inspired greater confidence, to the extent that China lost its reluctance to be a leader in the region, and became willing to play a major role in the international community. For example, in 2009 Chinese President Hu Jintao made a slight adjustment to Deng Xiaoping's directive, changing it from 'keep a low profile' to 'continue to keep a low profile and play positively a certain role'.<sup>94</sup> In October 2013, President Xi Jinping made no mention of the 'keep a low profile' strategy at the Working Conference on Neighbouring State Diplomacy, instead declaring, 'strive to promote our neighbouring state diplomacy'.<sup>95</sup> Professor Yan Xuetong of Tsinghua University argued that Xi Jinping's speech signified China's replacement of 'keep a low profile' with 'strive for achievements'.<sup>96</sup>

Secondly, the emphasis of China's soft power on cultural factors may be helpful to our understanding of China's establishment of overseas Confucius Institutes. On November 21, 2004, China's first overseas Confucius institute was officially established in South Korea. By the end of August 2012, 387 Confucius Institutes and 50 Confucius Classroom schools

92 'Zhonggong zhongyang guanyu zhiding guomin jingji he shehui fazhan di shierge wunian guihua de jianyi' (*The Suggestions of the CPC Central Committee on the 12th Five Year Plan for national economic and social development*), October 28, 2010, [http://www.most.gov.cn/yw/201010/t20101028\\_82966.htm](http://www.most.gov.cn/yw/201010/t20101028_82966.htm).

93 'Zhonggong zhongyang guanyu shenhua wenhua tizhi gaige tuidong shehui zhuyi wenhua dafazhan dafanrong ruogan zhongda wenti de jueding' (*Decision of the CPC Central Committee on Deepening the Reform of the Cultural System and Promoting the Development and Prosperity of Socialist Culture*), October 18, 2011, [http://www.gov.cn/jrzg/2011-10/25/content\\_1978202.htm](http://www.gov.cn/jrzg/2011-10/25/content_1978202.htm).

94 'Hu Jintao deng zhongyang lingdao chuxi dishiyici zhuwai shijie huiyi' ('Hu Jintao and other Central Government Leaders Attend the 11th Meeting of Diplomatic Envoys'), July 20, 2009, [http://news.xinhuanet.com/politics/2009-07/20/content\\_11740850.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/politics/2009-07/20/content_11740850.htm).

95 Qian Tong, 'Xi Jinping zai zhoubian waijiao gongzuo zuotanhui shang fabiao zhongyao jianghua' ('Important Speech by Xi Jinping at the Working Conference on Neighbouring States Diplomacy'), *Renmin ribao* (*People's Daily*), October 26, 2013.

96 Yan Xuetong, 'Zhongguo waijiao quanmian gaige de kaishi' (*The Beginning of a Comprehensive Reform of Chinese Diplomacy*), *Shijie zhishi* (*World Affairs*), No. 24 (2013), p. 15.

**Table 4.** Chinese Perception of Power, Foreign Policy, and China's Role

Scholars' perception of power	foreign policy
Underestimate China's comprehensive national power	1. Keep a low profile ( <i>taoguang yang hui</i> ) 2. Never seek hegemony
Stress cultural factors in soft power	1. Overseas Confucius Institutes 2. Responsible big country 3. Peacefulrise 4. Strive for achievements

had been set up in 108 countries and regions.<sup>97</sup> The mission of Confucius Institutes is to provide Chinese language and cultural resources to promote multiculturalism and build a harmonious world.<sup>98</sup> The development of Confucius Institutes will clearly help the outside world to understand Chinese culture and improve China's soft power in a harmonious way.<sup>99</sup> The attractiveness and influence of Confucianism are decisive factors in the success of the Confucius Institute project.<sup>100</sup> Confucianism, China's official ideology for millennia, still carries significant influence in China. Consequently, the Confucian creed, which abhors the use of military means and opposes unjust wars, still influences China's policies today.<sup>101</sup>

What's more, China emphasizes the importance of soft power, and tries to be a responsible big country through giving more foreign aid. China is hence influential and gains much support in developing countries. According to the Pew Research Centre Global Attitudes & Trends Project Survey Questionnaire, in answer to the question, 'Do you have a very favourable, somewhat favourable, somewhat unfavourable, or very unfavourable opinion of China?', people in developing countries, such as Argentina, Brazil, Egypt, and Indonesia showed a greater preference for the answer 'somewhat favourable' than 'somewhat unfavourable'.<sup>102</sup> China's rising strategy of soft power and foreign aid can promote the development of developing countries.

Table 4 summarizes the above discussion. The shift of scholarly focus to national power and foreign policies is attributable to China's rapid economic development and growing national self-confidence.

Since the reform and opening-up drive of the 1980s, Chinese scholars have engaged with many, possibly contradictory, Western theories and ideas. At the early stage, academics chose comprehensive national power. According to Table 4, when measuring and ranking the status of different states' comprehensive national power and soft power,

97 'Kongzi xueyuan: zhongguo wenhua yongbao shijie' ('Confucius College: Chinese Culture Embraces the World'), *Renmin ribao* (*People's Daily*), August 10, 2012, [http://www.hanban.edu.cn/confuciusinstitutes/node\\_10961.htm](http://www.hanban.edu.cn/confuciusinstitutes/node_10961.htm).

98 [http://english.hanban.org/node\\_7719.htm](http://english.hanban.org/node_7719.htm).

99 James F. Paradise, 'China and International Harmony: The Role of Confucius Institutes in Bolstering Beijing's Soft Power', *Asian Survey*, Vol. 49, No. 4 (2009), pp. 647–69.

100 *Ibid.*, p. 662.

101 Feng Zhang, 'Confucian Foreign Policy Traditions in Chinese History', *Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol. 8, No. 2 (2015), pp. 197–218.

102 <http://www.pewglobal.org/>.

Chinese scholars have been inclined to underestimate China's international role. China's dual identity as both a developing country and major power resulted in Chinese scholars' confused self-cognition of China's status. Meanwhile, foreign policies such as 'keep a low profile (*taoguang yang hui*)' and 'never seek hegemony' gained considerable academic support.

But, after long-term rapid economic development, Chinese scholars face new challenges, and now pay more attention to soft power. The Chinese inclination towards soft power can be attributed to its similarity in principle to Confucianism, which stresses the importance of morality and culture in the political arena.<sup>103</sup> China's development strategy has thus swung unsteadily from 'keep a low profile'; (*taoguangyanghui*) to 'peaceful rise' (*hepingjueqi*). As a result, we see that new policies such as 'overseas Confucius Institutes', 'responsible big country' and 'rising peacefully' have triggered heated discussion in China.

## Conclusion

This study tries to foresee China's future foreign policy through a thorough study of scholarly opinions on power. China's development has entailed influence from the outside world. Since the 1990s, Chinese scholars have shown a strong interest in measuring and ranking major states' comprehensive national power. Comparisons with foreign scholars show that Chinese scholars have a lower estimation than foreign scholars of China's comprehensive national power. The possible explanations may lay in the indexes chosen, their emphasis in operationalization on per capita GDP, and Chinese scholars' underestimation of China's comprehensive national power.

The year 2008 marked a turning point where Chinese scholars paid more attention to 'soft power' than to 'comprehensive national power'. Recently, China has had to deal with external pressure, such as the Diaoyu islands and South China Sea disputes. The current situation challenges Chinese scholars' original thinking whereby diplomatic pressure may be alleviated through the rise of comprehensive national power. They now turn to the new concept of soft power for a solution.

The main purpose of this article is to describe this change in academic thought, and find the link between scholarly debate and policy choice. Along with the shift of scholarly focus, China's foreign policies have also experienced a clear change, from 'keep a low profile' to 'peaceful rise'. The article does not try to suggest that scholarly attention to a certain topic has led to corresponding foreign policies. Proving the causality between the scholarly debate and policy changes is beyond the task of this study. However, we can find an indirect link between scholarly attention and policy choice, because the government welcomes expert consultations before a policy is made and also scholarly criticism after the announcement of a policy. China's foreign policy may, of course, also be influenced by other factors, such as external pressure, so Chinese foreign policy may imbue a certain complexity, and can hardly be explained simply from a power perspective.

This article tries to provide a macro perspective on China's policy. When the focus of Chinese scholars shifts from comprehensive national power to soft power, China's policy correspondingly exhibits different inclinations. But this does not mean that the current focus of the Chinese government is solely on soft power and peaceful rise. The new Chinese

103 Feng Zhang, 'The Rise of Chinese Exceptionalism in International Relations', *European Journal of International Relations*, Vol. 19, No. 2 (2013), pp. 305–28.

government stresses the importance of military strength over soft power, and China's attention is now more focused on such issues as the Thucydides trap. We can deduce from the findings of this article that, in the long run, if Chinese scholars pay more attention to soft power, China may opt for more moderate rising strategies, such as 'peaceful rise' or 'peaceful development'.

### **Acknowledgements**

This article was originally presented at the Griffith-Tsinghua Conference 'Chinese Scholars Debate International Relations' in Beijing on December 11–12, 2016. The authors would like to thank the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation for its support (Grant No. 16-1512-150509-IPS).

## China Debates Soft Power\*

---

Li Mingjiang<sup>†</sup>

Observers of Chinese politics and international relations could not have failed to notice in recent years the upsurge of references in China to the term *soft power*. The popularity of this concept among Chinese political leaders, scholars, journalists and pundits has been striking, and its prevalence in Chinese media significant. Although soft power is arguably one of the most important aspects of China's foreign strategy to have appeared in the new century, it is nonetheless insufficiently understood in the outside world. International political leaders and pundits have paid close attention to both the growth and practice of China's soft power, and unequivocally expressed concern as to its implications. These reasons warrant a thorough examination of the term.

Knowing how soft power is discussed among the Chinese elite is a good starting point towards understanding the importance of the concept within China's international politics. How do they understand and interpret soft power? Why is there such a strong and growing interest in soft power in China? What role do the Chinese elite assign to soft power within China's international strategy in the new century, especially in the context of China's rise? This article neither delves into the theoretical debate on what constitutes soft power nor focuses on China's actual practice of it. Its purpose is to examine the overall understanding of soft power among Chinese intellectuals and decision makers and its implications as regards China's international strategy. The scholarly community in today's China has taken an important part in foreign policy making, and there are several channels through which top decision makers consult Chinese experts on

\* This paper was presented at the 17th Biennial Conference of the Asian Studies Association of Australia in July 2008. The author is thankful for all the helpful comments received at the conference.

Li Mingjiang is an Assistant Professor at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, Nanyang Technological University.

<sup>†</sup> Corresponding author. Email: ismjli@ntu.edu.sg

various issues.<sup>1</sup> The current debate on soft power in China is unquestionably relevant to China's foreign policy orientation in the years ahead.

From a methodological standpoint, this article focuses on official documents endorsed by the top Chinese leadership, articles in prominent Chinese journals and influential national-level media reports and analyses. The first section discusses the popularity of soft power in China. The second analyses Chinese views on soft power and mainstream assessment of China's soft power. The third section examines motivations behind China's keen interest in soft power. The fourth addresses major approaches proposed to increase Chinese soft power. The concluding section sums up the main features of Chinese discourse on soft power and analyses its implications for China's international strategy.

This study arrives at several conclusions. First, Chinese decision makers and opinion leaders have paid close attention to the progress of their nation's soft power. Second, although Chinese discourse largely conforms to Joseph S. Nye's conceptual framework, it is not limited to its specific scope. Third, Chinese discourse, unlike Nye's exclusive focus on the efficacy of soft power in achieving foreign policy goals, frequently refers to a domestic context, evincing a mission for domestic purposes, although the domestic context is not the primary focus of Chinese interlocutors. Fourth, soft power, as expounded by Chinese analysts, is still a weak link in the country's pursuit of comprehensive national power. It is largely perceived as a tool for defensive purposes such as cultivating a better image of China to present to the outside world, correcting foreign misperceptions of China and fending off unwelcome Western cultural and political inroads into China. I argue on the basis of these analyses that the grand Chinese soft power strategy is still in its embryonic phase, despite the painstaking efforts of Chinese strategists to devise proposals. The lack of assertiveness in China's soft power discourse reflects that China has few political values to offer to a world still dominated by Western philosophies, and reveals that China itself is still undergoing a profound social, economic and political transition.

## Soft Power: Surging Popularity in China

The term soft power frequently comes to view when leafing through official Chinese government pronouncements, academic journals and

<sup>1</sup> For the role of the scholarly community in Chinese foreign policy making, see Yang Guangbin et al., *Zhongguo Guonei Zhengzhi Jingji yu Duiwai Guanxi (China's Domestic Political Economy and Foreign Relations)* (Beijing: Zhongguo renmin daxue chubanshe, 2007); Hao Yufan and Lin Su, *Zhongguo Waijiao Juece: Kaifang yu Duoyuan de Shehui Yinsu Fenxi (Chinese Foreign Policy Making: An Analysis of Societal Forces)* (Beijing: Shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe, 2007); Chih-yu Shih, *Reform, Identity and Chinese Foreign Policy* (Taipei: Vanguard Institute for Policy Studies Publication, 2000); Xuanli Liao, *Chinese Foreign Policy Think Tanks and China's Policy Towards Japan* (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 2006).

popular newspapers. This is a clear sign that soft power is now a noticeable aspect of official and popular discourse on foreign policy and international politics.

Soft power is no longer an alien concept to top Chinese political leaders. The political report to the 16th Chinese Communist Party (CCP) Congress in 2002, for instance, points out: 'In today's world, culture intertwines with economics and politics, demonstrating a more prominent position and role in the competition for comprehensive national power.'<sup>2</sup> The focus of the 13th collective study session of the Politburo of the 16th CCP Central Committee on May 28, 2004 was on how to develop China's philosophy and social sciences. The session took place two months after the CCP Centre had publicized the document entitled *Suggestions of the CCP Centre on Further Developing and Boosting Philosophy and Social Sciences*. Professor Cheng Enfu of the Shanghai University of Finance and Economics, one of the two scholars who gave lectures at the session, commented that the activity demonstrated the importance Chinese leaders attach to soft power.<sup>3</sup> Media commentary echoed Cheng's assessment, saying that the study session signifies the leadership's will to accelerate the growth of China's soft power from a strategic height.<sup>4</sup>

Party chief and President Hu Jintao made this clear at the Central Foreign Affairs Leadership Group meeting on January 4, 2006: 'The increase in our nation's international status and influence will have to be demonstrated in hard power such as the economy, science and technology, and defence, as well as in soft power such as culture.'<sup>5</sup> Other leaders also frequently refer to soft power. Jia Qinglin, CPPCC Chairman and member of the CCP Politburo Standing Committee, delivered a speech in March 2007 at the fifth session of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) 10th National Committee in which he elaborated on China's soft power. The CPPCC National Committee held a special session in July 2007 on 'cultural construction as the main approach for national soft power building' in which Jia Qinglin urged Chinese officials to: 'deeply understand the importance of national soft power with cultural construction as the main task', to meet domestic demands and enhance China's competitiveness in the international arena.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Jiang Zemin, *Political Report to the 16th CCP Congress*, November 8, 2002.

<sup>3</sup> 'Yi Ruanshili Tisheng Guojia Zhonghe Jinzhengli', ('Use Soft Power to Upgrade National Comprehensive Competitiveness'), *Wen Hui Bao (Wen Hui Newspaper)*, June 21, 2004.

<sup>4</sup> Yang Taoyuan, 'Tisheng Zhongguo Ruan Shili: Jiedu Zhongyang Zhengzhiju Di Shisan Ci Jiti Xuexi', ('Upgrading China's Soft Power: An Explanation of the 13th Collective Study Session of the CCP CC Politburo'), *Liaowang Xinwen Zhoukan (Outlook News Weekly)*, No. 23, June 7, 2004.

<sup>5</sup> Ma Lisi, 'Guanyu Woguo Jiaqiang Ruan Shili Jianshe de Chubu Sikao', ('Preliminary Thoughts on Accelerating China's Soft Power Building'), *Dang de Wenxian (Literature of Chinese Communist Party)*, No. 7, pp. 35–38.

<sup>6</sup> Pan Yue, 'Quanguo Zhengxie Zhaokai Zhuanti Xieshanghui', ('CPPCC National Committee Convenes a Special Consultation Meeting'), *Renmin Ribao (People's Daily)*,

President Hu advised the eighth National Congress of the China Federation of Literary and Art Circles to give more attention to the major practical issues of cultural development and upgrading China's soft power.<sup>7</sup> Hu again highlighted soft power in his political report to the 17th Party Congress of October 2007, stressing the urgency of building China's cultural soft power sufficiently to meet domestic needs and increase international competitiveness. Hu's call aroused a new round of interest in soft power throughout China. Local governments and various cultural communities held discussion sessions on the topic, and 'soft power and culture' featured in many newspaper headlines in the aftermath of the 17th Congress. A *People's Daily* commentary, for instance, proclaimed that China must substantially increase its soft power to play an active role in international competition.<sup>8</sup>

Various Chinese organizations and research institutes have followed up and contributed to the growing popularity of soft power by organizing conferences on the topic. The China Foreign Languages Bureau in Beijing hosted a forum on 'trans-cultural communications and soft power building' in August 2006, and the International Public Relations Research Center at Fudan University sponsored a forum for government officials and leading scholars in early 2007 on 'national soft power construction and the development of China's public relations'. The China Institute of Contemporary International Relations also conducted a special study<sup>9</sup> and the Institute of Strategic Studies of the Central Party School a comprehensive study on soft power.<sup>10</sup>

Soft power and its relevance to China has become an important topic of discussion in Chinese strategic circles, according to one Chinese strategist.<sup>11</sup> This observation is substantiated by the number of papers on the subject that have appeared in Chinese journals and newspapers. Results of a simple search on the China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI) database—currently the largest and most comprehensive of its kind on Chinese journals and periodicals, through the liberal arts/history/philosophy, politics/military affairs/law and education/comprehensive social sciences sections of CNKI journals and periodicals from 1994 to 2007—shows 485 papers featuring the

July 25, 2007; Excerpt of Jia's speech at the CPPCC National Committee special session on July 24, *Dang Jian (Party Building)*, No. 9, 2007, p. 6.

<sup>7</sup> 'Nuli Tigao Guojia Ruan Shili', ('Strive to Raise National Soft Power'), *Guangming Ribao (Guangming Daily)*, November 17, 2006.

<sup>8</sup> 'Tigao Guojia Wenhua Ruan Shili,' ('Upgrading National Cultural Soft Power'), *Renmin Ribao (People's Daily)*, December 29, 2007.

<sup>9</sup> See Study Group on Soft Power at CICIR, 'Ruanshili: Guoji Jiejian', ('International Lessons about Soft Power,') *Liaowang Xinwen Zhoukan (Outlook News Weekly)*, No. 11, March 12, 2007.

<sup>10</sup> Men Honghua, 'Zhongguo Ruanshili Pinggu Baogao', ('Assessment and Report of China's Soft Power'), *Guoji GuanCha (International Observations)*, No. 2 and No. 3, 2007.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

phrase soft power in their titles.<sup>12</sup> The same search for the period 1994 to 2000 shows the term appearing in 11 articles and in 58 from 2001 to 2004. There were 416 such articles from 2005 to 2007, and 104 in 2006. The number rose to 237 in 2007. After expanding the search from titles to full texts, results showed 1211 articles on the topic from 1994 to 2007 in the same three sections of the database. There were moreover 57 related articles from 1994 to 2000; 212 from 2001 to 2004; 942 pieces from 2005 to 2007; 273 papers in 2006; and 518 in 2007. Search results on the CNKI Chinese newspaper section, came up with a total of 509 articles from 2000 to 2008 whose titles included the term soft power. Not all of these papers or newspaper articles are specifically relevant to China's foreign policy or international relations, but the majority analyses soft power in relation to China's international politics. The fact that the term has become so popular in China in so many fields implies the extent of interest in soft power among Chinese interlocutors.

## Chinese Discourse: Scope and Assessment

In the decade since Nye coined the term soft power, Chinese writings have focused almost exclusively on introducing and evaluating the actual concept itself. Chinese writings on the subject in recent years, however, have become conspicuously comprehensive and sophisticated, covering a wide range of topics including critical reviews of Nye's conceptualization; soft power in China's peaceful rise and development; and Chinese choices and strategies as regards cultivation and use of soft power in international politics.<sup>13</sup>

Chinese writings on soft power make frequent references to the Great Wall, Peking Opera, pandas, martial arts, sports star Yao Ming and movie star Zhang Ziyi. The mainstream Chinese understanding of soft power, however, is based largely on the conceptual framework proposed by Nye; the majority of Chinese analysts abide by Nye's definition of soft power as: 'the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion or payments'.<sup>14</sup> They also mainly adhere to the parameters Nye identifies: culture, political values and foreign policy.<sup>15</sup> Yet the discussion has wider scope in China, often with emphasis on areas to which Nye pays little attention.

<sup>12</sup> The Chinese translation of Soft Power has four versions: Ruan Shili, ruan liliang, ruan guoli and Ruan Quanli. Ruan Shili is becoming more popular than the other three. For the searches, I entered all four terms and used the 'or' function.

<sup>13</sup> For a comprehensive review of Chinese discourse on Soft Power, see Liu Qing and Wang Litaο, 'Jinnian Guonei Ruan Liliang Lilun Yanjiu Zongshu', ('A Review of Chinese Studies on Soft Power Theory in Recent Years'), *Jiangnan Shehui Xueyuan Xuebao (Journal of Jiangnan Social University)*, No. 2, 2007, Vol. 9, pp. 14–23.

<sup>14</sup> Joseph S. Nye, *Soft Power: the Means to Success in World Politics* (New York: Public Affairs, 2004), p. x.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

## China's Soft Power Sources: Culture, Development and Foreign Policy

Wang Huning, now a member of the CCP Central Committee Secretariat, wrote and published the first Chinese article on soft power in 1993, according to Chinese analysts.<sup>16</sup> Chinese analysts have since followed the central thesis in Wang's argument that culture is the main source of a state's soft power. This is discernible in various speeches by Chinese leaders and numerous scholarly writings.<sup>17</sup> Traditional Chinese culture is singled out as the most valuable source of Chinese soft power, on the premise that it boasts a long history, and a wide range of traditions, symbols and textual records. Many Chinese writings also point out the values inherent in traditional Chinese culture found in Confucianism, Taoism, Buddhism and other classical schools of thought, for instance: winning respect through virtue (*yi de fu ren*), benevolent governance (*wang dao*), peace and harmony (*he*), and harmony without suppressing differences (*he er bu tong*).

These writings argue that the traditional Chinese cultural values, at whose core is the concept of 'harmony', are the basis of Chinese cultural appeal in an era of cultural diversification and globalization. In modern history, Western civilization, epitomized by science, individualism and materialism, pushed for industrialization but caused many problems in the process, including environmental degradation, confusion in social ethics and international and regional conflicts. Traditional Chinese culture, which stresses 'giving priority to human beings' (*yi ren wei ben*) and 'harmony between nature and humankind' (*tian ren he yi*), could provide alternative approaches to these problems, thus putting Chinese culture in a more advantageous position in the post-industrialization, information era.<sup>18</sup>

Also argued is that history aptly demonstrates the advantages of China's cultural soft power. The Chinese nation has a long history compared with other nations, of which cultural glory has been a prominent feature. More important, its culture has influenced East Asia for millennia. The socio-economic success of East Asian 'dragons' and the success story of China's own economy make Chinese cultural merits self-evident. As China and East

<sup>16</sup> Wang Huning, 'Zuwei Guojia Shili de Wenhua: Ruan Quanli', ('Culture as National Power: Soft Power'), *Fuda Daxue Xuebao (Journal of Fudan University)*, No. 3, 1993, pp. 23–28.

<sup>17</sup> For instance, Luo Jianbo, 'Zhongguo Jueqi de Duiwai Wenhua Zhanlue', ('External Cultural Strategy in China's Rise'), *Zhonggong Zhongyang Dangxiao Xuebao (Journal of the Party School of the Central Committee of the CCP)*, No. 3, 2006, pp. 97–100.

<sup>18</sup> Jiang Haiyan, 'Hongyang Zhonghua Minzu de Youxiu Wenhua yu Zengqiang Woguo de Ruan Shili', ('Promoting the Outstanding Culture of the Chinese Nation and Strengthening China's Soft Power'), *Zhonggong Zhongyang Dangxiao Xuebao (Journal of the Party School of the Central Committee of the CCP)*, No. 1, 2007, Vol. 11, pp. 107–112; Li Haijuan, "'Ruan Quanli" Jingzheng Beijing xia de Wenhua Zhanlue', ('Cultural Strategy in the Context of Soft Power Competition'), *Mao Zedong Deng Xiaoping Liluan Yanjiu (Studies of Mao Zedong Thought and Deng Xiaoping Theory)*, No. 12, 2004, pp. 49–54.

Asia ascend, the West pauses for cultural reflection and readjustment, which offers China a prime opportunity to expand its cultural influence.<sup>19</sup>

Discussions on cultural soft power, however, often turn to the obvious Chinese discontent at the country's lack of competitiveness in the international cultural products trade. The Chinese cultural sector lags far behind its Western counterparts in competing for world business, according to this utilitarian view. This school of thought is concerned about China's soft power, but mainly from the standpoint of otherwise being marginalized by Western cultural business juggernauts, particularly by the predominant position of the United States, as regards movies, popular music, television programmes, fast food and fashion.<sup>20</sup> There are in addition to this minor diversion also dissenting views on whether or not Chinese culture actually is the main source of China's soft power. Certain Chinese scholars, in the intellectual tradition since the May Fourth Movement (in 1919) of criticizing the many negative aspects of traditional culture, maintain that there is little in traditional Chinese culture to offer to the outside world owing to its many 'backward' aspects. One scholar holds that Chinese culture now is actually more diverse than ever, as it encompasses the Han Chinese culture, those of other ethnic minorities, folk culture, Confucianism, Buddhism, Taoism and other folk beliefs. Since modern times, traditional Chinese culture has also been infiltrated by Western culture and, moreover, been significantly reshaped by the revolutionary experience of the CCP. Putting too high a premium on Chinese culture in the pursuit of soft power, therefore, may be misleading, according to certain writers.<sup>21</sup> This group of scholars believes that the main reason for developing cultural soft power is that of domestic cultural revitalization.

Chinese analysts occasionally mention the Chinese model of development as a source of the nation's soft power. A study conducted by a scholar at the Central Party School concludes that China's gradualist approach to reform and opening up provides an alternative to the classic modernization theory and 'Washington Consensus' currently applicable to under-developed countries.<sup>22</sup> The Chinese experience of development is occasionally brought up at various forums, which implies that it is indeed part of the Chinese elite's consideration (concept?) of China's soft power.<sup>23</sup> There is no consensus among analysts, however, as to the efficacy of the so-called 'Beijing consensus' in bringing soft power to their nation, as further discussion in this article reveals.

<sup>19</sup> Men Honghua, 'Assessment and Report of China's Soft Power'.

<sup>20</sup> Ni Xun, 'Quanguo Zhengxie Weiyuan Tan Zengqiang Wenhua Ruan Shili de Zhuoyandian', ('CPPCC National Committee Members Discuss How to Strengthen Cultural Soft Power'), *Guangming Ribao (Guangming Daily)*, January 3, 2008.

<sup>21</sup> Yu Xintian, 'Ruan Liliang Duanxiang', ('Some Reflections on Soft Power'), *WaiJiao Pinglun (Foreign Affairs Review)*, No. 97, 2007, pp. 35–36.

<sup>22</sup> Men Honghua, 'Assessment and Report of China's Soft Power'.

<sup>23</sup> Feng Jian and Qian Haihong, 'Gonggong Guanxi Shiye xia de Zhongguo Ruan Shili Jiangou', ('China's Soft Power Construction in the Perspective of Public Relations'), *Xinwen Daxue (Journalistic University)*, No. 2, 2007, pp. 75–76.

A number of Chinese analysts also endorse Nye's emphasis on foreign policy and institutions. Su Changhe argues that soft power is evident in a state's international institution-building, agenda-setting, mobilization of coalitions and ability to fulfil commitments.<sup>24</sup> International agenda-setting and rule-making are important components of Nye's soft power concept, but Chinese discourse does not elaborate on this point. This could relate to the fact that the internal debate on whether or not China should adhere to its 'low profile' foreign policy or take on more international responsibility has not reached consensus; also to the concern that a more active posture in international agenda-setting might contribute to a revisionist image of China in the West. Another study suggests that China's soft power includes cultural diplomacy and multilateral diplomacy.<sup>25</sup> Its analysts emphasize flexibility in Chinese foreign policy as a source of Chinese soft power.

### Critical Views on Nye's Conceptualization

Many Chinese analysts deviate from Nye's core positions by attaching importance to the mass media. They argue that capability and effectiveness in mass communications are also important aspects of a state's soft power, and are consequently impressed with the dominant role of the Western media. 'Currently, the major four Western news agencies, Associated Press, United Press International, Reuters, and Agence France-Presse produce four-fifths of the total news stories in the world every day. The 50 top Western transnational media corporations hold 90 percent of the world communication market. The United States alone controls 75 percent of the TV programs in the world. In many developing nations, 60 to 80 percent of the content in TV programs comes from the US. Over half of the total show time in the world's theatres is taken by American movies, which account for only 6.7 percent of the total global movie production.' Western dominance in media and mass communications has resulted in their 'cultural hegemony' or 'media imperialism',<sup>26</sup> according to Chinese statistics.

Several studies challenge, or are critical of Nye's conceptualization.<sup>27</sup> One scholar, for instance, argues that soft power comes from three dimensions of

<sup>24</sup> Su Changhe, 'Zhongguo de Ruan Quanli—Yi Guoji Zhidu yu Zhongguo de Guanxi Wei Li', ('China's Soft Power—an Example in the Relationship between China and International Institutions'), *Guoji Guancha (International Observations)*, No. 2, 2007, pp. 27–35.

<sup>25</sup> Zhao Lei, 'Zhongguo Ruan Shili Tisheng Yin Ren Guanzhu', ('Increase of China's Soft Power Raises Attention'), *Zhongguo Dang Zheng Ganbu Luntan (Forum of Chinese Party and Government Officials)*, No. 1, 2007, pp. 45–46.

<sup>26</sup> Yao Xu, 'Gonggong Guanxi de Chuanbo Shouduan yu Zhongguo Ruan Shili Jiangou', ('Communication Methods of Public Relations and China's Soft Power Building'), *Xinwen qianshao (News Frontline)*, No. 7, 2007, pp. 93–94.

<sup>27</sup> For instance, Ji Ling and Chen Shiping, 'Guoji Zhengzhi de Bianqian yu Ruan Quanli Lilun', ('Changes in International Politics and the Soft Power Theory'), *Waijiao Pinglun (Foreign Affairs Review)*, No. 96, 2007, pp. 97–105; Fang Changping, 'Zhong Mei Ruan Shili Bijiao Jiqi Dui Zhongguo de Qishi', ('A Comparison of Soft Power between China

government ability: institutional power, identifying power and assimilating power, rather than Nye's power source-based conceptualization. *Institutional power* refers to a state's ability to propose or build new international institutions or arrangements. *Identifying power* refers to a state's ability to influence other states through their recognition of its leadership role. Finally, *assimilating power* refers to the attractiveness of a state's cultural values, ideology and social system.<sup>28</sup> Yan Xuetong believes that soft power lies in the political power of political institutions, norms and credibility, rather than in culture.<sup>29</sup> Zhu Feng also argues that soft power has little to do with sources of power, but rather whether or not the international community accepts a nation's policies and strategic choices, and to what extent these choices accord with other nations' interests.<sup>30</sup> Chinese scholars also occasionally refer to overseas assistance programmes as a source of Chinese soft power,<sup>31</sup> a proposition far beyond Nye's conceptual soft power framework.

As regards the relationship between hard power and soft power, certain Chinese analysts seem more willing than Nye to emphasize the inseparability of the two concepts. The integrated approach to power is evident in the Chinese discourse on 'comprehensive national power' which encompasses all sources of material and ideational power. Chinese analysts argue, for example, that 'soft power and hard power are mutually complementary. Soft power can facilitate the growth of hard power, whereas hard power can demonstrate and support the growth of soft power'.<sup>32</sup> Another study is critical of Nye's dichotomy of hard and soft power arguing that, depending on the context, any source of power is both hard and soft, and that China's soft power is best illustrated in the 'China model' of multilateralism, economic diplomacy, and good-neighbourly policy.<sup>33</sup> Another scholar identifies five key elements of soft power: culture, values, development model, international institutions, and international image.<sup>34</sup> In addition to these various

and the US and its Implications for China'), *Shijie Jingji yu Zhengzhi (World Economics and Politics)*, No. 7, 2007, pp. 21–27; Su Changhe, 'China's Soft Power'.

<sup>28</sup> Gong Tieying, 'Lun Ruan Quanli de Weidu', (On the Dimensions of Soft Power), *Shijie Jingji yu Zhengzhi (World Economics and Politics)*, No. 9, 2007, pp. 16–22.

<sup>29</sup> Yan Xuetong, 'Ruan Shili de Hexin Shi Zhengzhi Shili', ('The Core of Soft Power is Political Power'), *Huanqiu Shibao (Global Times)*, May 22, 2007.

<sup>30</sup> Zhu Feng, 'Zhongguo Ying Duo Cezhong "Ruan Shili" Jueqi', ('China Should Give Priority to Soft Power Rise'), *Huanqiu Shibao (Global Times)*, April 30, 2007.

<sup>31</sup> Zhao Lei, 'Increase of China's Soft Power Raises Attention'.

<sup>32</sup> Zhu Majie and Yu Xintian, 'Ruan Guoli Jianshe: Bu Rong Hushi de Wuxing Yingxiang', ('Soft Power Construction: Invisible Influence not to be Ignored'), *Proceedings of Annual Meeting of Shanghai Social Sciences Circle*, 2004.

<sup>33</sup> Zheng Yongnian and Zhang Chi, 'Guoji Zhengzhi zhong de Ruan Liliang Yiji Dui Zhongguo Ruan Liliang de GuanCha', ('Soft Power in International Politics and an Observation of China's Soft Power'), *Shijie Jingji yu Zhengzhi (World Economics and Politics)*, No. 7, 2007, pp. 133–138.

<sup>34</sup> Men Honghua, 'Assessment and Report of China's Soft Power'.

views, is a tendency among certain Chinese scholars to focus on whatever might be helpful towards promoting China's international influence, from traditional Chinese medicine,<sup>35</sup> to the story of China's economic success,<sup>36</sup> to sports culture,<sup>37</sup> to educational exchange programs.<sup>38</sup>

Another major departure from Nye's analysis is that of the domestic context to which numerous Chinese analysts frequently refer, i.e. national cohesion, domestic political institution-building, social justice, social morality and educational quality. Yu Keping, a political analyst well-known in China, argues that education, the psychological and physical condition of the people, technological advancement, superior national culture, human resources and strategy, social cohesion and unity, and the sustainability of socio-economic development, are all aspects of soft power.<sup>39</sup> The domestic context is also evident in the remarks of top Chinese leaders. Hu Jintao, for instance, propounded that cultural soft power has two main purposes; one is to enhance national cohesion and creativity and meet the demands of people's spiritual life; the other is to strengthen China's competitiveness in the contest for comprehensive national power within the international arena.<sup>40</sup> Official documents and writings by prominent scholars frequently mention the urgency of rebuilding Chinese culture and developing new values to hold together the rapidly changing society and strengthen national cohesiveness.<sup>41</sup>

### Soft Power: A Weak Link in China's Comprehensive Power

The dominant view among Chinese interlocutors on the current state of China's soft power is that China has made much headway and has great potential, but its soft power lags behind both its own hard power growth and that of the soft power of other major powers, particularly the

<sup>35</sup> Zhao Haibin, 'Yi Zhongyiyao Chuantong Wenhua Tisheng Zhongguo Ruan Shili', ('Use Traditional Chinese Medical Culture to Upgrade China's Soft Power'), *Yunnan Zhongyiyao Xueyuan Xuebao (Journal of Yunnan College of Traditional Chinese Medicine)*, No. 1, 2007, Vol. 30, pp. 4–9.

<sup>36</sup> Zhao Shusen, 'Jingji Shijiao xia de Ruan Quanli yu Zhongguo de Heping Fazhan', ('Soft Power in Economic Perspective and China's Peaceful Development'), *Yafei Zongheng (All-round Asia-Africa)*, No. 5, 2007, pp. 53–59.

<sup>37</sup> Cheng Bin et al., 'Tiyu Wenhua Chuanbo yu Tisheng Guojia Ruan Shili', ('Communications of Sports Culture and the Increase of China's Soft Power'), *Collection of Excerpts of Papers Presented at the 8th National Sports Science Conference*, 2007.

<sup>38</sup> Qian Zhengshun, 'Jiaoyu Waijiao zai Guojia Ruan Shili Waijiao Zhong Dayoukewei', ('Educational Diplomacy to Play a Big Role in China's Soft Power Diplomacy'), *Guojia Jiaoyu Xingzheng Xueyuan Xuebao (Journal of National Academy of Education and Administration)*, No. 2, 2007, pp. 33–35.

<sup>39</sup> Yu Keping, 'Zhongguo Moshi: Jingyan yu Jianjie', ('The China Model: Experience and Lessons') in Yu Keping, ed., *Zhongguo Moshi yu Beijing Gongshi—Chaoyue Huashengdun Gongshi (The Chinese Model and Beijing Consensus – beyond the Washington Consensus)* (Beijing: Shehui kexue chubanshe, 2006), p. 19.

<sup>40</sup> Hu Jintao, *Report at the CCP 17th Congress*, October 15, 2007.

<sup>41</sup> Wang Zuoshu, *Goujian Shehuizhuyi Hexie Shehui de Ruan Shili (Building Soft Power for a Socialist Harmonious Society)* (Beijing: Remin Chubanshe, 2007).

United States.<sup>42</sup> Chinese strategists actually describe the present state of China's soft power and its future development as worrisome. This is because China's soft power is weak, and also because converting China's growing national power into constructive international influence still constitutes a weak link in China's strategic planning.<sup>43</sup> Some argue that soft power, rather than Gross Domestic Product or military force, constitutes the main gap between China and the developed countries, particularly the United States. This is attributable to China's shortcomings as regards domestic institutions, inadequate research, low level of education, less-than-perfect national image and decline of sense of national identity and social cohesion.<sup>44</sup> Others base their pessimistic views on China's scant global name brands and significant deficit in the cultural products trade, even though it is becoming the factory of the world. The deficit in cultural trade is a clarion call for many Chinese officials and scholars. For instance, in 2004, China imported 4068 book titles from the United States but exported only 14; it imported 2030 titles from Britain but exported only 16; and imported 694 titles from Japan but exported only 22. This discrepancy is exemplified in the 4000:24 import:export ratio of China's intellectual property rights trade with the United States in 2005.

This pessimistic orientation was echoed by participants in a forum in January 2007 hosted by the Fudan University International Public Relations Research Centre on 'national soft power construction and the development of China's public relations'. Many participants said that China had indeed made soft power inroads. Wang Guoqing, deputy director of the State Council Information Office, said in his keynote speech that China has gained much soft power in recent years, as evidenced by the international attention given to China's development, the international attraction of China's development model, China diplomacy's ability to shape the course of international affairs, and the affinity emanated by Chinese culture. But he pointed out that, overall, China's soft power lags behind. Forum participants acknowledged that the weakness of China's soft power is most evident in exports of cultural products and the relatively weak influence of China's mass media within the international arena.<sup>45</sup>

As regards the international impact of China's development model, there is disagreement on whether or not the Chinese experience is or should be

<sup>42</sup> Zhan Yijia, 'Zhongguo Shi Ruan Shili Daguo Ma?' ('Is China a Nation with Strong Soft Power?') *Shijie Zhishi (World Knowledge)*, No. 20, 2006, p. 5; Deng Xiaochao, 'Qiaoran Jueqi de Zhongguo Ruan Shili', ('Chinese Soft Power Quietly Growing'), *Pandeng (Ascent)*, No. 6, 2005, pp. 89–93; 'Touxu Zhongguo "Ruan Shili"', ('Analyzing China's Soft Power'), *Jiefang Ribao (Liberation Daily)*, October 3, 2005.

<sup>43</sup> Men Honghua, 'Assessment and Report of China's Soft Power'.

<sup>44</sup> Huang Renwei, 'Ruan Liliang yu Guojia Anquan', ('Soft Power and National Security'), *Xuexi Yuekan (Study Monthly)*, No. 1, 2003, pp. 23–28.

<sup>45</sup> Feng Jian and Qian Haihong, 'China's Soft Power Construction in the Perspective of Public Relations'.

a source of China's soft power. Certain officials and scholars believe that the so-called 'Beijing consensus' has indeed demonstrated the model's attractiveness to developing countries. Wang Guoqing, as mentioned above, regards perceptions of China's development and development model as the two main sources of the country's soft power growth.<sup>46</sup> Others, however, disagree. Their scepticism is based on the fact that as Chinese development is not yet complete it is too early to present it as a model of Chinese socio-economic development.<sup>47</sup>

A minority of Chinese scholars hold more optimistic views on China's soft power. Those more sanguine emphasize the country's potential, arguing that China has all the elements of soft power, including cultural power, language power, civilizational power and intellectual power. The fact that China sponsors 'Confucius Institutes' throughout the world attests to the country's determination to expand its soft power.<sup>48</sup> One author states that in today's world, interdependence is intensifying, calling for ever closer cooperation among nations. International cooperation depends on equality, mutual trust and mutual benefit. This growing urgency for international cooperation offers Chinese culture, which emphatically values 'harmony', a valuable opportunity. The Chinese cultural stress on 'harmony without suppressing differences' (*He Er Bu Tong*) is likely to promote new thinking and a fresh approach to international relations, thus highlighting the comparative advantages of Chinese culture. In the eyes of these optimists, 'harmony'-laden Chinese culture can then proffer universal values to the outside world.<sup>49</sup>

## Soft Power: A Means to Multiple Ends

The above discussion demonstrates China's intense desire and strong sense of urgency towards building and promoting soft power, to the extent that many analysts argue soft power should be treated on the level of state strategy.<sup>50</sup> This urgency springs from the Chinese assessment of soft power as the weakest link in its rise in comparison to Western powers.<sup>51</sup> There are

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> Zhang Jianjing, "'Beijing Gongshi" yu Zhongguo Ruan Shili de Tisheng', ('The 'Beijing Consensus' and the Increase of China's Soft Power'), *Dangdai Shijie yu Shehuizhuyi (Contemporary World and Socialism)*, No. 4, 2004, pp. 10–14.

<sup>48</sup> Pang Zhongying, 'Kongzi Sixiang de "Chukou" he Ruan Liliang de Shiyong', ('The Export of Confucianism and Use of Soft Power'), *Shijie Zhishi (World Knowledge)*, No. 17, 2006, p. 67.

<sup>49</sup> Yu Yunquan, 'Zhongguo Wenhua Ruan Shili Jianshe Renzhongdaoyuan', ('China's Cultural Soft Power Construction Has a Long way to Go'), *Duiwai Dachuanbo (External Communications)*, No. 1, 2007, pp. 44–46.

<sup>50</sup> Zhao Changmao, 'Zhongguo Xuyao Ruan Shili', ('China Needs Soft Power'), *Liaowang Xinwen Zhoukan (Outlook News Weekly)*, June 7, 2004.

<sup>51</sup> Huang Renwei, *Zhongguo Jueqi de Shijian he Kongjian (Time and Space of China's Rise)* (Shanghai: Shanghai shehuikexue chubanshe, 2002).

other reasons why China is so keen on soft power. In a nutshell, soft power is envisioned as a means to multiple ends.

### Soft Power: An Indicator of World Status

The most frequent argument about soft power is that it must be an aspect of the 'comprehensive power' a major nation is expected to possess. It is commonly believed within Chinese strategic circles that soft power is an important indicator of a state's international status and influence.<sup>52</sup> A great power needs material or hard power as well as soft power to enjoy flexibility within international politics and maintain advantageous positions in international competition. In light of this, many Chinese analysts argue that soft power is inseparable from China's rise.<sup>53</sup> A world power should also be a world cultural centre, whose ideas, values, social life and beliefs are attractive and appealing to peoples of other countries. 'If a major power cannot provide some guiding moral or cultural ideals of universal value for the international society, its major power status is unlikely to be acknowledged by other states, and even its own development is hard to be sustained.'<sup>54</sup> Soft power, in the view of many Chinese strategists, does not occur automatically under the influence of material hard power, but must be purposefully cultivated and built up.

Building soft power commensurate with China's major power status and influence has become an urgent task in China's development strategy, according to various Chinese scholars. The sense of urgency emanates from the following factors: first, China's hard power—economic, technological, and military—has already achieved dramatic growth, but its soft power lags behind, creating imbalance within its national comprehensive power structure that is detrimental to China's aspirations towards higher international status and greater international influence.<sup>55</sup> Others are more specific, saying that building soft power is conducive to the domestic programme of building a 'harmonious society', a concept that the Hu-Wen leadership proposes to tackle mounting domestic social challenges. Domestic stability requires more attention to culture, national cohesion, morality and institutions. The purpose of these measures is to maintain social and political stability in China, and create favourable internal conditions for China's peaceful rise.

<sup>52</sup> Men Honghua, 'Assessment and Report of China's Soft Power'.

<sup>53</sup> Li Jie, 'Tisheng Ruan Shili Dui Shixian Woguo Heping Jueqi Zhanlue de Zuoyong', ('The Role of Increasing Soft Power for the Realization of China's Peaceful Rise'), *Taipingyang Xuebao* (Journal of Pacific Studies), No.12, 2005, pp. 64–71; Huang Jing and Yue Zhanju, 'Ruan Shili Jianshe yu Zhongguo de Heping Fazhan Daolu', ('Building Soft Power and China's Peaceful Development Road'), *Dangdai Shijie yu Shehuizhuyi* (Contemporary World and Socialism), No. 5, 2006, pp. 103–107.

<sup>54</sup> Luo Jianbo, 'External Cultural Strategy in China's Rise'.

<sup>55</sup> Wang Jianjun, 'Ruan Shili Shengwen', ('Soft Power Given More Attention'), *LiaoWang* (Outlook Weekly), No. 11 March 12, 2007.

The building up soft power, in addition to fulfilling specific tasks at the strategic level, is also a chance to explore alternative routes to sustainable growth.<sup>56</sup>

### A Soft Shield for Self-defence

The emerging Chinese soft power strategy also relates to the ‘important period of strategic opportunity’ that the Hu-Wen leadership emphasized. President Hu Jintao said at a meeting with Chinese diplomatic emissaries that to better serve Chinese interests during this ‘important period of strategic opportunity’, China needs to strive to ensure four ‘environments’: a peaceful and stable international environment; a neighbourly and friendly environment in surrounding regions; a cooperative environment based on equality and mutual benefits; and an objective and friendly media environment. Chinese analysts believe that soft power is instrumental to helping China achieve these goals. The immediate objective is to dispel what they see as misperception and misunderstanding of the real China by outside commentators, and to develop a better image of the Chinese regime in the world; also to fend off excessive influence and penetration of foreign cultures in China, particularly ideologies or beliefs that might harm the legitimacy of the ruling party.

Soft power, first and foremost, is intended to shape a better perception of China by the outside world. Its primary purpose is to refute the ‘China threat’ thesis, facilitate a better understanding of China’s domestic socio-economic reality, and convince the outside world to accept and support China’s rise.<sup>57</sup> Externally, building soft power is of benefit to China in maintaining a stable and peaceful neighbourhood. It also helps to solve problems among China and other countries and so avoid exacerbating tension.<sup>58</sup> The international strategic environment also contributes to China’s sense of urgency in developing its soft power. China lacks the propitious international context in which to emulate the American approach of first developing hard economic and military power and later focusing on soft power influence. China needs simultaneously to develop its hard and soft power because without the soft power necessary to maintain a favourable international status, the country is vulnerable to many forces in the world that prohibit or hamper its development.<sup>59</sup>

<sup>56</sup> Men Honghua, ‘Assessment and Report of China’s Soft Power’.

<sup>57</sup> Fang Changping, ‘A Comparison of Soft Power between China and the US and its Implications for China’.

<sup>58</sup> Song Xiaofeng, ‘Shi Xi Zhongguo Heping Jueqi zhong de Ruan Quanli Yinsu’, (‘A Preliminary Analysis of the Soft Power Factor in China’s Peaceful Rise’), *Guangdong Xingzheng Xueyuan Xuebao (Journal of Guangdong Institute of Public Administration)*, No. 3, 2005, pp. 46–50.

<sup>59</sup> Zhang Jianjing, ‘The Beijing Consensus and the Increase of China’s Soft Power’. President Hu Jintao said at a meeting with Chinese diplomatic emissaries that to better serve Chinese interests during this ‘important period of strategic opportunity’, China needs to strive to

Upgrading the capacity of Chinese mass media outlets can also help the outside world understand China better, according to Chinese scholars.<sup>60</sup> This is based on the concern that the increase in China's hard power and its impact on the international order prompts certain outside observers to hype China's economic competitiveness and growing demands on the world's energy, thus heightening external apprehension towards China's military power. Building soft power would mitigate such outside concerns. Chinese scholars are also aware that other major powers, particularly those critical of China's rise, may amplify its negative impact. Developing soft power would hence help to create a more favourable international political environment for China's rise.<sup>61</sup> Many Chinese analysts also insist that Chinese voices be heard in the international discourse on the topic, as Western analyses of China's soft power might be inaccurate owing to ideological, social and cultural differences, and Western scholars' inclination to focus on counter-measures to China's soft power.<sup>62</sup>

### International Competition: Soft Power but Hard Reality

China's long-term goal is to face up to the perceived competition for soft power among major powers. Chinese analysts, echoing many international strategists, acknowledge that the role of traditional means of power—i.e. military power—in today's world is relatively low-key. The world is experiencing ever deepening globalization, and stability, cooperation, multilateralism and democratization are on the rise in this new era of international politics. New rules and approaches have appeared in international competition. Soft power, therefore, as represented by culture, political ideology, development model and international institution-building capacity, in addition to the traditional dimensions of military, economic and technological hard power, should also be part of national comprehensive power.<sup>63</sup> In the words of one Chinese analyst, 'The competition among nation-states appears to be a rivalry of hard power, but behind such rivalry is the competition between institutions, civilizations, and strategies, which are essentially the rivalry of soft power.'<sup>64</sup> Zhu Feng argues that China must transcend the conventional approach to international competition that

ensure four 'environments': a peaceful and stable international environment; a neighbourly and friendly environment in surrounding regions; a cooperative environment based on equality and mutual benefits; and an objective and friendly media environment.

<sup>60</sup> Liu Sen, 'Xiang Shijie Shuoming Zhongguo, Guanjian Kao Tisheng Ruan Shili', ('Upgrading Soft Power is Key in Explaining China to the Outside World'), *Jiefang Ribao (Liberation Daily)*, November 3, 2007.

<sup>61</sup> Wang Jianjun, 'Soft Power Given More Attention'.

<sup>62</sup> Fang Changping, 'A Comparison of Soft Power between China and the US and its Implications for China'.

<sup>63</sup> Huang Jing and Yue Zhanju, 'Building Soft Power and China's Peaceful Development Road'.

<sup>64</sup> Zhang Jianjing, 'The 'Beijing Consensus' and the Increase of China's Soft Power'.

focuses on hard power, and seek instead to win ideas and international influence that maintain a 'soft' rather than 'hard counterbalance.'<sup>65</sup>

Many Chinese analysts claim that major powers, including European nations, the United States, Japan, India and South Korea, are stepping up efforts to build up their soft power.<sup>66</sup> Western powers have always actively propagated their political system, ideology (democracy) and culture.<sup>67</sup> The United States is believed to have pursued an aggressive soft power strategy as a means of putting 'cultural hegemonism' into practice, using its strong economic and political power and advantages in global information networks to promote its spiritual and cultural products, socio-political ideals and values.<sup>68</sup> Japan publicized a national strategic plan in 2005, which called for greater efforts to promote Japanese culture throughout the world. South Korea proposed back in 1998 that its cultural sector should be a main industry within its economy in the new century.<sup>69</sup> Chinese analysts frequently refer to South Korea as an example of successful practice of soft power. Many argue that if South Korea, which is greatly influenced by traditional Chinese culture, is successful in projecting its soft power, there is no reason why China should not also triumph, be, because many cultural fundamentals evident in South Korean cultural products originate in the Chinese culture.

Many among the Chinese elite are concerned about American cultural hegemony in the world, including Chinese society, and worry that the younger Chinese generation is excessively exposed to American cultural influence. What the political elite most fear is peaceful evolution; i.e. Western liberal political ideology gradually infiltrating Chinese society, thereby weakening its legitimacy. To many scholars, Western cultural penetration results in the waning of Chinese traditional culture and ultimately a weakened sense of Chinese identity.<sup>70</sup> Consequently, 'beefing up cultural competitiveness is as important as building a strong military'.<sup>71</sup>

<sup>65</sup> Zhu Feng, 'China Should Give Priority to Soft Power Rise'.

<sup>66</sup> See Study Group on Soft Power at CICIR, 'International Lessons about Soft Power'.

<sup>67</sup> Yu Xibin, 'Ruan Shili Liluan de Neihan, Chansheng Beijing ji Yunyong', ('Content, Background, and Application of the Soft Power Theory'), *Dangdai Shijie (Contemporary World)*, No. 9, 2006, pp. 33–35.

<sup>68</sup> Zhao Yi, 'Ruan Shili: Daguo Zhengxiong de Juelichang', ('Soft Power: the Arena of Major Power Rivalry'), *Zhongguo Shehui Daokan (China Society Periodical)*, No. 12, 2005, pp. 55–57.

<sup>69</sup> Li Jie, 'Ruan Shili Jianshe yu Zhongguo de Heping Fazhan', ('Soft Power Construction and China's Peaceful Development'), *Guoji Wenti Yanjiu (International Studies)*, No. 1, 2007, pp. 19–24.

<sup>70</sup> He Ying et al., 'Qian Xi Guojia "Ruan Quanli" Lilun', ('Notes on National Soft Power Theory'), *Guoji Guanxi Xueyuan Xuebao (Journal of University of International Relations)*, No. 12, 2005, pp. 5–8.

<sup>71</sup> Huang Renwei, 'Soft Power and National Security'.

'The competition of cultural power is the core of soft power contention.'<sup>72</sup> The Chinese government released in September 2006 an official document entitled 'The National Planning Guidelines for Cultural Development in the 11th Five-Year Period.'<sup>73</sup> The document states that today's world culture is increasingly intertwined with economics, politics and technologies, all of which are important indicators of a nation's comprehensive power. To win the international competition in this complex environment, a state not only needs strong economic, technological and defensive power, but also strong cultural power. The guidelines actually stipulate that one of the goals of Chinese cultural development is to heighten the influence of Chinese culture in the world until it matches the nation's economic power and international status.

## The Chinese Approach to Stronger Soft Power

This section discusses roadmaps to stronger soft power proposed by Chinese intellectuals. It should be noted from the outset that most analysts believe that China should focus on hard power and develop soft power on the basis of economic, technological and military advancement. Many, however, propose new ideas on how China can strengthen its soft power.

### A Cultural Offensive: Reaching Out to the World

In line with the dominant perception that culture matters most, the focus of both official and scholarly prescriptions for the growth of China's soft power is on various strategies on the cultural front. The 2006 National Planning Guidelines for Cultural Development is intent on a 'go out' strategy to ratchet up the competitiveness and influence of Chinese cultural products and actively promote Chinese culture in the world. Among major policies the document proposes are: utilize various festival occasions to promote international understanding of Chinese culture; actively participate in international decision-making to endorse China's discourse rights; cultivate international sales networks for Chinese cultural products; and provide support to major overseas-oriented cultural enterprises. Zhao Qizheng, former director of the State Council Information Office, said that China should regard reviving its culture and strengthening cultural communication with the outside world as vital to the nation's destiny.<sup>74</sup>

The Chinese government has done much in recent years to promote cultural exchanges with the outside world. Efforts include participation in

<sup>72</sup> Li Haijuan, 'Cultural Strategy in the Context of Soft Power Competition'.

<sup>73</sup> 'Full Text of The National Planning Guidelines for Cultural Development in the 11th Five-Year Period', *Xinhua News Agency*, September 13, 2006.

<sup>74</sup> Shen Suru, 'Kaizhan 'Ruan Shili' yu Duiwai Chuanbo de Yanjiu', ('Conducting Research on Soft Power and External Communications'), *Duiwai Da Chuanbo (Grand External Communications)*, No. 7, 2006, pp. 24–28.

the United Nations Education, Science and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Intergovernmental Conference on Cultural Policies for Development in 1998, the 1999 Paris China Culture Week, the 2000 US Tour of Chinese Culture, the China Festival at the Asia-Pacific Week in 2001 in Berlin, the Chinese year in France from October 2003 to July 2004, the sixth Asian arts festival, the Chinese cultural tour in Africa, the 'year of Russia' in China in 2006, and the 'year of China' in Russia in 2007. It has been stressed that the Chinese diaspora throughout the world is a good platform for promoting Chinese culture.<sup>75</sup> The Chinese government has also allocated significant funds in the past few years towards supporting, in partnership with various universities, the establishment worldwide of Confucius Institutes that promote educational programmes on the Chinese language and culture.

Official reports state that part of the responsibility for promoting the influence of Chinese civilization throughout the world lies with scholars of philosophy, humanities and the social sciences. It is their mission to further discover and promote traditional Chinese cultural values with 'harmony' at the core. As mentioned above, Chinese analysts claim that although in modern history Western civilization spearheaded industrialization, it cannot necessarily provide effective solutions to the various current challenges of environmental degradation, confusion in social ethics, and international and regional conflicts. Traditional Chinese culture, according to their view, stresses 'giving priority to human beings' (*yi ren wei ben*), and is valuable in overcoming the Western obsession with omnipotent materialism, in resolving humankind's growing spiritual crisis, reversing the worsening natural environment and reining in escalating international conflicts.<sup>76</sup>

### Political Values and Institutions: Officials versus Critics

The Chinese political elite and state-owned media continue to advocate adherence to traditional Marxist and socialist ideology in constructing a spiritual civilization.<sup>77</sup> According to official pronouncements, China must make greater effort to construct a socialist core value system to enhance the cohesion of the Chinese nation. Constructing a socialist core value system, therefore, should be the primary task in upgrading China's cultural soft power. Sinicized Marxism should continue to be upheld as the guiding ideology for the party and people. The common aspirations under socialism with Chinese characteristics should serve as the cohesive force. The spirit of

<sup>75</sup> Lin Guoxia, 'Zhongguo Ruan Shili Xianzhuang Fenxi', ('An Analysis of the State of China's Soft Power'), *Dang dai Shijie (Contemporary World)*, No. 3, 2007, pp. 24–28.

<sup>76</sup> Jiang Haiyan, 'Promoting the Outstanding Culture of the Chinese Nation and Strengthening China's Soft Power'.

<sup>77</sup> Shen Jiru, 'Buneng Hushi Zengqiang Woguo de "Ruan Shili"' ('The Enhancement of China's Soft Power Should not be Neglected'), *Liaowang Xinwen Zhoukan (Outlook News Weekly)*, No. 41, 1999, pp. 12–13.

patriotism and reform and innovation should be used to inspire the people.<sup>78</sup> Although Chinese decision makers realize the importance of culture in promoting Chinese soft power, they must still regard Marxism as the primary political framework of China's cultural development.<sup>79</sup>

Many liberal-minded intellectuals, however, focus on the root impediment to China's soft power. Qian Chengdan, history professor at Beijing University who has given lectures to members of the CCP Politburo, argues that the rise of China and the increase of China's soft power requires more institution-building in various fields—economic, social, cultural, jurisdictional, and political—to ensure the transition from the rule of men to the rule of law.<sup>80</sup> Another scholar argues that in addition to the significant changes that are needed to the Chinese model—for instance, making it more sustainable, open, free and harmonious—China must ultimately become a constitutional state to ensure universal application of its experience among developing states.<sup>81</sup>

Other scholars explicitly opine that the challenge to growth of China's soft power is that of elucidating a set of values that unites the Chinese population domestically and is convincing, appealing and attractive externally. One author proposes that China promote the values of peace, development, cooperation, democracy, justice and human rights to increase its soft power.<sup>82</sup> Another scholar argues that Chinese values of universal appeal include economic development, stability and harmony. China's task is to integrate, institutionalize and operationalize these values.<sup>83</sup>

## Public Relations: Expanding the Influence of Chinese Media

Another reason why China lags behind in soft power is because both previous and current Chinese efforts concentrate on traditional Chinese cultural legacies; the government has meanwhile not excelled in its conduct of international public relations, particularly when dealing with Western media, according to certain scholars. Western media have consequently focused on negative China reporting.<sup>84</sup> Another reason for China's lack of soft power, according to certain Chinese scholars, is insufficient financial

<sup>78</sup> 'Upgrading National Cultural Soft Power'.

<sup>79</sup> 'Full Text of the National Planning Guidelines for Cultural Development in the 11th Five-Year Period', *Xinhua News Agency*, September 13, 2006.

<sup>80</sup> Wang Haijing, 'Qian Chengdan: Zhidu Jianshe Chengqi Ruan Shili' ('Qian Chengdan: Institutional Building to Support Soft Power'), *LiaoWang (Outlook Weekly)*, No. 11, 2007.

<sup>81</sup> Zhang Jianjing, 'The "Beijing Consensus" and the Increase of China's Soft Power'.

<sup>82</sup> Zhu Majie and Yu Xintian, 'Soft Power Construction: Invisible Influence not to Be Ignored'.

<sup>83</sup> Chen Yugang, 'Shi Lun Quanqiuhua Beijing xia Zhongguo Ruan Shili de Goujian', ('Thoughts on the Construction of China's Soft Power in the Context of Globalization'), *Guoji GuanCha (International Observations)*, No. 2, 2007, pp. 36–59.

<sup>84</sup> Wu Xu, 'Zhongguo Ruan Shili Bunneng Chi Laoben', ('China's Soft Power cannot Depend on Traditions Only'), *Shiji Xing (Century)*, No. 6, 2007, pp. 47–48.

input into the tools of communication.<sup>85</sup> The solution to this problem is twofold: first, China must develop more effective strategies for dealing with Western media; and second, China must enlarge its media capacity within international communications.

## Conclusions

In recent years, both Chinese officials and scholars have gone to great lengths to explore soft power and its implications for China's foreign affairs. The popularity of soft power in China perhaps reflects the Chinese people's excitement at the pending rise of their nation, but also their sensitivity to anything that may have impact on China's ascent. Chinese officials and scholars who follow Nye's conceptual framework have shed much light on the sources, potential, practice and objectives of soft power in the Chinese context.

A few things, however, are still unclear in the Chinese discourse on soft power. For instance, how soft power can be translated into attainment of specific foreign policy goals. This is particularly the case in the discussion of culture as the main source of soft power. There are few concrete suggestions on how the Chinese 'harmonious' worldview could restructure the world order, and there has been no Chinese proposal or feasibility study by the initiation and leadership of China on how a harmonious world can be achieved. This is key evidence of the absence of a grand Chinese soft power strategy. Moreover, available Chinese studies lack empirical reviews and specific case studies on how China's foreign policy and participation in international institutions have impact on its soft power.

Another key point is that there is constant reference in Chinese discourse to the domestic context, to generally from the standpoint of culture, values and institutions. This domestic orientation implies that China itself is in a state of significant change—cultural, economic, social and political. This state of flux also implies that many sources of Chinese soft power are still uncertain, pending the ultimate transformation of the Chinese state and society. Uncertainties are also reflected in the debate among Chinese scholars, although certain common views are shared by the majority of analysts. Furthermore, the domestic political environment has impact on Chinese understanding of soft power. For instance, in the analysis of media influence as a source of soft power, very few Chinese analysts among those participants in the soft power discourse, realize that Western media—all-powerful in shaping world opinions constitutes more than just a submissive government tool. Western media, particularly, the US media, played a crucial role in bringing down the international reputation of the US government soon after the invasion of Iraq.

<sup>85</sup> Shen Suru, 'Conducting Research on Soft Power and External Communications'.

The official inclination to clutch at the last ideological straw could have significant negative impact on China's soft power. First, given the preferences of decision makers, substantial resources will continue to be allocated to research projects closer to the official ideology, the new Marxist project being a good example. Second, ideology gives political and ideological watchdogs the power to censure any work sometimes wantonly and arbitrarily, which they deem unfit for political reasons. Third, it discourages intellectual innovation. Perhaps most important, official discourse is likely to facilitate the 'go-slow' political reform process. Given the predominance of Western ideological and political ideals, political stagnation in China keeps it in a defensive position. Instead of shaping worldviews and setting agendas in world affairs, therefore, soft power, however the Chinese elite define it, is needed for defensive purposes.

In light of all these factors, it is understandable why Chinese discourse on soft power itself demonstrates a lack of confidence and forcefulness. This is particularly evident when comparing it with the American discussion of soft power. Chinese analysts seem either to downplay or neglect soft power's function of wielding aggressive influence over others, and Chinese authors rarely discuss political ideology and beliefs or their potential for promoting China's soft power. They are instead more or less inclined to base their arguments on relativity, stressing the relative nature of culture and ideology, whereas the American analysis of soft power is comparatively absolute in its advocacy of the universal nature of American ideology, socio-political system, beliefs and cultural tenets.<sup>86</sup>

Official Chinese voices more often than not steadfastly emphasize the importance of respecting cultural, social, political and ideological diversity in the world. The emphasis on diversity is clearly counter to the Western insistence on promoting its universal ideational influence throughout the world, including China, wherein it could pose a grave challenge to the ruling position of the CCP. China's lack of confidence also reflects the fact that the Chinese socio-political system is not in conformity with the global political discourse and atmosphere within which political openness and pluralism are the dominant norms. This is perhaps why official documents or statements emphasize the role of culture to the extent of overlooking political values, as a source of China's soft power. Another factor in the Chinese reluctance to advocate soft power aggressively is that of caution, in case such a loud voice might be interpreted in the West as a Chinese grand strategy to challenge the West. Beijing is fearful that a soft power fanfare might be used by certain Western observers as evidence to support a 'China threat' thesis.<sup>87</sup>

<sup>86</sup> Fang Changping, 'A Comparison of Soft Power between China and the US and its Implications for China'.

<sup>87</sup> Yu Yunquan, 'China's Cultural Soft Power Construction Has a Long Way to Go'.

China has indeed done much to promote its soft power. Efforts include various large-scale cultural activities in other countries, allotting substantial financial resources towards cultivating a better image of China, promoting the capacity of its mass media in international communications, and sponsoring Confucius Institutes throughout the world. Yet despite these efforts, Chinese intellectuals seem uncertain about the ultimate destiny of China's soft power. Numerous writings by Chinese analysts suggest the validity of the thesis: 'Soft power remains Beijing's underbelly and China still has a long way to go to become a true global leader.'<sup>88</sup> China, contrary to what many observers in the West fear, is unlikely to employ in the foreseeable future any effective soft power strategy that challenges the existing international order.

<sup>88</sup> Yanzhong Huang and Sheng Ding, 'Dragon's Underbelly: An Analysis of China's Soft Power', *East Asia*, Vol. 23, No. 4, 2006, pp. 22–44.



Article

# Controversial Identity of a Rising China

Pu Xiaoyu<sup>†,\*</sup>

<sup>†</sup>Pu Xiaoyu is Assistant Professor of Political Science, University of Nevada, Reno

\*Corresponding author. Email: shawnpu@gmail.com

## Abstract

How a rising power adapts to its new status is an important challenge in international relations. Since the global financial crisis, Chinese scholars have hotly debated China's international positioning. The ongoing debate reveals a high level of uncertainty about China's position in the world. While the notion of the 'revival of the Chinese nation' implies the clear goal of 'making China great again', China's ultimate place on the global stage is unclear. Many Chinese scholars might want China to become richer and stronger, but disagree on whether or not China should eventually seek superpower status. Regarding strategies, Chinese scholars also debate whether China should maintain a low profile or strive for greater achievements in global affairs. This article takes a 'status signalling' approach to explain why Chinese scholars take various positions in this debate. Status signalling aims either to change or maintain a special type of 'status belief' among relevant political actors. China must manage its conflicting roles in ways that advance its interests but do not engender dangerous misperceptions. In particular, China must balance the competing incentives between resolve and reassurance, status and responsibilities, and the domestic and international audience. These competing incentives have shaped the Chinese debate on international positioning.

## Introduction

Shortly after Xi Jinping became general secretary of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), he made a speech about his new slogan, the 'Chinese Dream', which means realization of 'the great renewal of the Chinese nation'.<sup>1</sup> Xi also laid out the 'two centenary goals', which are to complete the building of a moderately prosperous society by 2020, and to realize the great renewal of the Chinese nation by the middle of the century.<sup>2</sup> The idea of 'rejuvenation of the Chinese nation' has been a major theme promoted by several generations of Chinese

1 Xinhua, 'Xi Pledges Great Renewal of Chinese Nation', [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2012-11/29/c\\_132008231.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2012-11/29/c_132008231.htm).

2 The two goals are related to two centenary anniversaries: 2021 will be the 100th anniversary of founding of the CCP, and 2049 will be the 100th anniversary of founding of People's

leaders. Any political leader aiming to maintain legitimacy in modern China must redress the problem of the ‘century of humiliation’ and restore China’s rightful place in the world as a powerful nation.<sup>3</sup> Thus, the ‘Chinese Dream’ slogan has the important political function of mobilizing domestic support. However, the slogan’s international implications are subject to different interpretations. Does the ‘revival of the Chinese nation’ mean that China should become a hegemonic power in Asia as well as the world? For some, the ‘Chinese Dream’ sends a clear message. For Yan Xuetong, the national rejuvenation of China means that China should restore its historical international status, achieved during the Tang dynasty, as the world’s most advanced state. Thus, China’s comprehensive national power must catch up with that of the United States.<sup>4</sup> Liu Mingfu holds that China and the United States will pursue an Olympic-style competition for global leadership.<sup>5</sup> Michael Pillsbury, a former Pentagon official, claims that China has a ‘secret strategy’ to replace the United States as the leading world power.<sup>6</sup> These interpretations imply that China wants to become another superpower, or even the world’s most powerful nation.

But does it? There are several reasons why the answer is not that clear. First of all, Chinese officials have a long tradition of opposing superpower status. In his first speech at the United Nations in 1974 Deng Xiaoping said, ‘China is not a superpower, nor will it ever seek to be one. If one day China should change its colour and turn into a superpower . . . the people of the world should expose it, oppose it and work together with the Chinese people to overthrow it.’<sup>7</sup> Deng made this speech in the 1970s, when China was ideologically radical, economically weak, and diplomatically isolated. In the current ‘opening and reform’ era, China has become the world’s second-largest economy, with an expanding global presence. However, Chinese officials still avoid describing China as a potential superpower. They associate superpower status with hegemony, which has a negative connotation in the Chinese context. Secondly, while the international audience increasingly views China as an emerging superpower that should take a leadership role, many among the Chinese elite and general public still emphasize that China is a developing country, and should not be eager to take a leadership role in global affairs.<sup>8</sup> Thirdly, Chinese intellectuals and policymakers are ill prepared for China’s sudden high profile in global affairs, and some continue to downplay China’s high profile. For instance, according to Chinese senior diplomat Cui Tiankai, ‘We have been elevated in the eyes of others against our will. We

Republic of China (PRC). For the analysis, see Shannon Tiezzi, ‘Why 2020 Is a Make-or-Break Year for China’, *The Diplomat*, 13 February, 2015.

3 Zheng Wang, *Never Forget National Humiliation: Historical Memory in Chinese Politics and Foreign Relations* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014).

4 Yan Xuetong, ‘From Keeping a Low Profile to Striving for Achievement’, *Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol. 7, No. 2 (2014), pp. 153–84.

5 Liu Mingfu, *Zhongguo meng: hou Meiguo shidai de daguo siwei yu zhanlue dingwei* (*The Chinese Dream: Great Power Thinking and Strategic Posture in the Post-American Era*) (Beijing: Zhongguo youyi chubangongsi, 2010).

6 Michael Pillsbury, *The Hundred-Year Marathon: China’s Secret Strategy to Replace America as the Global Superpower* (New York: Henry Holt and Co, 2015).

7 Deng Xiaoping, ‘Speech at the special session of the UN General Assembly’, 10 April, 1974, <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/deng-xiaoping/1974/04/10.htm>.

8 Isaac Stone Fish, ‘Is China Still a ‘Developing’ Country?’, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2014/09/25/is-china-still-a-developing-country/>.

have no intention to compete for global leadership.<sup>9</sup> While scholars such as Yan Xuetong think China should replace the United States as the world's number one nation,<sup>10</sup> others, such as Wang Jisi and Zhang Ruizhuang, suggest that even a number two status might be too high for China.<sup>11</sup>

Since the global financial crisis of 2008, Chinese scholars and policymakers have heatedly debated China's status and role in the world.<sup>12</sup> The ongoing scholarly and policy debate reveals a high level of uncertainty about China's position on the global stage. As Henry Kissinger pointed out, a fundamental question about China is that of 'the nature of its place in the world'.<sup>13</sup> While the notion of the 'revival of the Chinese nation' implies the clear goal of 'making China great again', China's ultimate place on the global stage is unclear. Will a rising China seek to challenge or even to replace the United States as the new superpower? Is China a challenger or a supporter of the existing global order? Should China primarily position itself as an emerging superpower or as a developing country?

It is critical to investigate how and why the Chinese are debating China's international positioning on the world stage. First of all, China's international positioning relates to the fundamental relationship between China and the existing international order. The nature and content of the international system in the coming decades will partially depend upon what roles the emerging powers, especially China, decide to play.<sup>14</sup> Secondly, the debate shapes how China deals with a range of international issues. For instance, should China primarily position itself in climate change negotiations as a developing country or a responsible great power? China's complex roles in the international arena led to inconsistencies that plagued its position during the Copenhagen climate negotiations.<sup>15</sup> Finally, China's international positioning also shapes how the established powers might respond to the rise of China. For instance, if China were seeking to grow within the existing liberal order, the Sino-American relationship might not be a zero-sum game, and the United States could be

- 9 David Shambaugh, *China Goes Global* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 307.
- 10 Yan, 'From Keeping a Low Profile to Striving for Achievement', pp. 153–84.
- 11 Wang Jisi, 'Zhongguo de guoji dingwei yu taoguoangyanghui youshuozuowei de zhanlue sixiang' ('The International Positioning of China and the Strategic Principle of "Keeping a Low Profile While Getting Something Accomplished"'), *Guoji wenti yanjiu (International Studies)*, No. 5 (2011), pp. 28–31; Zhang Ruizhuang, 'Guoji geju bianhua yu Zhongguo dingwei' ('Change of International System and China's Positioning'), *Xiandai guoji guanxi (Contemporary International Relations)*, No. 4 (2013), pp. 20–22.
- 12 Thomas J. Christensen mentions the China's *Dingwei* (positioning) debate. Thomas J. Christensen, *The China Challenge: Shaping the Choices of a Rising Power* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2015), pp. 3–8.
- 13 Jeffrey Goldberg, 'World Chaos and World Order: Conversations With Henry Kissinger', *The Atlantic*, 10 November, 2016, <http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2016/11/kissinger-order-and-chaos/506876/>.
- 14 For the discussion of three possible roles for China in the emerging world order, see Randall L. Schweller and Xiaoyu Pu, 'After Unipolarity: China's Visions of International Order in an Era of U.S. Decline', *International Security*, Vol. 36, No. 1 (2011), pp. 41–72.
- 15 Björn Conrad, 'China in Copenhagen: Reconciling the "Beijing Climate Revolution" and the "Copenhagen Climate Obstacity"', *China Quarterly*, Vol. 210 (2012), pp. 435–55.

largely willing to accommodate China's rise.<sup>16</sup> However, if China were seeking to replace the United States as a new superpower, a Sino-American conflict might be inevitable.<sup>17</sup> In recent years, China's more assertive posturing has partially contributed to the rethinking of US strategy towards China.<sup>18</sup>

This article will proceed as follows. The first section discusses the conceptualization of international positioning. The second section explains the origin and context of the debate, and in particular analyses why international positioning is becoming such an important Chinese foreign policy issue. The third section identifies the consensuses and differences among Chinese scholars, and the fourth section provides a theoretical model to explain the differences among Chinese scholars. The conclusion summarizes the article's findings and their implications.

### **China's International Positioning: Definition**

What does international positioning mean? Originally a business management concept, 'positioning' (*dingwei*) refers to efforts to build a new image for a company or product.<sup>19</sup> Like a rapidly growing company trying to redefine its position and brand, China aims to project a new image and to establish a new position in the international order. In business, positioning or branding is the creation of a name or symbol, or a combination of the two, for an established brand with the intention of developing a differentiated position.<sup>20</sup> The concept of branding or positioning can also be applied in politics and international relations (IR).<sup>21</sup> Some Chinese scholars conceptualize China's positioning or *dingwei* as a matter of 'diplomatic transformation' (*waijiao zhuanxing*).<sup>22</sup>

According to Chinese scholars, Wang Jisi and Cai Tuo, the heated debate over China's *dingwei* within China's foreign policy community is unique, as there are no systemic studies

16 G. John Ikenberry, 'The Rise of China and the Future of the West: Can the Liberal System Survive?', *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 87, No. 1 (2008), pp. 23–37.

17 John J. Mearsheimer, 'The Gathering Storm: China's Challenge to US Power in Asia', *Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol. 3, No. 4 (2010), pp. 381–96.

18 For the discussion of China's assertive diplomacy, see Dingding Chen, Xiaoyu Pu and Alastair Iain Johnston, 'Debating China's Assertiveness', *International Security*, Vol. 38, No. 3 (2013), pp. 176–83; for the discussion of US rethinking of its China policy, see Harry Harding, 'Has US China Policy Failed?', *Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 38, No. 3 (2015), pp. 95–122.

19 In business, positioning and branding are similar, see L. Muzellec and M. Lambkin, 'Corporate Rebranding and the Implications for Brand Architecture Management: The Case of Guinness (Diageo) Ireland', *Journal of Strategic Marketing*, Vol. 16, No. 4 (2008), pp. 283–99.

20 *Ibid.*

21 Margaret Scammell, 'Political Brands and Consumer Citizens: The Rebranding of Tony Blair', *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Vol. 611 (2007), pp. 176–92; Peter Van Ham, 'The Rise of the Brand State: The Postmodern Politics of Image and Reputation', *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 80, No. 5 (2001), pp. 2–6.

22 Wang Yizhou, *Chuangzhaoxin jieru: Zhongguo waijiao xin quxiang (Creative Involvement: A New Direction in China's Diplomacy)*(Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2011).

of *dingwei* in the broader literature of IR.<sup>23</sup> While Wang and Cai's assessment of the Chinese scholarly literature might be accurate, I argue that the topic of China's international positioning can be analysed from a more theoretical perspective. Viewed in a broader context, 'the logic of positionality' is becoming increasingly important in the IR literature.<sup>24</sup> The logic of positionality proposes that hierarchies in world politics can constitute or make the salient actors' position-contingent roles. This implies that 'the content of what actors want and what is important to them depends in part on where they are positioned in a hierarchical order'.<sup>25</sup> The challenge of how a great power adapts to its new status is not a uniquely Chinese problem. Rising and declining powers often face obstacles to objectively evaluating their shifting power and how to adjust their policy accordingly. Not only the uncertainty and complexity inherent in the international system constrain the objective assessment of power and status at a national level; domestic politics could also complicate the process of strategic adjustments, leading to various pathologies, such as under-expansion, over-expansion, and under-balance.<sup>26</sup> In the late 19th century, for example, domestic political fragmentation inhibited the ability of the declining Britain to assess accurately its relative power position.<sup>27</sup> Under what conditions will a rising power pursue an over-expansionist policy? When and why will a rising power pursue a shirking policy?<sup>28</sup>

International positioning has subjective, objective, and inter-subjective dimensions. The subjective dimension refers to the identity and status narrative. In social interactions, the narrative identity is the foundation of positioning or image projection. As individuals may have multiple selves, a nation can also have different national identity narratives.<sup>29</sup> The objective dimension refers to the material capabilities a country might have. Economic and military capabilities constitute the material foundation of a country's position in the

- 23 Wang, 'The International Positioning of China and the Strategic Principle of "Keeping a Low Profile While Getting Something Accomplished" ', pp. 28–31; Cai Tuo, 'Dangdai Zhongguo guoji dingwei de ruogan sikao' ('Some Reflections on China's International Positioning'), *Zhongguo shehui kexue (Social Sciences in China)*, No. 5 (2010), pp. 121–36.
- 24 In a recent theoretical essay, two scholars propose that we should pay more attention to the 'logic of positionality', see Janice Bially Mattern and Ayşe Zarakol, 'Hierarchies in World Politics', *International Organization*, Vol. 70, No. 3 (2016), pp. 623–54.
- 25 *Ibid.*
- 26 Fareed Zakaria, *From Wealth to Power: The Unusual Origins of America's World Role* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998); Jack Snyder, *Myths of Empire: Domestic Politics and International Ambition* (Ithaca: Cornell University press, 1993); Randall Schweller, *Unanswered Threats: Political Constraints on the Balance of Power* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008).
- 27 Aaron Friedberg, *The Weary Titan: Britain and the Experience of Relative Decline, 1895-1905* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988).
- 28 For an analysis of under-extension or over-extension in the case of US foreign policy, see Peter Trubowitz, *Politics and Strategy: Partisan Ambition and American Statecraft* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011); Arthur A. Stein, 'Domestic Constraints, Extended Deterrence, and the Incoherence of Grand Strategy', in Richard Rosecrance and Arthur A. Stein, eds., *The Domestic Bases of Grand Strategy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993).
- 29 For the discussion of multiple identities at the individual level, see Hazel Markus and Paula Nurius, 'Possible Selves', *American Psychologist*, Vol. 41, No. 9 (1986), pp. 954–69.

international pecking order. The inter-subjective dimension refers to the recognition of a country's position by an international audience. By analysing the domestic debate on China's international positioning, this article will focus on the subjective dimension of international positioning. Although the objective dimension of China's positioning is still important, the objective indicators of China's international positioning are straightforward. For instance, no reasonable scholar would deny that China became the second-largest economy in 2010. The inter-subjective dimension of international positioning is also relevant, but it is not the focus of this article. That said, the subjective and inter-subjective dimensions of international positioning can be logically and theoretically linked. As Robert Jervis has pointed out, signalling and perceptions are two sides of the same coin in IR.<sup>30</sup> Based on Jervis's argument, when a state tries to project a particular image it will estimate how these signals might be perceived and recognized by other countries.

It should be noted that, in the Chinese context, the issue of international positioning overlaps other concepts, such as status, role, and identity, but these are not necessarily the same.<sup>31</sup> The common ground of these concepts lies in their helping us to conceptualize the position of a state in international society. The key difference is that positioning seems to be more comprehensive and dynamic than the concepts of status and identity. This article will focus on international positioning while occasionally touching upon the concepts of status and identity. In particular, it will examine three core questions related to China's international positioning: first, what is China's status and identity in the international system? Secondly, what is China's long-term goal? Thirdly, what should China's strategy be to fulfil its goal? They can be thus simplified: 'Who are we? Where are we going? What are we going to do?' Among the three, that of 'where are we going?' is the most crucial. As Henry Kissinger recently observed, the Chinese strategic tradition emphasizes long-term trends.<sup>32</sup> The question of 'where are we going' might hence reflect a long-term perspective on China's strategic orientation in IR.

## **The Debate on China's International Positioning: Origin and Context**

Why has international positioning become such a hot topic in China's foreign policy community? Why have Chinese scholars debated this issue in recent years? In this section, we will analyse the origins and context of the debate. In 2009, Cai Tuo, director of the Global Studies Institute at China University of Political Science and Law, hosted a major conference on China's international positioning. Participants included scholars from China's key

30 Robert Jervis, *The Logic of Images in International Relations* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), p. xiii.

31 For some examples focusing on the study of role and identity of a rising China, see Hu Jian, *Juese zheren chenzhang lujin: Zhongguo zai 21 shiji de jichuxin zhanlue wenti (Role, Responsibility and the Path of Growth: The Fundamental Strategic Question of China in the 21st Century)*(Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 2010); Kai He and Stephen Walker, 'Role Bargaining Strategies for China's Peaceful Rise', *Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol. 8, No. 4 (2015), pp. 371–88.

32 Jeffrey Goldberg, 'World Chaos and World Order: Conversations With Henry Kissinger', [www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2016/11/kissinger-order-and-chaos/506876/](http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2016/11/kissinger-order-and-chaos/506876/).

universities, as well as policymakers from the Chinese Foreign Ministry.<sup>33</sup> It was a comprehensive conference in China focusing solely on international positioning. According to Cai, there are four reasons why international positioning has become an important topic: first, the rapid transformation of the international system; secondly, China faces growing structural pressure; thirdly, China is confused about its identity and role; and finally, the international community has growing expectations of China, and is becoming more suspicious of China's role.<sup>34</sup> According to this perspective, both international and domestic factors compel China to clarify its position in the international system.

Borrowing the 'the level of analysis' framework in IR,<sup>35</sup> we can identify the origin and context of the debate on three levels. At the international level, China's international positioning has changed dramatically in recent years, and two events were especially salient in shaping the debate: the first was the global financial crisis of 2008, which drove China to the centre stage of global economic governance. The second was China's surpassing Japan in 2010 as the world's second-largest economy. To some extent, China's economic status has exceeded the expectations of China's political and intellectual elite. In a 2005 *Foreign Affairs* article, Zheng Bijian, a political advisor to the Chinese leadership, observed, 'China's economy is one-seventh the size of the United States' and one-third the size of Japan's.<sup>36</sup> It is hence unlikely that Chinese elites had any expectation that in just five years China's economy would surpass Japan's. Although China now has higher international status, certain Chinese elites are nevertheless ill prepared for the country's sudden high profile in the global community.

At the domestic level, China's foreign-policy-making process has become more complicated and fragmented. Different institutions and government agencies sometimes advocate different foreign interests and policy priorities.<sup>37</sup> Chinese scholars have greater opportunity to participate in the policy deliberation processes hosted by various government institutions, and the ever more complex decision-making process has created space for diverse voices to emerge.

At the individual level, the scholars' theoretical preferences also shape the debate. As observations are often theory-laden, Chinese scholars conceptualize differently the key problems of international positioning, largely according to their particular theoretical perspectives. There is a tendency where scholars with an international liberal orientation often emphasize the 'soft' dimensions of China's international positioning, such as soft power, international institutions, and provision of global public goods. Scholars with a nationalistic or realist orientation, meanwhile, lay emphasis on the material power and critical

33 For a summary of this conference, see Wu Leizhao, 'Dangdai Zhongguo de guoji dingwei xueshu yantao hui zhongshu' ('Summary of the Academic Conference on China's International Positioning'), *Xiandai guoji guanxi (Contemporary International Relations)*, No. 12 (2009), pp. 63–64.

34 Cai, 'Some Reflections on China's International Positioning', pp. 121–36.

35 Kenneth N. Waltz, *Man, the State, and War: A Theoretical Analysis* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959); David J. Singer, 'The Level-of-Analysis Problem in International Relations', *World Politics*, Vol. 14, No. 1 (1961), pp. 77–92.

36 Zheng Bijian, 'China's "Peaceful Rise" to Great-power Status', *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 84, No. 5 (2005), p. 19.

37 Zhang Qingmin, 'Bureaucratic Politics and Chinese Foreign Policy-Making', *Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol. 9, No. 4 (2016), pp. 435–58.

perspective of China's place in the Western-dominated international society. For instance, Chen Yugang suggests that China's international positioning should be viewed from the perspective of 'global relations', rather than 'international relations'. According to Chen, 'global relations' has transnational dimensions, and China should clarify its goal and strategy through global vision.<sup>38</sup> Cai Tuo identifies China's value system and soft power as among key issues related to the country's international positioning.<sup>39</sup> Pang Zhongying suggests that the most important thing for China is to resolve the identity issue 'who am I', so that it may then clarify its foreign policy.<sup>40</sup> In contrast to these soft power and identity perspectives, Tang Yongsheng regards evaluations of China's comprehensive power (including territory, population, economy, technology, and military) as the foundation of China's international positioning.<sup>41</sup> Wang Xianghui maintains that China should not forget its 'critical perspective' while integrating into international society.<sup>42</sup>

There are also scholars who take a middle ground approach. Highlighting the importance of evaluating China's capabilities and power, Wang Jisi suggests that the key lies in clarifying the *Taoguangyanghui* (maintaining a low profile) strategy.<sup>43</sup> Men Honghua holds that it is crucial to clarify China's various national attributes: institutionally, positioning itself as a socialist country; socio-economically, as a large developing country; culturally, as a cultural power with traditional resources; politically, as a responsible great power; and strategically, as a great power in the Asia-pacific region.<sup>44</sup>

## The Debate on China's International Positioning: Consensuses and Differences

Consensuses and differences are apparent in the debate among Chinese scholars on China's international positioning. Most agree that China has multiple identities, but seem to disagree on which identity should be most salient. Also, while Chinese scholars want China to become richer and stronger in the future, they disagree on the ultimate destination of China's rise on the global stage. In particular, they debate whether or not China should become a new superpower and replace the United States as the next global leader. Regarding strategies, Chinese scholars are actively debating whether China should maintain a low profile or strive for achievement in a new era.

Regarding the question of China's identity and status, Chinese scholars generally agree that China does not have a fixed identity; rather, China is a state with a political discourse

38 Quoted in Wu, 'Summary of the Academic Conference on China's International Positioning', pp. 63–64.

39 *Ibid.*

40 *Ibid.*

41 *Ibid.*

42 *Ibid.*

43 Wang, 'The International Positioning of China and the Strategic Principle of "Keeping a Low Profile While Getting Something Accomplished"', pp. 28–31.

44 Men Honghua, 'Liangge daju shijia xia de Zhongguo guojia rentong bianqian (1982-2012)' ('The Evolution of China's National Identity under the Two-Level Context 1982-2012') *Zhongguo shehui kexue (Social Science in China)*, No. 9 (2013), pp. 54–66.

grounded in several competing ideologies and narratives.<sup>45</sup> As China occupies multiple positions in world politics, it has to manage these conflicted identities and roles. For instance, China has the interests of both a developing country and a developed one, and it is both a weak country and a strong one. Possessing multiple identities, China finds it increasingly difficult to define its interests in a coherent way.<sup>46</sup>

There are at least five narratives on China's identities that are widely recognized in Chinese IR discourse. First, China is a socialist country with Chinese characteristics. That the CCP is the ruling party is the key feature of the Chinese system. As Yuan Peng said, 'Westerners sometimes exaggerate China's socialist characteristics and revert to the label "communist", while at other times ignoring China's socialist nature and dealing with it as if it were purely capitalist. Neither caricature adequately captures the complex nature of the Chinese economy, development model, or social policies.'<sup>47</sup> According to Wang Jisi, Chinese leaders are especially sensitive to 'domestic disorder caused by foreign threats'.<sup>48</sup>

Secondly, China is a developing country. While China's economy is now the world's second-largest, many China indicators still reflect a relatively low developmental level. Thirdly, China is an 'emerging great power' (*xinxing daguo*) and 'rising power' (*jueqi guo*). As an emerging power, China shares the same status as other BRICS countries (Brazil, India, Russia, and South Africa). Originally coined as a purely economic term by the Goldman Sachs investment bank, BRICS has emerged in the 21st century as a group of influential great powers. 'Emerging power' has become a buzzword in Chinese IR discourse. Although academic discussions of China as a 'rising power' earlier emerged,<sup>49</sup> the Chinese government started more explicitly to acknowledge China's 'rising power' status in the years 2013 and 2014. By highlighting *The Thucydides Trap* as analogous to the Sino-American challenge, the Chinese leader Xi Jinping proposed building a 'New Type of Great Power Relations' with the United States. From this perspective, managing tensions with the number one power has become an ever more urgent challenge for China,<sup>50</sup> a perspective that seems to position China as the number two power in the international pecking order.

Fourthly, China is an established great power. While international observers often view China as an emerging power, they sometimes ignore the fact that China has become one of the established great powers. Deng Xiaoping once said, 'In the so-called multi-polar world,

45 For an early summary of diverse perspectives in China, see David Shambaugh, 'Coping with a Conflicted China', *Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 34, No. 1 (2011), pp. 7–27. Shambaugh's article focuses on different foreign policy ideas in China, not necessarily China's competing national identities.

46 Some Chinese scholars have identified the duality of China's national identity, see Li Shaojun, 'Lun Zhongguo de shuangchong kunjin yu yingdui' ('China's Dual Identities Dilemma and its Countermeasures'), *Shijie jinji yu zhengzhi (World Economics and Politics)*, No. 1 (2012), pp. 5–20.

47 Nina Hachigian and Yuan Peng, 'The US-China Expectations Gap: An Exchange', *Survival*, Vol. 52, No. 4 (2010), pp. 67–86.

48 Wang Jisi, 'China's Search for a Grand Strategy: A Rising Great Power Finds Its Way', *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 90, No. 2 (2011), pp. 68–79.

49 For instance, Yan Xuetong, et al., *Zhongguo jueqi: guoji huanjin pinggu (The Rise of China: An Evaluation of the International Environment)* (Tianjin: Tianjin renmin chubanshe, 1998).

50 Qi Hao, 'China Debates the "New Type of Great Power Relations"', *Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol. 8, No. 4 (2015), pp. 349–70.

China too will be a pole. We should not belittle our own importance: one way or another, China will be counted as a pole.<sup>51</sup> Finally, China is a regional power in East Asia, and has been a predominant power there for thousands of years, which carries foreign policy implications in the contemporary era.<sup>52</sup> Some Chinese regard China's leading status in the region as natural rather than as challenging the *status quo*.<sup>53</sup> In light of the trade-offs between China's different identities, Chinese scholars tend to emphasize different aspects of China's identities and status. For instance, Cai Tuo argues that China should embrace the identity of an emerging great power, while Hu Jian emphasizes the importance of China's identity as a developing country.<sup>54</sup>

Regarding the question of China's long-term goals, Chinese elites have a clear sense of general direction but an unclear sense of ultimate destination. Modern Chinese leaders always strive to build China into a 'rich nation with a strong army' (*Fuguo qiangbin*).<sup>55</sup> President Xi Jinping's Chinese Dream slogan seems to reflect a continuity of modern Chinese political tradition rather than a creation of something entirely new. However, Chinese scholars have different beliefs regarding long-term goals. In particular, they ask, should China eventually become a superpower and play a leadership role on the global stage? As earlier mentioned, Chinese scholars, such as Yan Xuetong and Liu Mingfu, hold that China's ultimate goal is to replace the United States as the next global leader. From these perspectives, a status competition between China and the United States is inevitable. While China has the potential capabilities to be a superpower, the idea of superpower status is politically controversial in China. For one thing, 'superpower' status has a negative connotation in China's diplomatic discourse, as it is often associated with 'imperialism' or 'hegemony'. While some scholars support the idea of China as an emerging superpower, Chinese officials and other scholars typically do not embrace this notion. According to Wang Jisi, even though China possesses the second-largest economy, the country still lags far behind America, Japan, and Europe as regards innovation, quality of life, and soft power influence.<sup>56</sup>

Finally, regarding the question of China's strategy, should China play a more active role on the world stage? Scholars in China's foreign policy circle actively debate the opportunities and responsibilities of being a great power. Two decades ago, Deng Xiaoping set a guiding principle for China's diplomacy, emphasizing that China should 'hide its capabilities and bide its time'. This low-profile approach is widely known in China as the *Tao*

51 Deng Xiaoping, 'Guoji Xinshi yu jinji wenti' ('The International situation and Economic Problems'), in *Deng Xiaoping Wenxuan-di sanjuan* (*Selected Works of Deng Xiaoping-Volume 3*) (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1993), p. 353

52 David Kang, *China Rising: Peace, Power, and Order in East Asia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008).

53 Yan Xuetong, 'The Rise of China in Chinese Eyes', *Journal of Contemporary China*, Vol. 10, No. 26 (2001), pp. 33–39.

54 Cai, 'Some Reflections on China's International Positioning'; Hu, *Role, Responsibility and the Path of Growth*.

55 Orville Schell and John Delury, *Wealth and Power: China's Long March to the Twenty-first Century* (London: Hachette, 2013).

56 Wang, 'The International Positioning of China and the Strategic Principle of "Keeping a Low Profile While Getting Something Accomplished"', pp. 28–31.

*Guang Yang Hui* (TGYH) strategy.<sup>57</sup> In recent years, the Chinese foreign policy community has been debating what signal China should send to the domestic and international audiences. Many Chinese scholars, such as Wang Jisi and Qin Yaqing, argue that China should continue maintaining a low profile.<sup>58</sup> Yet, according to Yan Xuetong, 'the striving for achievement' strategy has served China well in defending China's national interests while maintaining relatively good relations with many countries.<sup>59</sup> To overcome the political and ideational obstacles to China's playing a larger role, Wang Yizhou suggests using 'creative involvement' to conceptualize China's more active approach to global affairs.<sup>60</sup>

Regarding China's strategy, there is also debate on how to conceptualize Xi Jinping's assertive diplomacy.<sup>61</sup> Although China still has several incentives to keep a low profile, Xi Jinping has started to modify China's low-profile approach by pursuing a more proactive diplomacy. From 24 October to 25 October, 2013, Beijing held a major conference in Asia on China's regional diplomacy. The meeting laid out certain long-term goals of China's regional diplomacy.<sup>62</sup> Besides holding this conference on regional diplomacy, Xi has initiated a range of proactive regional diplomacy events, and it was at one of these that Xi spoke for the first time of China's grand strategy of needing to embrace 'a new great power diplomacy with Chinese characteristics' (*you Zhongguo tese de xinxing daguo waijiao*), to craft a 'new type of great power relations' (*xinxing daguo guanxi*) with the United States.<sup>63</sup> In light of this change in Xi Jinping's foreign policy, certain scholars, such as Yan Xuetong, argue that China has abandoned the low-profile approach, and that China's top leadership has embraced the 'striving for achievement' strategy. While acknowledging the rapid change in Xi's foreign policy, Qin Yaqing sees both continuity and change in Chinese foreign policy. As Qin points out, 'a strident turn from one strategy to the other is inadvisable, and indeed continuity through change is a realistic description of China's present international strategy'.<sup>64</sup>

57 It is extremely difficult to translate Deng Xiaoping's original Chinese words into English. But Deng's main message was that China should maintain a low profile in international affairs. For a detailed analysis of the influence and debates of this idea in China, see Dingding Chen and Jianwei Wang, 'Lying Low No More?: China's New Thinking On the Tao Guang Yang Hui Strategy', *China: An International Journal*, Vol. 2, No. 9 (2011), pp. 195–216.

58 Wang, 'The International Positioning of China and the Strategic Principle of "Keeping a Low Profile While Getting Something Accomplished"', pp. 28–31; Qin Yaqing, 'Continuity through Change: Background Knowledge and China's International Strategy', *Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol. 7, No. 3 (2014), pp. 285–314.

59 Yan, 'From Keeping a Low Profile to Striving for Achievement', pp. 153–84.

60 Wang, *Creative Involvement*.

61 Yan, 'From Keeping a Low Profile to Striving for Achievement', pp.153–84; Qin, 'Continuity through Change', pp. 285–314.

62 'Xi Jinping: China to Further Friendly Relations with Neighbouring Countries', [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2013-10/26/c\\_125601680.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2013-10/26/c_125601680.htm).

63 For the summary in English of the Central Foreign Affairs Work Conference (CFAWC) of the CCP held in Beijing on 29 November, 2014, see 'China Eyes More Enabling International Environment for Peaceful Development', *China Daily*, 30 November, 2014.

64 Qin, 'Continuity through Change', pp. 285–314.

## Interpretation of the Debate: A Status Signalling Model

Why do Chinese scholars take different positions on China's international positioning? To conceptualize the relationship between scholars and the foreign-policy-making process in China, Huiyun Feng and Kai He propose four models: the epistemic community model, free market model, signalling model, and policy mirroring model.<sup>65</sup> These different models highlight the different relationships between scholarly debates and foreign policymaking in China. It should be noted that the four models are hubristic frameworks which might help us understand the relationship in China between the academic world and the policy process. They are not meant to be exclusive of each other. While acknowledging that all four models are valid, I have chosen the signalling model to interpret the Chinese debate, because it is perhaps most relevant to its core issue, namely, China's positioning in international society.<sup>66</sup> According to Feng and He, the signalling model refers to situations where Chinese scholars help the government to test social and international responses to new policy ideas or changes.<sup>67</sup> In other words, scholars that have a close relationship with the government can facilitate policymakers' signalling of certain controversial ideas to the outside world. I modify the signalling model in two respects. First, I focus on 'status signalling' rather than conventional signalling. Status signalling refers to the information transmission mechanism that aims either to change or maintain a special type of 'status belief' among relevant political actors.<sup>68</sup> Secondly, I highlight the significance of both domestic and international audiences rather than solely the 'outside world'. As status signalling is a multi-level game wherein the state leadership pivots between domestic and international audiences, Chinese leaders face competing pressure from these audiences to project different images.

My use of a signalling model to explain the Chinese scholarly debate raises the question: to what extent in IR do Chinese scholars serve the purpose of state signalling? Here are some caveats. First, China has a vibrant scholarly IR community where genuinely academic debates take place on a range of issues. In this sense, I make no claim that the aim of all Chinese scholars is simply to serve Chinese government propaganda. Secondly, even though some scholars might intentionally serve the Chinese government's purposes, they cannot be credible messengers in situations of diplomatic crisis; intentions that are signalled by scholars in the context of an international crisis might be too strident. That said, the scholarly debate can perform a signalling function in several respects. First, as Feng and He describe,

65 Huiyun Feng and Kai He, 'Why Chinese International Relations (IR) Scholars Matter: Understanding the Rise of China through the Eyes of Chinese IR Scholars', Paper delivered at the Griffith-Tsinghua Conference 'Chinese Scholars Debate International Relations' in Beijing on 11–12 December, 2016.

66 The core issue of positioning is that of the building and projection of various images, and image management can be analysed from a signalling perspective. See Jervis, *The Logic of Images in International Relations*.

67 *Ibid.*

68 Xiaoyu Pu and Randall L. Schweller, 'Status Signalling, Multiple Audiences, and China's Blue-water Naval Ambition', in T. V. Paul, Deborah Welch Larson and William C. Wohlforth, eds., *Status in World Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), pp. 141–62; Xiaoyu Pu, 'Ambivalent Accommodation: Status Signalling of a Rising India and China's Response', *International Affairs*, Vol. 93, No. 1 (2017), pp. 147–63.

the scholarly debate could help the Chinese government in its testing of waters. When implementing new policy, it might be prudent for the government to observe the reactions of domestic and international audiences, and the scholarly debate can facilitate this process.<sup>69</sup> Secondly, as some scholars also participate in policy deliberation, their diverse opinions could help outsiders to appreciate the range of China's policy choices. Finally, the hawkish and dovish voices in China's IR community sometimes represent both side of the same coin as China sets out to project its preferred image. As Robert Jervis observes, to achieve strategic advantages, states might at times wish to be feared, or even seen as irrational.<sup>70</sup> Certain hawkish voices that feature openly in the Chinese media might confuse international observers, but such voices could be more appropriately construed as part of government efforts to shape the perceptions of domestic and international audiences.<sup>71</sup>

To conceptualize the fundamental question of China's rise, some scholars have identified the security dilemma as a core challenge: as China upgrades its military capabilities, this will lead to an arms race and generate a regional backlash.<sup>72</sup> Sun Xuefeng conceptualizes China's major challenge as that of a 'rising dilemma': how can a rising power transform its material power into systematic influence while reducing the security challenges posed by the international system?<sup>73</sup> Although these studies have shed new light on China's challenges, their focus—solely on security—is too narrow. I propose that we could conceptualize China's rise and its implications more broadly. A rising China faces a variety of challenges, some of which do not necessarily relate to traditional security.

Why does China increasingly acknowledge its 'rising power' status while at the same time emphasizing its developing country status? Here I am using a status signalling theory to explain China's behaviours. The purpose of status signalling is to demonstrate a state's preferred ranking in international society. To indicate Great Power status, a rising power could build aircraft carriers, join major international organizations, and host the Olympic Games. However, a rising power could also employ 'strategic spinning' to demonstrate its preferred status, through statements and speeches.<sup>74</sup> At the individual level, a person 'spins' by telling a story that emphasizes certain facts and links them in ways that play to his advantage, at the same time downplaying inconvenient facts. As a communicative act, political leaders often use spin to persuade their targeted audiences to accept one particular interpretation of social reality.

69 Feng and He, 'Why Chinese International Relations (IR) Scholars Matter'.

70 Jervis, *The Logic of Images in International Relations*, p. xiv.

71 Andrew Chubb, 'Propaganda, Not Policy: Explaining the PLA's Hawkish Faction (Part One)', *China Brief*, Volume 13, No. 15 (2013), pp. 6–11.

72 Adam P. Liff and G. John Ikenberry. 'Racing toward Tragedy?: China's Rise, Military Competition in the Asia Pacific, and the Security Dilemma', *International Security*, Vol. 39, No. 2 (2014), pp. 52–91.

73 Sun Xuefeng, *Zhongguo jueqi kunjing: lilun sikao yu zhanlue xuanzhe-dierban (Dilemma of China's Rise: Theoretical Reflections and Strategic Options-2<sup>nd</sup> version)*(Beijing: Sheke wenxian chubanshe, 2013).

74 Spinning is often discussed in the domestic political context. See e.g. David Greenberg, *Republic of Spin: An Inside History of the American Presidency* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2015). For a discussion of 'spinning' in international politics, see John J. Mearsheimer, *Why Leaders Lie: the Truth about Lying in International Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 17.

A rising power might have different 'possible selves'. In psychology, 'possible selves represent individuals ideas of what they might become, what they would like to become, and what they are afraid of becoming, thus providing a conceptual link between cognition and motivation'.<sup>75</sup> China might have various 'possible selves': the collectively shared ideas of what China might become, what China would like to become, and what China is afraid of becoming. A rising power might have different attributes regarding status and capabilities, and the multiple attributes of a rising power provide conditions for its government to highlight certain dimensions rather than others. When a rising power aims to enhance its status to gain more privileges, it will highlight its strength. When a rising power tries to shirk greater responsibilities, it will downplay its strength. When a rising power aims to consolidate political support from the developing countries, it will highlight its status as a developing country for solidarity purposes. In other words, China sometimes sticks to its original developing country status and at other times emphasizes its newly acquired rising power status. In emphasizing different aspects of its identities, China's motivations are largely instrumental rather than symbolic.

However, China's power and capabilities have increased rapidly, and its international environment has changed dramatically. This rapid change has created a growing inconsistency between China's traditional diplomatic narrative and its newly acquired international status.<sup>76</sup> Such an inconsistency or ambiguity provides space for scholars to debate the meanings and implications of China's international positioning. China's challenge, as it advances, will be to manage its conflicting roles in ways that advance its national interests but avoid engendering dangerous misperceptions and expectations among multiple audiences. A rising China, therefore, faces competing incentives to project its image and status on the global stage. In particular, China must balance the competing incentives between resolve and reassurance, status and responsibilities, the Global North (West) and the Global South, and domestic audiences and international audiences. I argue that these competing incentives have shaped Chinese debates on international positioning. Most Chinese scholars agree that China has multiple identities; their differences seem to focus on which aspect China should emphasize.

First of all, the debate among Chinese scholars reflects the uneasy balance for a rising China between the signalling of resolve and of reassurance as the country rises in the international system. China's reassurance relates to its policy of endeavouring to divert fears among other countries about its growing power. China has repeatedly reassured the established powers and its regional neighbours that its future posture will be peaceful and non-threatening.<sup>77</sup> Chinese elites are eager to reassure the world of China's non-threatening intentions to the extent of changing the 'peaceful rise' (*heping jueqi*) slogan to that of

75 Markus and Nurius, 'Possible Selves', p. 954.

76 For the discussion on why it is difficult for China to change its outdated foreign policy ideas, see Jin Xu and Zheyuan Du, 'The Dominant Thinking Sets in Chinese Foreign Policy Research: A Criticism', *Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol. 8, No. 3 (2015), pp. 251–79.

77 For a systematic study of China's reassurance strategy, see Avery Goldstein, 'The Diplomatic Face of China's Grand Strategy: A Rising Power's Emerging Choice', *China Quarterly*, Vol. 168 (2001), pp. 835–64.

'peaceful development' (*heping fazhan*).<sup>78</sup> While the fundamental message of the two concepts is essentially the same, 'peaceful rise' has a more competitive nuance, because the notion of 'rise' implies enhancement of China's status, and hence a 'decline' in that of other countries. Thus, Chinese leaders opted for the term 'peaceful development' rather than 'peaceful rise'.<sup>79</sup> However, as China rises, it must also defend its claims by signalling resolve. Thus, the balance between signalling resolve and reassurance has shaped how Chinese scholars emphasize different aspects of Chinese foreign policy. The most interesting case is Zhang Ruizhuang's argument. In earlier years, when the country was much weaker, Zhang strongly opposed China's low-profile approach (TGYH) because he thought China should rather signal resolve to defend its claims. However, in recent years Zhang has championed a low-profile approach. He maintains that China's rise has generated strategic uncertainty and anxiety in the West (especially in the United States),<sup>80</sup> and that China must now be extremely cautious and prudent. Signalling reassurance to the international community is more crucial than ever in a new era where China is becoming a much stronger power.

Secondly, the Chinese debate reflects the competing incentives between seeking great power status and shirking unwanted responsibilities. China has many reasons to signal its great power status. In the scholarly literature, China is often viewed as a 'prestige maximizer', with a strong sense of status insecurity or status anxiety.<sup>81</sup> There are psychological and political motivations to close the gap between a rising power's desired status and actual status.<sup>82</sup> In recent years, China has carefully crafted its image as a strong nation, through various high-profile projects like the Beijing Olympic Games and the Shanghai Expo. However, China also has a strong incentive to signal a lower status to avoid taking on unwanted responsibilities. Chinese political elites argue that since China remains a developing country, keeping a low profile in the coming decades will allow China to concentrate on domestic priorities. The Chinese government is keen to emphasize that China is still essentially a poor country with many domestic problems to resolve. Having achieved such a high global profile, China has generated high expectations that it will provide global public goods. However, a high profile that brings with it high expectations is not what Chinese leaders willing to deal with at this stage of China's rise. The Copenhagen climate summit became a forum where different understandings of global responsibility clashed. The speech

78 Bonnie S. Glaser and Evan S. Medeiros, 'The Changing Ecology of Foreign Policy-Making in China: The Ascension and Demise of the Theory of Peaceful Rise?', *China Quarterly*, Vol. 190 (2007), pp. 291–310.

79 *Ibid.*

80 Zhang, 'Change of International System and China's Positioning', pp. 20–22.

81 Alastair Iain Johnston, 'Realism(S) and Chinese Security Policy in the Post-Cold War Period', in Ethan B. Kapstein and Michael Mastanduno, eds., *Unipolar Politics: Realism and State Strategies After the Cold War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), pp. 261–318; Yong Deng conceptualizes China's struggle for great power status as an 'uphill struggle', see Yong Deng, *China's Struggle for Status: The Realignment of International Relations* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

82 For instance, based on social identity theory, any country, but especially great powers, should have a natural tendency to project a positive and distinctive image and status on the world stage. See: Deborah Welch Larson and Alexei Shevchenko, 'Status Seekers: Chinese and Russian Responses to US Primacy', *International Security*, Vol. 34, No. 4 (2010), pp. 63–95.

Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao made at the summit made China's position as a developing country abundantly clear. Premier Wen emphasized the principle in environmental issues of 'common but differentiated responsibilities'. Given the speed and size of its economic miracle, China may be expected to experience growing pains as it transforms from a regional to a global player, and hence reluctant to take on major international responsibilities with respect to the global economy, climate change, and security crises. Instead, it may choose to focus inward, negotiating favourable international deals while shouldering fewer global burdens than other major powers would expect. Some Chinese scholars, such as Hu Jian, hold that dealing with China's domestic challenges constitutes an important part of the country's international responsibilities.<sup>83</sup> China's domestic development is beneficial to the rest of the world because Chinese consumption could boost world economic growth in the long term. However, certain other scholars propose that China should not shirk greater responsibilities, because by accepting them it could contribute to global governance, and build China's moral leadership on the global stage.<sup>84</sup>

Thirdly, the Chinese debate reflects China's unique position as a large developing country. While striving for great power status China also wants, for political purposes, to maintain developing country solidarity. A rising power like China can consolidate its political influence by emphasizing its identity as a 'developing country'. South-south unity and cooperation has long constituted a core component of Chinese foreign policy.<sup>85</sup> China has always declared that it stands with the developing world. China's South-South policy has been influenced by diverse factors, and largely shaped by its domestic priorities. Since the global financial crisis, although China's international status has been enhanced, China has nevertheless emphasized that it belongs to the South, or the developing world. The developing country identity has always been an important strand of China's diplomacy.<sup>86</sup> The People's Republic of China (PRC) achieved its seat at the United Nations over Taiwan largely due to support from the developing world. During the Cold War, China and the Soviet Union competed vigorously to woo support from the developing and Communist countries.<sup>87</sup> In the late 1970s, Beijing started its economic reforms, and China gradually abandoned its image as a radical revolutionary power. China's identity as a developing nation has intensified since the end of the Cold War. Having attempted to break through its initial isolation after the Tiananmen incident, China also looked for alternative sources of support after the collapse of the communist bloc.<sup>88</sup> Furthermore, as China's economic growth continues, economic interests and natural resources have been major driving forces

83 Hu, *Role, Responsibility and the Path of Growth*, pp.144–45.

84 Cai, 'Some Reflections on China's International Positioning', pp. 121–36.

85 George T. Yu, 'China's Africa Policy: South-South Unity and Cooperation', in Lowell Dittmer and George T. Yu, eds., *China, the Developing World, and the New Global Dynamic* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2010) p. 129.

86 Lowell Dittmer, 'China and the Developing World', in Dittmer and Yu, eds., *China, the Developing World, and the New Global Dynamic*, pp. 1–11.

87 Thomas Christensen, *Worse than a Monolith: Alliance Politics and Problems of Coercive Diplomacy in Asia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), chapter 5.

88 Peter Van Ness, 'China as a Third World State: Foreign Policy and Official National Identity', in Lowell Dittmer and Samuel S. Kim, eds, *China's Quest for National Identity* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993).

behind the country's engagement with the developing world.<sup>89</sup> Economic relations have also helped China to strengthen its political influence in the developing world. By underlining its identity as a developing country, China endeavours to strengthen its representation and voice in the global governance structure. China has asserted its discontent with the current global order and demanded a greater say for developing countries that will ultimately lead to parity with the developed world.<sup>90</sup>

China might not want to be viewed as a leader of the developing world, as Deng Xiaoping famously declared that China 'should never seek a leadership position' (*juebu dangtou*) within the developing world.<sup>91</sup> However, this approach conflicts increasingly with the reality of China's foreign policy practice: through active participation in South-South cooperation, China has held the default status of a leader of the developing world, and there are also growing international expectations that China should play a more active role in that sphere. Moreover, in recent years China has strengthened its efforts to build multilateral forums and institutions within the developing world.<sup>92</sup> Wang Jisi and Men Honghua maintain that China is a typical developing country no longer, and that China could self-identify primarily as a country capable of bridging the developed world (Global North) and the developing world (Global South).<sup>93</sup>

Finally, the Chinese debate reflects the uneasy balance between domestic and international incentives. China has the second-largest economy, strong military power, and privileged membership in major international organizations. Why should China struggle for still more status?<sup>94</sup> I argue that China's continuous struggle for international status is increasingly driven by domestic political calculations. The global financial crisis has transformed China from a peripheral member to a key player in global governance, and has also boosted China's ideational confidence in its political economic model. 'It is a popular notion among Chinese political elites, including some national leaders, that China's development model provides an alternative to Western democracy and experiences for other developing countries to learn from, while many developing countries that have introduced Western values and political systems are experiencing disorder and chaos.'<sup>95</sup> While China's domestic politics have driven China to take a more 'assertive turn' in diplomacy, some Chinese scholars

89 Deborah Brautigam, *The Dragon's Gift: the Real Story of China in Africa* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

90 Gregory Chin and Ramesh Thakur, 'Will China Change the Rules of Global Order?' *Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 33, No. 4 (2010), pp. 119–38.

91 Deng Xiaoping, 'Shanyu liyong shiji jingji jiejie fazhan wenti' ('Use World Economy to Solve Development Problems'), *Selected Works of Deng Xiaoping-Volume 3*, p. 363.

92 Injoo Sohn, 'After Renaissance: China's Multilateral Offensive in the Developing World', *European Journal of International Relations*, Vol. 18, No. 1 (2012), pp. 77–101.

93 Wang Jisi, 'China in the Middle', *American Interest*, Vol. 10, No. 4 (2015), pp. 1–7; Men, 'The Evolution of China's National Identity under the Two-Level Context 1982-2012', pp. 54–66.

94 A systematic study of great power status puts China as a 'status over-achiever' in the international system. See Thomas J. Volgy, Renato Corbetta, Keith A. Grant and Ryan G. Baird, 'Major Power Status in International Politics', in Thomas J. Volgy, Renato Corbetta, Keith A. Grant and Ryan G. Baird, eds., *Major Powers and the Quest for Status in International Politics* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp. 1–26.

95 Kenneth Lieberthal and Wang Jisi, *Addressing US-China Strategic Distrust* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 2012), p. 10.

have begun to worry about an international backlash. In this sense, multiple audiences and complicated incentives have shaped the way in which Chinese scholars debate China's international positioning.

## Conclusion

As China's development has entered a new stage, there is increasing uncertainty over China's identity and roles. As the China expert Lowell Dittmer observes: 'The truth may be that China, like a young adult, is now more confused about its national identity than it was when it was more radical and less developed. To some extent this confusion has affected images of China among other countries as well.'<sup>96</sup>

Like a rapidly growing company trying to redefine its goal and brand, a rising China is trying to establish a new position in the international system. China's rapid rise generates new uncertainty and confusion about its status and role on the world stage. Chinese scholars are actively debating China's international positioning. While China should clarify its position in the international pecking order, Chinese scholars have incentives to emphasize different aspects of China's status and identities. While some Chinese scholars see international positioning as a uniquely Chinese problem, the topic could be examined from a broader theoretical perspective. The challenge of how a rising power adapts to its new status is not a uniquely Chinese problem. Rising powers often face obstacles to objectively evaluating their shifting power and adjusting to the new reality accordingly.

As Chinese scholars debate China's positioning, they achieve consensus but also have differences. Most scholars agree that China has multiple identities, including that of socialist country, developing country, rising power, great power, and East Asian regional power. Chinese scholars seem to disagree on which identity should be most salient, but have a clear sense of China's direction; namely, they want to make China great again. However, they appear to be at odds as to the ultimate destination of China's rise on the global stage. In particular, they disagree on whether or not China should seek to become a new superpower. Moreover, Chinese scholars are actively debating whether China should continue to maintain a low profile or actively strive for achievement in a new era.

To explain various positions on China's international positioning, this article took a 'status signalling' approach to interpret this Chinese debate. As a mechanism of information transmission, status signalling aims to change or maintain a special type of 'status belief' among relevant political actors. China's status signalling is a multi-level game wherein the state's leadership pivots between domestic and international audiences. As Chinese leaders face competing pressure from domestic and international audiences, a rising China faces a wide range of challenges. China's crucial challenge will be to manage its conflicting roles in ways that advance its national interests, but avoid engendering dangerous misperceptions and expectations among various audiences. In particular, a rising China must balance between its competing incentives of resolve and reassurance, status and responsibilities, and a domestic audience and international audience. These competing incentives have shaped Chinese debate on international positioning.

### **Acknowledgements**

This article was originally presented at the Griffith-Tsinghua Conference ‘Chinese Scholars Debate International Relations’ in Beijing on December 11–12, 2016. The authors would like to thank the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation for its support [Grant No. 16-1512-150509- IPS]. The author would also like to express his appreciation to Amitav Acharya, Feng Huiyun, He Kai, Liu Feng, Stephen Walker, Yan Xuetong, Zhu Jiejun, and two anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments.

## **Part II**

# **China's Foreign Policy Principles**



Article

# Contending Ideas on China's Non-Alliance Strategy

Liu Ruonan<sup>†</sup> and Liu Feng<sup>‡,\*</sup>

<sup>†</sup>Liu Ruonan is Assistant Professor at the School of International Relations, University of International Business and Economics and <sup>‡</sup>Liu Feng is Associate Professor at the Zhou Enlai School of Government, Nankai University.

\*Corresponding author. Email: liufeng@nankai.edu.cn

## Abstract

As China's rise continues to shape its role in international affairs, Chinese international relations scholars are engaging in a lively debate about the country's grand strategy, particularly surrounding whether or not China should abandon the non-alliance strategy it has adopted since the early 1980s. Some scholars contend that a non-alliance strategy cannot safeguard China's national interests in the face of the United States' security alliance network throughout East Asia, and that without allies China's rise will be contained by the US. Pro-alliance scholars, therefore, are especially favourable towards a formal alliance with Russia. However, orthodox scholars in favour of supporting the official position of non-alliance argue that a formal alliance deviates from the fundamental principles of independence and self-reliance that have historically guided China's foreign policy. Moreover, a number of alternative strategies have been proposed to replace or complement the non-alliance strategy, among which are quasi-alliances, coalitions, and strategic partnerships. In practice, whether or not China forms alliances with other powers and neighbouring states depends on its self-defined role within the current international system, as well as its perception of external security threats. Considering both the external and internal constraints it faces, China is highly likely to maintain the non-alliance stance while pursuing other desirable approaches to making friends and partners.

## Introduction

In contrast to the contention and discussion among economists surrounding China's economic policies, or among sociologists on social policies, it is rare for Chinese international relations scholars to engage openly in debates over the government's foreign policies. Instead, Chinese scholars and analysts usually adopt the government's existing foreign policy principles and strategies as the orthodox view. However, in the past few years, particularly since the leadership transition in 2012, Chinese international relations scholars have

been more proactive in debating China's foreign policy. China's ascent to the international stage has prompted many in Chinese academia to give voice to their opinions on which policies best serve China's national interest. Scholars among them have debated the necessity of the recent policy shift from the traditional principle of 'keeping a low profile' (*Tao guang yang hui*), to a more proactive foreign policy (*feng fa you wei*).<sup>1</sup> A broad debate engaging many different schools of thought, among its most contentious issues is that of whether or not China needs to abandon its longstanding non-alliance policy and build military alliances with other states. China's alliance posture, therefore, is an important part of the overall discourse surrounding China's foreign policy under changing internal and external circumstances.

Forming alliances has been an essential instrument that states have used since ancient times to achieve security in an anarchic international system. In essence, alliances are mutual security commitments between two or more states.<sup>2</sup> Throughout history, alliances between states or quasi-state entities have formed, collapsed, and reformed. Although Chinese history has abundant examples of both the successes and weaknesses of the alliance system, this article will focus on contemporary China and how its current policies are informed by its recent past.

The People's Republic of China arose during the Cold War, an era that saw the United States and the Soviet Union's attempt to divide the world into two opposing ideological camps. As a newly formed nation, and unable to be completely self-reliant, China was unlikely to be able to remain neutral amid the Cold War rivalry. The United States' heavy presence throughout East Asia and China's ideological adherence to communism led China to formally ally with the Soviet Union during the 1950s. However, border disputes and ideological rivalry caused a gradual deterioration in Sino-Soviet relations, and by the early 1970s China had tilted towards the United States. During this period of rapprochement, the United States and China became 'tacit allies' bonded by their mutual desire to balance against the Soviet Union's expansion in Asia. It is thus clear that the first 30 years of New China's foreign policy primarily consisted in playing the superpowers against each other as national interest dictated.

However, the early 1980s saw China's refusal to be embroiled in the geopolitical confrontation between the two world superpowers, instilling the sentiments that would later become the foundation of the non-alliance policy. When the second generation of Chinese leaders designed the new 'reform and opening-up' strategy, China decided not to ally with any other states. It is widely believed that the non-alliance policy first gained formal

- 1 This broader debate involves many specific issues, such as activeness versus responsiveness, alliance versus non-alliance, and intervention versus non-intervention etc. For general surveys on these debates, see Zhu Liqun, 'China's Foreign Policy Debates', Chaillot Papers No. 121, EU Institute for Security Studies (EUISS), September 2010; Xu Jin and Du Zheyuan, 'The Dominant Thinking Sets in Chinese Foreign Policy Research: A Criticism', *Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol. 8, No. 3 (2015), pp. 251–79; Daniel C. Lynch, *China's Futures: PRC Elites Debate Economics, Politics, and Foreign Policy* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015); Yan Xuetong, 'From Keeping a Low Profile to Striving for Achievement', *Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol. 7, No. 2 (2014), pp. 153–84.
- 2 Robert E. Osgood, *Alliance and American Foreign Policy* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1968), p. 17; Stephen M. Walt, *The Origins of Alliances* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987), p. 12.

recognition in 1983, when Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping articulated the strategy to a foreign guest.<sup>3</sup> Since Deng Xiaoping, successive Chinese leaders have maintained the non-alliance principle. During the 14th Party Congress Committee in 1992, Jiang Zemin reiterated the policy by stating that China ‘will not enter into alliance with any country or group of countries and will not join any military bloc’.<sup>4</sup> Since then, the principle has been quoted at various times in Party speeches and government reports. For example, a 2011 government White Paper entitled ‘China’s Peaceful Development’ states that China, ‘does not form alliance with any other country or group of countries, nor does it use social system or ideology as a yardstick to determine what kind of relations it should have with other countries’.<sup>5</sup> The incumbent Chinese President Xi Jinping has also reasserted the principle on various occasions. Most notably, in his address to the Chinese Communist Party’s Central Conference on Work Relating to Foreign Affairs in November 2014, Xi Jinping called on China to ‘develop a distinctive diplomatic approach befitting its role as a great power’, and to ‘make more friends while abiding by the principle of non-alignment and build a global network of partnerships’.<sup>6</sup> Xi moreover defined China–Russia relations as ‘the new type of bilateral relations featuring non-alliance, non-confrontation, and not targeting a third party’.<sup>7</sup> In general, the Chinese government has viewed alliance as an archaic and entangling system that only increases the chances of costly military conflict. China has indeed frequently accused the United States of maintaining a ‘Cold War mentality’ by virtue of its efforts to sustain a ‘hub-and-spoke’ alliance system in Asia. The non-alliance policy has brought China measurable benefits, particularly that of maintaining a relatively benign regional environment, so allowing the government to focus on the central task of economic development and power accumulation.

In recent years, however, especially since the Obama administration’s ‘pivot’ or ‘rebalance’ to Asia, China’s perceived security environment has become more severe. It is under this background that some Chinese scholars increasingly advocate a rethink of the suitability of the non-alliance policy, and the design of more appropriate policies in response to the changing security environment. As Feng Zhang explicitly stated, ‘perceived strategic pressure from the United States is most frequently invoked as a justification for alliances to defend against or compete with the American security system in the region’.<sup>8</sup>

- 3 Ling Shengli, ‘Zhongguo weishenme bujiemeng?’ (‘Why Does China not Ally?’) *Waijiao pinglun* (Foreign Affairs Review), No. 3 (2013), pp. 20–33.
- 4 ‘Full Text of Jiang Zemin’s Report at 14th Party Congress,’ 29 March, 1992, [http://www.bjreview.com.cn/document/txt/2011-03/29/content\\_363504\\_10.htm](http://www.bjreview.com.cn/document/txt/2011-03/29/content_363504_10.htm).
- 5 *China’s Peaceful Development* (Beijing: Information Office of the State Council of the People’s Republic of China, September 2011), [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2010/china/2011-09/06/c\\_131102329\\_4.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2010/china/2011-09/06/c_131102329_4.htm).
- 6 Ministry of Foreign Affairs of China, ‘The Central Conference on Work Relating to Foreign Affairs Was Held in Beijing’, 29 November, 2014, [http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/zxxx\\_662805/t1215680.shtml](http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/t1215680.shtml).
- 7 Ministry of Foreign Affairs of China, ‘Xi Jinping Attends Commemoration Marking the 15th Anniversary of the Signing of Treaty of Good-Neighbourliness and Friendly Cooperation between China and Russia, and Delivers Important Speech’, 26 June, 2016, [http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/zxxx\\_662805/t1375792.shtml](http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/t1375792.shtml).
- 8 Feng Zhang, ‘China’s New Thinking on Alliance’, *Survival*, Vol. 51, No. 5 (2012), p. 135.

This emerging debate provides a helpful case that allows us to explore how Chinese scholars interpret China's security environment, and how they interact with the policy cycle to exert influence on the design of a rising power's grand strategy. The article is set out as follows. The first section categorizes three distinct schools in the debate. The first is an orthodox view, generally defending the utility of the existing non-alliance policy; the second is a revisionist perspective, suggesting a strategic shift to create alliances with other states; and the third is a moderate view envisioning certain complementary options without entirely replacing the original strategy. The second section reviews controversies over a specific policy issue, i.e. whether China should upgrade its security relationship with Russia and extend an offer of military alliance with it. The third section discusses the policy implications of the current debate, and particularly explores the interaction between academia and policy in the context of China. The article concludes with a critical assessment of the possibility of China's foreign policy shifts.

### **Three Positions in the Debate and Their Theoretical Foundations**

The current debate on whether China should abandon its non-alliance stance is emerging under the context of changing international and regional realities, as well as China's own shifting policy objectives. This article divides scholarly positions into three approximate groups based on their core arguments. They comprise: (i) the orthodoxy, which generally accepts the view posited by the Chinese government which assumes that non-alliance has been and will continue to be the optimal choice for China to realize its national interests; (ii) the revisionists, who by contrast challenge the official standpoint and advocate an alliance policy to attract security allies and partners in order to defend China's rise and extend its influence; and (iii) the moderates, who take the middle ground between the extremes of orthodoxy and revision, and attempt to find alternative measures that overcome the disadvantages of both the alliance and non-alliance options.

#### **The Orthodoxy: The Continuing Relevance of the Non-Alliance Principle**

Orthodox scholars generally support the existing policies that the Communist Party of China has designed and which the government has implemented. From this perspective, the idea of forming alliances deviates from the fundamental principles of independence and self-reliance that have historically guided China's foreign policy. Different scholars have proposed specific reasons for adhering to the non-alliance principle.

Orthodox scholars argue that traditional alliances are fundamentally flawed, because they force nations into a security and independence dilemma. Every alliance has its cost, and that cost is inevitably a nation's ability to act independently of its alliance partners. Therefore, under an alliance system states gain security at the expense of autonomy and flexibility. Non-alliance supporters refer to this problem as the 'alliance dilemma', a classic term coined by Glenn Snyder to describe the inherent contradiction of alliances, evident in a dual fear of entrapment and abandonment.<sup>9</sup> Orthodox scholars propose that in light of the alliance dilemma, it is far better for a state to preserve its independence. This allows a state the flexibility and manoeuvring space necessary to implement a comprehensive foreign

9 Glenn H. Snyder, 'The Security Dilemma in Alliance Politics', *World Politics*, Vol. 36, No. 4 (1984), pp. 461–95.

policy that can react as needed, as opposed to being involved in an alliance that can thrust a state, inadvertently and unwillingly, into an international crisis.<sup>10</sup>

Second, non-alliance scholars often believe that an alliance system is beyond China's capabilities. Looking at China's periphery and beyond, there are few alliance candidates. Of those available, many are poor or developing states with whom alliances would cost more than their worth. Sun Ru warns that allying with such underdeveloped states would place a heavy burden of cost on China that would far exceed any potential benefits.<sup>11</sup> Orthodox scholars also argue that a Chinese alliance system could well heighten tensions in East Asia, by forcing regional neighbours to band together and balance against China through political and military means.<sup>12</sup>

China's non-alliance policy has been its primary foreign policy principle for more than three decades. Although the newly formed China allied itself with the Soviet Union for survival, this served only to limit China's international flexibility, and at the same time did not meet the strategic interests of either party. Thus, for the supporters of non-alliance policy, it was not until after China abandoned its alliance with the Soviet Union that the Chinese strategic environment started to improve. Subsequently, China extended its relations beyond the socialist states camp, and normalized relations with the West, creating international spaces for its 'reform and opening-up' policy. Consistent implementation of the non-alliance policy has enabled China to avoid being restricted in international affairs due to the actions of others; it has also allowed China to contribute to global security and stability.<sup>13</sup>

Thirdly, US-China relations are a major factor in the debate surrounding the non-alliance policy. Since the end of the Cold War, China and the United States have been neither friends nor enemies. However, even pro-non-alliance scholars now admit that the United States poses a threat to certain aspects of China's national security, especially when considering the US-led security alliance system in East Asia. Since 2009, when the Obama administration announced its 'pivot to Asia' strategy, the US has strengthened military commitments to its formal allies and informal partners throughout the region; it has also become actively involved in territorial disputes in both the East and South China Seas. Scholars in both camps interpret these actions as efforts to contain China. However, orthodox scholars still emphasize the importance of maintaining a low profile and well-regulated conflicts with the United States, largely in recognition of China's relative weakness.<sup>14</sup>

- 10 Xu Jin, 'Debates in IR Academia and China's Policy Adjustments', *Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol. 9, No. 4 (2016), pp. 459–85; Jiang Yi, 'Bukaopu de Zhong'E jiemeng shuo' ('China-Russian Alliance Does not Make Sense'), *Shijie zhishi (World Knowledge)*, No. 5 (2012), pp. 52–3.
- 11 Sun Ru, 'Goujian huoban guanxiwang' ('Constructing a Network of Partnerships: an Updated Version of China's Non-alliance Policy'), *Shijie zhishi (World Knowledge)*, No. 6 (2015), pp. 58–60.
- 12 Zhang Bowen, 'Zhongguo hui zhudong fangqi bujiemeng zhengce ma?' ('Will China Give Up its Non-alliance Policy?'), *Guoji zhangwang (International Outlook)*, No. 5 (2012), pp. 17–18.
- 13 Liu Shengxiang, 'Zhongguo shixing daguo waijiao zhanlue weishishangzao' ('It is Too Early for China to Adopt a Major-power Strategy'), *Shijie jingji yu zhengzhi (World Economics and Politics)*, No. 7 (2000), pp. 76–80.
- 14 Li Guangyi and Shi Zuo, 'Bujiemeng zhengce xuyao chongxin shenshi ma?' ('Shall We Re-examine the Non-alliance Policy?'), *Guoji zhangwang (International Outlook)*, No. 21 (1999), pp. 17–8.

From this angle, Zhu Feng questions the feasibility of an alliance. He points out that few states would desire to ally with China at the expense of confronting the US. Moreover, were China to ally with other states, it would still be unable to change the current unfavourable balance of power. Establishing an alliance, therefore, is patently unnecessary.<sup>15</sup>

Finally, orthodox scholars argue that the utility of military alliances in the modern era is steadily diminishing.<sup>16</sup> Traditional military alliances are narrow, allowing for only limited types of aid and cooperation between nations. As such, they are unfit to respond to the increasingly varied threats of the 21st century, particularly those posed by non-state actors, such as piracy, terrorism, and nuclear proliferation. Non-alliance scholars propose that the best way to realize China's interests is to maintain a defensive national security posture while contributing to the construction of a new multipolar world order with a neutral security environment.<sup>17</sup> This would allow China to maintain its independence and satisfy its national security requirements while adhering to the non-alliance policy. Orthodox scholars do not believe that China's current security problems stem from a lack of allies, arguing that they are instead due to the complex interaction of domestic and international politics. An alliance system would not address the root cause of China's security challenges, but rather exacerbate regional tensions. Therefore, orthodox scholars maintain that China's foreign policy should continue to be one of non-alliance.

### The Revisionists: Forming Alliances to Defend China's Rise

Revisionist views are best expressed by a quote from Professor Yan Xuetong: '[the] international order is decided by the balance of power between great powers, and an alliance policy would help China increase its strategic partners'.<sup>18</sup> History has only seen rarely a great power rise or expand without allies, and whenever states did employ a non-alliance policy it was always a temporary choice. In this sense, China's long-term implementation of a non-alliance policy is an historical aberration. Revisionists argue that the non-alliance strategy is only suitable for weak states, and that unless China abandons its non-alignment posture it will incur more security challenges.<sup>19</sup>

In responding to the 'Pivot to Asia' policy, most Chinese scholars tend to perceive it as a strategic design intended to contain or counterbalance China's rise and influence—both

15 Zhu Feng, 'Zhongmei hui jinru diyuanzhengzhi duikang ma' ('Will China and the United States Face a Geopolitical Confrontation?'), *Huanqiu shibao* (*Global Times*), 13 January, 2012.

16 Liu Jianfei, 'Guanyu jinjinian Zhongguo waijiao de fansi' ('Reflecting China's Foreign Relations in Recent Years'), *Tansuo yu zhengming* (*Explorations and Controversies*), No. 4 (2012), pp. 40–5.

17 Ling Shengli, 'Why Does China not Ally?', pp. 20–33; Wang Cungang, 'Lun Zhongguo waijiao tiaozheng' ('On the Adjustment of China's Foreign Policy'), *Shijie jingji yu zhengzhi* (*World Economics and Politics*), No. 11 (2012), pp. 120–35.

18 Yan Xuetong, *Lishi de guanxing* (*The Inertia of History*) (Beijing: Zhongxing chubanshe, 2013).

19 Yan Xuetong, 'Cong taoguangyanghui dao fenfayouwei, Zhongguo jueqi shibukedang' ('From Keeping a Low Profile to Striving for Achievements: China's Rise is Unstoppable'), *Zhongguo jingji zhouban* (*Weekly Journal of Chinese Economy*), No. 43 (2013), pp. 44–7.

economically and militarily.<sup>20</sup> In particular, the Obama administration's moves to strengthen military ties with its allies and security partners in the region have been interpreted as 'ganging up with its troublemaking allies', and 'presenting itself as a security threat to China'.<sup>21</sup> Similarly, intensified maritime disputes in both the South China Sea and the East China Sea have been construed as counterbalancing efforts, the United States having implicitly or explicitly reassured its allies, i.e. the Philippines and Japan, who are disputing parties in potential conflicts with China, of its commitments to them.<sup>22</sup> Given these negative developments around China's periphery, many China scholars make pessimistic assessments of China's security environment. Seen from this perspective, China's current security environment should be what informs its security strategy, and in light of the dangers that the United States and its allies in the region pose to China's national security, revisionist scholars believe that China needs alliances. They defend the value of alliances by arguing that they are not a relic of Cold War antagonism, but rather that forging alliance is an important instrument for states to gain partners and foster good relations.<sup>23</sup>

Revisionist scholars hold that the 'alliance dilemma' mistakenly reduces alliances to zero-sum relationships. Revisionists in fact argue that China's unwillingness to give security guarantees to regional neighbours through alliances has caused neighbouring states to view their relationship with China as zero-sum, and dominated by fear. Therefore, a China that continues to implement a non-alliance strategy will increasingly find itself surrounded by neighbouring states that distrust it, and which turn to the United States for security guarantees.<sup>24</sup>

Revisionists argue that a rising China needs high quality, reliable friends.<sup>25</sup> Even though the current international order has been beneficial to China's economic rise, it has not

20 Ruan Zongze, 'Meiguo yao "zaipingheng" shenme?' ('What Does the US Want for "Rebalancing"?'), *Renmin ribao (People's Daily)*, 4 June, 2012; Liu Feitao, 'Meiguo "chongfan" yazhou yu zhongguo anquan huanjing' ('U.S. "Pivot to Asia" and China's Security Environment'), *Jinri zhongguo luntan (China Today Forum)*, No. 7 (2012), pp. 4–7.

21 'US Shows its True Colors', *China Daily*, 29 April, 2014.

22 For Chinese perceptions of the role of the US in the maritime disputes, see Zhou Qi, 'Meiguo nanhai zhengce de yanbian yu gengyuan', ('The Evolution and Roots of US Policy Towards the South China Sea Issue in the Post-Cold War Era'), *Shijie jingji yu zhengzhi (World Economics and Politics)*, No. 6 (2014), pp. 23–44; Zuo Xiyang, 'Yatai lianmeng zhuanxing yu meiguo de shuangcong zaibaozheng zhanlue', ('Alliance Transformation in Asia-Pacific and the Dual Reassurance Strategy of the United States'), *Shijie jingji yu zhengzhi (World Economics and Politics)*, No. 9 (2015), pp. 58–81; Liu Qing, 'New Trends in US Asia-Pacific Alliance Relations', *China International Studies*, No. 2 (2016), pp. 57–77. In contrast, Tongfi Kim finds a moderate role for US involvement in these disputes by surveying the scope of US commitments to both Japan and the Philippines. See Tongfi Kim, 'The US Alliance Obligations in the Disputes in the East and South China Seas: Issues of Applicability and Interpretations', PRIF Report No. 141, Frankfurt: Peace Research Institute Frankfurt, 2016.

23 Li Daguang, 'Zhongguo "bujiemeng" bingbu yiweizhe bu jiejiào pengyou' ('China's "Non-alliance" Policy does not Mean not Making Friends'), *Huanqiu shibao (Global Times)*, 27 February, 2012, <http://opinion.huanqiu.com/1152/2012-02/2472746.html>.

24 Yan, 'From Keeping a Low Profile to Striving for Achievements', pp. 44–7.

25 Yan Xuetong, 'Quanli zhongxin zhuan yi yu guoji tixi zhuanbian' ('The Shift of the Centre of the World and the Change to the International System'), *Dangdai yatai (Journal of*

strengthened China's strategic relationships. The United States is still the most allied nation in the world, while China has no single true ally. The United States' alliance structure has indeed become a significant obstacle to China's efforts to improve relations with its neighbours. After the Obama administration adopted 'smart power' as a foreign policy principle, the United States consolidated and strengthened its strategic partnerships. Revisionists warn, therefore, that unless China swiftly allies with other states it will lose the ability to realize interests in its own backyard.

Revisionists believe that non-alignment theories misunderstand alliances. An alliance does not automatically equate to a Cold War mentality. The Cold War was an ideological confrontation between superpower blocs wherein alliances were merely a peripheral method that superpowers used to achieve victory. Therefore, alliances are not inherently a step towards confrontation. Defensive alliances that encourage international cooperation on security concerns do not threaten regional security. Secondly, revisionists argue that alliances do not bind a state hand and foot, but instead bind two or more states together in a mutually restrictive agreement in order to achieve shared interests. Alliances are a system of disparate parts that work together to be mutually binding and beneficial to their members. Alliances also contribute to global stability by dis-incentivizing allied nations to act against each other's interests. Finally, since ancient times, Chinese history has recognized the value and utility of alliances. It is time for modern China to abandon its antiquated model for understanding alliances and align with nations that will contribute to the common good of a new world order.<sup>26</sup>

### The Moderates: Seeking Alternatives

Aside from pro- and anti-alliance scholars are moderates, who seek a third way to solve China's security dilemma which rests between a formal alliance and the non-alliance policy. Moderates believe that the United States is employing various aspects of its hard and soft power to obstruct China's growth and peaceful development, and that by itself China is unable to stop US containment. However, these scholars believe that complete abandonment of the non-alliance strategy is unrealistic, because potential alliance partners are few and any alliance formed would be weak and likely to provoke a strong response from the United States. Therefore, they propose that as China rises in a changing international environment it needs to develop a certain degree of security cooperation with other states. For example, Tang Shiping, a moderate proponent of the alignment policy, has mentioned China's alliance history, and further noted that the history of Sino-Soviet alliance should not be the burden of contemporary foreign policy. Any strategic tool effective in promoting national interest should be on the list for consideration.<sup>27</sup> This would fulfil the dual

*Contemporary Asia-Pacific Studies*), No. 6 (2012), pp. 19–20; Yan Xuetong, 'E'luosi kekao ma? ('Is Russia Reliable? '), *Guoji jingji pinglun (International Economic Review)*, No. 6 (2012), pp. 21–5; Yan Xuetong, *Shijie quanli de zhuanli: zhengzhi lingdao yu zhanlue jingzheng (The Transformation of World Power: Political Leadership and Strategic Competition)* (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2015).

26 Tang Shiping, 'Lianmeng zhengzhi he zhongguo de anquan zhanlue' ('Alliance Politics and China's Security Strategy'), *Lingdao (Leadership)*, No. 36 (2010), <http://www.21bcr.com/a/shiye/shijieguan/2010/1229/2153.html>.

27 *Ibid.*

purpose of liberating China from its isolationist position while also allowing a discourse on alliances gradually to evolve.

The first alternative approach is building issue-specific coalitions. States understand that, in international politics, certain interests are best achieved through coalitions. Coalitions allow nations to discuss and reach a consensus on specific issue areas; they are also suitable for solving a number of disputes outside of national security. Although there are few cases in international relations history of prominent coalition, it nevertheless merits exploration. Unlike alliances, coalitions emphasize specialized and informal cooperation to solve particular issues. Such informal cooperation can certainly include national security, but may also extend to politics, economics, and atypical security concerns. Furthermore, coalitions rely on cooperation with relevant international institutions to solve international crises and conflicts. Alliances tend to form in times of peace, and generally target a third party. Juxtaposed with alliances, coalitions of like-minded parties temporarily form in the event of armed conflict, to respond to a common threat, after which they dissolve. As coalitions are inherently less cohesive and more flexible than alliances, member states focus more on negotiating a fair costs and interest system than on creating binding rules. Some scholars believe that coalitions possess more utility than alliances, and that using coalitions to develop diverse methods of cooperation and engagement could supersede arguments over the non-alliance policy. Coalitions would allow China the flexibility to analyse the significance of a particular issue area and decide whether it merits cooperation. Ultimately, coalitions sustain the premises of a non-alliance strategy, but still enable China to partner with nations on a wide range of issues.<sup>28</sup>

Second, some scholars contend that China may establish loose and informal quasi-alliances rather than formal alliances. For example, Sun Degang believes quasi-alliances are an informal and flexible medium for collaboration between states. He defines quasi-alliances as when, ‘two or more states form an informal arrangement that targets an opponent’s national security’.<sup>29</sup> There are key differences between a quasi-alliance and an alliance in foreign policy. Alliances consist in stringent treaties and pacts with binding legal obligations, and quasi-alliances in informal arrangements with limited legal validity. Formal alliances rely on written security pledges, while the agreements of quasi-alliances possess a dynamic quality, thus avoiding the rigidity of traditional alliances. Furthermore, alliances are often extremely exclusive by nature, whereas quasi-alliances have fluid membership with a low barrier-to-entry. Finally, the structures of traditional alliances accord with conformity of interests and values, whereas quasi-alliances can comprise nations with differing values but common interests.

Specifically, Sun Degang suggests that China pursues a quasi-alliance-based foreign policy, termed ‘three-ring quasi-alliance diplomacy’. According to this concept, forming a quasi-alliance within multilateral organizations, like the Shanghai Cooperation Organization

28 Liu Feng, ‘Guoji zhengzhi zhong de lianhe zhengxian’, (‘Coalitions in International Politics’), *Waijiao pinglun (Foreign Affairs Review)*, No. 5 (2012), pp. 56–67. For a general study on the role of coalitions in international security, see Thomas S. Wilkins, ‘“Alignment”, Not “Alliance” – the Shifting Paradigm of International Security Cooperation: Toward a Conceptual Taxonomy of Alignment’, *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 38, No. 1 (2012), pp. 53–76.

29 Sun Degang, ‘Lun “zhunlianmeng” zhanlue’ (‘On Quasi-Alliance Strategy’), *Shijie jingji yu zhengzhi (World Economics and Politics)*, No. 2 (2011), pp. 55–79.

(SCO), constitutes the first ring; the second is building quasi-alliances with key states in East Asia based on a new model of cooperation; and the third is maintaining the model of friendly diplomacy. Sun believes that ‘three-ring quasi-alliance diplomacy’ will promote China’s rise from a great power to a dominant power by eliminating China’s isolation within the international system.<sup>30</sup> Wang Haiyun proposes a quasi-alliance strategy, and further holds that China should not form any alliances in the near future but instead strive to create a series of ‘belts’ on its periphery, including the belt of friendly relations, the belt of strategic stability, and the belt of economic cooperation. Wang assumes that these three belts would promote China’s image as a reliable partner with states on its periphery while also expanding its hard and soft power.<sup>31</sup>

The third alternative strategy is that of a strategic partnership, which does not necessarily target a third party, and lacks an antagonistic connotation. Tang Shiping argues that partnerships between nations are relatively common, and based on mutual interest.<sup>32</sup> Although collaboration between partners is often intense, the states themselves do not need to forge an intimate relationship; within a strategic partnership, states are relatively autonomous. This independence enables actors to abandon, change, or modify partnerships as needed. Strategic partnerships can be devoid of military commitments, as represented by the current partnership between China and Russia. Zhao Huasheng believes that the Chinese-Russian partnership best fits the current geopolitical landscape; although Sino-Russian cooperation does not equate to a formal alliance, the current level of cooperation between the two nations fits their capabilities while satisfying their respective domestic audiences.<sup>33</sup> Su Xiaohui argues that forming alliances is contradictory to China’s foreign policy traditions, while building a partnership is a more feasible course of action.<sup>34</sup>

The above alternatives are distinct from the conventional alliance thinking, in the sense that these options tend to eliminate the binding constraints that an alliance would impose, yet at the same time avoid the shortcomings of the non-alliance strategy. However, a seldom-discussed question is whether these alternatives can substitute the utility of military alliances in the case of severe conflict, or even war. A shared assumption behind these alternatives is that China can improve its relationship with most states as long as it maintains a cooperative posture with them. However, these options are primarily suitable for

- 30 Sun Degang, ‘Lun xinshiqi Zhongguo de zhunlianmeng waijiao’ (‘China’s Quasi-alliance Diplomacy in the New Era’), *Shijie jingji yu zhengzhi* (*World Economics and Politics*), No. 3 (2012), pp. 57–81.
- 31 Wang Haiyun, ‘Bian “bujiemeng” wei “zhunjiemeng”: pojie Meiguo duiwo zhanlue weidu de fanglue xuanze’ (‘From “Non-Alliance” to “Quasi-Alliance”: A Strategic Choice to Counterbalance U.S. Strategic Containment toward China’), 2012, [http://news.xinhuanet.com/world/2012-03/11/c\\_122815157.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/world/2012-03/11/c_122815157.htm).
- 32 Tang, ‘Alliance Politics and China’s Security Strategy’.
- 33 Zhao Huasheng, ‘“Zhong” E “jiemeng” weihe quefa xianshi kexingxing’ (‘Why the China-Russia “Alliance” Is Impractical: Analysis on the Historical and Practical Considerations of Two States’), *Xueshu qianyan* (*Academic Frontiers*), No. 5 (2013), pp. 62–71.
- 34 Su Xiaohui, ‘Zhongguo waijiao “jieban bu jiemeng”’ (‘China’s Foreign Policy: Making Partners but not Forming Alliances’), *Renmin ribao* (*People’s Daily*), 2 January, 2015; Men Honghua and Liu Xiaoyang, ‘Zhongguo huoban guanxi zhanlue pinggu yu zhanwang’ (‘Partnership Strategy of China: Progress, Evolution and Prospects’), *Shijie jingji yu zhengzhi* (*World Economics and Politics*), No. 2 (2015), pp. 65–95.

**Table 1.** Debating the Non-Alliance Strategy under Theoretical Context

	Determinants	Policy Orientations	Major Advocates
<b>Atheoretical</b>	Official discourse	Non-ally; partnership	Sun Ru Su Xiaohui
<b>Defensive realism</b>	Security; mitigating threats	Non-ally; Alternatives	Zhu Feng Tang Shiping
<b>Offensive realism</b>	Power maximization; great power rivalry	Ally	Dai Xu
<b>Moral realism</b>	Power and authority (leadership)	Ally	Yan Xuetong
<b>Liberalism</b>	Welfare; interdependence, cooperation	Non-ally; partnership with U.S.	Wang Jisi
<b>Constructivism</b>	Identity; strategic culture; background knowledge	Non-ally	Qin Yaqing

the economic area. Especially, China's strategic partnerships with most states contain few truly 'strategic' elements, in the form of security cooperation towards deterring potential adversaries. In terms of the nature of cooperation, therefore, there are no real substitutes for an alliance strategy.

Based on the above review of contending arguments, one may wonder how such divergent views could emerge on China's alignment strategy. In general, different prescriptions usually derive from the various theoretical perspectives underlying scholarship. However, most international relations scholars and foreign policy analysts in Chinese academia do not have a well-defined theoretical position, although certain prominent scholars do display relatively clear IR theory preferences.<sup>35</sup> Therefore, scholarly positions on whether China needs to abandon its non-alliance principle may not fit the traditional theoretical frameworks found in international relations literature. Putting the debate roughly into the spectrum of international relations theories may give us a better understanding of the differences in these positions. As Table 1 shows, the three broad policy preferences reviewed in the sections above reflect at least six theoretical positions.

The first group is in essence non-theoretical and located in the orthodox camp. These scholars do not rely on any theoretical concepts or schools in international relations scholarship, but only try to defend the official position. Not surprisingly, most scholars in this camp come from research institutions under governmental agencies or have close links with them. It is rare for orthodox scholars to express independent views on policy issues.

The second group may be categorized as defensive realists, who generally prefer non-alliance or other alternatives to alliance. For them, it is possible to mitigate the security dilemma between China and the United States through proper measures. In this regard, Tang Shiping develops a sophisticated account of defensive realism, and emphasizes the value of a reassurance strategy in shaping a benign security environment for China.<sup>36</sup>

35 David Shambaugh, 'Coping with a Conflicted China', *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 34, No. 1 (2011), pp. 7–27; Kai He and Huiyun Feng, 'Why Chinese International Relations (IR) Scholars Matter: Understanding the Rise of China through the Eyes of Chinese IR Scholars', Unpublished manuscript, 2016.

36 Tang Shiping, *Suzao zhongguo de lixiang anquan huanjing (Constructing China's Ideal Security Environment)*(Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 2003); Tang Shiping,

Similarly, Zhu Feng contends that the current unipolar system heavily constrains the development of countervailing coalitions against the United States. Owing to these structural constraints, it is wiser for China to pursue soft-balancing rather than hard-balancing.<sup>37</sup>

The third theoretical inclination in the debate is similar to an offensive realist perspective, with some military academics as leading scholars. These scholars usually emphasize China's severe security threats induced by its unfavourable external environment and US containment. For example, in a widely-quoted book, Colonel Dai Xu, an influential military strategist and a professor at China's National Defence University, warns that China is entrapped in a 'C-shape encirclement'—a curving perimeter established by the United States and its East Asian allies. In order to break through this encirclement, he urges China to pursue a hard-line defence strategy, including the development of a Sino-Russia alliance.<sup>38</sup>

The fourth theoretical approach, moral realism, originates in the Chinese context, with Yan Xuetong as a major advocate. From this perspective, competition among great powers is not only about power, but also about morality, a defining component of political leadership in international relations. It is only through extending security commitments to other states that China can attract reliable friends and improve its political leadership vis-à-vis other dominant powers, especially the United States.<sup>39</sup> That is why Yan vigorously calls on China to abandon its traditional non-alliance policy and begin to build a network of military alliances.

Liberals constitute the fifth group, who oppose the idea of forming alliance because this strategy will damage Sino-US cooperation. Wang Jisi, an eminent Chinese scholar with a strong liberal orientation, believes that 'a stable, cooperative relationship with the United States is in the best interest of China on its road to modernization'.<sup>40</sup> He also warns that 'a grand strategy based on the view that the United States is China's main adversary ... would seriously hold back China's economic development to antagonize the country's largest trading partner and the world's strongest economic and military power'.<sup>41</sup> Liberalists attach great importance to the effect that high interdependence and social interactions would have on a cooperative relationship between China and the United States.

Finally, a constructivist approach shows a predilection towards non-alliance. Qin Yaqing, a prominent constructivist in China, explains China's non-alliance strategy from

*A Theory of Security Strategy for Our Times: Defensive Realism* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), chapter 5.

37 Zhu Feng, 'China's Rise Will Be Peaceful: How Unipolarity Matters', in Robert S. Ross and Zhu Feng, eds., *China's Ascent: Power, Security, and the Future of International Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008), pp. 34–54.

38 Dai Xu, *C xing baowei: neiyou waihua xia de zhongguo tuwei (C-Shape Encirclement: China's Breakthrough with Internal Concerns and External Dangers)* (Shanghai: Wenhui chubanshe, 2009).

39 Yan Xuetong, 'Political Leadership and Power Redistribution', *Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol. 9, No. 1 (2016), pp. 1–26.

40 Kenneth Lieberthal and Wang Jisi, 'Addressing U.S.-China Strategic Distrust', John L. Thornton China Center Monograph Series, No. 4, The Brookings Institution, March 2012, p. 7.

41 Wang Jisi, 'China's Search for a Grand Strategy', *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 90, No. 2 (2011), pp. 68–79.

an idealist perspective. Incorporating Chinese culture with social constructivism, Qin develops a relational theory largely based on the *zhongyong* dialectic, a traditional Chinese method of thought that assumes the co-existence of two opposite extremes as indispensable parts of an organic whole, wherein “the middle way” is usually more appropriate than any extreme behaviour.<sup>42</sup> Drawing from this school of thought, Qin criticizes Yan’s idea of abandoning the non-alliance policy by arguing Yan’s strong dichotomous bias, and concludes that ‘non-alliance will continue to be a chief feature of China’s foreign policy. Active strategic alliances geared to increasing power seem an even less likely measure for China to take, no matter who the potential allies might be’.<sup>43</sup>

If we look only at the actual policy pursued or possible policy adjustment by the government, one may arrive at the straightforward conclusion that the supporters of the non-alliance principle occupy a dominant position in Chinese academia today. Opponents that have emerged as a dissenting view on this strategic issue, therefore, carry great significance by virtue of challenging the mainstream consensus as well as a long-standing policy adopted since 1980s. However, the closeness between expert opinion and the government’s policy choices cannot be presumed to be an indicator of the influence within the policy circle of a specific scholar or a group of scholars. Although the supporting view is indeed dominant in the current discourse, an opposing argument represents useful reflections on China’s existing external strategies and their appropriateness.

### Should China and Russia Ally? A Specific Focus of the Debate

The issue of whether or not to abandon the non-alliance strategy is not just about China’s general strategic posture; it also involves a number of specific policy issues. That most compelling is: who would be the most suitable ally? Not surprisingly, given their shared vision about a multi-polar world and similar responses to pressures from the United States, there has been frequent mention and discussion of a China–Russia alliance. For some, Russia is one of China’s available allies—even the best one. The controversy over the feasibility of a China–Russia alliance thus provides us with a specific focus in the broader debate on China’s non-alliance policy.

Pro-alliance scholars suggest that there are common interests in a China–Russia alliance. As regards national security, neither nation is able to integrate completely with the Western-dominated international system, while both contend with antagonism from the United States. Particularly since the Ukrainian Crisis, the US and its European partners have increased their pressure on Russia, inadvertently creating a situation where China is becoming a growingly attractive military and economic partner for Russia. Neither Russia nor China can individually match the United States’ military prowess, but together the two nations are a formidable force. Furthermore, China and Russia’s economies are naturally complementary. Through coordination, the two nations could avoid American market restrictions and achieve economic independence. Russia and China have respectively the

42 Qin Yaqing, ‘Continuity through Change: Background Knowledge and China’s International Strategy’, *Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol. 7, No. 3 (2014), pp. 285–314. For an elaboration on this theory, see Qin Yaqing, *Guanxi yu guocheng: zhongguo guoji guanxi lilun de wenhua jiangou (Relations and Processes: Cultural Construction of Chinese International Relations Theory)*(Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 2012).

43 Qin, ‘Continuity through Change’, pp. 285–314.

world's second and third strongest militaries, and as both are nuclear powers, their alliance could attract other nations, such as Iran, Pakistan, and even other small states. Were China and Russia to achieve such an expansive alliance network, the United States, even with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), would not reasonably be able to contain it. With Russia as an ally, China need not fear becoming involved in an unnecessary war. Russia's nuclear arsenal greatly dis-incentivizes large-scale warfare, and the country would need not to rely on China's military in the event of any small-scale conflict.

Yan Xuetong observes that US unipolarity has intensified rather than relaxed in recent years. China and the US are competing for international leadership, while Moscow is in strategic competition with Washington. Neither Russia nor China alone is able to alleviate pressure from the United States. Since annexation and making alliances have been common strategies to compete for dominance throughout history, as long as China regards national renewal as its policy goal it must abandon the principle of non-alliance and ally with Russia.<sup>44</sup> Yan also notes that 'the United States' unwillingness to accept China in the international arena, Russia's potential as an ally, and China's continued rise as a military power, make it increasingly clear that the benefits of a Sino-Russian alliance would greatly outweigh the costs'.<sup>45</sup> Colonel Dai Xu also advocates a Sino-Russian alliance from the perspective of geopolitical competition with the US in Eurasia.<sup>46</sup>

Luo Yuan and Zhang Wenmu display more moderate attitudes to China's alliance strategy, although both point out the need to build alliances. Luo posits that Sino-Russian security cooperation could take the form of a quasi-alliance,<sup>47</sup> while Zhang emphasizes the defensive objectives of the alliance whereby the legitimate interests of both China and Russia may be preserved. Other than the need to deal with US pressure, Zhang points out that China has traditional experience of managing alliances.<sup>48</sup> Yu Zhengliang moreover believes that Russia is the ideal candidate for establishing a quasi-alliance strategy, because Sino-Russian core national interests increasingly require cooperation to break the United States' global hegemony.<sup>49</sup> Aside from Russia, members of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, such as Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Laos, Cambodia, and North Korea, are all potential Chinese allies.<sup>50</sup>

44 Yan, 'From Keeping a Low Profile to Striving for Achievement', pp. 153–84.

45 Yan, 'Is Russia Reliable?', pp. 21–5.

46 Dai Xu, 'Zhong'E ying lianshou goujian ouya dalianmeng' ('China and Russia Should Form a Grand Eurasian Alliance'), *Huanqiu shibao (Global Times)*, 30 January, 2012.

47 See 'Huanqiu shibao nianhui, Shijie bianju, zhongguo zhanlue', ('Global Times Annual Summit: 2012, World Transformation and China's Strategy') *Huanqiu shibao (Global Times)*, 19 December, 2011, <http://finance.jrj.com.cn/2011/12/19102711863006-4.shtml>.

48 Zhang Wenmu, 'Zhong'E jiemeng de xiandu mubiao he yiyi' ('The China-Russia Alliance: Limitations, Objectives, and Implications'), *Shehui guancha (Social Observations)*, No. 3 (2012), pp. 84–7.

49 Yu Zhengliang, 'Guanyu Zhongguo dazhanlue de sikao' ('Thinking about China's Grand Strategy'), *Maozedong Daxiaoping lilun yanjiu (Studies on Mao-Zedong and Deng-Xiaoping Theories)*, No. 5 (2012), pp. 95–101.

50 Yan Xuetong and Qi Haixia, 'Football Game Rather Than Boxing Match: China-US Intensifying Rivalry Does not Amount to Cold War', *Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol. 5, No. 2 (2012), pp. 105–27; Yan Xuetong, 'Zhongguo huo ke kaolv gaibian 'bujiemeng'

Anti-alliance academics hold that there is simply too little to be gained from a Sino-Russian alliance. These scholars believe that the current level of multi-tier cooperation between Russia and China is sufficient to satisfy their mutual interests. Although both nations face similar security challenges, neither faces the threat of large-scale invasion, which lessens the need for a military alliance. Secondly, there is a large disparity between the two nations as regards their ideology and respective security challenges. It is unlikely that the two nations would be able to form a consensus on many issues, let alone give each other military support. The 2008 Georgian-Russo War aftermath provides a good example. The Russian State Duma passed a resolution recognizing the independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. China's somewhat muted reaction in no way aligned with Russia's policies, such reticence fuelled by China's domestic issues with Taiwan. There is hence no guarantee that a Sino-Russian alliance would not be fraught by as much, if not more, conflict than the current US-China relationship.

Li Kaisheng argues that the nature of geopolitics makes competition between Russia and China hard to avoid, whereas China and the United States, separated by thousands of miles, have no fundamental security conflicts.<sup>51</sup> A Sino-Russian alliance would still be subject to the alliance dilemma where both nations fear abandonment in times of need, or being embroiled in conflicts decoupled from national security interests.<sup>52</sup> Neither Russia nor China has the political foundation needed to resolve the security dilemma. At the same time, upon finding that they cannot reach an accord with one another, allied nations find setting aside their own interests for the sake of the alliance even more difficult.<sup>53</sup> Wang Jisi argues that the proposal to ally with Russia originates in the view that the US is China's main adversary. He acknowledges that the United States does pose certain challenges to China, but proposes that there is no need for China to treat the US as a threat or enemy, and that the country's continued economic success depends on a cooperative partnership with the United States. Moreover, few states, if any, would want to join China in an anti-US alliance.<sup>54</sup>

Anti-alliance scholars further argue that Russia and China are not suitable allies from an economic perspective. Sino-Russian trade volume falls far below that of the China-US relationship, and neither Russia nor China wishes to harm trade relations with the United States, the European Union or any large trading partner, as both nations rely on these trading partners for economic exchange and investment.<sup>55</sup> The unrest caused by a Sino-Russian alliance would inevitably spread to trade relations, needlessly harming both nations' economies. Finally, the core interest of a Sino-Russian alliance would be to resist Western powers and establish a new international order that is fair to both middle and developing nations. Since 1992, both Russia and China have emphasized transparency in bilateral relations.

zhanlue' ('China May Consider Changing its Non-alliance Strategy'), *Guofang shibao* (*Defence Times*), 8 June, 2011.

51 Li Kaisheng, 'Xianhua yu xianjin: Zhong'E jiemeng de beihou' ('Flowers and Traps: Behind the Alliance between China and Russia'), 2012, <http://blog.ifeng.com/article/18180895.html>.

52 Zhao, 'Why the China-Russia Alliance Is Impractical'.

53 Jiang, 'China-Russian Alliance Does not Make Sense', pp. 52-3.

54 Wang, 'China's Search for a Grand Strategy', pp. 68-79.

55 Yu Hongyang, 'Bekhbaatar Odgerel and Ba Dianjun, 'Shilun "zhongmengo jingji zoulang" de jichu yu zhangai' ('China-Mongolia-Russia Economic Corridor: Foundations and Obstacles'), *Dongbeiyu luntan* (*Northeast Asia Forum*), No. 1 (2015), pp. 96-106.

Their commitment to the three ‘nons’ (non-alliance, non-confrontation, non-third-party directed policy) has been the foundation of a new style of relations between the two nations. In 2001, both states signed the Sino-Russian Treaty of Friendship, further embedding the three ‘nons’ into the bedrock of their relationship. China and Russia have jointly promoted peace and international stability through cooperation, consultation, dialogue, mutual respect, and compromise. Anti-alliance scholars hence believe an alliance would in no way affirm these principles.

Huiyun Feng points out the current problems in Sino-Russian relations that prevent them from allying with each other. Although both countries employ foreign policies that challenge Western legitimacy and seek to weaken US dominance, China and Russia compete for geopolitical influence in Eurasia through arms sales. Their trade imbalance and divergent interests as regards sovereignty issues are also obstacles to deepening strategic coordination.<sup>56</sup>

There is aside from the pro- and anti-alliance scholars another group of scholars who believe that the conditions for a Sino-Russian alliance are not yet ripe. Were such conditions for an alliance to be ripe in the future, however, this group of scholars would not necessarily either support or oppose the alliance. For example, scholar Zhao Huasheng does not completely reject the possibility of a future Sino-Russian alliance, but he maintains that unless both governments make the necessary preparations for an alliance, and simply force one on the pretext of Sino-Russian cooperation, it would only inflict harm on both countries.<sup>57</sup> Therefore, as long as no major changes occur in the international arena in the near future, moderates propose that China and Russia maintain their strategic partnership.

When assessing the possibility of a China–Russia alliance, the Russian position must also be taken into consideration. A few Russian scholars do support a Sino-Russian alliance. Alexander Korolev, for example, argues that a formal alliance is to be expected.<sup>58</sup> In contrast, Xie Chao, a student of Yan Xuetong, provides a dissenting answer. Based on a systematic study of Russian strategic considerations, Xie Chao finds that Russia has little incentive to form a military alliance with China. He states, ‘from Russia’s point of view, it has the necessary state power to respond to regional security pressures, and as such, Russia will opt to maintain the present alliance structure, and will not attempt to expand its alliances. In the coming years, establishing an alliance with China is neither important nor necessary’.<sup>59</sup>

56 Huiyun Feng, ‘China and Russia vs. the United States?’ *The Diplomat*, 2 March, 2015, <http://thediplomat.com/2015/03/china-and-russia-vs-the-united-states/>.

57 Zhao, ‘Why the China-Russia Alliance Is Impractical’, pp. 62–71; Huang Dengxue, ‘Lun zhonghe zhanlue xiezuo huoban guanxi de fazhan qianjing’ (‘On the Prospects of a China-Russia Strategic Cooperative Partnership’), *Waijiao pinglun (Foreign Affairs Review)*, No. 2 (2008), pp. 25–31; Wang Shuchun and Wan Qingsong, ‘Lun xinxing zhonghe guanxi de weilai zouxiang’ (‘On the Prospects of a New Relationship between China and Russia’), *Dangdai yatai (Journal of Contemporary Asia-Pacific Studies)*, No. 4 (2013), pp. 4–22.

58 Alexander Korolev, ‘The Strategic Alignment between Russia and China: Myths and Reality’, Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy Research Paper No. 15-19, 15 April, 2015, <https://ssrn.com/abstract=2594568>.

59 Xie Chao, ‘Yu zhongguo jiemeng ma? Eluosi guojia liyi yu zhonghe jiemeng gailv’ (‘Will China Form Alliances? Russian Interests and Prospects of a Sino-Russian Alliance’), *Dangdai yatai (Journal of Contemporary Asia-Pacific Studies)*, No. 4 (2016), pp. 44–69.

China–Russia strategic relations also depend largely on US policy towards these two powers. As Huiyun Feng points out, ‘if the United States continuously pushes Russia through NATO, and China through its “rebalancing” in the Asia Pacific, it will certainly drive Russia and China closer to each other’.<sup>60</sup> The recent tensions over Ukraine, Syria, and North Korea provide incentives for China and Russia to strengthen their strategic consultation and cooperation. Indeed, the two powers issued a joint statement on strengthening global strategic stability and anti-missile joint exercises in response to the United States’ decision to deploy the Terminal High Altitude Area Defence (THAAD) system in South Korea.<sup>61</sup>

However, in the wake of the unexpected election of the new US president Donald J. Trump, and his first few weeks in office, there still exists great uncertainty as regards the dynamics of the China–Russia–US triangle, as well as US relations with its allies. On the one hand, President Trump has firmly expressed his support of US–Russian rapprochement, and shown a nascent willingness to challenge China’s interests. Therefore, if his divergent views on China and Russia become official policy, it might drive a wedge between China and Russia.<sup>62</sup> On the other hand, US allies in Europe and Asia have found his tough rhetoric about burden-sharing deeply unsettling, because it creates worries about the credibility of US security commitments. President Trump’s impact on alliance politics clearly represents a significant challenge for all parties involved. However, the policies towards Russia, China, and US alliances pursued in practice by the Trump administration are also constrained by a number of internal and external circumstances – just as his first weeks have been. Taken as a whole, therefore, this is still a fluid situation and beyond the scope of this article.

### Policy Implications of the Debate over the Non-Alliance Strategy

Here, the interaction between academia and policy in the Chinese context is an interesting issue that deserves further discussion. In international relations scholarship, the linkage between academic research and policy making is a controversial issue. In US academia, a mainstream consensus seems to have emerged and determined the need to bridge the academia-policy gap, stressing the importance of policy-relevant research.<sup>63</sup>

- 60 Huiyun Feng, ‘The New Geostrategic Game: Will China and Russia Form an Alliance against the United States?’ DIIS (Danish Institute for International Studies) Report, No. 07, 2015, p. 37.
- 61 ‘China, Russia Sign Joint Statement on Strengthening Global Strategic Stability’, 26 June, 2016, [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2016-06/26/c\\_135466187.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2016-06/26/c_135466187.htm); ‘Joint Missile Defence Drill Set for 2017’, *China Daily*, 11 October, 2016, [http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/world/2016-10/11/content\\_27026552.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/world/2016-10/11/content_27026552.htm).
- 62 Simon Tisdall, ‘Donald Trump Attempting to Play Nixon’s “China Card” in Reverse’, *The Guardian*, 12 December, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2016/dec/12/donald-trump-us-china-relations-taiwan-nixon>.
- 63 Alexander George, *Bridging the Gap: Theory and Practice in Foreign Policy* (Washington, DC: US Institute for Peace, 1993); Joseph S. Nye, Jr., ‘Bridging the Gap between Theory and Policy’, *Political Psychology*, Vol. 29, No. 4 (2008), pp. 593–603; Paul Avey and Michael C. Desch, ‘What Do Policymakers Want From Us? Results of a Survey of Current and Former Senior National Security Decision Makers’, *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 58, No. 2 (2013), pp. 227–46.

The relationship between Chinese academia and the policy-making circle, however, is quite different from its US counterpart, which is characterized by a revolving-door mechanism. Chinese IR scholars seldom have systematic and institutionalized approaches to infiltrating the policy-making sphere. Therefore, the separation between theory and policy is even more evident in China.

However, the role of Chinese IR scholars in informing foreign policy has recently expanded. As the Chinese government becomes more active in international affairs, new issues and challenges have emerged, providing space for academic input. In this context, various multi-level institutions and bureaucracies have amassed and studied both public and academic opinions to provide consultation on policy design. At the same time, Chinese scholars now strive to supply knowledge and advice to the policy circle. It should be noted that the patterns and effects of Chinese IR scholars' influence on the actual policy-making process is largely dependent on individual scholars' expertise and personal relationships with specific officials and bureaucracies. Both prominent scholars and promising young experts now have expanding opportunities to give consultations to various government ministries and departments dealing with external affairs.

In their insightful analyses of the role of Chinese IR scholars in foreign policy, Kai He and Huiyun Feng propose four ideal models: epistemic community, free market, policy signalling, and mirroring policy.<sup>64</sup> As far as the topic of discussion is concerned, the 'free market' model seems to make the most sense, because the Chinese government has a strong preference at this stage for maintaining the established non-alliance strategy, yet also tends to tolerate alternative voices. As can be seen from official media commentaries and other sources, the central government does respond to academic debates over strategic issues, particularly when they challenge official guidelines and principles. For example, Fu Yin, an experienced Chinese diplomat and former Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs, recently published an article in *Foreign Affairs* in which she responds to the debate on 'the nature of the Chinese-Russian partnership' and 'whether it will evolve into an alliance'. Based on a comprehensive analysis of the China-Russia relationship, she concludes that the two countries will not enter into a formal alliance.<sup>65</sup> This is an extremely authoritative response to the debate on China's non-alliance policy in general, and to the envisioned China-Russia alliance in particular. In this case, therefore, Chinese policy makers have a clear sense of the different views that have emerged.

Alliance, in essence, is a security commitment between states to their mutual defence. Although China claims not to have any military alliances, in practice, the Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance between China and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), signed in 1961, is an alliance treaty still officially in force.<sup>66</sup> At the same time, the exact meaning of this treaty and its associated commitments and obligations would be subject to interpretation today. Other than on rare occasions, this treaty seldom gets a public airing. On July 11, 2016, Xi Jinping and Kim Jong Un

64 He and Feng, 'Why Chinese International Relations (IR) Scholars Matter'.

65 Fu Ying, 'How China Sees Russia: Beijing and Moscow Are Close, but Not Allies', *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 95, No. 1 (2016), pp. 96-105.

66 Andrew Scobell labels this security relationship as a 'virtual alliance'. See Andrew Scobell, 'The PLA Role in China's DPRK Policy', in Phillip Saunders and Andrew Scobell, *PLA Influence on China's National Security Policymaking* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2016), p. 199.

exchanged congratulatory messages to celebrate the treaty's 55th anniversary. This high-profile act took place in the aftermath of South Korea's decision to deploy the THAAD system, regarded as a severe threat to China's nuclear-delivery capabilities. Beyond that symbolic felicitation, however, meaningful security cooperation between the two states has long been absent. Moreover, in response to the DPRK's nuclear and missile tests, China has strengthened its economic sanctions against North Korea, showing a genuine motivation to promote denuclearization of the Korean peninsula—or at least to manage the acceleration of Pyongyang's nuclear programme—even at the cost of deteriorating bilateral relations with North Korea.<sup>67</sup> From a Chinese perspective, a nuclear-armed North Korea would exert negative impact on China's national security.<sup>68</sup> The still-existing China–DPRK treaty could not be seen as a contradiction of China's non-alliance policy, because it persists only in the strictly legal sense. Chinese leaders have no instinctual resistance to the option of forming military alliances, but the current security environment and perceived low likelihood of war simply do not warrant China's abandonment of the long-standing policy. In fact, the relatively stable and peaceful external environment of the past thirty years has served only to strengthen Chinese leaders' desire to support the non-alliance strategy.

Although unlikely to instigate a significant policy shift in the near future, Chinese leaders nevertheless acknowledge the importance in international politics of making friends and recruiting support. In this regard, 'building a global network of partnerships' has been put forward as a distinct foreign policy doctrine under Xi Jinping's leadership. Partnership diplomacy may not be an entirely new concept in Chinese diplomatic thought, but the current administration is trying to expand its scope and dimensions. By the end of 2014, China had established strategic partnerships with 67 individual countries throughout five regions, including those within regional institutions.<sup>69</sup> More than 10 new partnerships have since been established or improved based on existing ones between China and other parties.

The newly proposed 'global network of partnerships' can also be interpreted as an official response to the debate on China's non-alliance strategy. Compared to China's partnership diplomacy of the past two decades, President Xi Jinping has expanded understanding of strategic partnerships by defining them through different characteristics, seeking to

67 The Chinese Ministry of Commerce announced the suspension of all imports of coal from North Korea from 19 February, 2017. See 'MOFCOM and GACC Announcement No.12 of 2017', The Ministry of Commerce, China, 18 February, 2017, <http://www.mofcom.gov.cn/article/b/c/201702/20170202518342.shtml>; In a recent press conference, Chinese Premier Li Keqiang said that 'China is committed to the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula, to peace and stability there and to resolving issues through dialogue. That has been China's consistent and clear-cut position. With respect to UN Security Council resolutions, China has all along made clear its commitment to and fully complied with these resolutions.' See 'Transcript of Premier Li Keqiang's Meeting with the Press at the Fifth Session of the 12th National People's Congress', The Ministry of Ministry of Foreign Affairs, China, 16 March, 2017, [http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/zxxx\\_662805/t1446292.shtml](http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/t1446292.shtml).

68 Yu Shaohua, 'Chinese Views of North Korea's Regional Role', in Carla P. Freeman, eds., *China and North Korea: Strategic and Policy Perspectives from a Changing China* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), pp. 81–90.

69 Wang Yi, '2014 in Review: A Successful Year for China's Diplomacy: Speech delivered by Foreign Minister Wang Yi at the Opening Ceremony of the Symposium on the International Developments and China's Diplomacy'.

establish a global network with China at its centre. The emphasis on global partnerships in President Xi's speech shows that Chinese leaders and policy makers are cognizant of the discourse surrounding the non-alliance policy. They are also aware that there are few nations that can be relied upon to defend China's strategic interests; therefore, continued adherence to non-alliance is not due solely to its efficacy, but also to the dearth of desirable alternatives.

It is plain to see that the dilemma of a rising power lies at the core of most of the above debates. For those who call for a change of China's strategy, allying with other nations is necessary and urgent, while those who advocate continued adherence to non-alliance emphasize the cost and consequences of alignment. In practice, China's official stance on non-alliance has changed little. The Chinese government clearly stated in the White Paper on Peaceful Development, published in 2011, that its foreign policy accords with the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, and that it does not form alliance with any other country or group of countries.<sup>70</sup> Beyond diplomatic rhetoric, however, Beijing's foreign policy has indeed become more proactive.

It should be borne in mind that the Chinese government tends to articulate its foreign policy principles and strategies using absolute and negative terminology, such as, 'China will never enter into any military alliance'. Such terminology is unpalatable to foreign audiences, because it conveys an aggressive and uncompromising posture. These negative absolutes are misleading to domestic audiences because they deny the reality of dynamic actors operating in international relations. The absolute discourse the Chinese government employs in international relations thus severely harms China's reputation and prestige. In fact, some Chinese policies are merely propaganda tools, and have no actual bearing on China's foreign policy. When China does make changes to its foreign policy, i.e. shifts from a non-alliance strategy to an alliance strategy, this inconsistency undermines China's strategic reputation. Wise politicians understand that policy choices are designed to serve temporary aims, which are adjusted in accordance with changes in the international system. Absolutes unnecessarily limit foreign policy choices and show a lack of foresight. China's foreign policy aims would be better served by employing flexible terminology that enables China to operate dynamically in response to changes in the international system.

## **Conclusion**

Since ancient times through to the present day, alliances have played a central role in international politics. Although for certain non-security reasons defensive alliances still persist after the collapse of major adversaries—as shown by the maintenance of a large scale US-led global alliance network in the post-Cold War era—the primary function of military alliances is to deter potential adversaries and to improve security against various threats. Therefore, alliances form, collapse, and transform in response to changes in the security environment that individual states confront, most especially the shifting balance of power and external threats to their national security.

Considering the specific adversaries that a potential alliance would target, as well as the functions it would be expected to perform, the answer to the question of whether China would form alliances with other secondary powers and neighbouring states largely depends

on its self-defined role within the current international system. More specifically, there are two significant calculations China's decision-makers need to take into account: one is whether China can continue to benefit from the current regional order; the other is the extent to which China would be able to bear the costs of challenging US military dominance in the Asia Pacific region and beyond. China will only choose to ally with other states that also perceive the United States as a threat to their national interests if it views the current regional system as a constraint on its legitimate national interests rather than as an enabler of its rising power and influence. Currently, it is safe to argue that China will not change its non-alliance position in the near future, but that it may ally with other states in the long-term should external conditions pose severe challenges to its security interests. Although the debate surrounding the non-alliance strategy reviewed in this article has not precipitated any dramatic policy shift in the short-term, it nevertheless provides us with valuable information for understanding China's foreign policy behaviour as well as its relations with other major powers and neighbouring states in the context of global and regional transformation.

### **Acknowledgements**

This article was originally presented at the Griffith-Tsinghua Conference 'Chinese Scholars Debate International Relations' in Beijing on December 11–12, 2016. The authors would like to thank the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation for its support (Grant No. 16-1512-150509- IPS). The authors would also like to express their sincere appreciation to Antonio Douglas for his excellent assistance, and to Yan Xuetong, He Kai, Hannes Ebert, Li Mingjiang, Zhao Kejin, Alexander Korolev, and two anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments.



Article

# China Debates the Non-Interference Principle

Chen Zheng<sup>†,\*</sup>

<sup>†</sup>Chen Zheng is Assistant Professor of the School of International and Public Affairs, Shanghai Jiao Tong University and Postdoctoral Fellow of the Oxford-Princeton Global Leaders Fellowship Programme, University College, University of Oxford

\*Corresponding author. Email: [chenzhengpku@gmail.com](mailto:chenzhengpku@gmail.com)

## Abstract

Although Beijing maintains its diplomatic stance of ‘non-interference’ in the internal affairs of other countries, a debate has appeared in recent years on the sustainability of this principle. The various arguments fall into three general groups: abandoning the principle; strict adherence to the principle; and more flexibility in practice while maintaining the principle. Among them, the third, represented by new concepts like ‘creative involvement’ and ‘constructive involvement’, has attracted growing support in academic circles. After a close reading of certain representative arguments, this article suggests that the controversies among different analysts derive largely from divergent judgments on two interrelated, strategic issues: whether China should continue to keep a low profile in global affairs, and China’s relations as a whole with the Western-led international society. The non-interference debate thus reflects the conflicting orientations that underlie the worldview of contemporary China, and the non-interference dilemma Beijing faces. The impact of the debate on Beijing’s policy is difficult to ascertain, but it is noticeable that in spite of its unquestioning commitment to sovereignty and non-interference, which will not change in the short run, the Chinese government is nevertheless moderately adjusting its policies. A loose pragmatic consensus among scholars both reflects and brings about this change.

## Introduction

Non-interference (or non-intervention) is a long-observed feature of China’s foreign policy.<sup>1</sup> Although it receives continued rhetorical support from the Chinese government, a

1 Some degree of ambiguity exists in China’s ‘non-interference/non-intervention principle’. Indeed, the two terms ‘interference’ (干涉) and ‘intervention’ (干预) are often used interchangeably in Chinese foreign policy publications. This ambiguity is aided by the absence of

public debate has appeared in recent years on the principle's sustainability. A number of analysts suggest that Beijing should change its commitment to the 'non-interference' principle to safeguard its expanding overseas interests and improve its reputation as a responsible power. Others, meanwhile, argue that the benefits of sustained insistence on the principle outweigh the costs of abandoning it. Recently, a loose pragmatic consensus has gradually emerged which calls for more creativity and flexibility in practice while maintaining the principle. Concepts like 'creative involvement' and 'constructive involvement' have become catchwords in academic discussions, although subtle differences still exist among scholars.

The non-interference debate reflects both the complexity of Beijing's current international strategy and the intellectual conditions of foreign policy studies in China. It thus deserves a thorough examination. Although Beijing's attitude towards international intervention is one of the most perplexing topics in Chinese foreign policy studies, the public debate around the principle has received insufficient attention in previous studies, and only been referred to occasionally as the background to Beijing's policy change.<sup>2</sup> This article, however, delves deep into the debate. It examines the divergent understandings among Chinese analysts of the non-interference policy and how the debate on it interacts with government policy change. By investigating the intellectual context of Beijing's non-interference policy adjustment, it also tries to provide a new lens to understand China's contemporary foreign policy and international studies. From a methodological standpoint, the article examines relevant Chinese academic articles, media reports, and online discussions, including essays directly engaging in the non-interference debate, as well as concrete discussions on certain specific and relevant cases of non-interference.<sup>3</sup> The first section discusses the background to the debate. The second addresses various representative arguments. The third part analyses the main features of the debate and its place in current grand strategy debates among Chinese scholars. The fourth discusses the relationship between the debate and Beijing's policy adjustment. The concluding section sums up.

a precise definition in Chinese government policy statements and international relations literature of exactly which of a government's actions might constitute interference in a state's domestic affairs. The boundary between interference and legitimate diplomatic practice has never been clearly defined, an ambiguity that creates space for diplomatic flexibility.

- 2 For some examples of general studies on China's non-interference policy, see Chiung-Chiu Huang and Chih-yu Shih, *Harmonious Intervention: China's Quest for Relational Security* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014); Ren Mu, 'An Analysis on the Contradiction between China's Non-intervention Policy and Intervention Activities', *Ritsumeikan Journal of International Studies*, Vol. 13 (2013), pp. 25–29; Mathieu Duchâtel, Oliver Bräuner, and Zhou Hang, 'Protecting China's Overseas Interests: The Slow Shift away from Non-interference', *SIPRI Policy Paper*, No. 41 (2014), pp. 5–20.; Zhongying Pang, 'China's Non-Intervention Question', *Global Responsibility to Protect*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (2009), pp. 237–52.
- 3 In collecting samples, the author searched within the China National Knowledge Infrastructure(CNKI) 'China Journals Full-text Database' using keywords '不干涉' and '不干涉内政'. Articles published between the year 2005 and 2016 with high downloads, consequences and citations were selected and examined.

## The Debate

Non-interference is a basic principle of China's foreign policy.<sup>4</sup> In the Chinese context, the principle generally means that a country shall not interfere/intervene in other countries' internal affairs, which in essence come under domestic jurisdiction.<sup>5</sup> The notion of the concept dates back to the Sino-USSR alliance treaty signed in early 1950.<sup>6</sup> Since Zhou Enlai incepted it as part of the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence in 1953, and the concept's incorporation into the 'Ten Principles' of the 1955 Bandung Conference, it has become a crucial component of China's foreign policy discourse.<sup>7</sup> Except for some aberrations in the late 1960s during the peak of the Cultural Revolution, Beijing has generally adhered to it. It was also enshrined in the preamble to the Chinese Constitution in 1982. Beijing has cherished the principle even more since the Tian'anmen Square incident of 1989, and shown strong opposition towards the humanitarian intervention initiatives of certain Western countries in the past decades. Non-interference, therefore, is understood as a key guideline and major rhetorical tool of Beijing's diplomatic work, though there has always been a degree of flexibility.<sup>8</sup>

However, having been crafted when Beijing had few interests abroad, the principle has recently faced mounting challenges. Since the turn of the millennium, China's phenomenal economic expansion and the consequent need for raw materials, energy, and markets has stimulated Chinese firms' outbound investment and the subsequent influx of Chinese citizens to foreign countries.<sup>9</sup> However, China's deepening interdependence with the global economy entails high vulnerabilities. Increasingly, Chinese companies must deal with domestic turmoil in unstable regions like the Middle East, Central Asia, and Africa. In the past few years, Chinese workers in such countries as Sudan, South Sudan, Nigeria, Libya, and Yemen have suffered kidnappings, killings, and/or evacuations. There are consequently growing demands at home for Beijing to develop more active policies to protect its expanding overseas interests.<sup>10</sup>

4 Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 'China's Initiation of the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence', 17 November, 2000, <http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/ziliao/3602/3604/t18053.htm>.

5 Xinhua, 'Heping gongchu wuxiang yuanze' yuanze' ('The Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence'), 6 June, 2004, [http://news.xinhuanet.com/ziliao/2004-06/09/content\\_1515866\\_1.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/ziliao/2004-06/09/content_1515866_1.htm).

6 *China, Sino-Soviet Treaty and Agreements: Signed in Moscow on 14 February, 1950* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1990).

7 See Chen Jian, 'China and the Bandung Conference, Changing Perceptions and Representations', in Tan See Seng and Amitav Acharya, eds., *Bandung Revisited, the Legacy of the 1955 Asian-African Conference for International Order* (Singapore: National University of Singapore Press, 2008), pp. 132-59.

8 Ren, 'An Analysis on the Contradiction between China's Non-intervention Policy and Intervention Activities', pp. 25-29.

9 Duchâtel, Bräuner, and Zhou, 'Protecting China's Overseas Interests', p. 2.

10 For instance, Su Changhe, 'Lun Zhongguo haiwai liyi' ('On China's Oversea Interests'), *Shijie jingji yu zhengzhi* (*World Economy and Politics*), No. 8 (2009), pp. 13-20; Meng Honghua and Zhong Feiteng, 'Zhongguo haiwai liyi yanjiu de lichen, xianzhan yu qianzhan' ('Studies on China's Oversea Interests: Past, Now and Prospects'), *Waijiao pinglun* (*Foreign Affair*

The normative developments of international society since the end of the Cold War also challenge the traditional primacy of state sovereignty. The Western World is promoting a post-Westphalia order that entails a stronger emphasis on human rights.<sup>11</sup> Many developing countries are also adjusting their positions. The popularity of non-interference is thus declining. Moreover, with the rapid expansion of China's power and influence, other international players expect Beijing to make more 'contributions' to, and shoulder bigger 'responsibilities' in global issues.<sup>12</sup> All of these developments challenge the non-interference principle. A public debate on non-interference policy has hence emerged.

### Criticism

In the past few years, certain analysts have increasingly questioned whether non-interference serves China's national interest, but most of their criticisms have appeared in news magazines and Internet blogs rather than in academic journals. In the eyes of those critics, Beijing's 'passive' non-interference policy, combined with a lack of experience and power-projection capabilities, has imposed serious limits on Chinese efforts to safeguard its interests in various regions. For instance, well-known and active columnist Qiu Lin holds that the non-interference doctrine induced China to 'bury its head in the sand like an ostrich' in its dealings with certain countries, notably Myanmar. He insists that it was Beijing's passive 'wait-and-see approach', stemming from the 'wishful thinking' characteristic of a non-interference policy, that caused the loss of China's economic initiative amid Myanmar's political change.<sup>13</sup> Meanwhile, other analysts have complained that Beijing's reluctance to intervene in support of Chinese companies in countries like Sudan, Libya, and South Sudan has resulted in substantial losses, and that the 'no strings attached' approach to foreign aid, trade, and investment has not won the goodwill of local governments. For instance, the China National Petroleum Corporation reportedly did not receive equal and fair treatment after its investment in the Sudanese oil industry.<sup>14</sup> Thus, they

*Reviews*), No. 5 (2009), pp. 56–71; Duchâtel, Bräuner, and Zhou, 'Protecting China's Overseas Interests', pp. 13–14.

- 11 Jack Donnelly, 'Human Rights: A New Standard of Civilization?', *International Affairs*, Vol. 74, No. 1 (1998), pp. 1–24; Yongjin Zhang, *China in International Society Since 1949: Alienation and Beyond* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998), p. 250; Barry Buzan, 'China in International Society: Is "Peaceful Rise" Possible?', *Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (2010), pp. 5–36; Tim Dunne, 'The Rules of the Game are Changing: Fundamental Human Rights Crisis after 9/11', *International Affairs*, Vol. 44, No. 2 (2007), pp. 269–86; Andrew Hurrell, *On Global Order: Power, Values, and the Constitution of International Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 1–2, 121, 287–318.
- 12 See, for instance, Robert B. Zoellick, 'Whither China: From Membership to Responsibility?', National Committee on United States-China Relations, 21 September, 2005, <http://www.ncuscr.org/articlesandspeeches/Zoellick.htm>.
- 13 Qiu Lin, 'Zhongguo diudiao Miandian shi wubuzhu de xianshi nanti' ('Has China's Ostrich Policy of Non-interference in Other States' Internal Affairs Led to the Loss of Burma?'), 19 June, 2013, <http://blog.ifeng.com/article/28276210.html>.
- 14 Li Anshan, 'China's New Policy toward Africa', in Robert I. Rotberg, ed., *China into Africa: Trade, Aid, and Influence* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2008), p. 38; Ian Taylor, *China's New Role in Africa* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2009), p. 51. See also, Wang Meng, 'Da er fu er weiji: Zhongguo wajiao zhuanxing de tiaozhan yu qiji' ('Darfur Crisis: The Challenge to and Juncture of Changes in China's Foreign Policy'), *Shijie jingji yu zhengzhi*

argued, Beijing should be more assertive in defending its own interests. Some critics have also complained that China's investments and 'assistance with no political conditions' are of benefit solely to the rulers of pariah countries, rather than to common civilians, and that Beijing's maintenance of its 'unconditional' aid policy might thus be interpreted as implicit moral endorsement of their wrongdoings. Xie Yiqiu, deputy chief executive editor of the influential journal *Nanfengchuang* (South Reviews), asserted in this connection that if certain states accept Chinese aid but use it for 'wrongdoings', Beijing should intervene directly as a matter of necessity, and monitor African governments to ensure the effectiveness of such assistance.<sup>15</sup>

Normative developments in the international system constitute another significant factor contributing to criticisms of non-interference. Such critics highlight the gradual softening of a hitherto rigid understanding of sovereignty on the part of several non-Western regional organizations, especially the African Union (AU).<sup>16</sup> They consequently infer that non-interference might no longer be an effective rhetorical device to win China support from developing countries, and that it might instead circumscribe China's diplomatic flexibility while obstructing its regional cooperation efforts.<sup>17</sup> In their eyes, the rise of human rights and democratic values is irresistible, and resistance to this global trend can be justified neither in legal terms nor on moral grounds.<sup>18</sup> The non-interference principle, therefore, is inconsistent with China's promise to be a responsible power. Beijing's 'ignorance' of human rights abuses in some developing countries, Sudan and Zimbabwe, for instance, has thus only presented its adversaries with a demonizing tool.<sup>19</sup> Rigid adherence to non-interference, therefore, has become a serious barrier to China's public diplomacy.<sup>20</sup>

(*World Economy and Politics*), No. 6 (2005), pp. 35–40; Zha Daojiong, 'Zhongguo zai Feizhou de shiyou liyi: guoji zhengzhi keti' ('China's Oil Interests in Africa: A Topic of International Politics'), *Guoji zhengzhi yanjiu* (*International Politics Quarterly*), No. 4 (2006), pp. 53–67.

- 15 Xie Yiqiu, 'Buganshe de kunjin' ('The Dilemma of Non-interference of Domestic Affairs'), *Nanfengchuang* (*South Reviews*), No. 1 (2010), pp. 42–44.
- 16 Duchâtel, Bräuner, and Zhou, 'Protecting China's Overseas Interests', p. 9.
- 17 Ibid.; Zhou Huilai, 'Zhongguo ying chaoyue bugansheneizheng waijiao' ('China Should Transcend Non-interference Diplomacy'), 24 June, 2010, [http://www.21ccom.net/articles/qqsw/zwj/article\\_2010062411975.html](http://www.21ccom.net/articles/qqsw/zwj/article_2010062411975.html).
- 18 Wu Zhengyu, 'Zhuquan, renquan yu rendaozhuyi ganshe' ('Sovereignty, Human Rights and Humanitarian Intervention'), *Ouzhou yanjiu* (*Chinese Journal of European Studies*), No. 1 (2005), p. 99; Luo Guoqiang, 'Rendaozhuyiganyu de guojifa lilun ji qi xin fazhan' ('The International Law of Humanitarian Intervention and Its New Developments'), *Faxue* (*Law Science*), No. 11 (2006), p. 86; Li Bojun, 'Rendao junshi ganshe yu guoji rendaofa' ('Humanitarian Intervention and International Humanitarian Law'), *Wuda guojifa pinglun* (*Wuhan University International Law Review*), No. 1 (2010), p. 121.
- 19 This kind of pressure on China peaked in 2008 when the 'Genocide Olympics' campaign targeted Chinese policy on the Darfur issue. Alexandra Cosima Budabin, 'Genocide Olympics: The Campaign to Pressure China over the Darfur Conflict,' *CEU Political Science Journal*, Vol. 4, No. 4 (2009), p. 521.
- 20 Wang Jiangbo, 'Bugansheneizheng yuanze he Zhongguo de gonggong waijiao' ('The Principle of Non-interference and the Development of China's Public Diplomacy'), *Henan shifan daxue xuebao* (*Journal of Henan Normal University*), No. 1 (2013), pp. 25–27.

Certain critics of non-interference, moreover, have even suggested that abandoning the principle might promote China's domestic reforms. Zhou Huilai, an active media commentator and graduate of Shanghai's Fudan University, averred that using the existence of domestic problems to justify the non-interference principle is ridiculous, and that it only reveals the government's lack of self-confidence. Instead, Zhou said, Beijing should use its abandonment of the non-interference principle to propel necessary domestic reforms to resist the emerging 'crony capitalism'.<sup>21</sup> In sum, in these critics' eyes, rigid adherence to the non-interference principle is unfavourable to both China's national interest and international reputation.

## Defence

Ahead of the emerging critics of the non-interference diplomacy are certain people who maintain defence of strict adherence to the principle. From their point of view, Beijing's persistent advocacy of non-interference serves three purposes. First, the principle is vital to defending China's sovereignty from foreign interference. Western countries will not abandon ideas of obstructing China's rise, or plots to 'westernize' and 'divide' China. Non-interference, therefore, is indispensable to defending Beijing's 'core interests', particularly on issues related to its state sovereignty, territorial integrity, and the CPC leadership.<sup>22</sup> Most of these arguments have appeared in the country's leading newspapers, and many among the defenders of the non-interference principle are veteran diplomats who regard it as the foundation of China's foreign policy. For instance, China's former Ambassador to Egypt An Huihou argued that jettisoning non-interference would only 'invite trouble and undermine [China's] own sovereignty and core interests'. Similarly, Ren Weidong, senior researcher at the China Institute of Contemporary International Relations, holds that the principle of non-interference is still an important 'political weapon' for Beijing's prevention of external meddling in China's domestic affairs, and that it is a 'political guarantee against the submersion of socialist countries in the sea of capitalism'.<sup>23</sup> NATO's intervention in Libya in 2011 further intensified these commentators' suspicions that Western powers were pursuing regime changes under the cover of such humanitarian concepts as 'the

21 Zhou, 'China Should Transcend the Non-interference Diplomacy'.

22 An Huihou, 'The Principle of Non-interference Versus Neo-interventionism', *Foreign Affairs Journal*, No. 104 (2012), <http://cpifa.org/en/q/listQuarterlyArticle.do?sessionId=557C11C7D4DBDC65B56A2D437B8E739D?pageNum=4&articleId=230&quarterlyPageNum=24>; Liu Wutong, 'Buganshe neizheng yuanze burong jianta' ('The Principle of Non-interference Should not be Trampled on'), *Guangming ribao (Guangming Daily)*, 22 May, 2012, [http://gm.cn/gjgc/2012-05/31/content\\_4255014.htm](http://gm.cn/gjgc/2012-05/31/content_4255014.htm); An Huihou, 'Jianchi buganshe neizheng yuanze budongyao' ('Non-interference Must be Insisted upon'), *Jiefang ribao (Jiefang Daily)*, 10 December, 2013. *China's White Paper on Peaceful Development (2011)* defines China's core interests as 'state sovereignty, national security, territorial integrity, and national reunification, China's political system established by the Constitution and overall social stability, and the basic safeguards for ensuring sustainable economic and social development'. Chinese State Council, *China's Peaceful Development, White Paper* (Beijing: Information Office of the State Council, 2011). Duchâtel, Bräuner and Zhou, 'Protecting China's Overseas Interests', p. 7.

23 Ren Weidong, 'Xiaoxin "ganshe bieguo neizheng" xianjing' ('Be Careful of the Trap of Interfering in Other States' Internal Affairs'), *Renmin ribao-haiwaiban (People's Daily-Overseas Edition)*, 14 June, 2013.

responsibility to protect (R2P).<sup>24</sup> They asserted that China should be vigilant against the West's attempts to soften China's position on non-interference, which include attacking Beijing's policy on the grounds of 'humanitarian values' and stepping up of rhetoric that presses China to assume more 'international responsibility'.<sup>25</sup> As a Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) official warned, 'If you listen to Western countries' blandishments to abandon the non-interference principle today, who will stand out to support your sovereignty and dignity in the future?'<sup>26</sup>

These defenders of the principle also hold that China's promise of non-interference, which stands for the nation's moral commitment to anti-imperialism, would continue to win support from many developing countries. Advocating the principle would thus portray China as the moral superior of those Western states.<sup>27</sup> If Beijing were to abandon this policy, they warned, it would not only break its own promise but also damage its partnership with many developing countries.<sup>28</sup> These analysts, unlike their opponents, believe, therefore, that the non-interference policy enhances rather than weakens China's soft power.

Other defenders of non-interference argue that forsaking non-interference would damage the credibility of China's promise of 'peaceful development' and 'not seeking hegemony', and attract unnecessary international responsibilities beyond China's capabilities.<sup>29</sup> They believe that protecting overseas interests does not necessarily entail intervening in other countries' domestic politics, and that a more interventionist China would increase the danger of conflict with the West and arouse suspicions among China's neighbours. They strongly question whether China's immediate neighbours and other states would welcome or even tolerate the country's interventionist posture.<sup>30</sup> Professor Su Changhe of Fudan University argued that non-interference would enable China to maximize resources directed towards domestic economic growth while avoiding the danger of overexpansion. At times when China is highly reluctant to take part in international interventions orchestrated by other powers that are not in its interests or conflict with China's moral standards, he said,

24 An, 'The Principle of Non-interference Versus Neo-interventionism'; Lin Bo, 'Xifang xinganshezhuwei wei ai wuqiong' ('The Western Neo-interventionism is Hazardous'), 21 February, 2012, <http://gb.cri.cn/27824/2012/02/21/5951s3566144.htm>; Wang Yusheng, 'Zhongguo waijiao de bianyu bubian' ('The Changes and Consistencies of China's Diplomacy'), *Jiefang ribao*, 29 October, 2012; Wu Xingtang, 'Guoji xingshi dongdang duobianxia, Zhongguo waijiao ying jianchi sanbu yuanze' ('With the Turbulence of the International Situation, China's Diplomacy Should Insist on the 'Three NOs' Principles'), *Dangdai shijie (The Contemporary World)*, No. 4 (2012), pp. 52–53; Duchâtel, Bräuner, and Zhou, 'Protecting China's Overseas Interests', p. 7.

25 Zheng Xiwen, 'Buganshe neizheng yuanze bingwei guoshi' ('The Principle of Non-interference Is Not Outdated'), *Dongfang zaobao (Oriental Morning Post)*, March 29, 2011.

26 Liu, 'The Principle of Non-interference Should not be Trampled On'.

27 *Ibid.*

28 Su Changhe, 'Buganshe neizheng yuanze buneng dongyao' ('China's Adherence to Non-interference Cannot be Shaken'), *Jiefang ribao (Jiefang Daily)*, April 25, 2011.

29 *Ibid.*

30 Guo Kai, 'Wei buganshe neizheng yuanze bianhu' ('In Defence of the Non-interference Principle'), *Ershiyi shiji jingji baodao (21st Century Business Herald)*, 24 February, 2012.

the existence of the principle is also useful in enabling Beijing to justify its inaction or opposition.<sup>31</sup>

Defenders of the non-interference principle thus argue that the benefits of further adherence outweigh the potential costs of a major policy change. Notably, however, while defending adherence to the principle, several scholars also argue that upholding the non-interference principle should not amount to a foreign policy straitjacket, and that Beijing's practice of non-interference can be flexible. Su Changhe, for instance, clearly argues that although non-interference must be maintained, China should be active and creative in its international studies and foreign policy practices. Non-interference should not inhibit people from thoroughly studying other countries' domestic conditions, while providing 'no strings attached aid' does not preclude a proper auditing process and supervision mechanisms.<sup>32</sup> For him, insistence on the non-interference principle is also compatible with non-indifference towards collective interests and regional cooperation with other countries. Advocating non-interference, therefore, does not imply that China cares only about its own selfish interests.<sup>33</sup>

### Pragmatic Adjustment

As the debate proceeds, a growing number of analysts suggest drawing distinctions between principles and tactics. For instance, Professor Liu Zhongmin, director of the Middle East Studies Institute at Shanghai International Studies University, holds that Beijing should learn from its experiences during the Arab Spring that it needs to be more flexible in diplomatic practices while adhering in principle to the non-interference doctrine.<sup>34</sup> Similarly, in his study on China's policy in Sudan, Professor Guo Peiqing of the Ocean University of China said that Beijing should maintain the non-interference principle on a strategic level, whereas on a tactical level it could 'meet changes by adapting to changes' through engaging selectively in the local affairs of other states. It should not only interact with government agencies but also increase contacts with 'social forces' in these countries.<sup>35</sup> Pragmatism thus prevails in these scholars' arguments.<sup>36</sup> For them, both policies of non-interference

31 Su, 'China's Adherence to Non-interference Cannot be Shaken'; Guo, 'In Defence of the Non-interference Principle'.

32 Su, 'China's Adherence to Non-interference Cannot be Shaken'; Su Changhe, 'Zhongguo haiwai liyi guanli de xin shijiao' ('New Perspectives on the Management of China's Overseas Interests'), *Tansuo yu zhengming* (*Exploration and Free Views*), No. 8 (2011), pp. 37–42.

33 *Ibid.*

34 Liu Zhongming, 'Zhongguo zhongdong waijiao de de yu shi' ('The Gains and Losses of China's Diplomacy in the Middle East'), *Dongfang zaobao* (*Oriental Morning Post*), 5 January, 2012.

35 Guo Peiqing, 'Bu fujia renhe zhengzhi tiaojian zhi sikao' ('On the Principle of Not Attaching Any Political Conditions'), *Ershiyi shiji wangluoban* (*Online version of The 21st Century*), Vol. 66, No. 9 (2007), <http://www.cuhk.edu.hk/ics/21c/supplem/essay/0706060g.htm>; Duchâtel, Bräuner, and Zhou, 'Protecting China's Overseas Interests', p. 17.

36 See also Gao Zugui, 'Constructive Involvement and Harmonious World: China's Evolving Outlook on Sovereignty in the 21st Century', *Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Briefing Paper*, No. 13 (2008), <http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/iez/05923.pdf>.

and selective involvement are ‘available options’ for Beijing, and the question of which policy is preferable should depend on China’s interests and capabilities.<sup>37</sup>

A loose consensus has gradually emerged on a modest pragmatic adjustment of the non-interference policy, leading to the emergence of several new concepts. Among them, ‘constructive involvement’ and ‘creative involvement’ are the two that have attracted most followers. Professor Zhao Huasheng of Fudan University first raised the notion of ‘constructive involvement’ in early 2011, in his analysis of the 2010 crisis in Kyrgyzstan. Zhao said that although China had benefited from the improved situation in Central Asia, its hands-off approach had damaged Beijing’s credibility as a reliable regional partner, and reinforced the impression of China as a self-interested outsider. He argued that adherence to non-interference should not preclude the option of involvement as a ‘tactic’ in China’s diplomatic toolkit.<sup>38</sup> Many scholars echoed Zhao’s argument, saying that China should play a more constructive role in international issues.<sup>39</sup> Certain government officials have endorsed this concept in speeches and articles. Lu Shaye, Director General of the MFA’s Department of African Affairs, for instance, argued that China was already constructively involved in Africa through its sending there of special envoys to undertake direct mediation, supporting United Nations (UN) or regional-led mediation initiatives, and buttressing regional peace operations. According to Lu, these efforts characterize China’s constructive involvement in practice, namely, respecting sovereignty, consulting on an equal footing, and promoting peace and impartial dialogues.<sup>40</sup>

In a similar vein, Professor Wang Yizhou, Vice Dean of the School of International Studies at Peking University, and one of the most influential IR scholars in China, coined in 2011 his concept of ‘creative involvement’. It attracted even more followers in academic circles. Wang defines ‘creative involvement’ as a ‘new and positive attitude’ and a ‘new direction’ that calls on China to play a more active role and become voluntarily involved in international affairs.<sup>41</sup> In his various books, articles, and interviews, Wang explains in some detail the necessity to adjust the ‘non-interference’ policy. As China is transitioning to a state of global influence, Wang argues, if it were to fail to shoulder international responsibilities in line with its degree of power, China’s reputation and ‘soft power’ would suffer

37 Duchâtel, Bräuner, and Zhou, ‘Protecting China’s Overseas Interests’, p. 18.

38 Zhao Huasheng, ‘Buganshe neiheng yu jianshexing jieru: Jierjisitan dongdang hou dui zhongguo zhengce de sikao’ (‘Non-interference in Internal Affairs and Constructive Involvement—Reflection on Chinese Policy after the Unrest in Kyrgyzstan’), *Xinjiang shifan daxue xuebao (Journal of Xinjiang Normal University)*, Vol. 32, No. 1 (2011), pp. 23–29; Zhao Huasheng, *Shanghai hezuo zuzhi: fenxi yu zhanwang (Shanghai Cooperation Organization: Analysis and Outlook)* (Beijing: Shishi chubanshe, 2012).

39 For instance, Zhou Shixin, ‘Zhongguo dui zhongdong bianju de jianshexing jieru’ (‘China’s Constructive Involvement of the Middle East Situation’), *Alabo shijie yanjin (Studies of the Arabian World)*, No. 2 (2013), pp. 40–52.

40 Lu Shaye, ‘ZhongFei xinxing zhanlv huoban guanxi de jidian sikao’ (‘Some Thoughts on the New Strategic Partnership between China and Africa’), speech given at the Institute of International Strategy at the Party School of the Central Committee of the CPC, 19 September, 2012, <http://ias.zjnu.cn/show.php?id=2627>.

41 Wang Yizhou, *Chuanzaoxing jieru: Zhongguo waijiao de xinqxiang (Creative Involvement: A New Direction in China’s Diplomacy)*(Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2011).

great damage.<sup>42</sup> Meanwhile, China's overseas interests are expanding rapidly, and Beijing can no longer shelve disputes. In light of the pressing threats stemming from domestic crises in certain countries, Beijing's traditional diplomacy of hiding its strength is incompatible with protecting China's interests abroad.<sup>43</sup> Wang's 'creative involvement' initiative thus stresses that China should move on from its previous non-interference doctrine, and attach more importance to global and regional public goods; through a more active and creative posture China can thus improve its image as a responsible power and have a greater say in international affairs.<sup>44</sup>

While advocating active participation in international affairs, however, Wang also emphasizes that his new concept does not contradict the non-interference principle. That a state's significant internal affairs—its political system, security arrangements, mode of governance, and choice of leaders—should be decided by its government and its people is the core of the non-interference principle. When another state plays a constructive role towards this end, Wang argues, their involvement should be considered as neither a breach nor denial of non-interference. Thus, 'creative involvement' is not a betrayal but rather an enrichment of China's traditional diplomatic principles.<sup>45</sup> Wang also holds that creative involvement is different from the US style of 'interventionism', and that its implementation carries three preconditions. They are: obeying the UN Charter; consent of the parties concerned; and support from the UN and regional organizations. It must also be a selective move, adopted only where China's important interests are concerned. Moreover, the 'creative involvement' concept stresses full exploration of all possible diplomatic means, and a prudent approach towards the use of force.<sup>46</sup>

In sum, Wang's 'creative involvement' argues that China should develop a flexible involvement strategy that is complementary to its non-interference principle. Focusing on how China can grow from a marginalized nation to a responsible global power, he holds that China should timely extend the non-interference doctrine to protect its expanding overseas interests, and provide the world with more public goods.<sup>47</sup> Areas identified as appropriate for China's creative involvement include global governance in the high seas, the Polar Regions, and outer space; multilateral peacekeeping; and the protection of sea lines of

42 Wang Yizhou, 'New Direction for China's Diplomacy', *Beijing Review*, March 5, 2012, [http://www.bjreview.com.cn/world/txt/2012-03/05/content\\_439626.htm](http://www.bjreview.com.cn/world/txt/2012-03/05/content_439626.htm).

43 Yu Lintao, 'Calling for Transformation of China's Diplomacy: Tsinghua University Holds Seminar on Chinese Foreign Policy', *Beijing Review*, December 20, 2011, [http://www.bjreview.com/exclusive/txt/2011-12/20/content\\_413832.htm](http://www.bjreview.com/exclusive/txt/2011-12/20/content_413832.htm).

44 Wang, *Creative Involvement*.

45 Wang, 'New Direction for China's Diplomacy'.

46 Ma Xin and Zhang Meng, 'Zhuangfang Beijing daxue guojiguanxixueyuan fuyuanzhang Wang Yizhou' ('Interview with Wang Yizhou, Vice dean of the School of International Relations, Peking University, on "Creative Involvement" in China's Diplomacy'), *Diyi caijing ribao* (*China Business Review*), 30 December, 2011, <http://www.yicai.com/news/2011/12/1312961.html>.

47 Wang, *Creative Involvement*, pp. 20–21; Jian Junbo, 'Beijing's New Oversea Initiative', *Asia Times*, 17 February, 2012, <http://www.atimes.com/atimes/China/NB17Ad01.html>.

communication against non-traditional threats.<sup>48</sup> Wang is also a keen advocate of reforms to diplomatic policies and institutions.<sup>49</sup>

After the publication of Wang's books, many analysts, and especially young generation scholars, echoed his viewpoints on different occasions. They praised Wang's idea as a creative policy initiative and an encouraging exploration of China's 'academic independence within international relations theory studies'. They also agreed with Wang that although transformation of China's foreign affairs would be a long process, now is the time to make pragmatic and partial adjustments.<sup>50</sup> Concrete studies have appeared that apply the 'creative involvement' concept to policy analyses. For instance, scholars say that China should act as a proactive peacemaker during regional crises in the Middle East, Central Asia, and Africa; that it should establish contacts with different political forces in countries involved in conflicts, so to reinforce communication channels and influence; and that it should step up cooperation with regional organizations and (possibly) other major powers to address the root causes of instability. 'Creative involvement' has rapidly become a catchword in academic publications.<sup>51</sup>

48 Wang Yizhou, *Chuanzhaoxing jieru: Zhongguo guoji juese zhi shengcheng (Creative Involvement: the Evolution of China's Global Role)* (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2013), pp. 96–121.

49 Wang Yizhou, 'Zhongguo xuyao dali tuozhang "gaobianjiang" he tigong guoji gonggong wuping' ('China Should Vigorously Strengthen Its Participation in Issues Related to the "High Frontier" and Provide Public Goods'), *Dangdai shijie (Contemporary World)*, No. 5 (2012), pp. 16–18; Wang Yizhou, 'Zhongguo weihe ying chuangzhaoxing jieru' ('China Should be Creatively Involved in Peacekeeping Operations'), *Zhongguo baodao (China Report)*, No. 2 (2010), p. 59.

50 'Creative Involvement in Global Order Can Leave Clearer Chinese Imprint', *Global Times*, 15 August, 2013, <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/804152.shtml>; Yu, 'Calling for Transformation of China's Diplomacy'.

51 See He Guangqiang and Song Xiuju, 'Chuangzaoxing jiru: Zhongguo canyu beiji diqu shiwu de tiaojian yu lujing tansuo' ('Creative Involvement: The Conditions and Approach Explorations of China's Involvement in Arctic Region Affairs'), *Taipingyang xuebao (Pacific Journal)*, No. 3 (2013), pp. 51–58; Zhang Chun, 'Zhongguo tese waijiao lilun de xintansuo: ping chuanzaoxingjieru: Zhongguozhi quanqiujuese de shengcheng' ('New Exploration on Diplomacy Theory with Chinese Characteristic: Review on Creative Involvement: A New Direction in China's Diplomacy'), *Guoji zhanwang (Global Review)*, No. 6 (2013), pp. 145–9; Liu Haifang, 'Kuayue shu yu dao: chuangzaoxing jieru pingjie' ('Transcend Means and Values: Review on Creative Involvement'), *Shijie jingji yu zhengzhi (World Economy and Politics)*, No. 12 (2011), pp. 147–51; Li Xin, 'Chuangzaoxing jieru pingjie' ('Review of Creative Involvement'), *Guoji jingji pinglun (International Economy Review)*, No. 6 (2011), p. 160; Ying Jiwei, 'Zhongguo waijiao chuangzaoxing jieru linian de zhishipuxi he yanjiu yicheng' ('The Knowledge Linage and Research Agenda of the Creative Involvement Idea in Chinese Diplomacy'), *Guojiguanxi xueyuan xuebao (Journal of University of International Relations)*, No. 5 (2012), pp. 65–70; Ye Shulan, 'Zhongguo waijiao de linian chuangxin yu zhongguo tese: ping Chuangzaoxing jieru' ('Chinese Diplomacy's Idea Innovation and Chinese Characteristic: Review of Creative Involvement'), *Guoji zhengzhi yanjiu (International Politics Quarterly)*, No. 3 (2012), pp. 176–81; Zhang Zhizhou, 'Chuangzaoxing jieru yu zhongguo guoji juese' ('Creative Involvement and China's International Role: Review on the

The popularity of ‘creative involvement’ and ‘constructive involvement’ reflects that a loose pragmatic consensus is emerging, at least in academic circles. More and more analysts agree that the principle of non-interference is still very important, while not absolute. Beijing should pragmatically adapt its policies in accordance with the changing situation to safeguard China’s interests. Meanwhile, discussions of concepts like ‘creative involvement’ remain nascent, and require clarification as to how they can translate into concrete practices. Subtle differences among scholars remain on such critical questions as under what conditions and for what reasons should (or should not) China be involved, how can the results of China’s involvement be assessed, and how China should withdraw if it should judge its involvement as ineffective or even counterproductive. To clarify the non-interference debate, we should put it into a broader context.

## Understanding the Debate

After the country’s rapid power ascendance in the past few decades, neither the Chinese government nor its people are prepared for a new set of external demands. Despite a somewhat constrained intellectual environment, foreign policy analysts in China have been pre-occupied in recent years with animated discussions on the opportunities, risks, and responsibilities of being a rising power.<sup>52</sup> Controversies around the non-interference principle are just a part of those general debates on China’s grand strategy, as different positions among scholars largely derive from substantial divisions with respect to certain fundamental questions. Is China a major power, or still a developing country? What kind of a global role should China embrace in view of its enhanced power? Chinese foreign policy analysts have often given diverse and contradictory answers to these questions.<sup>53</sup> These competing ideas, however, are crucial to understanding the non-interference debate.

## Conflicting Strategies

In recent years, Chinese scholars and policymakers have held heated debates on whether or not China should abandon its low-profile foreign policy. Controversies around the non-interference principle are just a part of this debate. On the one hand, those who advocate abandoning or adjusting the principle usually believe that, given China’s rapidly rising power, its former attitude of non-interference should change with the times.<sup>54</sup> Beijing must

Second Volume of Creative Involvement’, *Guoji luntan (International Forum)*, No. 1 (2014), pp. 77–78; Wang Junsheng, ‘Zhongguo quanqiu juese de quel: Jianping chuangzaoxing jieru’ (‘The Establishment of China’s Global Role—And the Comment on Creative Involvement: The Evolution of China’s Global Role’), *Taipingyang xuebao (Pacific Journal)*, No. 5 (2014), pp. 60–67; Tan Jian and Chen Jianfeng, ‘Chuangzaoxing jieru yu kuojing anquan zhili: yi meigonghe canan houxu chuli de guoji hefalxing weili’ (‘A Tentative Analysis of the Relationship between Creative Involvement of China’s Diplomacy and the Cross-border Security Cooperation’), *Guoji zhanwang (Global Review)*, No. 1 (2015), pp. 90–103.

52 See David Shambaugh, ‘Coping with a Conflicted China’, *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 34, No. 1 (2010), pp. 7–27.

53 *Ibid.* See also, Zhu Liqun, *China’s Foreign Policy Debates* (Paris: European Union Centre for Security Studies, 2010).

54 Xu Jin and Du Zheyuan, ‘The Dominant Thinking Sets in Chinese Foreign Policy Research: A Criticism’, *Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol. 8, No. 3 (2015), pp. 251–79.

update its traditional pattern of staying low key and silent in international affairs, and adopt more active and creative strategies to defend its own interests and expand its international influence.<sup>55</sup> China's swift recovery from the 2008 global financial crisis has enhanced the confidence of many Chinese scholars (and government officials) as regards evaluating their country's power and influence. They believe that China has transformed from a regional power to a global one, or that it is at least well on its way to becoming one.<sup>56</sup> From their point of view, the compatibility between this newly gained status and a rigid commitment to non-interference is tenuous, and the balance between the two requires a less dogmatic approach to non-interference.<sup>57</sup>

Meanwhile, nearly all of those that strongly defend the non-interference principle argue for maintaining the Keeping a Low Profile (韬光养晦, KLP) guideline that Deng Xiaoping laid out decades ago. These scholars believe that their opponents' optimism is due to an underestimation of the various difficulties China would face in the process of development. Highlighting various problems in the process of China's economic development and the barriers in the course of domestic reform, these scholars warn that China is still a developing country, albeit a big one, which faces many challenges. A low-key profile would help China to avoid confrontation with the United States while reassuring other countries, especially its neighbours. More importantly, it would allow China to focus on economic development, and on solving its own domestic problems.<sup>58</sup> Most of those supporters of the non-interference principle share this view.

However, this argument has also encountered serious challenges from scholars like Yan Xuetong. From Yan's point of view, regardless of whether or not China keeps a low profile, other powers would still consider the growth of Chinese power as a significant threat. They would interpret China's 'non-interference', together with Beijing's insistence on identifying itself as a developing country, as reluctance to take international responsibilities. Thus, Yan argues, it is impossible for a rising power to 'hide' its capability, and non-interference cannot reduce international pressure on China.<sup>59</sup> Different preferences as to strategies thus lead to different positions on the non-interference debate.

55 Zhu Feng, 'Zai "taoguang yanghui" yu "yousuo zuowei" zhijian qiu pingheng' ('Searching a Balance between "taoguang yanghui" and "yousuo zuowei"'), *Xiandai guoji guanxi (Contemporary International Relations)*, No. 9 (2008), p. 29.

56 Yan Xuetong, 'From Keeping a Low Profile to Striving for Achievement', *Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol. 7, No. 2 (2014), pp. 153–84.

57 Hu Jian, 'Zhongguo canyu quanqiu zhili de zhiyuxing yinsu fenxi' ('Analysis of Constraint Factors of China's Participation in Global Governance'), *Xueshu yuekan (Academic Monthly)*, No. 11 (2015), pp. 71–73.

58 Wang Jisi, 'Zhongguo de gouji dingwei wenti yu "taoguangyanghui, yousuozuowei" de zhanlue sixiang' ('The Issue of China's International Status and the "Keeping a Low Profile, Making Achievements" Strategy'), *Guoji wenti yanjiu (International Studies)*, No. 2 (2011), p. 4; Jin Canrong, 'Chengshu de daguo shi lixingde—douzhi douyong bu douqi' ('A Mature Big Power is Rational—Competing Wisely and Bravely but not Angrily'), 17 September, 2012, <http://theory.people.com.cn/n/2012/0917/c40531-19025384-1.html>.

59 Yan, 'From Keeping a Low Profile to Striving for Achievements'.

### Divergent Ideological Orientations

Nonetheless, controversies around the KLP strategy and on whether or not to intervene do not cover the entire non-interference debate. Besides, scholars also have different ideas about when, how, and to what extent China should get involved, which largely derive from their conflicting ideological orientations. In defining national interests and formulating international strategy, Chinese analysts attach great importance to their country's relations vis-à-vis international society in general and Western powers in particular.<sup>60</sup> On this issue, Chinese scholars' ideological orientations can be classified under three major categories, namely, nativism, pragmatism, and globalism, which relate closely also to their different domestic political orientations.<sup>61</sup> Refining David Shambaugh's previous discussion, this article draws a spectrum that ranges from isolationist tendencies on the left, nativism end, to globalism on the right end.<sup>62</sup> In between these two extremes, the school of pragmatism thought progresses from realist to more liberal orientations. As these ideas are likely to continue to coexist, China's non-interference policy will continue to be plagued with such competing orientations.

### The Nativist School: Marxism with Chinese Characteristics

At one end of the spectrum is the 'Nativist' school. As David Shambaugh describes it, this is a collection of populists, xenophobic nationalists, and Maoists. They strongly oppose 'western powers' and distrust international institutions. Especially for retired government officials, the two 'fundamental' contradictions, 'between independence and hegemony, and between socialism and capitalism' still closely relate to China's survival.<sup>63</sup> They vociferously suspect the West, especially the United States, of 'attempts' to undermine China's sovereignty and overthrow the CPC's rule. Many believe that concepts like 'global governance', 'responsible power', or 'responsible stakeholder' are dangerous 'Western' traps intended to retard and undermine China's power, and alienate China's relations with its partners in developing countries.<sup>64</sup> This idea, in turn, generates anxieties that any compromise on non-interference would backfire. They thus regard the non-interference principle as the foundation of China's national security and foreign policy. Most such dogmatic defendants of the non-interference principle belong to this school.

### Pragmatism: Realism with Chinese Characteristics

Unlike the Nativist school, the majority of Chinese IR scholars are pragmatic about China's national interests and its relations with international society. These Chinese realists take

60 Zhu, *China's Foreign Policy Debates*, pp. 15, 19, 37.

61 As Shambaugh said, these schools are sometimes contradictory, but also sometimes complementary; we should not see them as mutually exclusive. Moreover, Chinese scholars and officials are often eclectic thinkers; although strongly rooted in one school of thought, they often voice views associated with others. Cognitive complexity prevails. Shambaugh, 'Coping with a Conflicted China', p. 9.

62 *Ibid.*, pp. 9–10.

63 *Ibid.*, pp. 17–18.

64 Zhang Shengjun, "'Zhongguo zerenlun' keyi xiuyi' ('The China Responsibility Discourse' Should Be Ended)', *Renmin luntan* (*People Forum*), No. 6 (2007), p. 50; Lin Limin, 'Lixing bianxi Zhongguo zerenlun' ('Rational Assessment of the "Chinese Responsibility"'), *Renmin luntan* (*People Forum*), No. 3 (2007), p. 53.

the nation state as their core unit of analysis, and uphold the priority of national interests above all else. Like realists elsewhere, they tend to see the international environment as anarchic. In these respects, they are pessimists as regards China's external environment and its relations with the United States.<sup>65</sup> They meanwhile believe that foreign policy should be based on practical national interests and specific situations rather than on ideas and theories. This pragmatic thinking is predominant in the majority of elite opinion and the centre of gravity in China's debates today. Chinese realists generally agree that China should expand its global involvements, but that it must be selective. For them, contributing to global governance is a tactic, not a philosophy.<sup>66</sup>

Corresponding to the KLP debate, Chinese realists could, nonetheless, be roughly divided into 'offensive' and 'defensive' camps. Offensive realists, who have a more optimistic estimation of China's current power status, prefer an assertive posture, and argue that China should use newly built power and diplomatic influence when offering assistance to its allies and close partners.<sup>67</sup> Defensive realists, meanwhile, have a conservative or pessimistic evaluation of China's power, and emphasize prudence in policymaking. Most question whether it is within China's capability to become involved in the internal affairs of other countries. Many believe that China is still not ready to engage fully in global governance, and are deeply wary of doing too much abroad.<sup>68</sup> Thus, due to different estimations of China's strength and interests, there are several variations and splinter factions of the realism school as regards when and to what extent China should intervene.

### The 'Globalism' School: Liberalism with Chinese Characteristics

At the other end of the spectrum are people of the 'Globalism' school, who believe that China needs to shoulder more transnational responsibility, commensurate with its growing power and influence. In China, the 'globalism' school is an eclectic group comprising individuals that are more philosophically disposed to liberalism. They emphasize transnational linkage, soft power, and international cooperation. Such people are supportive of multilateral institutions, as compared to realists, who advocate selective multilateralism. In their eyes, China is a beneficiary of the current international order. Hence, Beijing should play a constructive role and, as a responsible power, contribute more to global governance.<sup>69</sup> Some in the globalist school have a stronger commitment

65 Zhang Ruizhuang, 'Chonggu Zhongguo wajijiao suochu zhi guoji huanjingheping yu fazhan bingfei dangdai shijie zhuti' ('Reassessing the International Environment of China's Foreign Affairs Peace and Development are Not the Main Theme of Today's World'), *Zhanlue yu guanli (Strategy and Management)*, No. 1 (2001), pp. 20–30.

66 Zhu, *China's Foreign Policy Debates*, p. 13.

67 Yan, 'From Keeping a Low Profile to Striving for Achievement'.

68 Zhu, 'Searching a Balance between "taoguang yanghui" and "yousuo zuowei"', p. 28; Xue Chen, 'Feichuantong anquan wenti yu guoji gongong chanpin gongji—jianlun Zhongguo zerenlun yu hexie shijie linian de shijian', *Shijie jingji yu zhengzhi (World Economy and Politics)*, No. 3 (2009), p. 66; Ren Xiao, 'Yanjiu he lijie Zhongguo de guoji zeren', *Shehui kexue (Social Science)*, No. 12 (2007), p. 27; Hu Jian, 'Zhongguo zeren yu heping fazhan daolu' ('China's Responsibilities and the Path of Peaceful Development'), *Xiandai guoji guanxi (Contemporary International Relations)*, No. 7 (2007), p. 43; Shambaugh, 'Coping with a Conflicted China', pp. 18–20.

69 Shambaugh, 'Coping with a Conflicted China', pp. 20–21; Hu, 'China's Responsibilities and the Path of Peaceful Development', p. 70.

towards liberal values, and usually argue for abandonment of the non-interference principle, so following the trend of human rights protection. Meanwhile, those with more realist sensibilities argue only for adjustment of the principle towards more active practices in global governance.<sup>70</sup>

The above discussions help us clarify the non-interference debate. For instance, we could further divide those that advocate policy adjustment into two groups—one the ‘internationalist school’, represented by Wang Yizhou, the other the ‘realist school’, represented by Yan Xuetong. Both agree that the non-interference principle must be adjusted in accordance with the new situation, but have significant differences as regards specific diplomatic approaches and involvement strategies. While calling for international engagements, Wang disapproves of the use of force, and believes in multilateralism and international institutions. He advocates compliance with international norms, cooperation with the Western powers, and active participation in global governance. He also urges Beijing to pay more attention to the common interests of the global community, and to be more active in contributing public goods and taking international responsibility.<sup>71</sup> Yan Xuetong, on the other hand, expresses scepticism with regard to China’s cooperation with the western powers, wherein his emphasis is more on China’s hard-defined pragmatic interests. His distinct and definitive view on the matter of international reputation is that China should be more assertive in protecting its own strategic interests. Yan advocates forging military and political partnerships, rather than participating in global or regional governance, and proposes a selective strategy of rewarding states ‘who are willing to play a constructive role in China’s rise’, and punishing those who show hostility towards China, which entails efforts to ‘guide other countries to act in the direction favourable to China’.<sup>72</sup>

The two thus display subtle differences. For instance, in early 2012, China’s two joint vetoes, along with Russia’s, of the UN Security Council draft resolutions on Syria triggered heated public debates in China. Many self-identified ‘liberal public intellectuals’ harshly criticized online the government’s non-intervention discourse and ‘irresponsible action’ in support of ‘dictatorship’.<sup>73</sup> In explaining China’s two vetoes, Wang Yizhou argued that Beijing’s paramount concern is to delegitimize the regime-change mode of external intervention promoted by the Western powers, and to avoid setting a precedent after NATO’s Libya intervention. It is thus, in his view, reasonable. However, Wang also expressed unequivocal dissatisfaction at the government’s passive handling of the issue, which achieved no absolute gains and put China in an awkward position. Wang holds that Beijing should instead have followed his ‘creative involvement’ formula, and been more proactive in promoting its own proposals in the first place; that it should have proposed political dialogues among different entities, promoted an arms embargo, and initiated a more inclusive and

70 Wang Gonglong, ‘Guojia Liyi, gongyou liyi yu guoji zerenguan’ (‘National Interests, Shared Interests and International Responsibilities’), *Shijie jingji yu zhengzhi (World Economy and Politics)*, No. 9 (2008), p. 26.

71 Wang, *Creative Involvement*.

72 Yan Xuetong, ‘China’s New Foreign Policy: Not Conflict but Convergence of Interests’, *Huffington Post*, 28 January, 2014.

73 Zhang Diyu, ‘Yizhang foujuepiao de zhengyi’ (Controversies Around a Veto), *Shijie zhishi (World Affairs)*, No. 5 (2012), p. 21.

authoritative observation group through the partition of other Middle-East countries beyond the Arab League. In Wang's view, such efforts would have won China more international support and safeguarded its status as a responsible power.<sup>74</sup>

However, while many people were, like Wang, anxious about Beijing's loss of international face due to the vetoes, Yan argued that China has nothing to gain from intervening in Syria, and rejected the notion that the first two Chinese vetoes had damaged Beijing's international image and achieved nothing. The rebels in Syria would not appreciate China even though Beijing abstained, and if they did fetch power, they would still turn to Western countries for post-war reconstruction, as did the Libyan rebels earlier. Besides, the Western World would also continue to criticize Beijing as an authoritarian regime with no regard for human rights, while the Arab countries would always take the side of Washington. Instead, Yan asserted, China's having blocked the Security Council resolutions would bring it certain 'absolute' gains, including strengthening Beijing's partnership with Moscow, so confirming China's expanding influence in the region and reducing the risk of war between the United States and Iran, thus reducing the likelihood of an interruption in Iran's oil supply to China. Yan furthermore argued that the two Chinese vetoes would show the West that China's foreign policy cared not only about its material interests, but was also based on strong moral commitments, such as respect for non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries. As advocate of a more 'moral' foreign policy, Yan believes that this commitment to one's diplomatic principles is vital to a rising power.<sup>75</sup> Meanwhile, Yan also warned that China should be cautious about involving itself in military conflicts in the Middle East.<sup>76</sup>

In brief, the understanding in China's international studies community of the non-intervention principle is not static but in flux. The controversies among different analysts derive largely from divergent judgments on two interrelated issues. One is whether China should continue to keep a low profile in global affairs; the other is China's relations as a whole with the Western-led international society. The non-interference debate thus reflects conflicting strategy preferences and ideological orientations that underlie the worldview of contemporary China (Figure 1).

## Academic Debates and Policy Adjustments

The academic debate on the non-interference principle has unquestionably been relevant to China's foreign policy adjustments over the past few years. First, the debate and policy adjustment share the backdrop of China's 'non-interference' dilemma. The country's rapid domestic transition and rise in power over the past decades have created unprecedented challenges for China's foreign policy. In formulating its non-intervention policy, Beijing must simultaneously deal with multidimensional challenges, divergent expectations, and

74 *Ibid.*, pp. 21–24.

75 Yan Xuetong, 'Zhongguo fujue Xuliya jueyan de libi' ('The Pros and Cons of China's Veto on Syria'), 8 February, 2012, <http://yanxuetongvip.blog.sohu.com/203112403.html>.

76 Yufan Huang, 'Q&A: Yan Xuetong Urges China to Adopt a More Assertive Foreign Policy', *The New York Times*, 9 February, 2016, [http://www.nytimes.com/2016/02/10/world/asia/china-foreign-policy-yan-xuetong.html?\\_r=1](http://www.nytimes.com/2016/02/10/world/asia/china-foreign-policy-yan-xuetong.html?_r=1).

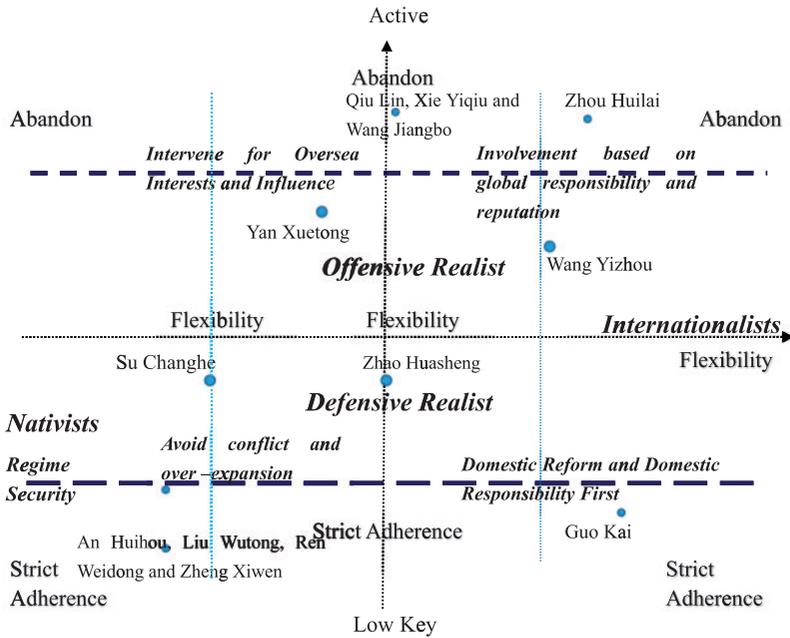


Fig. 1 Debates in China on the Non-Interference Principle.

conflicting requirements.<sup>77</sup> Various arguments raised during the non-interference debate have highlighted the compound challenges that Beijing faces, and reflected Chinese leaders’ complex considerations of the non-interference issue.

Secondly, debates among policy analysts provide government officials and the public with diverse interpretations of China’s national interests and power status, its international circumstances, and a broader view of other countries’ foreign policies, which might assist their policy thinking. Today, several channels exist for decision makers to consult with international studies expertise.<sup>78</sup> Scholars also have various ways to influence wider public opinion. Beijing’s longstanding commitment to non-interference does not imply that people within China have always reached consensus on its validity and relevance. Among the three above-mentioned options—abandonment, strict adherence, and pragmatic adjustment—the abandonment option was at one time quite popular in online discussions, which are generally abrasive and emotional. For instance, Huanqiu.com, the *Global Times* website, conducted an online survey in March 2012. According to its results, 54.6% of respondents thought that Beijing should change the non-interference principle, and only 37.8% believed it should be upheld.<sup>79</sup> However, the latter opinion had little support in academic circles.

77 Chen Qi and Huang Yuxing, ‘Guoji ganshe de guifan weidu’ (‘The Normative Dimension of International Intervention’), *Shijie jingji yu zhengzhi* (*World Economy and Politics*), No. 4 (2009), pp. 6–15.

78 Zhu, *China’s Foreign Policy Debates*, p. 57.

79 ‘Caobanshu daibiao weiyuan zantong gaibian “buganshe neizheng” yuanze’ (‘More than Half of Representatives and Commissioners Agree to Adjust the “Non-intervention” Principle’), 14 March, 2012, [http://mil.huanqiu.com/china/2012-03/2522502\\_4.html](http://mil.huanqiu.com/china/2012-03/2522502_4.html).

Only a few scholars openly advocated abandoning the non-interference principle. Pragmatic reviews by professional analysts helped to ‘pacify’ the general public mood, and inform people about the problems entailed in a drastic policy change.

Meanwhile, the government still interprets its policies along the lines of the non-interference principle and has not—at least not in public—been inclined to adjust it.<sup>80</sup> The principle is consistently incorporated into Beijing’s various political reports, policy papers and newly signed diplomatic statements with other states.<sup>81</sup> The majority of Chinese IR scholars, however, now agree on a pragmatic adjustment of the non-interference policy. Although they still believe that maintaining non-interference in principle is indispensable to China’s diplomacy, they have nevertheless criticized Beijing’s former ‘passive’ and ‘reactive’ policy posture, and highlighted the necessity for an adjustment. They have also presented many concrete policy proposals. In the light of public demand and academic advice, Beijing has tried to reinterpret its non-interference policy and adjust its practices. The loose consensus on pragmatism reached in the debate thus assisted and promoted the government’s policy adjustments.

Nonetheless, it must be borne in mind that the impact of academic discussion on foreign policy decision makers is difficult to gauge. The autonomy of researchers and their spontaneous influence on government policymaking should not be overestimated. In China, the IR academic agenda is still to a great extent set by top leaders. The significance of research is also largely evaluated according to the attitudes of the government, rather than its genuine academic value. A closer examination of the relevant literature would reveal that many scholars intentionally highlighted new Chinese foreign policy practices that displayed growing pragmatism and flexibility as regards non-interference as the starting point of their analyses, to support their arguments.<sup>82</sup> Even scholars that display relatively independent thinking are inclined to rely on interpretations of government policy to support their arguments. For instance, Wang Yizhou emphasized that the inspiration for his new concept came from some of China’s diplomatic initiatives, such as its mediation efforts in the Six-Party Talks on North Korea’s nuclear programme and in Sudan.<sup>83</sup>

The impact of the public debate on Beijing’s non-interference policy is thus difficult to ascertain. Nevertheless, in practice, Beijing has been slowly shifting from a strict interpretation of non-interference, and has slightly tweaked its behaviour. China is indeed adjusting its

80 For instance, China’s Vice Foreign Minister Zhai Jun once clearly stated that ‘the non-interference principle is not outdated’, see Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, ‘Waijiaobu fubuzhang Zai Jun zai diqijie “langting luntan”’ (‘Vice Foreign Minister Zhai Jun’s Speech at the Seventh Blue Room Forum’), 12 July, 2012, <http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/ce/cggb/chn/xwdt/t950390.htm>.

81 See, for instance, ‘Full Text: China’s Second Africa Policy Paper’, [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2015-12/04/c\\_134886545.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2015-12/04/c_134886545.htm); ‘Full Text of China’s Arab Policy Paper’, [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2016-01/13/c\\_135006619.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2016-01/13/c_135006619.htm); ‘Joint statement between China and Iran on the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership (Full Text)’, *China Daily*, 23 January, 2016, [http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/world/2016xixivisitmiddleeast/2016-01/23/content\\_23216249.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/world/2016xixivisitmiddleeast/2016-01/23/content_23216249.htm).

82 Pan Yalin, ‘Cong hanweishi changdao dao canyushi changdao: Zhongguo buganshe neizheng yuanze waijiao dixin fanzhang’ (‘From Defensive Advocacy to Participatory Advocacy: China’s Non-Interference Diplomacy’), *Shijie jingji yu zhengzhi (World Economics and Politics)*, No. 9 (2012), pp. 45–57.

83 Duchâtel, Bräuner, and Zhou, ‘Protecting China’s Overseas Interests’, pp. 30–34.

foreign strategy. Hu Jintao announced in 2009 that China would adopt a new approach of ‘continuously keeping a low profile and proactively getting some things done’.<sup>84</sup> After President Xi Jinping took power in late 2012, China’s overall external strategy underwent a further transformation from ‘keeping a low profile’ to ‘striving for achievement’. He declared that China should ‘keep pace with the times and be more active in blueprinting diplomatic strategy and undertaking diplomatic work’.<sup>85</sup> With its growing power, influence, and self-confidence, Beijing places ever more emphasis on contributing Chinese vision to the management of international affairs and providing international public goods.<sup>86</sup> For instance, Beijing engages, albeit cautiously, more actively in international mediation and peacekeeping activities, having become a key contributor to UN peacekeeping missions. China has sent almost 30 000 personnel to UN peacekeeping operations, more than any other permanent member of the UN Security Council. Chinese fleets have as well conducted escort missions in the Gulf of Aden and off the coast of Somalia.<sup>87</sup> Beijing also takes an active part in global cooperation on curbing the spread of communicable diseases and fighting terrorism. For instance, a month after the Chibok schoolgirls’ kidnapping incident, Premier Li Keqiang promised during his visit to Nigeria in May 2014 that China would provide intelligence assistance and training for Nigerian military personnel in anti-insurgency operations.<sup>88</sup> This does not violate China’s non-interference principle, but implies a growing level of engagement.

Beijing has also become actively involved in the peaceful settlement of many hotspot issues. In 2014, it successfully hosted the fourth Ministerial Conference of the Istanbul Process on Afghanistan, and initiated the ‘Special Consultation in Support of the IGAD-led South Sudan Peace Process’.<sup>89</sup> In the past few years, China has demonstrated greater willingness to support multilateral international involvements in conflict situations, and engaged actively in selected cases. Among those international involvements that China has supported, the targeted country concurred with the intervention or, as in the case of Somalia, no government existed at the time it occurred.<sup>90</sup> In UN debates and decisions on

- 84 See Dingding Chen and Jianwei Wang, ‘Lying Low No More? China’s New Thinking on the Tao Guang Yang Hui Strategy’, *China: An International Journal*, Vol. 2, No. 9 (2011), pp. 195–216.
- 85 ‘Xi Jinping: China to Further Friendly Relations with Neighbouring Countries’, 26 October, 2013, [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2013-10/26/c\\_125601680.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2013-10/26/c_125601680.htm)
- 86 ‘Speech by H. E. Xi Jinping President of the People’s Republic of China at the Körber Foundation, Berlin’, 28 March, 2014, [http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/wjdt\\_665385/zyjh\\_665391/t1148640.shtml](http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjdt_665385/zyjh_665391/t1148640.shtml); ‘Written Interview Given by Chinese President Xi Jinping to Major Media Agencies of Four Latin American and Caribbean Countries’, 15 July, 2014, [http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/wjdt\\_665385/zyjh\\_665391/t1185623.shtml](http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjdt_665385/zyjh_665391/t1185623.shtml).
- 87 ‘Towards a New Type of International Relations of Win-Win Cooperation Speech by Foreign Minister Wang Yi at Luncheon of the China Development Forum’, 23 March, 2015, [http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/wjwb\\_663304/wjwb\\_663308/2461\\_663310/t1248487.shtml](http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjwb_663304/wjwb_663308/2461_663310/t1248487.shtml)
- 88 Xinhua, ‘Nigerian Opposition Welcomes China Support on Abducted Girls’, 13 May, 2014, [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/africa/2014-05/13/c\\_133328870.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/africa/2014-05/13/c_133328870.htm).
- 89 ‘Wang Yi: Explore Effective Solutions with Chinese Characteristics to Hotspot Issues in Africa’, 6 December, 2015, [http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/zxxx\\_662805/t1322225.shtml](http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/t1322225.shtml).
- 90 David Shinn, ‘Africa Tests China’s Non-interference Policy’, 15 May, 2014, <http://www.chinausfocus.com/foreign-policy/africa-tests-chinas-non-interference-policy/#sthash.JJlYgcM.dpuf> .

collective interventions, Chinese representatives became more flexible. They placed more emphasis on 'peaceful means', the 'consent of the government', and the authority of the UN. China is now much more likely to approve interventions if regional organizations such as the AU or Arab League concur. Chinese officials have also increasingly diversified the country's diplomatic outreach beyond contacts with 'legitimate governments'.<sup>91</sup> In such cases, Beijing has tried to exert influence, but in a restrained manner different from the traditional Western hard interventions, such as economic sanctions and military interference. From the Chinese perspective, these efforts did not collide with the non-interference principle. All those changes reflected the flexibility of the Chinese government in accommodating the non-interference principle, and the pragmatic needs of overseas interests and the country's international reputation.<sup>92</sup>

China's policy in Sudan and South Sudan provides strong evidence of the influence of overseas interests on an adjustment to Beijing's approach to non-interference, and its limitations.<sup>93</sup> China is the main investor in Sudan's oil sector and main purchaser of oil from South Sudan. Its first challenge was responding to the Darfur crisis. Initially, China abstained on a series of UN resolutions calling for sanctions against Khartoum. By late 2006, however, with an eye on holding a successful Olympics in Beijing, China began methodically to adjust its policy, and finally persuaded Sudan to accept the UN–AU hybrid peacekeeping mission in Darfur.<sup>94</sup> South Sudan's independence in 2011 further complicated Chinese policy, as periodic conflicts between the two Sudans continued. At the end of 2013, a virtual civil war broke out in South Sudan, seriously threatening Chinese oil interests. Beijing then played an unusually active diplomatic role in mediating the conflict.<sup>95</sup> In early 2015, China deployed a 700-soldier infantry battalion to South Sudan to bolster the UN mission in the country. It was the first-ever Chinese infantry battalion sent on an external peacekeeping operation.<sup>96</sup>

Nevertheless, the non-interference doctrine remains the cornerstone of China's policy towards the two Sudans. Beijing refrained from imposing itself as arbitrator of disputes between and within Sudan and South Sudan, and it has never applied conditions to its aid allocation process in the two Sudans. Its various engagements have remained reactive and aimed mostly at limiting damage to Chinese economic interests and the country's

91 *Ibid.*; Jonathan Holslag, 'China's Diplomatic Manoeuvring on the Question of Darfur', *Journal of Contemporary China*, Vol. 17, No. 54 (2008), pp. 71–84.

92 Li Zhiyong, 'Guifang zhenglun yu xieshan jieru: Zhongguo dui buganshe neizheng guifang de chongsu' ('Norm Contestation and Deliberate Involvement: China's Remodeling of the Non-interference Norm'), *Dangdai yatai (Contemporary Asia-Pacific Studies)* No. 3 (2015), pp. 146–54.

93 Duchâtel, Bräuner, and Zhou, 'Protecting China's Overseas Interests', pp. 31–34.

94 Pak K. Lee, Gerald Chan, and Lai-ha Chan, 'China in Darfur: Humanitarian Rule-Maker or Rule-Taker?', *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 38, No. 2 (2012), pp. 423–44.

95 He Wenping, 'Jianshexing ganyu nansudan zhangxian daguo zeren' ('Constructive Intervention Manifests Great Power Responsibility in South Sudan'), 9 January, 2014, <http://opinion.haiwainet.cn/n/2014/0109/c353596-20138782.html>.

96 'China Sends First Infantry Battalion for UN Peacekeeping', 22 December, 2014, [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2014-12/22/c\\_133871006.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2014-12/22/c_133871006.htm); 'China Sends Infantry Battalion to South Sudan', 8 April, 2015, <http://english.cntv.cn/2015/04/08/VIDE1428436441364296.shtml>.

international image after the conflict escalated. Whether such adaptation of Chinese policies will lead to a more proactive conflict prevention approach in the future is uncertain.<sup>97</sup>

China still refrains from intervening directly in other countries' internal politics, but tries other means to protect its overseas interests. While investing overseas, Beijing tends to create firm ties with the ruling elite but otherwise has little to do with local politics. Promoting the principle of non-interference and expressing support for those currently in power has gained China the allegiance of such leaders. However, once a power transition has occurred in certain countries, China has usually had no fallback position. The political change in Sri Lanka in 2015 exemplifies such a predicament. The country occupies an important position in Beijing's 'string of pearls' and 'One Belt, One Road' initiative. Under the tenure of its former President Mahinda Rajapaksa, Colombo accepted China's development assistance in return for Beijing's development of major maritime ports. However, after the election of Maithripala Sirisena in January 2015, the new Sirisena administration showed no hesitation in changing the pro-China policy of Rajapaksa. Many projects invested by Beijing ground to a halt, and tenders were cancelled due to allegations of widespread corruption, all of which seriously threatened China's interests.<sup>98</sup>

In response, Beijing did not intervene directly but firmly stated that none of the foreign direct investment desperately needed to salvage Sri Lanka's economy would be forthcoming unless the impasse over ongoing projects was resolved. China's intensive investments, whereby it funded and built almost 70% of Sri Lanka's infrastructure projects, would be difficult for any government to dislodge. Consequently, after a few months the island nation's rising foreign debt due to Chinese investment had almost crippled its economy, forcing Colombo to repair its relations with China and resume the infrastructure projects.<sup>99</sup> Beijing has thus become more assertive in defending many of its overseas interests through its newly gained bargaining power, though without fundamentally changing its non-interference principle, as it still pursues a strategy of general reassurance towards its neighbours to defend its rise.<sup>100</sup>

The non-interference principle also provides Beijing with a way of keeping its distance from some of the world's most difficult trouble spots, thus avoiding becoming mired in

97 Besides, Beijing is also making efforts to form a new intervention policy in dealing with countries like Myanmar. Hak Yin Li and Yongnian Zheng, 'Re-interpreting China's Non-intervention Policy towards Myanmar: Leverage, Interest and Intervention', *Journal of Contemporary China*, Vol. 18, No. 61 (2009), pp. 617–37.

98 Shannon Tiezzi, 'Suspended Sri Lankan Port Project Complicates Sirisena's Trip to China', 26 March, 2015, <http://thediplomat.com/2015/03/suspended-sri-lankan-port-project-complicates-sirisenas-trip-to-china/>.

99 Rishi Iyengar, 'Sri Lanka Attempts to Repair Relations With China Amid an Escalating Financial Crisis', 19 October, 2015, <http://time.com/4077757/sri-lanka-china-financial-crisis-ravi-karunanayake-interview/>; Sri Peter Popham, 'Lanka is Welcoming China—and Its Money—Once More', 12 December, 2015, <http://www.independent.co.uk/voices/sri-lanka-is-welcoming-china-and-its-money-once-more-a6770201.html>; "'All Chinese Infrastructure Projects to Proceed", Sri Lanka Says', <http://www.voanews.com/content/all-chinese-infrastructure-projects-proceed-sri-lanka/3107722.html>.

100 Liu Feng, 'China's Security Strategy towards East Asia', *Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol. 9, No. 2 (2016), pp. 151–79.

messy political disputes. For instance, China found itself in a tight spot in early 2014 over the situation in Ukraine. China and Russia have recently seen eye-to-eye on many international diplomatic issues, but Beijing has taken care not to become embroiled in the struggle between Russia and the West over Ukraine. China is also allergic to its domestic separatist movements. It is, therefore, risky for Beijing to go on record as supporting the secession of a piece of territory based on ethnic, cultural, or linguistic differences like the Crimean referendum of independence.<sup>101</sup> China consequently abstained from voting on the March 2014 UN resolutions.<sup>102</sup> On every occasion, the Chinese officials were asked for their views on the Russian intervention in Ukraine, they emphasized that Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity should be respected, and that external forces should not be allowed to interfere in Ukraine's internal affairs. Meanwhile, they also suggested that the Western powers should consider Russia's legitimate security concerns over Ukraine,<sup>103</sup> and called on relevant sides to engage in diplomatic negotiations and balance the interests and concerns of different sides.<sup>104</sup> Beijing thus apparently attempted to carve out China's position as a neutral third party, while the non-interference principle gave them a good reason to do so.<sup>105</sup>

Similarly, Beijing adopted a passive attitude towards appeals for direct intervention in North Korea. The DPRK's development of nuclear weapons posed a serious challenge to China's national security. Many Chinese analysts consequently called on China to take more actions.<sup>106</sup> Some even argued that if Beijing did not abandon North Korea, it should at least develop a system of 'limited intervention', and try to install in Pyongyang a pro-Chinese regime that would denuclearize North Korea.<sup>107</sup> Nonetheless, in public discussions, stern critiques of the nuclear test were balanced by more traditional analyses stressing

101 Zhang Lihua, 'Explaining China's Position on the Crimea Referendum', 1 April, 2015,

<http://carnegietsinghua.org/2015/04/01/explaining-china-s-position-on-crimea-referendum/f5cs>.

102 Geoff Dyer, 'In the Battle for Crimea, China Wins', *Foreign Policy*, 12 March, 2014, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2014/03/12/in-the-battle-for-crimea-china-wins/>.

103 See, for instance, 'China Premier Says Respects Ukraine Integrity, Won't Be Drawn on Crimea', 15 March, 2015, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-china-parliament-ukraine-idUSKBN0MB05220150315>.

104 Wang Yi, 'Toward a New Type of International Relations of Win-Win Cooperation Speech by Foreign Minister Wang Yi at Luncheon of the China Development Forum', 23 March, 2015, [http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/wjdt\\_665385/zjyh\\_665391/t1248487.shtml](http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjdt_665385/zjyh_665391/t1248487.shtml).

105 Shannon Tiezzi, 'China Reacts to the Crimea Referendum', 18 March, 2014, <http://thediplomat.com/2014/03/china-reacts-to-the-crimea-referendum/>.

106 Zhu Feng, 'Zhongguo de wajiao woxuan yu Chao he wenti liufan huitan: wei shenme wajiao jiejie Chao he wenti zhome nan?' ('China's Diplomatic Mediation and the Six-Party Talks: Why Is It So Hard to Solve the North Korea Nuclear Crises Via Diplomatic Ways?'), *Wajiao pinglun (Foreign Affairs Review)*, No. 8 (2006), pp. 23–30.

107 Deng Yuwen, 'Should China Abandon North Korea?', *Liaowang zhongguo (China Outlook)*, March 2013, [http://www.21ccom.net/articles/qqsw/zlwj/article\\_2013032379684.html](http://www.21ccom.net/articles/qqsw/zlwj/article_2013032379684.html); Deng Yuwen, 'China Should Abandon North Korea', 27 February, 2013, <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/9e2f68b2-7c5c-11e2-99f0-00144feabdc0.html#axzz42VSFclyH>.

Pyongyang's strategic importance.<sup>108</sup> Chinese officials spoke out harshly against the North Korean test, and Beijing has accepted impositions of coercive measures on North Korea. However, what Beijing expected of its support for the imposition of these tough sanctions was that it would force Pyongyang back to the negotiating table. In other words, China's main purpose is to warn, but not to penalize North Korea, to the extent that it loses authority and is exploited by other powers. Besides, Beijing has also repeatedly explained that its influence over North Korea is limited.<sup>109</sup> For Beijing, military or political interference in other countries' domestic affairs is not a pragmatic tactic.

Moreover, Beijing's evolving position on the emerging responsibility to protect (R2P) norm reveals both the erosive impact and the limits thereof that normative developments in the international system exert on its adherence to non-interference.<sup>110</sup> In light of the rapid progress of the R2P concept, Beijing has gradually acknowledged the responsibility to respond to, and in certain circumstances intervene militarily in humanitarian catastrophes. Meanwhile, China has developed a prudent case-by-case approach to R2P (and to international intervention more generally), and seeks to condition its support for intervention. It has participated actively in relevant debates to shape R2P in a direction that gives primacy to capacity-building and preventative measures, and to ensure the concept's limited application, so diminishing instances where it might breach state sovereignty and non-interference.<sup>111</sup> Within Chinese academia, a new concept, 'responsible protection', has been proposed to make civilian protection interventions more accountable and proportionate.<sup>112</sup> China thus manages to shape the discursive environment to make R2P more compatible with its preferences. The R2P case reveals, therefore, that without fundamentally changing the non-interference principle, Beijing is exploring alternative strategies to deal with international normative challenges.

In sum, since President Xi took office, China, with its rising power, expanding interests, and growing self-confidence, has embraced more flexible and expansive interpretations of non-interference to safeguard its interests and reputation. However, while its international posture becomes more determined and active, China still places state sovereignty above all

108 François Godement, 'China Analysis: The End of Non-Interference?', 24 October, 2013, p. 9, [http://www.ecfr.eu/page/-/China\\_Analysis\\_The\\_End\\_of\\_Non\\_interference\\_October2013.pdf](http://www.ecfr.eu/page/-/China_Analysis_The_End_of_Non_interference_October2013.pdf).

109 Huang and Shih, *Harmonious Intervention*, pp. 51–86.

110 On R2P, see International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty, *The Responsibility to Protect: Report of the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty* (Ottawa: International Development Research Centre, 2001).

111 Rosemary Foot, 'The Responsibility to Protect (R2P) and its Evolution: Beijing's Influence on Norm Creation in Humanitarian Areas', *St Antony's International Review*, Vol. 6, No. 2 (2011), pp. 47–66; Zheng Chen, 'China and the Responsibility to Protect', *Journal of Contemporary China* (2016), doi:10.1080/10670564.2016.1160500.

112 Qu Xin, 'The UN Charter, the Responsibility to Protect, and the Syria Issue', 16 April, 2012, [http://www.ciis.org.cn/english/2012-04/16/content\\_4943041\\_2.htm](http://www.ciis.org.cn/english/2012-04/16/content_4943041_2.htm); Ruan Zongze, 'Fuzeren baohu: jianshe yige genganquan de shijie' ('Responsible Protection: Building a Safer World'), *Guoji wenti yanjiu (China International Studies)*, No. 3 (2012), pp. 19–41; China Institute of International Relations, 'International Symposium: 'Building a Safer World Through Responsible Protection' ', 17–18, October 2013, [http://www.ciis.org.cn/chinese/2013-11/12/content\\_6454176.htm](http://www.ciis.org.cn/chinese/2013-11/12/content_6454176.htm).

other international institutions. Although its engagement practices become more flexible, the non-interference principle is maintained. The crux of the problem is that domestic concerns still play a paramount role in shaping Beijing's non-interference policy. China may be rising, economically and militarily, but Beijing's suspicions about divisive and subversive plots sponsored by 'hostile external forces' remain. Persistent sensitivity to potential domestic disorder due to 'foreign hostile forces' is a paramount feature of Chinese leaders' foreign policymaking.<sup>113</sup> They worry that adjustment of the non-interference policy would have extremely negative implications for China's domestic security and sovereign integrity.<sup>114</sup> Based on their deep-rooted suspicions that the ultimate goal of 'Western powers' is to overthrow their rule, Chinese leaders firmly believe that the principles of sovereignty and non-interference are still vital.<sup>115</sup> China's international involvement, therefore, must not exert negative impact on Beijing's state security.

This might be why Professor Wang Yizhou and others emphasize that the transformation of China's foreign policies is closely associated with and mutually reinforced by domestic reforms. As Wang said, 'China will have limited opportunity to creatively join in global governance without a sound domestic foundation', and 'China can influence the world by changing itself.'<sup>116</sup> The future of China's non-interference policy depends fundamentally on its further domestic reform and developments. Once the Chinese government becomes more confident about its domestic order, its international involvement will be more active, constructive, and determined.

## Conclusion

Non-interference still constitutes a cornerstone principle of Chinese foreign policy. Nonetheless, the urgent need to protect rapidly expanding overseas interests, and normative developments in the international system have contributed to China's domestic recalibration recently of the relevance and validity of the non-interference principle. A number of analysts suggest that Beijing should change its commitment to the 'non-interference' principle in order to safeguard its overseas interests and improve its reputation as a responsible power. Others, meanwhile, argue that the benefits of further insistence on the principle still outweigh the costs of abandoning it. In between these two poles has gradually appeared a loose consensus, which calls for more creativity and flexibility in practice while maintaining the principle. New concepts like 'creative involvement' and 'constructive involvement' represent this emerging consensus of moderate adjustment, and they have become catchwords in academic discussions. Pragmatism prevails in these scholars' arguments. For most Chinese analysts, the policies of non-interference and selective involvement are 'available

113 Dai Bingguo, 'State Councillor Dai Bingguo: Adhere to the Path of Peaceful Development', 6 December, 2010, [http://www.gov.cn/ldhd/2010-12/06/content\\_1760381.htm](http://www.gov.cn/ldhd/2010-12/06/content_1760381.htm).

114 Wang Jisi, 'China's Search for a Grand Strategy: A Rising Great Power Finds Its Way', *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 90, No. 2 (2011), pp. 68–79.

115 Kenneth Lieberthal and Wang Jisi, *Addressing U.S. - China Strategic Distrust* (Washington: Brookings Institution, 2012), pp. 11–12.

116 Ding Ying, 'China's Evolving Global Role', *Beijing Review*, No. 43 (2013), 21 October, 2013, [http://www.bjreview.com.cn/world/txt/2013-10/21/content\\_573435\\_2.htm](http://www.bjreview.com.cn/world/txt/2013-10/21/content_573435_2.htm).

options', and the question of which policy is preferable should depend on China's interests and capabilities.<sup>117</sup>

Subtle differences among scholars still exist as to when and how to intervene. Various arguments raised during the non-interference debate highlight compound challenges and the dilemma Beijing faces over the non-interference issue. The ongoing debate also reveals the diverse and sometimes conflicting identities that underlie the worldview of contemporary China. These controversies among scholars derive largely from divergent judgments on two interrelated strategic issues: whether China should continue to keep a low profile in global affairs, and China's relations as a whole with the Western-led international society. The understanding of the non-interference principle in China's foreign policy community is not static but in flux. Divergent strategic preferences and ideological orientations explain differences among scholars.

The impact of the public debate on Beijing's policy is difficult to ascertain. Nonetheless, Beijing has realized the limitations of the non-interference principle, but chosen the cautious approach of pragmatic adaptation. On the one hand, as non-interference remains crucial to the 'core interests' of state security and territorial integrity, Beijing will not easily relax its vigilance or drop this principle in the foreseeable future. On the other, maintaining the non-interference principle has not prevented China from conducting certain intervention activities. In the past few years, changing situations and growing self-confidence have pushed Beijing to innovate and explore policy options that stretch the previously known limits of the non-interference principle. Its behaviour is hence becoming more and more pragmatic and flexible. For instance, China has participated in certain international involvements in the domestic conflict resolution of other countries, but avoids use of the term 'intervention'. The emergence of new concepts like 'creative involvement' facilitates this gradual change, and equips Beijing with more leeway to pursue an increasingly engaged foreign policy posture.

As China continues to deepen its engagement with the international system, tensions are bound to grow between a traditional interpretation of non-interference and China's expanding interests and influence in other countries. However, readjustment of Beijing's international strategy would be a long and complex process. China is and will continue for some time to be a country of multiple identities. The non-interference debates will not end in the short run. Beijing will be more active and flexible on relevant issues, but bearing in mind its paramount concern of state security and deep-rooted distrust of the Western powers, for the time being a dramatic shift towards an interventionist policy remains highly unlikely.

## **Acknowledgements**

For valuable comments and discussions on previous versions, I would like to thank He Kai and Liu Feng. I also thank anonymous reviewers for their very helpful comments and suggestions. This research is supported by the National Social Science Fund of China (15FGJ007).

117 *Ibid.*; Duchâtel, Bräuner, and Zhou, 'Protecting China's Overseas Interests', p. 18.



Article

# Debating China's International Responsibility

Mao Weizhun<sup>†,\*</sup>

<sup>†</sup>Mao Weizhun is Associate Professor at the School of Government and Research Fellow at the Centre for Asia-Pacific Development Studies, Nanjing University

\*Corresponding author. Email: wzhmao@nju.edu.cn

## Abstract

'International Responsibility' has become one of the most significant topics in Chinese International Relations studies over the last decade. Although growing numbers of scholars have focused on this issue, there remains a low awareness of the need to explore its roots in China's academia, and to investigate the internal debates that display the different Chinese perceptions of international responsibility. This article provides a discourse-activation framework to explain why Robert B. Zoellick's speech polarized China's attention on international responsibility. It moreover constructs a typological framework based on dimensions that include the nationalism–internationalism orientation and degree of fulfilling international responsibility. It singles out three camps of scholars and their respective viewpoints on international responsibility and China's relevant policies in this regard, and demonstrates the 'divergent convergence' feature that characterizes the debate on the topic. In addition to this structural analysis, the article also summarizes the overall trend from 1950 to 2015 of the preventative to projecting preferences apparent in China's academic studies and political discourses on international responsibility. Subsequently, the article briefly investigates the possible factors affecting convergence and divergence of perceptions of international responsibility, which imply that fulfilling international responsibility is crucial to China's growing presence on the global stage, and that Chinese academics' attention to international responsibility should focus on collaboration towards improving the effectiveness of China's assertive behaviour in international affairs.

## Introduction

As a prominent issue, 'international responsibility' has been on China's International Relations (IR) research agenda for more than a decade. On September 21, 2005, Robert B. Zoellick, the then-US Deputy Secretary of State, gave a speech in his Remarks to the National Committee on United States–China Relations in New York on the United States' China policy, proposing that China act as a 'responsible stakeholder' rather than 'just a

member'. According to Zoellick, this would help the United States and China to work together on the international stage and 'sustain the international system that has enabled its success'.<sup>1</sup> This speech triggered China's large-scale studies on 'international responsibility'.<sup>2</sup>

Zoellick's remarks created at least two influential consequences for theoretical and policy-related studies in China.<sup>3</sup> On the one hand, it prompted collective large-scale research endeavours with respect to 'international responsibility'. In fact, according to some think tanks, China displayed symptoms of '*obsession*' with Zoellick's ideas, in particular his remark about a 'responsible stakeholder', in both the policy area and theoretical domain.<sup>4</sup> Yong Deng finds the idea diffusion of responsible power in China 'extraordinary'.<sup>5</sup> This characteristic was demonstrated by Chinese scholars' research topics with respect to international responsibility, shown in Figure 1. Since 2005, growing numbers of studies have focused on key phrases within the international responsibility domain, which by 2010 displayed a stable trend, if the numbers of relevant articles at the China Knowledge Resource Integrated Database (CNKI) can be regarded as an indicator. Therefore, it is also interesting to investigate why and in what ways Zoellick's speech polarized China's collective focus on international responsibility.

On the other hand, Zoellick's speech also catalysed a series of debates on China's foreign policies towards the United States. For example, some Chinese policy advisors optimistically highlighted its function in Sino-United States relations as a way to 'alleviate the wave of "China threat thesis"', so implying 'a comparatively reasonable and pragmatic tone' as regards the US view of China.<sup>6</sup> However, another group of scholars disagreed with this viewpoint, rather displaying a distinctly cautious and hostile attitude to this new American term. They mostly regarded the new idea of 'responsible stakeholder' as mere a

- 1 Robert Zoellick, 'Whither China: From Membership to Responsibility? Remarks to National Committee of U.S.-China Relations', 21 September, 2005, <http://2001-2009.state.gov/s/d/for/mer/zoellick/rem/53682.htm>.
- 2 In addition, European countries have also proposed the concept of responsibility in relation to China. See Commission of the European Communities, *EU-China: Closer Partners, Growing Responsibilities* (Brussels: European Union, 2006).
- 3 Zoellick's remark also triggered a wave of deep discussions on US policy towards China, which seemingly indicated that the United States was transferring its strategies on China. In addition, 'responsible stakeholder' usually acts as a standard framework for Western scholars evaluating or criticizing China's foreign behaviour on different issues. Many scholars started to discuss the role of China, from the perspective of 'responsible stakeholder', in different issues. For example, Amitai Etzioni, 'Is China a Responsible Stakeholder?' *International Affairs*, Vol. 87, No. 3 (2011), pp. 539-53.
- 4 Stratfor, 'China's Obsession with the Zoellick Speech', 9 November, 2005, <https://www.stratfor.com/analysis/chinas-obsession-zoellick-speech>.
- 5 Yong Deng, 'China: The Post-Responsible Power', *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 37, No. 4 (2015), p. 119.
- 6 Yuan Peng, 'Common Responsibilities of "Stakeholders"', *People's Daily Overseas*, 25 January, 2006, [http://en.people.cn/200601/25/eng20060125\\_238320.html](http://en.people.cn/200601/25/eng20060125_238320.html).

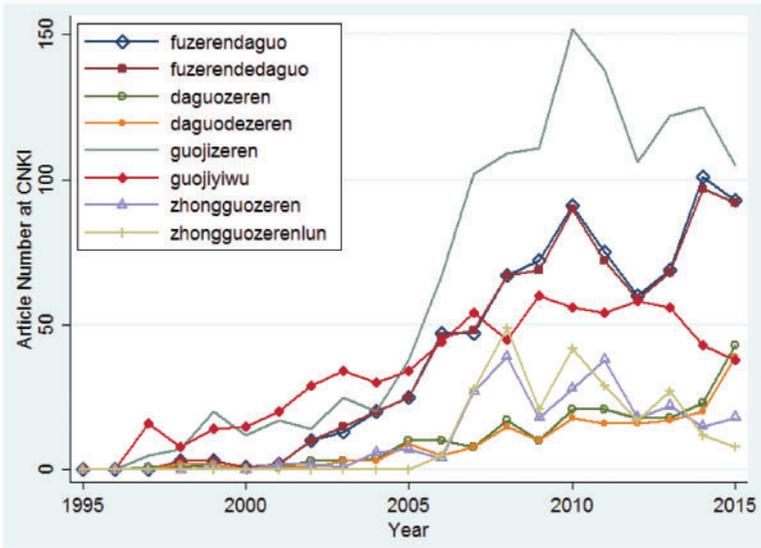


Fig. 1. Trend of Studies in Chinese on International Responsibility, 1995–2015.

**Notes:** In addition to international responsibility (*guoji zeren*) and international obligations/duties (*guoji yiwu*), there are other synonymous terms in Chinese relating to international responsibility which connect with China's role within the scope of international responsibilities, such as responsible great powers (*fuzeren daguo*), responsible states (*fuzeren guojia*), responsible developing countries (*fuzeren de fazhanzhong guojia*), great-power responsibility (*daguo zeren*), great-power undertaking (*daguo dandang*), responsible China (*fuzeren de zhongguo*), China's responsibility (*zhongguo/woguo zeren*), global responsibility (*quanqiu zeren*), and China's undertaking (*zhongguo/woguo dandang*). It calculates the number of articles in CNKI according to titles that contain the above key phrases as the indicator of China's academic studies on this topic.

variant of such hostile arguments as the 'China threat thesis' and 'China collapse thesis', despite its ostensibly positive connotations.<sup>7</sup>

Several internal debates have also taken place on expressions specifically relating to 'international responsibility'. Chinese scholars have since shown divergent attitudes to this topic, especially as the terms 'China's responsibility', 'responsible power', and 'international responsibility' are closely intertwined. Certain faculty members have embraced the concept of 'responsibility' because it implies a strategic transference of the US's China policies, and emphasizes China's potentially irreplaceable future role in the international order. For example, Shi Yinhong regards 'international responsibility' as 'key words (*guanjian ci*)' in the Chinese grand strategy.<sup>8</sup> Others, however, warn of a possible trap set by the United

7 Ma Zhengang, 'Zhongguo de zeren yu Zhongguo zerenlun' ('China's Responsibility and the "China Responsibility" Theory'), *Guoji wenti yanjiu* (*China International Studies*), No. 3 (2007), pp. 1–3.

8 Shi Yinhong, 'Chengjiu yu tiaozhan: Zhongguo heping fazhan, hexie shijie linian yu duiwai zhengce xingshi' ('Achievements and Challenges: China's Peaceful Development, the Idea of a Harmonious World and Foreign Policy Situations'), *Dangdai shijie yu shehui zhuyi* (*Contemporary World and Socialism*), No. 2 (2008), p. 81; Shi Yinhong, 'China, "Global

States, in line with its long-time containment policies concerning China. If we take a long view, the majority of Chinese scholars have finally accepted the concept, so collectively promoting China's transference to international responsibility. Especially since 2010, Chinese studies on international responsibility have displayed growing convergence with respect to its value, although revealing different opinions as to the tool through which it should be applied.

Scholarship has noted this significant phenomenon in China's IR development, and tried to categorize it as either the extent to which China fulfils its responsibility, or as China's multiple identities or theoretical divides.<sup>9</sup> For example, Zhu Liqun regards China's responsibility as a focal point of the country's foreign policy debate, and introduces discussions on the concept and the diverse extent to which China fulfils its international responsibilities.<sup>10</sup> Yan Xuetong attempts to summarize Chinese viewpoints on this topic by dividing them into two 'school of thought'.<sup>11</sup> David Shambaugh has observed the debate on China's policy on international responsibility, and finds that '[S]o diversity of opinion prevails,' which respectively includes the 'trap' group, incapable-of-doing group, should-do group, selectively-do group, and do-more group.<sup>12</sup> Hung-jen Wang describes China's attitudes towards international responsibility by identifying the differences between the liberalist, nationalist, and realist approaches.<sup>13</sup> Others demonstrate four viewpoints on China's responsibility via the roadmap of key variables in mainstream IR branches, namely, power, institutions, identity, and critical perspectives.<sup>14</sup>

However, current progress in exploring China's intellectual focus on international responsibility encounters at least two limitations. On the one hand, existing discussions on debates on the topic are generally descriptive and unidimensional. Scholars describe the general divides among Chinese scholars and policymakers, but few provide relevant explanations as to why these divides exist. Moreover, their attention is mostly constrained by

Challenges" and the Complexities of International Cooperation', *Global Policy*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (2011), p. 95.

- 9 In addition, scholars such as Liu Tiewa and Zhang Haibin pay attention to China's discourse, policies, and debates in the Responsibility to Protect, a subfield in international responsibility. See Liu Tiewa and Zhang Haibin, 'Debates in China About the Responsibility to Protect as a Developing International Norm: A General Assessment', *Conflict, Security & Development*, Vol. 14, No. 4 (2014), pp. 403–27.
- 10 Zhu Liqun, *China's Foreign Policy Debates* (Paris: Institute for Security Studies, 2010), pp. 40–44.
- 11 Yan Xuetong, 'How Assertive Should a Great Power Be?', *The International Herald Tribune*, 1 April, 2011, <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/04/01/opinion/01iht-edyan01.html>.
- 12 David Shambaugh, *China Goes Global: The Partial Power* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 19–20.
- 13 Hung-jen Wang, *The Rise of China and Chinese International Relations Scholarship* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2013), pp. 65–68.
- 14 Li Yuqiu, 'Zeren yu quanqi: guoji zeren de Zhongguo shijiao yu jiazhi quxiang' ('Responsibility and Rights: China's Perspectives and Preference on International Responsibility'), in Liu Hongwu and Huang Meibo, eds., *Zhongguo duiwai yuanzhu yu guoji zeren de zhanlve yanjiu* (A Study on China's Foreign Assistance and International Responsibility Strategy)(Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 2013), pp. 55–67.

either Sino-US relations or the analytical—even artificially manipulated—roadmap consisting in three theoretical branches. These separate dimensions should be combined.

On the other hand, current attempts also fail to catch the dynamic transformations among different groups and the inter-group interactions of certain opinions on international responsibility. Both China's policy orientation and Chinese scholars' viewpoints on this issue have evolved during the process of China's involvement in global society. In addition, certain new features have emerged within China's new leadership under Xi Jinping with respect to China's fulfilment and perceptions of international responsibility. Therefore, it is necessary to investigate further the questions: to what extent and why do Chinese scholars' viewpoints diverge on international responsibility? What factors affect divergence and convergence of Chinese attitudes towards international responsibility?

In summary, China's changing attitudes to international responsibility reveal an unusual process characterized by its unanticipated arrival, internal debates, and unintended consequences of China's international performance. To answer the above questions, the subsequent sections are set out as follows. The second section tries to explain how the discourse on international responsibility became activated in China through a discourse-activation framework, on the basis of studies and political discourses before 2005. The next section provides a typological framework constructed according to the orientation of nationalism and degree of fulfilling international responsibility, and divides the current academic focus on international responsibility into three different groups, namely, the averters, the accommodators, and the advocates. Furthermore, it briefly outlines the process of China's divergent and convergent perceptions from 1950 to 2015. The fourth section aims to explain divergence and convergence of China's attention to international responsibility. The article's findings constitute its conclusion.

## **Discourse Activation: Transfer of Chinese Attention to International Responsibility**

The attention Chinese academics began to pay to the issue of international responsibility in international politics after Robert B. Zoellick's speech in 2005 calling upon China to be a 'responsible stakeholder' was no straightforward matter. Zoellick, as an official in the foreign branch of the US government, effectively threw a verbal 'stone' into the 'academic pool' of China's IR and foreign policies, so alerting China's academia to this issue. To be exact, Zoellick activated Chinese discussions on international responsibility. This article attempts to apply a discourse-activation framework to explore the significance of Zoellick's speech to reviving Chinese attention to this issue. The verbs 'activate' and 'revive' imply that discussions on international responsibility had taken place before 2005, but may have lost their momentum or prominence within China's academic and policy domain. Hence, this study analyses the historical development of Chinese attention to international responsibility before 2005 through both the academic track and the dimension of political discourse.

### **The Academic Dimension before 2005**

Chinese scholars had earlier focused on international responsibility, international liability, international obligation, and Chinese responsibility. Initially, the Chinese term, *guoji zeren*, a translation of 'international liability', was mostly a legal term. According to the CNKI, the earliest articles whose titles included *guoji zeren* appeared in 1982. Some Chinese legal scholars introduced the discussion of *guoji zeren* (international liability) in the light of

'Damage Caused by Space Objects',<sup>15</sup> while the focus of others had been on editing international law on international liability (*guoji peichang zeren*).<sup>16</sup>

Chinese IR scholars realized the significance of international responsibility within the context of national power in the late 1980s. In August 1987, the first nationwide IR conference took place in Shanghai, which more than 80 Chinese scholars attended. Chinese IR scholars argued that national power closely connects with international responsibility/obligations. They raised a basic principle, still mentioned today, whereby China should 'correctly estimate' its national power, as this could help to 'adequately evaluate our international position' and avoid 'applying the strategies and tactics that do not equate with our national power on the international platform, bearing international responsibilities and obligations that are not appropriate for our national power, or giving up international responsibilities and obligations that suit our national power'.<sup>17</sup> Also in the 1980s, the term 'international obligation (*guoji yiwu*)' was used in academic journals to refer to China's contributions in the form of foreign assistance, rather than as a purely legal phrase, to connote China's internationalism and special emphasis on developing countries.<sup>18</sup>

In the 1990s, international responsibility became more relevant in the context of IR, implying China's growing confidence and willingness to integrate into the international community. China's academic concerns with respect to international responsibility synchronized with those of scholars in other countries and regions. For example, in 1994, Young Seek Choue, the rector of Kyung Hee University, expected the responsibilities and missions that the three countries (South Korea, China, and Japan) in East Asia should bear in the global common community and human future, as published in the journal *Guoji Zhengzhi Yanjiu (International Politics Quarterly)* at Peking University.<sup>19</sup> Hou Jiaju, an economist from Taiwan, paid particular attention to the role of China in international society, calling on China to integrate into global society, fulfil its responsibility to the international community, and share the Chinese experience with others.<sup>20</sup>

- 15 Carl Q. Christol, 'International Liability for Damage Caused by Space Objects', *The American Journal of International Law*, Vol. 74, No. 2 (1980), pp. 346–71; this article was translated as follows, Carl Q. Christol, 'Waikong wuti zaocheng sunhai de guoji zeren', *Huanqiu falv pinglun (Global Law Review)*, No. 1 (1982), pp. 56–63.
- 16 Wei Li, 'Lvelun guoji zerenfa de bianzuan' ('A Discussion on Editing the Law of International Responsibilities'), *Shanghai daxue xuebao: shekeban (Journal of Shanghai University: Social Science and Philosophy)*, No. 1 (1991), pp. 30–35.
- 17 Tian Zhili, 'Guoji guanxi lilun taolunhui guandian zongshu' ('Review on the Seminar of International Relations Theory'), *Zhengzhixue yanjiu (CASS Journal of Political Science)*, No. 6 (1987), p. 58.
- 18 Xiao Ning, 'Lxing guoji yiwu zhiyuan pinkun guojia' ('Fulfilling International Obligations and Assisting Poor Countries'), *Guoji jingji hezuo (International Economic Cooperation)*, No. 7 (1987), pp. 26, 28.
- 19 Zhao Yongzhi (Young Seek Choue), 'Ershiyi zhiji zhanwang he Hanguo Riben Zhongguo de zeren yu shiming' ('Prospect of 21st Century and the Responsibility and Mission of South Korea, Japan and China'), *Guoji zhengzhi yanjiu (International Politics Quarterly)*, No. 2 (1995), pp. 1–5.
- 20 Hou Jiaju, 'Quanqiu xinjiyuan yu Zhongguo de guoji shehui jese ji zeren' ('Global New Epoch and China's Roles and Responsibilities in International Society'), *Jingji xuejia (Economist)*, No. 6 (1995), pp. 29–31.

Furthermore, Yan Xuetong argued that China should bear more and more ‘political responsibility’ for the international community in light of the China’s increasing power, which had finally become ‘China’s important interests’.<sup>21</sup> Nevertheless, in spite of advocating the significance of international responsibilities, Yan Xuetong recognized the possible pitfalls of pursuing the course of ‘international responsibility’, because it has no common definition, and it was the developed countries that actually coined this term.<sup>22</sup> Meanwhile, a few studies were carried out on the international responsibility of other countries. For example, some scholars discussed the role of the German army after reunification within the discourse of international responsibility.<sup>23</sup> In addition, in 1999 Wang Yizhou highlighted ‘responsibility with its related interests’ as one of China’s three 21st-century foreign policy demands paralleling development and sovereignty.<sup>24</sup> At the beginning of the 2000s, some scholars, like Xiao Huanrong and Tang Shiping, regarded fulfilling international responsibility as one of China’s regional strategies.<sup>25</sup>

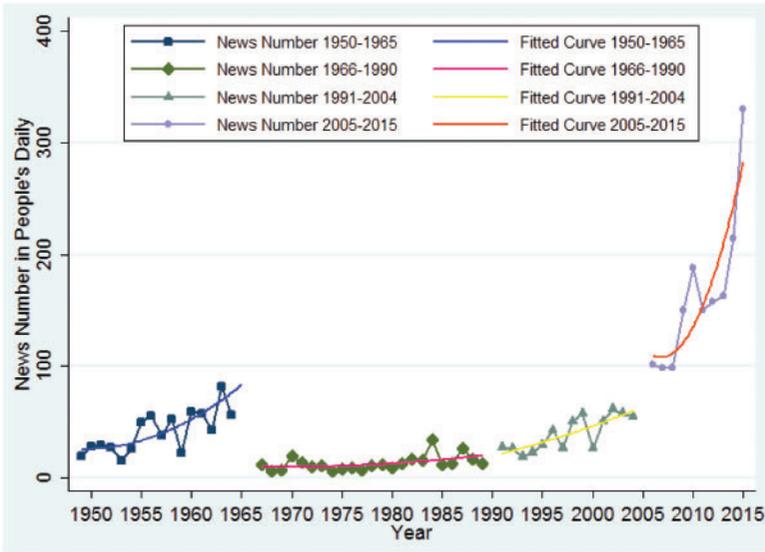
Conversely, scholars outside China started to deliberate China’s responsibility during the very process of China’s rise. For example, in 1999, when the People’s Republic of China (PRC) celebrated its 50th anniversary, a few international scholars like Yongjin Zhang and Greg Austin attempted to analyse China’s diverse attitudes towards the ‘responsibility of its rising power in international relations’.<sup>26</sup>

### On the Political Discourse, 1949–2005

‘International responsibility’ and its related terms entered China’s political discourse during an even earlier period. Taking *People’s Daily (Renmin Ribao)* as a measurement indicator, Figure 2 shows that the term ‘international responsibility’ was in no way new to Chinese political discourse. After the birth of the PRC, the phrases *guoji zeren* and *guoji yiwu* frequently appeared in the *People’s Daily* through such approaches as *Government Working Reports*, *CPC Communiqué*, Chinese leaders’ speeches, and commentators’ reviews.

The PRC’s first wave of advocating international responsibility was from 1949 to 1965. On the one hand, it stemmed mainly from Chinese enthusiasm for internationalism on an

- 21 Yan Xuetong, *Zhongguo guojia liyi fenxi (Analysis of China’s National Interests)* (Tianjin: Tianjin renmin chubanshe, 1996), pp. 207–08.
- 22 Yan Xuetong, ‘The Rise of China in Chinese Eyes’, *Journal of Contemporary China*, Vol. 10, No. 26 (2001), p. 37.
- 23 Chen Yi, ‘Cong zubuchuhu dao chengdan gengduo de guoji zeren’ (‘Vom Daheimbleiben Bis Zum Tragen Von Mehr Internationalen Verantwortungen’), *Dequo yanjiu (Deutschland-Studien)*, No. 2 (1996), pp. 14–21.
- 24 Wang Yizhou, ‘Mianxiang ershiyi shiji de Zhongguo waijiao: sanzong xuqiu de xunqiu jiqi pingheng’ (‘Towards Chinese Diplomacy in the 21st Century: Pursuing and Balancing Three Demands’), *Zhanlve yu guanli (Strategy and Management)*, No. 6 (1999), pp. 18–27.
- 25 Xiao Huanrong, ‘Zhongguo de daguo zeren yu diqu zhuyi zhanlve’ (‘China’s Great Power Responsibility and Regional Strategy’), *Shijie jingji yu zhengzhi (World Economics and Politics)*, No. 1 (2003), pp. 46–51; Tang Shiping and Zhang Yunling, ‘Zhongguo de diqu zhanlve’ (‘China’s Regional Strategy’), *Shijie jingji yu zhengzhi (World Economics and Politics)*, No. 6 (2004), pp. 8–13.
- 26 Yongjin Zhang and Greg Austin, ‘China and the Responsibility of Power’, in Yongjin Zhang and Greg Austin, eds., *Power and Responsibility in Chinese Foreign Policy* (Canberra: Asia Pacific Press, 2001), pp. 1–20.



**Fig. 2.** Distribution of News items about 'International Responsibility' in the *People's Daily*, 1949–2015. **Notes:** The figure sets the number of news items containing *guoji zeren* as the measurement indicator.

international platform; on the other hand, the term usually functioned as a propaganda tool in disputes between China and the Soviet Union. It also implied China's willingness to participate in international affairs and escape from the isolation resulting from the Western economic blockade. From 1966 to 1989, China's references to international responsibility showed sporadic distribution. A series of influential events happened during this period, including the Cultural Revolution, China's resumption of its United Nations seats, the Reform and Opening Policy, and the Tiananmen incident of 1989. Despite coming back to an international platform and dramatically recalibrating its foreign policies, China remained isolated and self-centric. Regaining its UN seats was mostly an affirmation of Chinese international legitimacy rather than a platform for bearing international responsibility and obligations. During this period, China emphasized the significance of fulfilling its international responsibility to protect world peace in interactions with other powers such as Britain and Japan.

In fact, China revived its proactive willingness with regard to international responsibility on the international platform around the last decade of the 20th century. Hereby, China attempted to display its responsible face to the United States. For example, when he met with Frank Carlucci in 1988, Deng Xiaoping asserted that China is an honest and a responsible country.<sup>27</sup> Later, in September 1992, Chinese Foreign Minister Qian Qichen proposed

27 Sun Yi, 'Deng Xiaoping huijian kaluqi' ('Deng Xiaoping Meet with Frank Carlucci'), *Renmin ribao* (*People's Daily*), 8 September, 1988, p. 1.

China as 'a responsible great power in the world' when discussing Sino-US relations.<sup>28</sup> When Jiang Zemin met with Bill Clinton in November 1994, he declared, [our?] 'two countries will assume more and more responsibility for maintaining peace in the world'.<sup>29</sup> In addition to a number of political declarations by Chinese leaders and foreign officials, China also exhibited its responsible performance via a regional platform in the mid 1990s, in particular after the Asian Financial Crisis. As a result, the country's reputation as a responsible country grew when China responded to the crisis and assisted its neighbour countries in Southeast Asia. From then on, China's ambitions as a responsible great power gathered pace. In 1999, China officially perceived its own image as that of a 'peaceful, cooperative, and responsible great power'.<sup>30</sup>

### How was China's Attention to International Responsibility Activated?

As mentioned above, both academic studies and political discourse show an overall trend of Chinese concern towards international responsibility. The records of academic and policy-related discourses demonstrate at least two salient features. First, the concerns China expressed in political discourse and policies about international responsibility precede those appearing in academic studies. Compared with Figure 1, Figure 2 shows greater and earlier attention to international responsibility, before 1965 and from 1980 to 1995, when commentaries and reports were regarded as indicators of Chinese political discourse. Secondly, the concept of *guoji zeren* has gradually transformed in the last decades, through a series of counterparts in English, from the legal term 'international liability' to expressions with much more comprehensive meanings, both in theoretical and policy-related studies. Hereby, Table 1 provides a summary of China's evolving notions of international responsibilities from 1949 to 2015 which implies China's perceptions of the changing issues.

Most importantly, a sharp 'discontinuity' or 'jump' appeared around 2005 with regard to concerns about international responsibility, both on the track of political discourse and from the perspective of journal articles, as both Figure 1 and Figure 2 illustrate, suggesting that China's attention to international responsibility increased dramatically from 2006 to 2015. In spite of warnings that this emphasis on international responsibility might incur some risks, China has officially showed its gradually opening attitude, at different levels and across different issues, to bearing and fulfilling international responsibilities. For example, in 2009, when China set about handling the global financial crisis, the *People's Daily* argued that China's diplomacy could be characterized as the image of a responsible great power.<sup>31</sup> In 2012, China began actively applying the international responsibility discourse to more diverse issues, and playing a more comprehensive and active role in fulfilling

28 He Hongze, 'Zai Meiguo waijiao zhengce xiehui shang, Qian Qichen waizhang tan zhongmei guanxi' ('Foreign Minister Qian Qichen Discuss Sino-US Relations at US Council of Foreign Policy'), *Renmin ribao (People's Daily)*, 24 September, 1992, p. 6.

29 Cited from Yan, *Analysis of China's National Interests*, pp. 207–08.

30 Office of Policy Studies of Ministry of Foreign Affairs, ed., *Zhongguo waijiao (China's Foreign Affairs)*(Beijing: Shijie zhishi chubanshe, 1999), p. 4.

31 Sun Guangyong, 'Zhongguo waijiao zhanshi fuzeren daguo xingxiang' ('China's Diplomacy Shows Its Image of Responsible Powers'), *Renmin ribao (People's Daily)*, 2 March, 2009, p. 3.

**Table 1.** Evolving Concepts of China's International Responsibility, 1949–2015

Year	Viewpoints
1949	Providing spiritual and material assistance for the working classes and labourers in capitalist and imperial countries.
1953	Struggle for the working class of the world, for unity of the international workers' movement, and for world peace and security.
1960	Strengthening friendship and unity between Sino–Soviet peoples; Strengthening the friendship and unity of the socialist bloc led by the Soviet Union.
1962	Opposing the invasion and war policies of the United States and the imperial bloc; Supporting the nationalist and democratic movement in Asia, Africa, and Latin America; Supporting workers movement in Western Europe, North America, and Australia; Supporting the world peace movement and all just struggles.
1965	Opposing imperialist, reactionaries, and modern revisionists; Struggling for world peace, national liberation, people's democracy, and socialist victory.
1971	Assisting Vietnam's struggle against the United States.
1984	Protecting the interests of Third World Countries; Supporting their struggles for independence, sovereignty, national economy, and an international new economic order.
1989	Supporting the just struggle of Third World countries.
1992	Promoting world peace and development; Insisting upon the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence; Developing friendly relations with neighbouring countries.
1996	Obedying international law and Improving International law; Building a peaceful, stable, just, and reasonable international political and economic new order.
1998–2001	Actively and constructively participating in multilateral institutions; Supporting peace and development; Conducting unilateral or bilateral policies for peace and development; Opposing the United States.
2007	Following the UN Charter; Pursuing an independent foreign policy of peace; Protecting China's legal interests and respecting other countries' interests; Solving divergence through consultation and solving challenges through cooperation; Insisting upon defensive national defence policies and improving military transparency; Actively participating in counterterrorism, non-proliferation, UN peacekeeping, and other cooperation in international security.
2015	Providing more public goods and more actively exerting constructive functions; Collectively handling global issues and challenges, including attending global climate change negotiations and promoting a 2030 agenda of sustainable development; Promoting foreign aid to help developing countries, benefiting their peoples, and responding to humanitarian disasters; Protecting international public security, including fighting terrorist activities, participating in UN peacekeeping, cooperating on non-proliferation; regulating sensitive issues; maintaining the security of international routines; strengthening the multilateral and bilateral concert; and participating in the promotion of global Internet security.

Sources: *People's Daily*, November 24, 1949, p. 1; May 13, 1953, p. 1; January 13, 1960, p. 6; January 1, 1961, p. 1; January 6, 1965, p. 1; May 9, 1965, p. 1; November 25, 1971, p. 2, May 30, 1984, p. 3; September 15, 1989, p. 7, September 24, 1992, p. 6; December 10, 1996, p. 1; March 7, 2007, p. 3; November 23, 2015, p. 6; and Johnston, 2008, pp. 148–49.

its international responsibility.<sup>32</sup> On the academic track, two academic conferences on IR were launched, one in 2006 by Fudan University, and one in 2008, when the China Reform Forum collaborated with the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, in response to Zoellick's speech and its influence, with the aim of discussing international responsibility and the prospects for China as a responsible power.<sup>33</sup> If Zoellick's speech in 2005 was an external activator of China's debate on international responsibility, after 2012 the dynamics of convergent studies on international responsibility were on a mostly internal level.

Zoellick's proposal clearly aroused Chinese resolve to deal with this issue, but it is necessary to discuss why it was the proposal of 'responsible stakeholder' and 'China's responsibility' rather than other arguments, such as the 'China threat thesis' or 'China collapse thesis', that found an echo within the Chinese attitude, and triggered a series of positive responses. In fact, the Chinese refocus on the international responsibility discourse can be ascribed to various dynamics. This section preliminarily proposes a discourse-activation framework to explain the dramatic development around 2005 of Chinese attention to international responsibility. The framework includes five variables: China's existent awareness, self-expectations, expectations from society, the relevance of the activator, and the environment.

The first factor is the relevant preparatory Chinese discourse, or arousal of awareness about international responsibility. If a specific discourse could be activated, the precondition is that it, or an awareness of it, was already existent, albeit in an un-activated or vapid state. In fact, China usually projected itself as a responsible state or responsible power during an even earlier period.<sup>34</sup> As an unintended consequence, Chinese measures in response to the Asian Financial Crisis earned it praise from other countries as 'a responsible power', which further aroused the awareness of both China's scholars and policy advisors.<sup>35</sup> China's response to the crisis was argued to have been 'a seminal event' in its perception of international responsibility.<sup>36</sup> During this crisis, especially the 'currency war', to stabilize

32 Zhong Sheng, 'Fahui fuzeren daguo zuoyong' ('Exerting the Function of Responsible Powers'), *Renmin ribao* (*People's Daily*), 4 December, 2012, p. 3.

33 Pan Zhongqi and Zheng Li, 'Zhongguo guoji zeren yu guoji zhanlve de lilun sikao: Zhongguo wajiaou uu guoji guanxi lilun 2006 niandu guoji qingnian yantaohui' ('A Theoretical Analysis of China's International Responsibility and Strategy: Review for the Seminar on China's Diplomacy and International Relations Theory in 2006'), *Guoji guancha* (*International Review*), No. 1 (2007), pp. 22–28; Li Nan, 'Zhongguo de guoji zerenguan yantaohui zongshu' ('Review of the Conference of China's Perception of International Responsibility'), *Dangdai yatai* (*Journal of Contemporary Asia-Pacific Studies*), No. 6 (2008), pp. 150–55.

34 Mao Weizhun, 'Gujie zeren de xingwei luoji bianqian: xinnian, zeren, yu guanhuai' ('The Evolving Logics of International Responsibility: From Conviction to Responsibility to Care'), *Dangdai yatai* (*Journal of Contemporary Asia-Pacific Studies*), No. 5 (2013), pp. 22–58; Wu Bing, 'Cong tianxia zeren dao fuzeren daguo: shenfen shijiao xia de Zhongguo guoji zerenguan lishi chanbian yanjiu' ('From Heavenly Responsibility to Responsible Great State: A Study of the Historical Evolution of Views of China's International Responsibility from an Identity Perspective'), *Dangdai yatai* (*Journal of Contemporary Asia-Pacific Studies*), No. 4 (2015), pp. 93–127.

35 Alastair Iain Johnston, *Social States: China in International Institutions, 1980-2000* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), pp. 148–49.

36 Deng, 'China', p. 120.

Asia's economy, China maintained its exchange rate, rather than devaluing the Renminbi, even though the country was at that time wrestling with considerable difficulties, both internally and internationally, while other countries like Japan devalued their currencies to increase exports.<sup>37</sup> This episode was frequently mentioned by Chinese scholars in their constructing of China's identity as a responsible major power. For example, Wu Bing traces China's 'responsible great power' awareness to 1997, arguing that it was Thai Prime Minister Chuan Leekpai who proposed the term, and concluding that other countries' recognition of China's responsible actions constituted the external recognition which heightened China's internal awareness.<sup>38</sup> With the rise of China's awareness of its international responsibility, China's government subsequently began to regard itself as a responsible power,<sup>39</sup> while Chinese IR scholars gradually began to discuss the role of responsibility in Chinese foreign affairs.<sup>40</sup> In this vein, Yong Deng holds that the 'widespread international praise of China's behaviour vindicated the notion of responsible power' and 'the Chinese were more ready than ever before to actively participate in regional undertakings'.<sup>41</sup>

The next dynamic is China's self-expectation as a responsible power, and its pursuit of international status. If China had not had self-expectations with respect to international society, there would probably not have been any positive response when a catalyst appeared. For decades, China had pursued its global role on an international platform,<sup>42</sup> such as by acting as a 'peaceful, cooperative, and responsible great power'.<sup>43</sup> According to Rosemary Foot, that China harbours concerns about an 'international image' and desires to be 'a cooperative and responsible great power' is becoming more salient.<sup>44</sup> Similarly, Yong Deng also argues that China's 'self-identification' is as 'a responsible power', which is also an instrument for improving China's status in international society.<sup>45</sup> Beverley Loke observes that China is 'gravitating toward greater notions of international responsibility, albeit instrumentally' to acquire a 'burgeoning global role as a great power' and seek international legitimacy.<sup>46</sup> In addition, China's self-expectation also includes a desire not to be considered as a 'rogue state' or a free-rider in global society which other countries criticize.<sup>47</sup> Gerald Chan observes that there is a 'heightened expectation' both 'within' and 'outside'

37 From July 1997 to October 1998, only the Renminbi and Hong Kong dollar remained stable in East Asia; see C. H. Kwan, 'The Yen, the Yuan, and the Asian Currency Crisis: Changing Fortunes between Japan and China', *Tokyo Club Papers*, No. 12 (1999), p. 38.

38 Wu, 'From Heavenly Responsibility to Responsible Great State', p. 121.

39 Office of Policy Studies of Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *China's Foreign Affairs*, p. 4.

40 Wang, 'Towards Chinese Diplomacy in the 21st Century', pp. 23–26.

41 Yong Deng, *China's Struggle for Status: The Realignment of International Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 223.

42 Pichamon Yeophantong, 'Governing the World: China's Evolving Conceptions of Responsibility', *Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol. 6, No. 4 (2013), p. 352.

43 Office of Policy Studies of Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *China's Foreign Affairs*, p. 4.

44 Rosemary Foot, 'Chinese Power and the Idea of a Responsible State', in Zhang and Austin, eds., *Power and Responsibility in Chinese Foreign Policy*, p. 36.

45 Deng, *China's Struggle for Status*, p. 15.

46 Beverley Loke, 'Between Interest and Responsibility: Assessing China's Foreign Policy and Burgeoning Global Role', *Asian Security*, Vol. 5, No. 3 (2009), pp. 195–215.

47 Zhang and Austin, 'China and the Responsibility of Power', p. 6.

China of China's rise.<sup>48</sup> Finally, China's self-expectation as a responsible power is located in current international institutions, rather than in challenging the existing structure as a revisionist. Alastair Iain Johnston's analysis of *People's Daily* articles finds that China's identity discourse as a responsible power is typical of one 'distinctively multilateralism and status quo' which includes 'upholding extant rules and norms inside the institution'.<sup>49</sup>

The third variable is the external expectations from international society, which requires that a rising China act as a responsible power and fulfil relevant international responsibilities. International society calls on China to assume more responsibilities, rather than acting merely as a component of global governance. Chih-Yu Shih and Chiung-Chiu Huang observe that China confronts 'all kinds of expectations and criticisms on various global issues'.<sup>50</sup> For example, some scholars accuse China of seeking relevant rights and privileges while refusing to assume international responsibilities.<sup>51</sup> In this line, some scholars point out that China's 'full membership' of international society is 'questionable'.<sup>52</sup> In fact, since the 1990s, international society and key actors like the United States have consistently tried to engage China's participation in international affairs. For example, in 1996, President Clinton proposed that the United States 'welcome China to the great power table. But great powers also have great responsibilities'.<sup>53</sup> In 2004, the then-US Secretary of State Colin L. Powell showed a welcoming attitude to China's global role, with the precondition: 'so long as China assumes responsibilities commensurate with that role'.<sup>54</sup> Hereby, the 'positive attitudes' of other countries are usually regarded as incentives for China's deeper involvement in global affairs which can trigger China's greater role as a responsible great power.<sup>55</sup> Based on previous endeavours, Zoellick called on China to transfer 'from membership to responsibility'.<sup>56</sup> His proposal both strengthened China's focus on great power responsibility and triggered China's interests in the diverse issues stemming from international responsibility, such as climate change, arms proliferation, human rights, and global governance.<sup>57</sup>

The fourth factor is the relevance of the activator, as regards representing the expectations of international society, fitting in with China's self-expectation, and echoing China's awareness. Robert Zoellick's 'responsible stakeholder' argument is the very activator of China's re-embracing international responsibility. Shaun Breslin argues that China's leaders

48 Gerald Chan, *China's Compliance in Global Affairs: Trade, Arms Control, Environmental Protection, Human Rights* (Singapore: World Scientific Publishing Company, 2006), p. 33.

49 Johnston, *Social States*, pp. 148–49.

50 Chih-Yu Shih and Chiung-Chiu Huang, 'Preaching Self-Responsibility: The Chinese Style of Global Governance', *Journal of Contemporary China*, Vol. 22, No. 80 (2013), p. 357.

51 Evan S. Medeiros and M. Taylor Fravel, 'China's New Diplomacy', *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 82, No. 6 (2003), pp. 23–32.

52 Zhang and Austin, 'China and the Responsibility of Power', p. 6.

53 Anthony Lake, 'Speech by Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs to the Japan-America Society', 23 October, 1996, <https://clinton6.nara.gov/1996/10/1996-10-23-anthony-lake-on-us-policy-for-east-asia.html>.

54 Colin L. Powell, 'A Strategy of Partnerships', *Foreign Affairs*, Vol.83, No. 1 (2004), p. 32.

55 Xia Liping, 'China: A Responsible Great Power', *Journal of Contemporary China*, Vol. 10, No. 26 (2001), p. 22.

56 Zoellick, 'Whither China'.

57 Chan, *China's Compliance in Global Affairs*.

are 'keen' to project China's image as a responsible power.<sup>58</sup> As Yeophantong observed, Zoellick's argument acted mostly to 'rekindle debates' on China's responsibility and international responsibility.<sup>59</sup> Although Zoellick's primary intention was to rectify the US policy direction towards China, his idea about China's future global role indeed represented the growing voice of international society consistent with China's self-identification, and struck a responsive chord in China's awareness of its 'great power responsibility' and identity as 'a responsible power'. Compared with the 'China threat thesis', the responsibility thesis is the more appealing one, because it reflects China's inherent demands. Some scholars even assert that China's policies and nationalist atmosphere are 'largely a reaction' to the United States; if the United States were to display a cooperative stance, China would mostly follow this signal with a reciprocal response.<sup>60</sup> Consequently, China's enthusiasm was instantaneously triggered, to the extent of becoming 'obsess[ed] with' Zoellick's debate.<sup>61</sup>

The last variable is the mild environment of the international stage and the trustful relations among key powers. If there is a good relationship among states, their signals will be more easily accepted by the target country. Xia Liping argues that China's willingness to fulfil its responsibility also depends on its confidence in the international security environment, better interactions, and greater participation in international mechanisms.<sup>62</sup> From 2001 to 2007, China and the United States, as the largest developing and developed countries, improved their relations from the initial confrontational phase to a normalized period of better interactions, as measured by The Dataset on Relations between China and Great Powers (*zhongguo yu daguo guanxi shujuku*) by Tsinghua University.<sup>63</sup> Furthermore, as the advisor on US foreign policies, Zoellick pointed out '[T]herefore, China clearly needs a benign international environment for its work at home. Of course, the Chinese expect to be treated with respect and will want to have their views and interests recognized. But China does not want a conflict with the United States.'<sup>64</sup> When he visited China, Zoellick asserted that China should 'play a very positive role in the international system'. Both a better interactive environment and positive incentives from US policies provide strong momentum towards reduced fears of US containment and activating China's discourse and norms on international responsibility. Zoellick asserted, therefore, that the role of a 'stakeholder' could provide a new direction.<sup>65</sup>

In summary, the discourse-activation framework of international responsibility shows a handful of related dynamics that contribute to China's increasing attention and large-scale discussions on international responsibility as well as great power responsibility. Higher

58 Shaun Breslin, 'China's Emerging Global Role: Dissatisfied Responsible Great Power', *Politics*, Vol. 30, No. s1 (2010), p. 53.

59 Yeophantong, 'Governing the World', p. 352.

60 Michael Alan Brittingham, 'The "Role" of Nationalism in Chinese Foreign Policy: A Reactive Model of Nationalism & Conflict', *Journal of Chinese Political Science*, Vol. 12, No. 2 (2007), p. 162.

61 Stratfor, 'China's Obsession with the Zoellick Speech'.

62 Xia, 'China: A Responsible Great Power'.

63 Yan Xuetong and Zhou Fangyin, 'A Quantitative Measurement of International Bilateral Political Relations', *Social Sciences in China*, No. 6 (2004), pp. 90–103.

64 Zoellick, 'Whither China'.

65 Xinhua, 'Zoellick: "Stakeholder" Concept Offers New Direction', *China Daily*, 25 January, 2006, [http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/09usofficials/2009-05/22/content\\_7932826.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/09usofficials/2009-05/22/content_7932826.htm).

awareness of responsibility, more active self-identification as a responsible state, stronger expectations from international society of China's responsible role, the more relevant catalysts that Zoellick's speech launched, and a better international atmosphere all facilitate the process of discourse activation concerning China's attention to international responsibility.

### Diverse Responses to International Responsibilities in China

As a simple roadmap, China's intellectual attention to international responsibilities can be traced back to the 1980s,<sup>66</sup> but its primary development coincided with a revival of 'the culture of responsibility'<sup>67</sup> since the 1990s, and was further triggered by China's response to the Asian Financial Crisis in 1997.<sup>68</sup> In 2005, Zoellick's 'responsible stakeholder' statement galvanized China's academic discussion of this issue to its first climax: a series of debates concerning international responsibilities and Chinese foreign strategies. In spite of a short hiatus around 2010, China's transformation of foreign policies under the new leadership boosted this wave of analyses of international responsibilities, due to a new political declaration on fulfilling international responsibilities.

During the process of China's intellectual focus on international responsibility, different impetuses moved studies in this respect further, bringing both structural divides and processual convergences in China's relevant scholarship. In fact, behind the overall trend, diverse, and even conflictual viewpoints emerged within the Chinese academic groups which focused on the topic of international responsibility. Therefore, it is necessary to analyse from an internal perspective the relevant Chinese studies on international responsibility and further explore the dynamics that affected Chinese scholars' divergence and later convergence in their discussions of the topic.

### A Typological Framework of Nationalism versus Responsibility

As regards the internal perspective, different groups of Chinese scholars have different and even conflicting perceptions of the specific terms relating to international responsibilities. This article combines dimensions that scholars have previously applied to categorize international responsibility, which assume that Chinese academic divergence in perceiving international responsibility is affected not only by the ideological position of the

66 Tian, 'Review on the Seminar of International Relations Theory', p. 58.

67 According to Zhao Yifeng's observations, responsibility is one kind of fundamentally social and cultural value, which has been analysed in different disciplines since the 1990s both internationally and domestically, including ethics, economics, politics, sociology, and international relations. Scholarship reflects the issue of responsibility because it has great significance in the context of serious issues and decreasing awareness of responsibility. See Zhao Yifeng, 'Zeren wenhua de suxing' ('The Revival of the Culture of Responsibility'), in Zhao Yifeng, ed., *Dangdai Zhongguo sixiang tansuo zhong de zeren guan (The Idea of Responsibility in Contemporary Chinese Thinking)*(Changchun: Dongbei daxue chubanshe, 2010), pp. 1–11.

68 Niu Haibin, 'Pingxi Zhongguo zerenlun' ('Comments on China's Responsibility Theory'), *Fudan guoji guanxi pinglun (Fudan International Studies Review)*, No. 8 (2008), pp. 94–108; Xing Yue and Zhan Yijia, 'Fuzeren daguo: lilun lishi yu xianshi' ('Responsible Great Power: Theory, History, and Reality'), *Fudan guoji guanxi pinglun (Fudan International Studies Review)*, No. 8 (2008), pp. 80–93.

nationalism–internationalism continuum, but also by its evaluation of the extent of China’s fulfilling of its international responsibility.

On the one hand, the academic orientation of nationalism can act as a typological criterion through which scholars may categorize international responsibility. China’s foreign policy is usually shaped by nationalism as well as internationalism.<sup>69</sup> As a result, as one kind of foreign policy, international responsibility also relates closely to an ideology of nationalism (as well as its counterpart, internationalism) during China’s rise. Qin Yaqing and Zhu Liqun argue that China, as a responsible member of international society, must abandon parochial nationalism and follow a new internationalism.<sup>70</sup> Shambaugh distinguishes between nine different discourses among contending schools of thought on Chinese global identities, constructing a spectrum from nationalist to internationalist to globalist. He concludes that nationalists tend to refuse international responsibility, while globalists are keen to take on ‘an ever-greater responsibility’.<sup>71</sup> Since international responsibility is what a specific country fulfils within the international platform and among other countries, as Yong Deng has argued, China’s identity as a ‘responsible power’ is actually manipulated by its ‘nationalist impulse’ and ‘realpolitik calculations’.<sup>72</sup> Furthermore, this issue will surely embed itself in the national context as well as the international environment. Different opinions on nationalism–internationalism determine different attitudes towards international responsibility. For example, Wu Bing holds that China’s responsibility discourse is connected with China’s national rejuvenation (*zhongguo minzu fuxing*) in the world, and that China’s different notions of responsibility (*zeren guan*) have been affected by both the nationalist and internationalist factors in different periods.<sup>73</sup> In addition to the positive effects, Chinese nationalism also affects its fulfilling of international responsibility in a negative sense. Xing Yue and Zhan Yijia warn that extremist nationalism will hurt China’s strategy of international responsibility.<sup>74</sup>

On the other hand, China’s academics also show their divergent positions on China’s degrees of fulfilment of its international responsibility. Theoretically, a ‘responsible agency’ is actually ‘a matter of degree’.<sup>75</sup> It should also be noted that the extent of a given scholar’s position on China’s fulfilling international responsibility is not necessarily related to the spectrum, from nativist to globalist, of China’s global identities. For example, both nativists and selective multilateralists demonstrate a negative attitude towards international responsibility.<sup>76</sup> Mao Weizhun depicts a typological framework on international responsibility based on the degrees of fulfilment of responsibility and the subsequent roles of responsibility undertaken. The typological framework contains an obstructionist approach as a

69 Chen Zhimin, ‘Nationalism, Internationalism and Chinese Foreign Policy’, *Journal of Contemporary China*, Vol. 14, No. 42 (2005), pp. 35–53; Zhu Tianbiao, ‘Nationalism and Chinese Foreign Policy’, *China Review*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (2001), pp. 1–27.

70 Qin Yaqing and Zhu Liqun, ‘Xin guoji zhuyi yu Zhongguo waijiao’ (‘Neo-Internationalism and China’s Diplomacy’), *Waijiao pinglun (Foreign Affairs Review)*, No. 5 (2005), pp. 21–27.

71 Shambaugh, *China Goes Global*, pp. 25–36.

72 Deng, ‘China’, pp. 117–18.

73 Wu, ‘From Heavenly Responsibility to Responsible Great State’, pp. 114–16.

74 Xing and Zhan, ‘Responsible Great Power’, pp. 80–93.

75 Garrath Williams, ‘Responsibility’, in James Fieser and Bradley Dowden, eds., *The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 19 July, 2006, <http://www.iep.utm.edu/responsil/>.

76 Shambaugh, *China Goes Global*, pp. 22–36.

defender, a defensive approach as an accommodator, an accommodative approach as a reactor, and a proactive approach as an anticipator, along with the degree of fulfilling international responsibility from the negative dimension to positive aspects.<sup>77</sup> In this way, different positions on fulfilling international responsibility reveal Chinese scholars' various notions on the necessity, possibility, and prospects through which the Chinese understand international responsibility in different settings.

Subsequently, as Figure 3 shows, this article operationalizes the academic orientation of Chinese scholars into a continuum from nationalism to internationalism, which also stands for the interval from a close and isolated state to an open position. Meanwhile, the article follows the most accepted dimensions of international responsibility from a negative sense to a positive approach. Both dimensions follow the general logic of China's foreign practice, and academic studies from isolation to openness, in spite of a few departures. In sum, Chinese viewpoints on international responsibility can be further categorized into at least three groups: averting, accommodating, and advocating.

### The Averting Camp: It is a Trap!

In spite of the traditional Chinese emphasis on responsibility<sup>78</sup> and the awakening of Chinese IR scholars with regard to international responsibility,<sup>79</sup> many Chinese scholars and policy advisors remain highly vigilant in their opposition to the proposal of international responsibility,<sup>80</sup> especially when the term is mentioned by the United States under the names of 'responsible stakeholder' and 'China's responsibility'. This camp maintains the conservative, even isolated stance of nationalism and negative opinions on fulfilling international responsibility, which usually have at least three arguments in common. In brief, what this group attempts to avert is the blame and criticism of other countries, the potential traps of the US containment strategy, and the extra burden on China's normal rise.

First, they mostly pay attention to the morally accountable dimension of responsibility, and are highly cautious about the foreign critiques of other countries' opinions on the causes of a specific crisis or problem. Initially, China's official policy advisor demonstrated a leery reaction. For example, Ma Zhengang argued that Zoellick's speech in fact carries a certain 'subtext' which implies that China is an irresponsible country, and that China should act according to the will of Western countries.<sup>81</sup> In spite of not being a scholar in

77 Mao Weizhun, 'Guoji zeren gainian zaishenshi: yizhong leixingxue fenxi kuangjia' ('Reconsidering the Concept of 'International Responsibility': A Multi-Typological Framework'), *Shijie jingji yu zhengzhi (World Economics and Politics)*, No. 12 (2016), pp. 68–100.

78 Zhao Yifeng, 'Dangdai Zhongguo sixiang tansuozhong de zeren gainian: zongshu' ('The Concepts of Responsibility in Contemporary Chinese Thinking: A Review'), in Zhao, ed., (*The Idea of Responsibility in Contemporary Chinese Thinking*), pp. 539–52; Yeophantong, 'Governing the World', pp. 329–64.

79 Yan, *Analysis of China's National Interests*, pp. 207–08; Wang, 'Towards Chinese Diplomacy in the 21st Century', pp. 18–27.

80 Shambaugh, *China Goes Global*, p. 19.

81 Ma Zhengang, 'Yingdui guoji xin tiaozhan, cujin heping yu fazhan' ('Dealing with International New Challenges, Promoting Peace and Development'), *Guoji wenti yanjiu (China International Studies)*, No. 1 (2006), p. 8; Ma Zhengang, 'Zhongguo zerenlun budengyu Zhongguo zeren' ('China's Responsibility Theory Is Not Equal to China's Responsibility'), *Liaowang (Outlook Weekly)*, No. 42 (2010), p. 68.

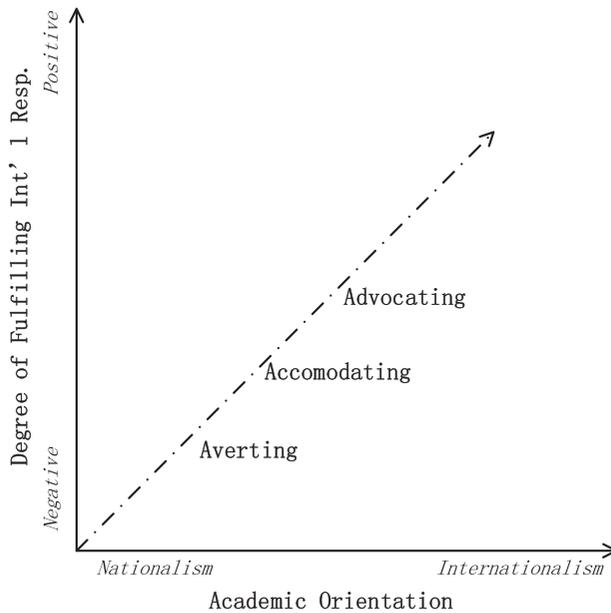


Fig. 3. Typological Framework of China's Debates on International Responsibility.

the strictest sense, Ma Zhengang's opinion and official position as the director of China Institute of International Studies were influential among Chinese IR scholars at the initial stage. Many journal articles on international responsibility cited Ma's sentiments as a representative point of China's relevant discussions.<sup>82</sup> Similarly, Lin Limin from China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations also regarded Zoellick's argument as a Western 'conspiracy'.<sup>83</sup>

Secondly, these scholars are alert to the strategic concepts proposed by Americans, and usually believe that the 'China's responsibility' argument is in line with other similar proposals, like the 'China threat thesis' and 'China collapse thesis'.<sup>84</sup> All these arguments are cited as tools of the US's containment strategies against China. As to the 'China's responsibility' proposal, many scholars consider it as a variant of the 'China threat thesis', while

82 For example, see Niu, 'Comments on China's Responsibility Theory', pp. 94–108; Hu Jian, 'Zhongguo zeren yu heping fazhan daolu' ('China's Responsibility and Its Strategy of Peaceful Development'), *Xiandai guoji guanxi* (*Contemporary International Relations*), No. 7 (2007), pp. 43–47; Liu Jianfei, 'Zhongguo zerenlun: tiaozhan haishi jiyu' ('China's Responsibility: Challenges or Opportunities?'), *Liaowang* (*Outlook Weekly*), No. 23 (2007), p. 64.

83 Lin Limin, 'Lixing bianxi Zhongguo zerenlun' ('Rationally Discuss China's Responsibility Theory'), *Renmin luntan* (*People's Tribune*), No. 6 (2007), p. 63.

84 Zhang Mingzhi, 'Cong Zhongguo weixielun dao Zhongguo zerenlun: xifang lengzhan siwei dingshi xia de Zhongguo fazhan anquan' ('From China's Threat to China's Responsibility: China's Development Security under the Western Mindset of Cold War'), *Shijie jingji yu zhengzhi luntan* (*Forum of World Economics and Politics*), No. 3 (2012), pp. 1–14.

others directly label it as the 'US's "China's responsibility"'.<sup>85</sup> Yuan Peng sees the transfer as a transformation of the US's attitudes and policies towards China, in spite of Zoellick's arguments having some positive aspects.<sup>86</sup> Zhang Shengjun regards 'China's responsibility' as an alternative way of imposing pressure on China which is merely a new concept with ulterior motives.<sup>87</sup> Zhang Ruizhuang is vigilant about the diverse responsibility-related proposals (e.g. Responsibility to Protect, R2P), asserting that they would overturn the current international order and construct challenges to China.<sup>88</sup> Based on interviews, Shambaugh observed that Chinese scholars showed a worrying attitude, and considered the proposal as a kind of 'Western effort' to 'tie China down', or a tool to 'contain China which is actually a trap for China'.<sup>89</sup>

Thirdly, this group pessimistically predicted that the burden of taking on responsibility for other countries and the world might impede China's rise. It is true that 'China's responsibility' has been a trial to China's peaceful development.<sup>90</sup> Some scholars directly consider 'China's responsibility' as a great threat to the development of China's security.<sup>91</sup> In spite of China's having generally declared that it will bear international responsibility according to its own capacity, many scholars nevertheless doubt the true intentions of Western countries like the United States. China's rise and the relative decline of the United States within a complex international environment is a scenario that the Chinese, including scholars, do not believe the United States will easily accept; when taking into account the US's long-term hostility over the past decades, rising degrees of mistrust and misinterpretation are inevitable. As Zhang Shengjun noted, 'China's responsibility' is regarded as a requirement by 'Western Anti-China Forces', which implies that 'responsibility' is a term imbued with a specific meaning: China should behave according to the roadmap designed by Western countries.<sup>92</sup>

85 Xie Lijiao and Tang Yanlin, 'Meiguo de Zhongguo zerenlun and zhongmei guanxi' ('On 'China's Responsibility' to the U.S and Sino-U.S.Relations'), *Changchun shifan xueyuan xuebao* (*Journal of Changchun Teachers College*), No. 4 (2006), pp. 24–27.

86 Yuan Peng, 'Meiguo duihua taidu fenxi: cong Zhongguo weixielun dao Zhongguo zerenlun' ('The Transformation of Us' China Attitude: From China's Threat to China's Responsibility'), *Dongfang zaobao* (*Oriental Morning Post*), 22 December, 2005, <http://news.eastday.com/eastday/node81741/node81762/node107715/userobject1ai1737526.html>; Yuan Peng, 'Meiguo Zhongguoguan qiaoran bianhua' ('Us' Viewpoints on China Is Gradually Changing'), *Renmin ribao* (*People's Daily*), 23 January, 2007, p. 3.

87 Zhang Shengjun, 'Zhongguo zerenlun keyi xiuyi' ('China's Responsibility Theory Should End'), *Renmin luntan* (*People's Tribune*), No. 6 (2007), p. 50.

88 Zhang Ruizhuang, 'Jingtí xifang yì rendaozhuyi ganyu weiming dianfu xianxing guoji zhixu' ('Be Vigilant About the West Overturning Contemporary International Order in the Name of 'Humanitarian Intervention'), *Xiandai guoji guanxi* (*Contemporary International Relations*), No. 9 (2008), pp. 12–13.

89 Shambaugh, *China Goes Global*, p. 19.

90 Liu Jianfei, 'Zhongguo zerenlun kaoyan geping fahan' ('China's Responsibility Tests Peaceful Development'), *Xiandai guoji guanxi* (*Contemporary International Relations*), No. 4 (2007), pp. 22–26.

91 Zhang, 'From China's Threat to China's Responsibility', pp. 1–14.

92 Zhang, 'China's Responsibility Theory Should End', p. 50.

In summary, the responsibility-averting camp is highly alert to the hidden motivations of the discourses concerning international responsibility, such as ‘China threat’ and ‘responsible stakeholder’, a position which actually exaggerates the possibly negative consequences of the relevant terms from Western countries. Although the scholars in this camp maintain a strictly hostile attitude to the notion of international responsibility as proposed by Western countries, they do not deny that China should bear some international responsibility.<sup>93</sup> More importantly, the averting camp can be regarded as a first wave of ‘mind-set’ response to the US’s proposal within the structure of Sino–US hostility.

### The Accommodating Camp: It is a Trend!

A second group of Chinese scholars has attempted to accommodate China to China’s rise and the appeal of international responsibility within contemporary international society. Scholars in this group adjust their standpoints to a mediate position, along with both the nationalism dimension and the degree of fulfilling responsibility. They disagree with the judgement of the averting camp, and regard the arrival of ‘China’s responsibility’ and ‘responsible stakeholder’ not solely as challenges but also as containing certain opportunities.<sup>94</sup> Taking the new dynamics, such as power transition and China’s growing role on the international stage, into account, many scholars follow a pragmatic approach to the issues of international responsibility and China’s responsibility. According to this camp, that China must seriously face its responsibility and the relevant issues of international responsibilities seems inevitable, because they are the requirements not only of the ‘external expectation’ of international society, but also of China’s own ‘development demand’ as a rising power.<sup>95</sup> For example, Jin Canrong evaluates the pros and cons of China’s fulfilling international responsibilities, concluding that the benefits to China of bearing international responsibility will be greater than the relevant costs of the international system.<sup>96</sup> However, this camp also realizes that China may encounter problems and limitations in its taking on of various international responsibilities.<sup>97</sup> As a result, some scholars pay more attention to the approaches to bearing international responsibility, rather than totally rejecting it.<sup>98</sup>

The issues that scholars in this group want to accommodate include development of the current world situation, China’s increasing power, the balance between internal and external expectations, and the trade-off between China’s capacity for fulfilling both domestic

93 Ma, ‘Dealing with International New Challenges, Promoting Peace and Development’, p. 8.

94 Liu, ‘China’s Responsibility’, p. 64.

95 Niu, ‘Comments on China’s Responsibility Theory’, pp. 94–108; Hu, ‘China’s Responsibility and Its Strategy of Peaceful Development’, pp. 43–47.

96 Jin Canrong, ‘Cong Zhongguo weixielun dao Zhongguo zerenlun: Zhongguo guoji yulun huanjing de bianhua yu yingdui’ (‘From China’s Threat to China’s Responsibility: Changes and Responses of China’s International Public Opinion Environments’), *Lv ye (Green Leaf)*, No. 5 (2009), pp. 63–70.

97 Xing and Zhan, ‘Responsible Great Power’, pp. 80–93; Niu, ‘Comments on China’s Responsibility Theory’, pp. 94–108.

98 Gan Junxian, ‘Zhongguo zerenlun jiedu yu Zhongguo wajiao yingdui’ (‘The Analysis of China’s Responsibility and Its Diplomatic Countermeasures’), *Guoji zhanwang (Global Review)*, No. 4 (2010), pp. 59–69.

and international responsibilities. In general, the accommodating camp has four characteristics. First, Chinese scholars partly and more willingly accept the notion of the ‘responsible great power’, and that subsequent of ‘responsible stakeholder’ under the contemporary international structure. In fact, fulfilling international responsibility coincides with China’s national interests, international interests, and identity on the international stage. On the one hand, in addition to Yan Xuetong’s argument, wherein bearing more responsibility became ‘China’s important interest’, in 1996,<sup>99</sup> others like Ren Xiao, Liu Hongsong, and Wang Gonglong, highlighted the enhancement of public interest and shared and integrated interest in international society, in addition to China’s national interests, when China bears relevant international responsibility.<sup>100</sup> On the other hand, international responsibility connects with identity-driven willingness. Niu Haibin argues that international responsibility is something of a derived nature that a country holds as a member of international society.<sup>101</sup> With its rise, therefore, China has to meet both the demands of the international community and its own requirements as a responsible great power.<sup>102</sup> With respect to the relations between security and identity, Qin Yaqing points out that China’s identity as a responsible great power can expand its security interests and promote good interaction between China and international society.<sup>103</sup>

Secondly, scholars in this group show cautious attitudes towards deliberations on the relations between China’s power and international responsibility. This point was emphasized by China’s scholars at the first IR conference in the late 1980s.<sup>104</sup> According to them, China’s rise both revived its internal willingness and triggered external expectations of fulfilling its international responsibility. For example, many studies focused on the issue of China as a ‘responsible great power’ rather than that of ‘China’s responsibility’.<sup>105</sup> Such scholars realized

99 Yan, *Analysis of China’s National Interests*, pp. 207–08.

100 Ren Xiao, ‘Yanjiu he lijie Zhongguo de guoji zeren’ (‘Studying and Understanding China’s International Responsibility’), *Shehui kexue (Journal of Social Science)*, No. 12 (2007), pp. 24–27; Wang Gonglong, ‘Guoji liyi, gongyou liyi, yu guoji zerenguan’ (‘National Interest, Shared Interest, and International Responsibility’), *Shijie jingji yu zhengzhi (World Economics and Politics)*, No. 9 (2008), pp. 21–28; Liu Hongsong, ‘Shengyu, zeren yu gongzheng: Zhongguo duobian waijiao de sanzong xuqiu’ (‘Reputation, Responsibility, and Justice: Three Demands of China’s Multilateral Diplomacy’), *Guoji guanch (International Review)*, No. 4 (2004), pp. 26–32.

101 Niu, ‘Comments on China’s Responsibility Theory’, pp. 94–108.

102 Wu Bing, ‘Shenfen yu zeren: Zhongguo guoji zerenguan yanjiu’ (‘Identity and Responsibility: A Study on China’s Viewpoints on International Responsibility’), *Shehui zhuyi yanjiu (Socialism Studies)*, No. 2 (2011), pp. 138–41.

103 Qin Yaqing, ‘Guojia shenfen, zhanlve wenhua, he anquan liyi’ (‘National Identity, Strategic Culture, and Security Interests’), *Shijie jingji yu zhengzhi (World Economics and Politics)*, No. 1 (2003), pp. 10–15.

104 Tian, ‘Review on the Seminar of International Relations Theory’, p. 58.

105 Xing and Zhan, ‘Responsible Great Power’, pp. 80–93; Li Baojun and Xu Zhengyuan, ‘Lengzhanhou Zhongguo fuzeren daguo shenfen de jiangou’ (‘The Construction of China’s Identity as Responsible Great Power after the Cold War’), *Jiaoxue yu yanjiu (Teaching and Research)*, No. 1 (2006), pp. 49–56.

the significance of China's power in the supply–demand structure of international responsibility.<sup>106</sup> Nevertheless, most Chinese scholars take a prudent approach when attempting to bridge China's power and China's international responsibility. Liu Feitao argues that power and responsibility together construct the preconditions for great power identity, highlighting that responsibility is actually 'the adequate exertion of powers', particularly warning that responsibility in international politics usually appears as a hegemonic politics label.<sup>107</sup> As a result, Chinese scholars admit that China should bear international responsibilities but with the proviso that they should set the standards of 'power adequacy' or 'capacity matching' to the fulfilling of international responsibility.<sup>108</sup> For example, in line with the standard of absolute power, some scholars assert that a country should bear its responsibility in accordance with its position within an international power structure.<sup>109</sup>

Thirdly, Chinese scholars specify an alternative 'defensive' principle with regard to fulfilling international responsibility; that is, the most important aspect of China's international responsibility, or its largest international contribution, is to resolve its domestic problems. Both China's foreign policy and political discourse decision-makers have emphasized this standard.<sup>110</sup> This orientation is mostly followed in the intellectual discussions on international responsibility. For example, many scholars insist that China's internal responsibilities belong to the first priority of its great-power responsibilities.<sup>111</sup> According to Ren Xiao, taking responsibility for domestic citizens and public interests, and prioritizing China's own problems are the two principles on which China may begin to fulfil its international responsibility.<sup>112</sup> Niu

106 Xu Zhengyuan, 'Quanli yu zeren: Lengzhanhou Zhongguo fuzeren daguo shenfen de jiangou' ('Power and Responsibility: The Construction of China's Identity as a Responsible Great Power after Cold War'), *Fudan guoji guanxi pinglun (Fudan International Studies Review)*, No. 8 (2008), pp. 40–55.

107 Liu Feitao, 'Quanli, zeren yu daguo rentong: jianlun Zhongguo yingdui guojishehui zeren de yingyou taidu' ('Power, Responsibility and Big Power Identity: On the Should-Be Attitude of China Towards Its International Responsibility'), *Taipingyang xuebao (Pacific Journal)*, No. 12 (2004), pp. 25–32.

108 Pan and Zheng, 'A Theoretical Analysis of China's International Responsibility and Strategy', pp. 22–28; Li, 'Review of the Conference of China's Perception of International Responsibility', pp. 150–55.

109 Ren, 'Studying and Understanding China's International Responsibility', pp. 24–27; Liu, 'China's Responsibility', p. 64.

110 In 2007, Chinese Minister of Foreign Affairs Li Zhaoxing commented on 'China's responsibility', claiming that the foremost of China's responsibilities is the responsibility for the Chinese people. In addition, the *People's Daily* declares that the starting point of China's active participation in international affairs is being 'responsible for the people of our country'. See Wang Xiping, 'Zhongguo heping fazhan fuhe shijie renmin liyi' ('China's Peaceful Development Accords with the Interests of People of the World'), *Renmin ribao (People's Daily)*, 10 November, 2007, p. 3; Zhong Sheng, 'Exerting the Function of Responsible Powers', p. 3.

111 Wu, 'Identity and Responsibility', pp. 138–41.

112 Ren, 'Studying and Understanding China's International Responsibility', pp. 24–27.

Jusheng also argues that China should in the first place do its best to solve its own problems—the ‘inherent meaning’ of China’s great power responsibility.<sup>113</sup>

Fourthly, another introversive feature of the accommodating camp is Chinese scholars’ conceptual operationalization and issue narrowing of international responsibility. Chinese scholars have deliberated on the operationalization of this concept and categorized it through diverse dimensions, dividing the notion of international responsibility into several aspects, and clarifying the relationship between international responsibility and other relevant variables. For example, Li Dongyan disagrees with the use of ‘international responsibility’, preferring the concept of ‘international contribution’, thus identifying the different defining sources of international responsibility and breaking down the plausible relations between power and international responsibility.<sup>114</sup> Others have probed the diverse natures of international responsibility, and concentrated on its moral essence, noting that there are no ‘recognized and operationalized’<sup>115</sup> standards for fulfilling international responsibility.<sup>116</sup> In spite of some scholars’ application of the concept to diverse issues like human rights, climate change, energy, and humanitarian actions,<sup>117</sup> most researchers have maintained a passive and defensive stance on identifying international responsibility. Liu Ming’s discussion is an adequate case. When talking about international responsibility, he proposed the concept of ‘limited responsibility (*youxian zeren*)’, concerning ‘international obligations that go beyond the narrow domestic interests and strategic targets’.<sup>118</sup>

In sum, this camp realizes the significance of fulfilling international responsibility, but worries about the risks in light of the China’s limitations in this respect, including its

- 113 Niu Jusheng and Wu Kai, ‘Hexie shijie linian xia de Zhongguo daguo zeren’ (‘China’s Great Power Responsibility within the Idea of Harmous World’), *Xuexi luntan (Tribune of Study)*, No. 7 (2011), pp. 44–47.
- 114 Li Dongyan, ‘Cong guoji zeren de rending yu tezheng kan Zhongguo de guoji zeren’ (‘On China’s International Responsibility from the Perspective of the Identification and Characteristics of International Responsibility’), *Xiandai guoji guanxi (Contemporary International Relations)*, No. 8 (2011), pp. 52–57.
- 115 Zhou Fangyin, ‘Zhongguo de shijie zhixu linian yu guoji zeren’ (‘China’s Ideas on World Order and International Responsibility’), *Guoji jingji pinglun (International Economic Review)*, No. 3 (2011), pp. 36–51.
- 116 Li, ‘On China’s International Responsibility from the Perspective of the Identification and Characteristics of International Responsibility’, pp. 52–57.
- 117 Wu Chengqiu, ‘Sovereignty, Human Rights, and Responsibility: Changes in China’s Response to International Humanitarian Crises’, *Journal of Chinese Political Science*, Vol. 15, No. 1 (2010), pp. 71–97; Yu Hongyuan and Tang Wei, ‘Ditan fazhan zhongde Zhongguo guoji zerenen’ (‘China’s International Responsibility in Low-Carbon Development’), *Dangdai shijie (Contemporary World)*, No. 10 (2009), pp. 53–56; Cai Dingjian, ‘Ershiyi shiji de Zhongguo: fazhi renquan, ziwo rentong he guoji zeren’ (‘China in the 21st Century China: Rule of Law and Human Rights, Self-Recognition and International Responsibility’), *Jiaoyu yanjiu yu pinglun (Research and Review on Education)*, No. 6 (2010), pp. 4–16.
- 118 Liu Ming, ‘Zhongguo zerenlun pingxi’ (‘Review on China’s Responsibility’), *Mao Zedong Deng Xiaoping lilun yanjiu (Studies On Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping Theories)*, No. 1 (2008), pp. 50–55.

capacity deficiencies, domestic nationalist trend, and [lack of] institutional support.<sup>119</sup> For this camp, international responsibility generally encompasses maintaining world peace and stability, safeguarding the contemporary international economic order, abiding by international rules, participating in global governance, involvement in international institutions, promoting dialogues and mutually beneficial cooperation among countries with different social systems and civilizations, attending security operations, including UN peacekeeping, and fighting non-traditional security threats.<sup>120</sup>

### The Advocating Camp: It is a Tool!

The advocating camp takes a more proactive line on fulfilling international responsibility while maintaining a relatively open opinion on exerting China's nationalism. The scholars in this camp further emphasize the significance of fulfilling international responsibilities across diverse issues within the context of China's rise and China's new position over the last decade. Rather than seeing 'responsible stakeholder' as a conspiracy of Western countries, however, these scholars mostly regard it as an opportunity for China's further development on the international stage, even though China may bear some costs and suffer some risks. For them, fulfilling international responsibilities should be an active performance by a specific country based on its particular situation, rather than purely conforming to a trend. Most important, they advocate embedding international responsibility in China's foreign policies and global strategies through different dimensions. Hereby, Chinese scholars reaffirm the connections between China's capacity and international responsibility, rather than arguing their non-linear linkages, so underlining China's ambitions as a great power rather than over-emphasizing China's status as a developing country, and thereby promoting its role in providing public goods in global governance rather than acting passively. For example, as Yan Xuetong points out, 'if China wants to regain its historical status as a great world power, it must act like a great world power'.<sup>121</sup> In general, the advocating camp shows its typical characteristics in the following respects.

First, most scholars in this camp consider international responsibility as a strategic issue as regards China's foreign policies and global performance. For example, in addition to regarding the fulfilling of responsibility as an inevitable demand on China, Wang Yizhou also proposes a concept of 'creative involvement', wherein the approaches to fulfilling international responsibility play a significant role.<sup>122</sup> Meanwhile, Shi Yinhong recognizes the change of China's role in the world and the transformation of China's relationships with

119 Xing and Zhan, 'Responsible Great Power', pp. 80–93; Niu, 'Comments on China's Responsibility Theory', pp. 94–108.

120 Wang, 'National Interest, Shared Interest, and International Responsibility', pp. 21–28; Wu, 'From Heavenly Responsibility to Responsible Great State', pp. 93–127; Xing and Zhan, 'Responsible Great Power', pp. 80–93; Zhang Ji and Kang Wenzhong, 'Gaigekaifang yilai Zhongguo chengdan guoji zeren de zhanlve sikao' ('The Strategic Thinking on China's Fulfillment of International Responsibilities since Reform and Open'), *Dangdai shijie shehui zhuyi wenti* (*Issues of Contemporary World Socialism*), No. 4 (2008), p. 34.

121 Yan, 'How Assertive Should a Great Power Be?'

122 Wang Yizhou, *Chuangzaoxing jieru: Zhongguo wajiao xin quxiang* (*Creative Involvement: A New Direction in China's Diplomacy*)(Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2011); Wang Yizhou, *Chuangzaoxing jieru: Zhongguo zhi quanqiu juese de shengcheng* (*Creative Involvement: The Evolution of China's Global Roles*)(Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2013).

other countries which impel China's strategy of absorbing the elements of international responsibility.<sup>123</sup> Yan Xuetong also calls for a change in China's foreign principles from an economic to a political orientation, in the light of its role as a responsible great power.<sup>124</sup> Prior to the global concerns, scholars like Xiao Huanrong and Tang Shiping with Zhang Yunling observed the possibility of international responsibility pertaining to China's regional strategy.<sup>125</sup>

Secondly, advocating scholars not only consider fulfilling international responsibilities as a necessary step towards participating in international society, but also as a problem-solving approach, such as the 'China Plan (*zhongguo fang'an*)' of global governance, especially in light of the recent crises. Pang Zhongying differentiates China's involvement in the international system from China's greater roles in the international system. He argues that the involvement dimension prevails, and that China's 'role' consciousness at the beginning of the 21st century was relatively low, and hence that it is 'responsibility' that is at issue. Thus, he calls for the taking on of such responsibilities as efficient global governance, sustainable development, and world stability through China's problem-solving approaches.<sup>126</sup> Qin Yaqing also argues that China should contribute its 'China Plan' to transformation of the international order.<sup>127</sup> On the other hand, advocating scholars go beyond the involvement dimension to highlight the problem-solving dimension, having started to focus on leadership responsibility at the international level. For example, Liu Hongsong examines China's international leadership responsibility and calls on China to actively provide public goods and build relevant international institutions.<sup>128</sup> In a similar vein, Yan Xuetong proposes international leadership responsibility within China's foreign policies as a responsible great power wherein China should learn to lead.<sup>129</sup>

In addition, many scholars in this camp have adopted a reflective viewpoint on China's traditional principles (like non-interference)<sup>130</sup> in the new era, and proposed related notions about international responsibility that entail a more open and radical mindset. These

123 Shi, 'Achievements and Challenges', pp. 81–85; Shi, 'China, "Global Challenges" and the Complexities of International Cooperation', pp. 89–96.

124 Yan Xuetong, *Lishi de guanxing: weilai shinian de Zhongguo yu shijie (Inertia of History: China and the World in the Next Ten Years)*(Beijing: zhongxin chubanshe, 2013), pp. 183–90.

125 Xiao, 'China's Great Power Responsibility and Regional Strategy', pp. 46–51; Tang and Zhang, 'China's Regional Strategy', pp. 8–13.

126 Pang Zhongying, 'Zhongguo zai guoji tixi zhong de diwei yu zuoyong' ('China's Status and Roles in International System'), *Xiandai guoji guanxi (Contemporary International Relations)*, No. 4 (2006), pp. 17–22; Pang Zhongying, 'Zhongguo jueqi bixu xiang shijie tigong wenti jiejie fang'an' ('China Should Provide Problem-Solving Plans for the Worlding During Its Rise'), *Zhongguo yu shijie guancha (China and World Observer)*, No. 2 (2011), [http://www.ccwe.tsinghua.edu.cn/upload\\_files/file/20150614/1434245285069072628.pdf](http://www.ccwe.tsinghua.edu.cn/upload_files/file/20150614/1434245285069072628.pdf).

127 Qin Yaqing, 'Wei guoji zhixu biange gengxian Zhongguo fang'an' ('Providing China's Plan for the Change of International Order'), *Zhongguo shehui kexuebao (Chinese Social Science Today)*, 17 December, 2014, [http://sscp.cssn.cn/zdtj/201412/t20141217\\_1445580.html](http://sscp.cssn.cn/zdtj/201412/t20141217_1445580.html).

128 Liu, 'Reputation, Responsibility, and Justice', pp. 26–32.

129 Yan, *Inertia of History*, pp. 183–90.

130 Chen Zheng, 'China Debates the Non-Interference Principle', *Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol. 9, No. 3 (2016), pp. 349–74.

notions are either sourced from China's classical tradition or introduced from international academia. In the first case, Yan Xuetong proposes his theory, namely 'moral realism', which highlights the importance of fulfilling international responsibilities as the core of the *wangdao* strategy. He also bridges international responsibility with the principles of international norms to maintain stability in the international order.<sup>131</sup> In addition, scholars observe a specific topic of international responsibility which relates to China's global roles, and which aims to evaluate the pros and cons of this notion and provide Chinese scholars with relevant policy implications; scholars such as Ruan Zongze, Liu Tiewa and Zhang Haibin, and Chen Zhen focus on R2P, analysing the characteristics of China's discourse and China's internal debates in this regard, and provide some innovative proposals, like Ruan Zongze's 'Responsible Protection', and framing techniques as China's alternative or response to this issue.<sup>132</sup> Other concepts like 'Sovereignty as Responsibility' have also been introduced and adjusted according to China's typical conditions, reflecting Chinese academics' attempts to eradicate such dogmatic principles as sovereignty to keep up with international trends.<sup>133</sup>

In summary, the advocating camp mostly regards China's fulfilment of international responsibility as a strategic instrument for China to participate in international society and increase its power, as well as interests, on the international stage. What Chinese scholars in this camp try to advocate contains the strategic value of assuming international responsibilities, the necessity of participation in global community and providing the China plan, and China's updated viewpoints on sovereignty-related notions and principles. According to the scholars in this camp, international responsibility can spread and be applied to other areas, with an emphasis on political influence, thus expanding China's overseas interests and global performance, and facilitating China's global strategy for overcoming current obstacles, etc. However, the advocating group's support for China's increased share in international responsibilities is not without conditions. According to Shi Yinhong, China's fulfilment of international responsibility holds only when it '(1) will not violate its vital interests and surpass its capability; (2) results from equal consultation between China and the external world, rather than from any "dictation" or coercion by the latter; and (3) largely matches China's reasonable international rights and privileges'.<sup>134</sup> In a similar vein, Yan Xuetong also sets relevant conditions for assuming international responsibilities, and keeps a wary

131 Yan Xuetong, *Shijie quanli de zhuanji: zhengzhi lingdao yu zhanlve jingzheng* (*The Transition of World Power: Political Leadership and Strategic Competition*) (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2015), pp. 3, 236.

132 Chen Zheng and Zhu Yuxuan, 'Zhongguo zhengfu yu baohu de zeren bianlun: jiyu anlihui xiangguan bianlun fayuan de fenxi' ('The Chinese Government and the Debate on Responsibility to Protect: An Analysis Based on UN Security Council Proceedings'), *Dangdai yatai* (*Journal of Contemporary Asia-Pacific Studies*), No. 5 (2015), pp. 130–55; Ruan Zongze, 'Fuzeren de baohu: jianli geng anquan de shijie' ('Responsible Protection: Building a Safer World'), *Guoji wenti yanjiu* (*China International Studies*), No. 3 (2012), pp. 9–22; Liu and Zhang, 'Debates in China About the Responsibility to Protect as a Developing International Norm', pp. 403–27.

133 Mao Weizhun and Bu Yongguang, 'Sovereignty as Responsibility: Thought Sources, Evolving Paths, and Theoretical Debates', *Journal of International Security Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (2015), pp. 95–119.

134 Shi, 'China, "Global Challenges" and the Complexities of International Cooperation', p. 95.

eye on the excessive burdens they entail, arguing that over-commitment would cause both the decline of great powers and the failure of rising powers. In particular, he argues that China should match the fulfilling of international responsibility with its own powers and positions in the international system.<sup>135</sup>

### Towards Divergent Convergence in Debating International Responsibility

This section analyses the three groups of Chinese scholars whose focus on international responsibility is in line with a continuum from negative to positive dimensions, demonstrating state-of-the-art studies concerning international responsibility in China over the last few decades, especially since the 1990s. The debate summary is shown in Table 2.

It is important to note that the international responsibility categories proposed by these three camps are mostly done so in the ideal sense, as any given scholar might cross two camps, depending on different issues and different periods. What the typological framework seeks to clarify is the intellectual roadmap on a specific issue, rather than labelling certain given scholars. Furthermore, 'international responsibility' is embedded in an existing structure of key indicators, including security, sovereignty, realpolitik interests, international image, and China's identities. As Alastair Iain Johnston has observed, the Chinese have to make multiple trade-offs between/among different dimensions.<sup>136</sup> In this vein, none of the Chinese IR scholars either totally refutes or absolutely accepts the notion of international responsibility. In other words, conditions matter. They make trade-offs according to their objective evaluations and academic orientation among different sets of tensions within the mentioned structure. Most importantly, China possesses diverse and conflictual identities,<sup>137</sup> which further diversify and complicate the viewpoints of Chinese scholars per international responsibility. This article attempts to apply a simplified logic to demonstrate the divergence of the different camps of scholars.

As a result, Chinese debates among the three camps regarding international responsibility show a seemingly contradictory characteristic: 'divergent convergence'. First, the referred terms of international responsibility in the Chinese debate are still diverse, but internally show a growingly positive meaning. Chinese scholars now finally accept the term 'China's responsibility', which before 2008 was a negative argument, and admit that China should actively take on relevant responsibilities in international affairs. While the averting scholars are adjusting their viewpoints to that of positive support, the advocating scholars are also reflecting on their opinions about avoiding the overheated activities of international responsibilities.

Secondly, China's international responsibility preference is becoming more positive, but the different terms imply the varied logics of Chinese scholars which connect with China's multiple identities. China's evolving preference can be regarded as a process from 'responsible state', to 'responsible power', to 'responsible stakeholder', and to general international

135 Yan, *The Transition of World Power*, pp. 239–40; Deng Yuan, 'Yan Xuetong: Zhengzhi lingdaoli gaodi jue ding Zhongguo jueqi chenggong' ('Yan Xuetong: The Level of Political Leadership Determines the Success or Failure of China's Rise'), *Guoji xianqu daobao* (*International Herald Leader*), 8–14 January, 2016, pp. 19–20; Yan Xuetong, 'Zhengzhi lingdao yu daguo jueqi anquan' ('Moral Realism and the Security Strategy for Rising China'), *Guoji anquan yanjiu* (*Journal of International Security Studies*), No. 4 (2016), pp. 9–10.

136 Johnston, *Social States*, p. 146.

137 Shambaugh, *China Goes Global*, pp. 35–36.

**Table 2.** Summary of China's Debates about International Responsibility

Averting	Key points	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Underline the morally accountable and blameable dimension of responsibility.</li> <li>2. Highly cautious about external critics of China's responsibility.</li> <li>3. Regard as a variant the 'China threat thesis' in line with US containment strategy.</li> <li>4. Fear of interrupting China's rise via the onerous burden of fulfilling international responsibilities.</li> </ol>
	Typical figures	Ma Zhengang, Lin Limin, Yuan Peng, Zhang Ruizhuang, and Zhang Shengjun
Accommodating	Key points	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Partly accept the notion of 'responsible stakeholder' with greater willingness to assume international responsibility.</li> <li>2. Cautiously deliberate the relations between power and responsibility for China.</li> <li>3. Set up defensive mechanisms for bearing international responsibility via solving internal problems.</li> <li>4. Narrow issues in concept operationalization of international responsibility.</li> </ol>
	Typical figures	Li Dongyan, Liu Hongsong, Liu Jianfei, Niu Jusheng, Ren Xiao, and Wu Bing
Advocating	Key points	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Focus on the strategic value of international responsibility.</li> <li>2. Argue for a necessary step towards participating in international society and a problem-solving approach in the world.</li> <li>3. Advocate new notions compared with traditional principles.</li> </ol>
	Typical figures	Pang Zhongying, Qin Yaqing, Shi Yinhong, Tang Shiping, Wang Yizhou, Xiao Huanrong, Yan Xuotong, Zhang Yunling, and Zhu Liqun

responsibility. For example, the use of 'responsible state' takes a neutral logic of China as a developing country in the world. When using 'responsible power', Chinese scholars actually highlight China's higher status and potential prestige with a latently nationalist position. The reference to 'responsible stakeholder' shows Chinese scholars' positioning of the state as a community member that has a significant internationalist or even globalist identity.

Thirdly, 'divergent convergence' also implies that China's comprehensive perception of international responsibility would take more issues, including more complicated ones, into account. As Table 1 shows, when the mentioned issues are included into the rhetoric of international responsibilities in a convergent manner, a problem emerges: fulfilling the international responsibility of different issues may result in incoherent policy consequences. For example, how might it be possible to fulfil international responsibility for North Korea and balance the targets between insisting upon nuclear non-proliferation and providing foreign aid?

Finally, a few new disputes can be derived from the general convergence of Chinese scholars' viewpoints on international responsibility, including whether or not to assume international leadership responsibility in face of the United States' possible retreat under the new administration, to what extent China should fulfil its international responsibilities

and which area takes priority, and how it is possible to effectively assume international responsibilities in a systematic manner. In particular, most of China's recent attention has focused on the debate about the extent to which China should shoulder international responsibilities in the new strategic situation. On the one hand, Chinese IR scholars have almost reached a basic consensus wherein China should be more prudent in assuming its international responsibility, given the huge investments and possible risks of China's current regional projects. On the other hand, both Chinese academia and policy researchers have to take note of the emerging 'Kindleberger Trap' discussion,<sup>138</sup> which might trigger new debates on international responsibility within a Sino-US power transition context.<sup>139</sup>

### Extension: From Preventing to Projecting?

In addition to the negative-positive dimension, the studies on international responsibility can also be discussed in a time dimension, that is, from preventing the burden of international responsibility of a previous time to projecting the fulfilment of international responsibility to gain a global presence—a convergent trend in Chinese IR studies on this topic. For example, some scholars and policy advisors in the averting camp have gradually changed their opinions on China's responsibility and international responsibility.<sup>140</sup> For instance, in 2015 Ma Zhengang demonstrated a positive attitude towards China's responsibility when participating in the resolution of international hot disputes;<sup>141</sup> Yuan Peng has emphasized the positive aspects of Zoellick's speech, asserting that China should shoulder some of the international responsibility burden with other countries.<sup>142</sup> Zhang Shengjun has even critically accepted the notion of 'sovereignty as responsibility' and tried to discuss this notion under the background of developing countries.<sup>143</sup>

138 Joseph S. Nye, 'The Kindleberger Trap', *Project Syndicate*, 9 January, 2017, <https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/trump-china-kindleberger-trap-by-joseph-s-nye-2017-01>.

139 Chinese have noticed this term and started to consider its policy implications; see Li Wei, 'How Can China Avoid the 'Kindleberger Trap?', 13 February, 2017, <http://www.chinausfocus.com/foreign-policy/how-can-china-avoid-kindleberger-trap>; Xinhua, 'FM: China, U.S. can avoid Thucydides Trap, Kindleberger Trap', *Xinhua*, 20 March, 2017, [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2017-03/20/c\\_136143525.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2017-03/20/c_136143525.htm).

140 It is a normal phenomenon in academic studies on the topic of international responsibility. Even for the scholars in the advocating group, they also demonstrate the changes of their perceptions of international responsibilities. For example, Yan Xuetong advocates China fulfilling international responsibilities, yet warns of the potential risks underlying the discourses of international responsibility defined by Western countries. See Yan, 'The Rise of China in Chinese Eyes', p. 37; Shambaugh, *China Goes Global*, p. 33.

141 Ma Zhengang, 'Zhongguo ying jinze jiji canyu jieju guoji redian' ('China Should Take Full Responsibility to Actively Resolve the International Hot Issues'), 8 May, 2015, <http://v.ifeng.com/news/opinion/201503/01af1774-3f71-4ff4-b04a-f3208c112ca8.shtml>.

142 Yuan, 'Common Responsibilities of "Stakeholders" '; Yuan Peng, 'Women weishenme tantao guoji zhixu bianqian' ('Why Should We Discuss the Transformation of International Order'), *Xiandai guoji guanxi (Contemporary International Relations)*, No. 7 (2014), pp. 1–3.

143 Zhang Shengjun, 'Kuaguo weixie shidai de "zeren zhuquan": yizhong fazhanzhong guojia de shijiao' ('Responsible Sovereignty in the Era of Transnational Threats: A Perspective of Developing Countries'), in Cai Tuo and Cao Xing, eds., *Gonggong quanli yu quanqi zhili*:

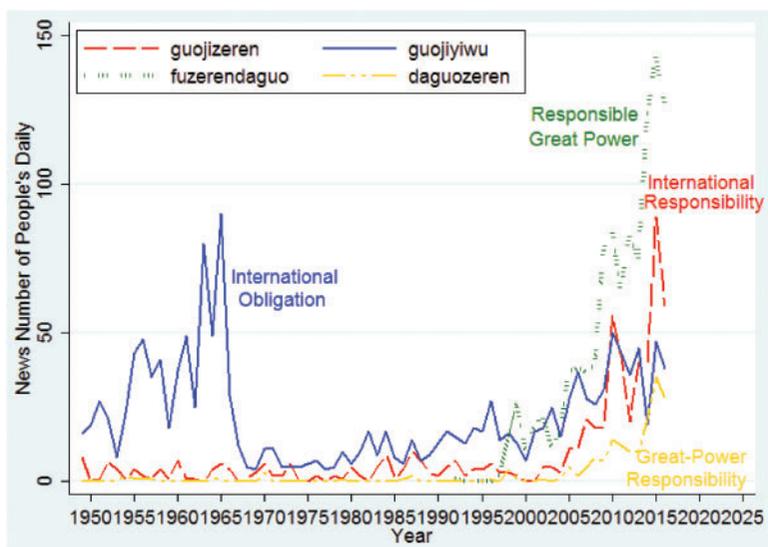


Fig. 4. Trends of Responsibility-related Terms in the *People's Daily*.

**Notes:** This figure disaggregates the concept of international responsibility into *guoji zeren*, *guoji yiwu*, *fuzeren daguo*, and *daguo dandang*, etc. and calculates the number of news and reports as the indicator.

From a long-run term, as demonstrated in Figure 4, the *People's Daily* has shown that the concept is generally amid a period of transference from preventing international responsibilities to projecting international responsibilities. Despite a high trend before the mid 1960s, China actually emphasized the international obligations and duties of other countries in a negative sense, while showing its willingness to take on international responsibilities for the socialist bloc. Thus, it embraced this term in a passive and obligated way. The 1990s saw the start of China's emphasis on the responsibility of a major power, and it actually became somewhat positive in this regard. Around 2010, China's focus on international responsibility surpassed that on *international obligations*, and the trend of all four key words rose, indicating China's full and positive acceptance of international responsibility.

Before 2005, there were few disputes on the issue of responsibility within the discipline of international relations in spite of some pioneering insights among China's foreign studies. Chinese scholars have framed the issue as an indispensable element of China's foreign strategies agenda, such as regional strategy. However, Zoellick's 'responsible stakeholder' argument intruded into China's academic discussion, fragmenting the previously calm status quo and triggering a series of debates. Scholars' viewpoints diverged because of their differing opinions on relevant variables such as Sino-US competitive relations, ideological struggles, and the structural tensions of international competition.

Later, Chinese scholars combined their own 'responsible great power' proposal with the external framework of 'responsible stakeholder', so soothing the anxiety of Chinese

*gonggong quanli de guoji xiangdu xueshu yantaohui lunwenji (Public Powers and Global Governance: Conference Proceedings of International Dimensions of Public Powers)* (Beijing: Zhongguo zhengfa daxue chubanshe, 2011), pp. 26–41.

scholars and policymakers. They also found that international responsibility could benefit China in spite of the possible costs. Moreover, as further involvement in international society is one of key tasks of Chinese foreign policies, this proposal actually provided some opportunities for China. Consequently, scholars no longer debated whether or not to fulfil international responsibility, but instead discussed possible approaches to, and the extent of bearing international responsibility.<sup>144</sup> Some scholars even proposed to build a system of international responsibility in the transitional period.<sup>145</sup>

With the rise of China on the global stage, Chinese scholars have found that actively promoting the extent to which the country bears international responsibility may bring more comprehensive benefits for China as a great power. At present, the concept of ‘international responsibility’ covers diverse issues, related to China’s historical task, global issues and challenges, international development, and global common security. According to the interpretation of State Councillor Yang Jiechi, ‘as a responsible great power, China should raise China’s Initiative, exert China’s roles, and conduct China’s contribution’, so expressing the aim to project international responsibility to construct the ‘interest community’ and ‘a community of common destiny’.<sup>146</sup>

In summary, China’s attention to international responsibility is not simply linear logic. Recalling the findings in Figure 2, Figure 5 indicates that China adopted a less isolated nationalism and preferred to undertake international responsibility within the socialist bloc before the split between China and the Soviet Union of the mid 1960s. After 1978, China gradually accepted the notion of international responsibility, and started to focus on this issue from an academic perspective. From ‘responsible great power’ after 1997 to ‘regional responsibility’ in the early 2000s, and to ‘responsible stakeholder’ in 2005, China’s experience and discourse on bearing international responsibility started to burgeon. Based on a 10-year study of international responsibility from 2006 to 2015, three camps with different opinions emerged, varying in accordance with different configurations composed of various academic orientations of nationalism–internationalism, and different degrees of fulfilling international responsibility.

However, since 2015 there have been certain new signs with regard to China’s consideration of fulfilling its international responsibilities which may impose certain restraints on Chinese policy advisors and scholars in this regard. For example, with the rise of large-scale academic studies and political discourses, along with China’s projecting behaviours concerning international responsibility under China’s grand strategic initiatives like the One Belt One Road (OBOR),<sup>147</sup> many scholars who were optimistic in the previous period have gradually shown a more cautious attitude to China’s overseas strategies, especially with

144 Zhu, *China’s Foreign Policy Debates*, p. 41.

145 Gao Fei, ‘Zhuanxingzhong de Zhongguo guojia dingwei yu guoji zeren tixi’ (‘China’s National Position and International Responsibility System in Transition’), *Guoji guancha* (*International Review*), No. 5 (2013), pp. 37–43.

146 Yang Jiechi, ‘Jiji chengdan guoji zeren he yiwu’ (‘Actively Bearing International Responsibilities and Obligations’), *Renmin ribao* (*People’s Daily*), 23 November, 2015, p. 6.

147 Meanwhile, many reports and studies warn of the potential risks of China’s OBOR initiatives, with regard to its huge investment, China’s currency reserves, and the political risks in target countries; see Don Weiland, ‘China Warned of Risk to Banks from One Belt, One Road Initiative’, *Financial Times*, 26 January, 2017, <https://www.ft.com/content/6076cf9a-e38e-11e6-8405-9e5580d6e5fb>; Daniel Blumenthal, ‘A Strategy for China’s Imperial

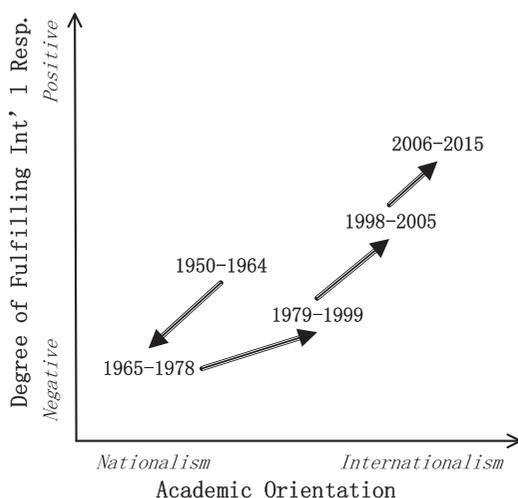


Fig. 5. Development of China's Attention to International Responsibility, 1950–2015.

regard to China's international responsibility, implying a newly emerging convergence on avoiding overheated attitudes to fulfilling international responsibilities. They worry that China's over-commitment may interrupt China's national rejuvenation and lead to the failure of China's rise. For example, taking China's slowing economic growth and severe international tension into account, Shi Yinhong, who once advocated responsibility as a key word in China's strategy, points out the risk of 'strategic overstretch (*zhanlve touzhi*)' in the new phase of China's international expansion, and particularly emphasizes the importance of 'prudence' in implementing OBOR.<sup>148</sup> Meanwhile, Yan Xuetong calculates the extent of China's provision of foreign aid, and finds that China is actually overburdened with international responsibility in this regard. Based on the rationale of Moral Realism, he criticizes the quixotic, extreme-leftist foreign conduct that exceeds national capacity as Grandiose (*haoda xigong*), rather than Striving for Achievements (*fenfa youwei*), and which may finally disrupt China's successful rise and threaten the security of China's rise.<sup>149</sup> In March 2017, a seminar on 'Strategic Considerations of Contemporary China's Foreign Policies' was hosted by Guangdong University of Foreign Studies; Yan Xuetong, as the keynote speaker, again expressed his worries about certain rash behaviour with regard to the onerous burden of international responsibilities, and most participants urged that China be more cautious and prudent in conducting China's foreign affairs and assuming international responsibilities. Coincidentally, some American experts have suggested that China is

Overstretch', *The American Interest*, 1 March, 2017, <http://www.the-american-interest.com/2017/03/01/a-strategy-for-chinas-imperial-overstretch/>.

148 Shi Yinhong, 'Yidai Yilu: qiyuan shenshen' ('Prudence Crucial to the One-Belt-One-Road Initiative'), *Shijie jingji yu zhengzhi* (*World Economics and Politics*), No. 7 (2015), pp. 151–54; Shi Yinhong, 'Chuantong Zhongguo jingyan yu dangjin Zhongguo shijian: zhanlve tiaozheng, zhanlve touzhi he weida fuxing wenti' ('China's Traditional Experience and China's Contemporary Practice: Strategic Adjustment, Strategic Overstretch, and Great Revival'), *Wajijiao pinglun* (*Foreign Affairs Review*), No. 6 (2015), pp. 62–65.

149 Yan, 'Moral Realism and the Security Strategy for Rising China', pp. 9–19.

moving towards the role of a 'post-responsible power' with hints of growing 'revisionism'.<sup>150</sup>

In addition to the constraining aspect of fulfilling international responsibility, Donald Trump's election as US president and his declaration on the US's global responsibilities per climate change and international stability provide a different impulse for Chinese scholars' viewpoints on international responsibility. Yan Xuetong notes the contradiction between the United States' shifting of responsibility and its enjoyment of world privileges, arguing that this will bring big uncertainties and conflicts, and will not 'stop the US economy from a relative decline'.<sup>151</sup> In this case, the US attitude actually pushes China towards taking on more responsibilities, or acting as a more responsible power. In face of the US withdrawal, the risk of global conflict, and China's own status, Li Wei confirms that China could play a greater role and bear more responsibility in specific areas when the United States denies its global leadership responsibility. He holds that China can selectively project international responsibilities in such areas as free trade, infrastructure, clean energy, etc., wherein China holds some comparative advantages.<sup>152</sup>

In sum, all these observations imply that China's attention to international responsibility is resulting in further adjustments to China's future policies and theoretical studies. In other words, China's international responsibility is generating new debates on these issues, such as to what extent the country should assume international responsibility in the new situation, whether or not it should assume leadership responsibility, and how the relevant areas (e.g. international security) in which to assume international responsibility should be selected.

### Why Diverge and Why Converge on Chinese Attention on International Responsibility?

Three divergent camps of scholars can be said to represent a comprehensive picture of Chinese viewpoints on international responsibility. In general, both dimensions, that is, academic orientation in a nationalism–internationalism continuum and the degree of assuming international responsibility, together determine the positional distribution of a specific group with regard to international responsibility in the typological matrix. The divergence among China's IR studies on international responsibility can be ascribed to the different preference configurations of different camps on nationalism and fulfilling international responsibility. Subsequently, the convergence of their viewpoints on this issue is triggered because their 'distance' on both dimensions is narrowed within the matrix.

On the one hand, there are at least five dynamics that can explain the divergence of China's attention on international responsibility. This set of variables can also explain why some realists, rather than liberalist and constructivist scholars, tend to advocate that China fulfils its international responsibility. First, the ideological differences between nationalism

150 Deng, 'China', pp. 117–18.

151 Shuhei Yamada, 'Interview: US-China Tensions will Continue under Trump— Tsinghua University's Yan Xuetong', *Nikkei Asian Review*, 21 November, 2016, <http://asia.nikkei.com/Politics-Economy/International-Relations/US-China-tensions-will-continue-under-Trump-Tsinghua-Univ.-s-Yan-Xuetong>.

152 Zhang Jian, Xue Li and Li Wei, 'Dangxia zhongguo youzhe zenyang de jihui' ('What Kinds of Opportunities Exist for China'), *Shijie zhishi (World Knowledge)*, No. 5 (2017), pp. 19–20.

and internationalism in China may determine the orientation of China's scholars, which affects the divergent viewpoints on international responsibilities among different groups. In fact, China has long had internationalist traditions and practices, while nationalist forces have also played great roles in affecting China's policies on the fulfilling of international responsibilities.<sup>153</sup> When a given scholar prefers an open nationalist or internationalist position, he or she will mostly likely support an active role for China in fulfilling its international responsibility. Shambaugh echoes this argument, indicating that globalists are prepared to bear greater responsibilities than the other schools.<sup>154</sup>

Next, the complex concept of responsibility and international responsibility is too multi-dimensional and internally conflictual to constitute a common stance. It covers issues across the economic, political, security, and environmental sectors, and concerns different attributes, like legality, justice, morality, conflicts, and changes, which inevitably lead to a conflicted situation, and lack a recognized operationalized standard.<sup>155</sup> As a result, Chinese scholars have been debating a series of concepts, such as international responsibility, China's international responsibility, responsible power, and bottom-line responsibility.<sup>156</sup> Taking Chinese conflicting identities into account would compound the already complex situation of concept divergence.

Thirdly, the gap between theory and policy is an important variable in explaining theoretical divergence. There have generally been certain inconsistencies between academia and policymakers on China's foreign policies.<sup>157</sup> Policy advisors at governmental think tanks usually take a conservative attitude towards fulfilling international responsibility compared with the more open mindset of university academics. Especially when the notion was proposed by the United States, the hostile and competitive relations between China and Western countries often put pressure on policy advisors to adopt a more cautious and alert stance. Moreover, China's foreign officials have typically incorporated the rationale of academic studies into national policy, so narrowing the gap between theory and policy, and reducing the divergence between different camps when debating international responsibility. For instance, when discussing the Recommendations for the 13th Five-Year Plan for Economic and Social Development, Yang Jiechi argued that three factors co-determine China's endeavours in assuming international responsibility and obligations, as proposed by academic faculty: the inherent meaning of China's typical great-power diplomacy, the expectation of international society, and the influence of China's diplomatic traditions.<sup>158</sup>

Fourthly, different theoretical IR branches also play a role in affecting Chinese scholars' choices of supporting or refusing international responsibility. In particular, the concept of interests is a key variable in deciding a given scholar's international responsibility preference. According to liberalists, if there exist common interests, China should prefer to fulfil international responsibility. Realists are more cautious about the relative gains, and aware

153 Xing and Zhan, 'Responsible Great Power', pp. 91–92; Wu, 'From Heavenly Responsibility to Responsible Great State', pp. 93–127.

154 Shambaugh, *China Goes Global*, pp. 34–35.

155 Li, 'On China's International Responsibility from the Perspective of the Identification and Characteristics of International Responsibility', pp. 52–57.

156 Zhu, *China's Foreign Policy Debates*, pp. 40–44.

157 Xu Jin, 'Debates in IR Academia and China's Policy Adjustments', *Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol. 9, No. 4 (2016), p. 460.

158 Yang, 'Actively Bearing International Responsibilities and Obligations', p. 6.

of the potential struggles among great powers. Moreover, the constructivists deliberate on China's identity, whether or not it is a responsible great power; if they recognize the identity, they will actively fulfil international responsibilities on the international stage. However, when different and conflictual identities of China emerge, the conflicts concomitant with fulfilling international responsibility will turn out as well.

Lastly, the potential uncertainties and risks of power transition and China's unbalanced development can trigger different interpretations and emphases among Chinese scholars. The multiple dimensions of both structural and national actors are further complicated by scholars pursuing different theoretical branches, leading to further debates on international responsibilities. Different camps have varied focal points, and therefore different evaluations of China's particular advantages and disadvantages in fulfilling its international responsibility. On this line, David Scott notes that there are ambiguities and tensions in the process of China's becoming responsible and having responsibilities, given the current international system'. International responsibility as one kind of 'power rise language' implies varied emphases and debates among scholars and policy advisors.<sup>159</sup>

On the other hand, China's perceptions of international responsibility are changing from controversy to convergence, with more proactive and positive approaches in general. The viewpoint convergence of Chinese IR scholars is based on three factors: China's grand strategy, Chinese world viewpoints, and China's international practice. First, China's policy direction guiding its fulfilling of international responsibilities gives impetus to the basic convergence of China's viewpoints on bearing or not bearing international responsibility. China has its typical connections between policy guidance and theoretical justifications within its own political-academic structure. Since 2005, the Chinese leadership has raised a series of guiding foreign principles, such as 'harmonious world' and 'community of common destiny', most of which could bridge relationships with international responsibility. The proactive stance exposed by China's leaders could, as mentioned, cause scholars who previously took a conservative approach to transfer their former standpoints. For example, some scholars in the averting camp finally transferred their viewpoints on international responsibility under the background of new national foreign guidance, such as advocating China's international undertaking guided by China's new 'community of common destiny' proposal.<sup>160</sup>

Secondly, convergence is also the result of the evolution of China's world viewpoint during its involvement in international society. In the last few decades, China has experienced in interactions between itself and international society a process ranging from stubborn opposition to limited involvement to comprehensive integration. It has also been a process where China has transformed from 'a victim of the strong' to a 'responsible power'.<sup>161</sup> The learning and socialization process has provided China with opportunities to participate in international institutions and accept prevailing international norms, such as being a

159 David Scott, 'China and the "Responsibilities" of a "Responsible" Power: The Uncertainties of Appropriate Power Rise Language', *Asia-Pacific Review*, Vol. 17, No. 1 (2010), pp. 72–96.

160 Lin Limin, 'Goujian renlei mingyun gongtong ti de Zhongguo dandang' ('Constructing China's Undertakings in the Community of Human Destiny'), *Jiefangjun bao (Liberation Army Daily)*, 21 January, 2017, p. 4.

161 Deng, 'China', p. 120.

'responsible stakeholder'.<sup>162</sup> China has finally accepted this norm, and prefers the identity of responsible stakeholder on the international stage, which is influential in the academic debate convergence from both the theoretical and policy perspectives.

In addition to ideational factors, recent practice, based on China's rising power, provides more sufficient capacity and also higher willingness, as well as confidence, for China as it chooses to fulfil its international responsibility. For years, China's responsibility activities in dealing with financial crises, contributions to battling climate change, and building new international institutions not only brought China real benefits, but also led to a greater global presence as a rising power with a growing international reputation. These cases are frequently cited in academic and policy discussions, implying a convergent trend. On the other hand, China's recent practice of fulfilling international responsibility (e.g. OBOR) exposes certain latent dangers and risks in conducting its assertive strategies, and which urge China's academia to take a more cautious and prudent posture on perceiving China's international responsibilities in a convergent manner.

In conclusion, this section explains the divergence of Chinese IR studies of international responsibility from a structural perspective, shedding light on the convergence of relevant studies through a processual approach. As regards the academic debate, nationalist-internationalist tensions, the conflictual concepts of international responsibility, the theory-policy difference, different theoretical branches, and China's unbalanced situation regarding power transition together create the divergence of China's viewpoints on international responsibility. Furthermore, the evolution of China's political guidance, worldview, and international practice in the last few decades has empowered China to become more confident when participating in international affairs, more open-minded when dealing with its own nationalism, and more assertive in its conduct of international issues, leading to a convergent trend in fulfilling international responsibility.

## Concluding Remarks and Policy Implications

The rise of 'international responsibility' has been a noticeable phenomenon in Chinese IR studies, especially since 2005, when Robert Zoellick catalysed the debate on this topic, activating China's existing non-salient focuses and traditions on international responsibility through a configuration of different dynamics. Most importantly, it reviews Chinese academic discussions on international responsibility since the end of 1980s. Based on a typological framework built by the academic orientation of nationalism and the responsibility-fulfilling degree, it discerns at least three groups of scholars who have different viewpoints on international responsibility from the negative to positive dimension and on the ideological orientation from isolation to openness in the sense of nationalism-internationalism, that is the averting camp, the accommodating camp, and the advocating camp.

In addition to the structural perspective, these camps mostly hold a time dimension from preventing international responsibility to projecting international responsibility according to both Chinese policy discourse and theoretical studies. The overall trend of China's academic studies in terms of international responsibility has transferred from

162 Zhu Liqun and Zhao Guangcheng, 'Zhongguo guoji guannian de bianhua yu gonggu: gongli yu qushi' ('The Change and Consolidation of China's International Ideas: The Dynamics and Trend'), *Waijiao pinglun* (*Foreign Affairs Review*), No. 1 (2008), pp. 18–26.

divergence to convergence, namely ‘divergent convergence’, showing that the debate on China’s fulfilling international responsibility is still ongoing rather than static. New political and academic dynamics in the Sino–US interactions, such as Trump’s ‘America first’ policies, excessive hints of China assuming responsibilities, Chinese scholars’ reflection, and American scholars’ proposed discourses (e.g. Kindleberger Trap), will mostly trigger new debates in China on fulfilling international responsibility in the coming years. A series of variables can explain the divergence of China’s discussions on this topic, including the conceptual attribute, theory–policy gap, disputes among theoretical branches, the nationalist–internationalist tensions, China’s own characteristics, and the era of power transition. The Chinese policy orientation of positive support for international responsibility, its evolving viewpoints on international affairs, and China’s capacity signal a willingness to converge different opinions on China’s selection with regard to fulfilling international responsibilities.

Based on the review above, two policy implications can be concluded within the context of China’s rise and global presence. On the one hand, fulfilling international responsibility is a crucial step. It is not a trap; China should follow the trend of fulfilling its responsibility and use it as a tool in international politics. The current question is not whether China should or should not undertake its international responsibility; it is rather how China may bear more international responsibilities, and how it may improve its effectiveness across different world issues. China’s responsibility and its problem-solving plans with regard to global challenges are essential for China’s status and advantages in the current international structure. In this vein, some scholars have focused specifically on China’s foreign assistance, and suggested that China should focus on the effectiveness and quality of China’s aid.<sup>163</sup>

On the other hand, China may enhance the significance and share of international responsibility through the assertiveness of its foreign policies, which can be labelled ‘responsible assertiveness’. The term ‘assertiveness’ is usually used by other countries or researchers to describe China’s foreign ambitions in the period of power transition.<sup>164</sup> Can responsibility be an effective response to the fear of a global leadership struggle?<sup>165</sup> Deng has indicated that a ‘responsible China’ would be a good weapon to fight the fear of China’s rise and possible revisionism.<sup>166</sup> According to Shaun Breslin, the ‘credentials’ through which a responsible power can act are a useful means to ensure China’s national needs on the global stage while China seeks ‘responsible change’ and keeps the global system stable.<sup>167</sup> As a result, projecting more international responsibilities and gaining more

163 Bai Yunzhen, ‘Yidai yilu changyi yu Zhongguo duiwai yuanzhu zhuanxing’, (‘The Belt and Road Initiative and the Transformation of Chinese Foreign Aid’), *Shijie jingji yu zhengzhi* (*World Economics and Politics*), No. 11 (2015), pp. 53–71.

164 Dingding Chen, Xiaoyu Pu and Alastair Iain Johnston, ‘Debating China’s Assertiveness’, *International Security*, Vol. 38, No. 3 (2014), pp. 176–83.

165 Chinese foreign minister Wang Yi declared that ‘[R]ather than talking about leadership, we should really be talking about responsibility’, see Xinhua, ‘Full Video: Foreign Minister Wang Yi Meets the Press’, [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2017-03/08/c\\_136112550.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2017-03/08/c_136112550.htm).

166 Deng, ‘China’, p. 163.

167 Shaun Breslin, ‘China’s Emerging Global Role’, p. 52; Shaun Breslin, ‘China and the Global Order: Signalling Threat or Friendship?’ *International Affairs*, Vol. 89, No. 3 (2013), p. 616.

international support from other countries can reduce the noises of other competitive powers and the worries of neighbouring countries, promote China's performance on the international stage, and provide new alternatives for China's peaceful development and global presence.

### **Acknowledgement**

This article was originally presented at the Griffith–Tsinghua Conference ‘Chinese Scholars Debate International Relations’ in Beijing on December 11–12, 2016. The author would like to offer thanks for the support from the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation [Grant No. 16-1512-150509-IPS] and thank Yan Xuetong, He Kai, Liu Feng, Li Wei, Zuo Xiyang, Xu Jin, and two anonymous reviewers for their useful comments.

## **Part III**

# **Scholarly Debates and Making Foreign Policy in China**



Article

# The Dominant Thinking Sets in Chinese Foreign Policy Research: A Criticism

Xu Jin<sup>†\*</sup> and Du Zheyuan<sup>‡</sup>

<sup>†</sup>Xu Jin is Senior Research Fellow at the Institute of World Economics and Politics, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences

<sup>‡</sup>Du Zheyuan is a Postgraduate Student at the Graduate School of Chinese Academy of Social Sciences

\*Corresponding author. Email: xuj@cass.org.cn

## Abstract

'Thinking sets' refer to particular aspects of knowledge, or ideas, which upon accumulation and dissemination are institutionalized as a means of understanding a phenomenon or actor, and which enable the understanding of its internal logic or the thinking which guides its behaviour, its content, and its expectations and preferences. Since the 1990s, a number of dominant thinking sets have emerged within Chinese foreign policy research circles, including: keeping a low profile, non-alignment, never taking the lead, China will not become a superpower, priority to Sino-US relations, and diplomacy serving economic development. For many years, these thinking sets helped our understanding of the objectives and trends of China's foreign policy. In more recent years, as Chinese foreign policy has adapted, it is now important to reflect upon and discuss the direction in which these thinking sets might evolve. In particular, how Chinese foreign policy analysts should understand the relationship between Deng Xiaoping's '28 character guidelines for foreign policy' and the spirit of the 2013 Working Conference on Neighbouring State Diplomacy and, more specifically, the relationship between 'keeping a low profile' and 'striving for achievement', will determine the ongoing relevance of these thinking sets.

Since the 1990s, because of the close interaction between the Chinese central government and the IR academia, a number of dominant 'thinking sets' have gradually become established in mainland Chinese foreign policy studies. Over the past two decades, these dominant thinking sets have been helpful, under certain conditions, for understanding China's policy objectives, actions, and trends. However, as China's foreign policy objectives and guiding principles are experiencing transformation, it is critical that we reflect on and discuss whether or not these 'thinking sets' indeed still facilitate accurate understanding and interpretation of China's foreign policy.

This article holds that an incident in the summer of 2010 involving the Japanese detainment of a Chinese trawler precipitated a dramatic shift in Chinese foreign policy. Over the five or more years since the incident, China has become more proactive, this change having culminated in the October 2013 convening of the Working Conference on Neighbouring State Diplomacy. At this conference, which all Standing Members of the Politburo attended, President Xi Jinping discussed the essential objectives of Chinese foreign policy over the coming five to ten years. They are: follow and strive to realize the 'twin hundred year goals', achieve the great Chinese rejuvenation, comprehensively develop relations with the periphery, consolidate friendly ties with neighbouring states, deepen mutually beneficial cooperation, and safeguard and utilize the period of strategic opportunity that China has in which to develop; defend state sovereignty, security and developmental interests; and strive to deepen friendly political relations, consolidate economic hubs, and deepen security cooperation and cultural ties with neighbouring states. President Xi went on to identify the principles that guide China's diplomacy towards its neighbouring states. These principles are persisting in building a good-neighbourly relationship and partnership with them, and insisting on the ideas of amity, sincerity, mutual benefit, and inclusiveness. President Xi Jinping summed up with the remarks that China should be more proactive in promoting diplomacy with its neighbours, should strive for a sound environment around China, and should make China's development more beneficial to neighbouring states for purposes of common development.<sup>1</sup>

This conference marks a key shift in the direction and guiding principles of Chinese foreign policy, and likely also signals comprehensive reform of Chinese diplomacy. At this historical juncture, Chinese scholars must now review the dominant 'thinking sets' that have guided Chinese foreign policy research for two decades. Although a few scholars have been critical of these 'thinking sets', their criticisms are sporadic and not systematic. We hope this article will trigger more and deeper reflections among Chinese IR scholars.

## The Thinking Sets

The so-called 'thinking sets' refer to particular aspects of knowledge or ideas which upon accumulation and dissemination are institutionalized as a means of understanding a certain phenomenon or actor, and which enable understanding of the internal logic or principles guiding that phenomenon or actor's behaviour, and associated expectations or preferences. Thinking sets emerge when existing knowledge and ideas are transformed into a stable modality or path, and when these modalities or paths can be used to predictably understand an actor's assessment of the present and future. Thinking sets might be thought of as cognitive structures that provide a means of positioning knowledge and values within a system, and as a means of achieving cognitive consistency.

A thinking set has the following properties: (i) stability. Once a thinking set has formed, it will not undergo any obvious change over a significant period of time; (ii) systemic,

1 'Xi Jinping zai zhoubian waijiao gongzuo zuotanhui shang fabiao zhongyao jianghua' ('Important Speech by Xi Jinping at the Working Conference on Neighbouring States Diplomacy'), *Renmin ribao (People's Daily)*, 26 October, 2013. Although its name implies that the conference focused on China's peripheral diplomacy, if we judge from the scale of the conference and the essence of Xi Jinping's speech it actually set the tone for China's foreign relations policy over the next five to ten years.

self-regulating, and predictable. Thinking sets represent a cognitive framework for understanding a particular phenomenon or actor. In the event that this framework is exposed to an outside stimulus, it will always be able to offer a predictable assessment and response that is self-regulated by the knowledge and values embedded in that cognitive framework. Take, for example, the 1960 U-2 Incident during the Cold War. Regardless of how the Kennedy Administration attempted to explain the situation, Khrushchev would always interpret it as a strategic challenge against the Soviet Union. (iii) Closed and conservative. As a cognitive structure, a thinking set has rigid boundaries and is resistant to new knowledge or norms. Thinking sets have a natural proclivity towards prevailing knowledge and values. For example, former US Secretary of State John Foster Dulles saw the Soviet Union as an evil state, and consequently associated all information about the USSR or any of its actions with evil-doing; even when the Soviet Union expressed a desire to cooperate, he would not hesitate to distort the facts.<sup>2</sup>

Thinking sets have both advantages and disadvantages. On the positive side, they help people understand a phenomenon over a period of time, enhance cognitive efficiency, help build consensus within a community, and are a key means through which new ideas or new values emerge. On the negative side, thinking sets are not adaptable across space and time, their internal knowledge and logic structures are not amenable to change, and when faced with new situations or conditions they often produce incorrect judgments or assessments, thereby constituting a barrier to norm or policy innovation.

This essay will research the dominant 'thinking sets' of a group of people. Everyone has his (her) own thinking set. When the majority of people in a group hold the same thinking set, we can say the thinking set is a dominant one. Someone will think and behave strictly according to the dominant thinking sets, while somebody else will not. Every dominant thinking set has its critics, who are the group's minorities. The debate between proponents and opponents helps us to reconsider whether or not the thinking sets match and reflect the realities. When the environment is changing, a person will gradually (but not necessarily) weaken his adherence to the old thinking set, and eventually establish a new one. When the majority of a group are proponents of a newly established thinking set, this is the dominant one. Thus, the change of dominant thinking sets depends on two paths: the change of personal thinking set and the generation change.

There are at least two opposite arguments to any question in human history. Only when the majority of a group holds some knowledge or perceptions can we judge whether or not there are dominant thinking sets in the group. For example, if Professor John J. Mearsheimer insists on his judgment that the Sino-American relationship cannot avoid the tragedy of great power politics, this is his personal thinking set. If the majority of American IR scholars believe the tragedy cannot be avoided, this is the dominant thinking set in the American IR academia.

## **The Dominant Thinking Sets in Chinese Foreign Policy Studies**

The following are the dominant thinking sets pervasive in Chinese foreign policy studies: Keeping a low profile (KLP); Non-alignment; Never taking the lead; China will not become

2 Ole R. Holsti, 'The Belief System and National Images: A Case Study', *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 6, No. 3 (1962), pp. 244–52.

a superpower; Priority to Sino-US relations; and Diplomacy serving economic development.

What was the source of these thinking sets? In the 1980s and early 1990s, faced with tremendous diplomatic challenges and great uncertainties around the Post-Cold War era, Deng Xiaoping described the general principles of China's diplomacy with 28 Chinese characters: observe coolly (*lengjing guancha*), hold our line (*wenzhu zhenjiao*), deal calmly (*chenzhuo yingdui*), keep a low profile (*taoguang yanghui*), guard weaknesses (*shanyu shouzhuo*), never take the lead (*juebu dangtou*), and play a role (*yousuo zuowei*).<sup>3</sup> These principles were applied to help China weather the storms that the political transformation of Eastern Europe and collapse of the Soviet Union produced. They safeguarded Chinese sovereignty in the face of pressures and sanctions from the West, and created a new situation for China's diplomacy. It is argued herein that Deng's '28 Character Guidelines' are either direct or indirect sources of the thinking sets discussed below. However, the authors argue that these guidelines need to be carefully reviewed to determine whether they should be sustained, adjusted, weakened, or outright abandoned in an updated policy environment.

### Keeping a Low Profile

Keeping a low profile and playing a certain role are undoubtedly the primary principles of China's foreign policy since 1989. At the 2009 Diplomatic Envoy's Meeting, Chinese President Hu Jintao adjusted this guidance slightly to 'Continue to keep a low profile and positively play a certain role'.<sup>4</sup> Nonetheless, keeping a low profile (KLP) is a mainstream mode of thinking in Chinese foreign policy circles. But among the supporters of KLP, there are two camps with slightly different stands on how to insist on the principle.

Two leading figures of the first camp, which voices firm support for the continued application of the principle, are former Chinese Ambassador to France Wu Jianmin and Director of the China Institute for International Studies Qu Xing. Ambassador Wu has argued on many occasions that China must continue to 'keeping a low profile and playing a certain role' over the long term. In a report delivered on September 27, 2005, Wu Jianmin pointed out that 'some people note that the era of China "keeping a low profile" has passed. Such a statement is not at all consistent with China's policies. "Keeping a low profile and playing a certain role" was proposed by Deng Xiaoping on the basis of the international context, and is a very wise policy, which the Chinese government will definitely not change over the short term'.<sup>5</sup> On May 31, 2009 in an interview with China News Service, Wu Jianmin

3 Qian Qichen: 'Shenru xuexi Deng Xiaoping waijiao sixiang, jinyibu zuohao xin shiqi de waijiao gongzuo' ('Thoroughly Study Deng Xiaoping's Foreign Policy Thinking, Practice Diplomacy Fit for a New Era') in Wang Taiping, ed., *Deng Xiaoping waijiao sixiang yanjiu lunwenji* (A Compilation of Essays on Deng Xiaoping's Theory of Diplomacy)(Beijing: Shijie zhishi chubanshe, 1996), pp. 6-7.

4 'Hu Jintao deng zhongyang lingdao chuxi dishiyici zhuwai shijie huiyi' ('Hu Jintao and other Central Government Leaders Attend the 11<sup>th</sup> Meeting of Diplomatic Envoys'), 20 July, 2009, [http://news.xinhuanet.com/politics/2009-07/20/content\\_11740850.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/politics/2009-07/20/content_11740850.htm).

5 'Wu Jianmin: Zhongguo yao changqi jianchi taoguang yanghui yousuo zuowei fangzhen' ('China Should Continue to Follow the Principle of "Keep a Low Profile and Play a Certain Role" Over the Long Term'), 24 July, 2005, <http://www.chinanews.com/news/2005/2005-09-27/8/631955.shtml>.

noted that ‘China’s rise still has a long way to go, and it is just beginning to see some achievements; as such Deng Xiaoping’s thinking on “keeping a low profile and playing a certain role” will continue to apply for at least one hundred years’. In early January of 2014, in an interview with *Southern Metropolis*, Wu Jianmin expressed once again his support for the principle, noting that in practice it can help China reduce many obstacles. Ambassador Wu went on to express his view that opponents of keeping a low profile are misguided due to a weak state mentality. In his view, such a mentality prevails when anxiety over the country’s weakness and fears of being looked down upon generate anxious desire to express strength.<sup>6</sup> On 20 July, in a television debate with retired Major General Luo Yuan, a noted hardliner, Wu Jianmin re-emphasized that ‘China’s security environment is generally positive, with peace and development still the themes of the time. There is no coordinated attempt on the part of the West to contain China, and as such there is no need to change the basic foreign policy principle of “keeping a low profile”. At the same time, we should not overemphasise America’s re-balancing strategy’.<sup>7</sup>

While Ambassador Wu maintains and analyses the keeping a low profile principle from the perspective of an accomplished diplomat, Director Qu Xing, on behalf of the Chinese foreign policy analysts, offers a more systematic and academically polished argument in favour of the policy. As early as 2001, Qu Xing wrote an article analysing the importance of China maintaining the KLP policy:

‘Keeping a low profile’ comes from the Chinese historical allegory, and is deeply rooted in traditional Chinese culture and history. Nonetheless, it is not sufficient to use a historical allegory to explain China’s application of the principle of ‘keeping a low profile’ since the 1990s. The key to understanding the policy is to understand the types of ‘limelight’ that China should ‘avoid’, and what types of ‘claws’ it is developing, and to use this to determine the applicability of the ‘keeping a low profile’ policy in China’s diplomatic practice. Based on the historical context of Deng Xiaoping’s speech, we can see clearly that the ‘limelight’ to ‘avoid’ was the ideology, i.e. that China should not try to demonstrate through Marxist discourses the prospects, hopes and superiority of socialism, but that it should let the experience of Chinese people speak for itself; the ‘claws’ that ‘keeping a low profile’ seek to strengthen are the rise and development of socialist China; i.e., while other states are embroiled in chaos, China should plan on realising its ‘first doubling of capacity’; and by the middle of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, China should have basically achieved modernisation.<sup>8</sup>

Director Qu argues that at the beginning of the 21st century, there is no need for China to steer away from the ‘keeping a low profile and playing a certain role’ principle, as the ‘global imbalance in power has not been corrected, with Western states continuing to enjoy positions of power, while China remains relatively weak. Although many issues have come up in China-US relations, China has not reached the point of facing any threat of foreign

6 ‘Wu Jianmin: Xi zhuxi tichu de “yiliguang” henyong zhenduixing’ (‘The Concept of “Justice and Benefit” Proposed by President Xi Has a Specific Target’), 2 January, 2014, [http://paper.nandu.com/nis/201401/02/161329\\_2.html](http://paper.nandu.com/nis/201401/02/161329_2.html).

7 ‘Chongtu yu moca huifou chengwei zhongguo waijiao “Xing Changtai”’ (‘Will Conflicts and Tensions Become the “New Normal” for Chinese Diplomacy?’), 20 July, 2014, <http://v.ifeng.com/news/opinion/2014007/01a470a7-20f4-4669-af07-180ab24210d0.shtml>.

8 Qu Xing, ‘Jianchi taoguang yanghui, yousuo zuowei de waijiao zhanlue’ (‘Continue to Follow the Foreign Policy Strategy of Keeping a Low Profile and Playing a Certain Role’), *Zhongguo renmin daxue xuebao* (Journal of Renmin University of China), No. 5 (2001), p. 14.

invasion, and peace and prosperity continue to be the key themes of the times. This means that China continues to enjoy ample opportunities for development. In other words, the background context under which China opted for the principle of “keeping a low profile and playing a certain role” is unchanged.<sup>9</sup>

Roughly a decade later, Qu Xing continued to assert a similar argument. At the annual *Global Times* gala on December 17, 2011, Qu Xing pointed out once again that there are three key Chinese characters in the eight character saying ‘keeping a low profile, play a certain role’. They are: ‘limelight’, ‘claws’, and ‘role’.

Limelight refers to ideology; China should not depend on Marxist ideology in determining its international strategy and foreign relations. Regardless of how other states transform their political or economic systems, China should determine its foreign policy based on the five principles of peaceful coexistence and on whether or not the public of a state in question accepts these principles – this is called “avoiding limelight”. Claws refer to economic development, while role refers to a role in building a new order of international politics. Based on these three characters, we can see the answer as to what is meant by “keeping a low profile”, and whether or not we should continue this policy.<sup>10</sup>

That President Xi Jinping did not mention the ‘keeping a low profile, playing a certain role’ principle at the Working Conference on Neighbouring State Diplomacy convened in October of 2013 is significant. Instead Xi used the phrase ‘strive to achieve’. Qu Xing still guards his point of view, arguing that there is no contradiction between ‘keeping a low profile’ and ‘striving to achieve’ and that the former principle is not challenged by the latter.<sup>11</sup>

The second camp, of which Professor Wang Jisi of the School of International Studies at Peking University is a leading figure, advocates adjustment of the application principle. In 2011, Professor Wang Jisi cited in his article the significant changes in the international context, including the economic downturn of Western countries and rise of new powers. He went on to argue that this might not necessarily result in an improvement to the international environment China faces. Although China’s national power has greatly increased over the past twenty years, the international pressures it faces have not eased. In other words, China has discovered that ‘getting more powerful means facing more serious challenges’. Vis-à-vis a context of increasing international challenges, ‘keeping a low profile, playing a certain role’, continues to have profound practical significance as a strategic principle, and must not be abandoned. Maintaining the principles should nevertheless not mean a slavish adherence to old practices. If we are not able to supplement and adjust the principle to respond to the internal and external change over the past two decades, it will become very difficult to maintain its spirit. ‘Play a certain role’ in foreign affairs is always a correct practice for China, but in the absence of ‘keeping a low profile’, the slogan becomes meaningless. As such, we need to rethink the meaning and practical implications of

9 *Ibid.*, p. 16.

10 ‘Zhuanjia jibian taoguang yanghui: heping jueqi bupaichu wuli fanji qingfan’ (‘Scholars Vigorously Debate Keeping a Low Profile: Peaceful Rise Does not Exclude Use of Force to Counter an Offensive Attack’), 17 December, 2011, <http://china.huanqiu.com/roll/2011-12/2273974.html>.

11 Qu Xing, ‘Linian gengxin wei Zhongguo waijiao zhuru xin huoli’ (‘Updated Theories Provide Chinese Diplomacy with New Energy’), *Shijie zhishi* (World Affairs), No. 24 (2013), p. 27.

'keeping a low profile'.<sup>12</sup> In this vein, Wang Jisi makes two suggestions: first, the 'keeping a low profile, playing a certain role' principle should not be a public policy declaration, but its spirit might instead be absorbed by notions of modesty and prudence; second, we should more accurately understand and describe China's long-term strategic objectives and development directions. Specifically, China's strategic objective should not focus on surpassing the United States, but on self enhancement.<sup>13</sup>

Senior fellow at China Institutes for Contemporary International Relations Wang Zaibang holds a similar point of view. He argues that 'keeping a low profile, playing a certain role' is not a practical mandate that can become outmoded or cease to apply, but a philosophical principle and political strategy that must be followed. China, therefore, must creatively maintain the basic state policy by responding to objective changes in the international environment. Specifically, 'keeping a low profile, playing a certain role' must be placed within the theoretical framework of peaceful development and a harmonious world, and used objectively and realistically to safeguard our national interests. By doing so, China can avoid the two extremes of either blindly upholding outdated principles or blindly adopting change. China must treat the relationship between keeping a low profile and playing a certain role dialectically, and ensure that ideological principles are maintained but not at the cost of policy flexibility.<sup>14</sup>

Professor Qin Yaqing, President of China Foreign Affairs University, considers the problem from the perspective of traditional Chinese thinking on the doctrine of the mean. Professor Qin argues that Chinese diplomacy never features dramatic policy changes, and that we might more appropriately use the idiom 'continuity through change' to describe the development of China's foreign policy. In general, China's diplomatic goals, strategy design, and its main strategic policies do not change; what has changed is that we now accord higher priority to our core national interests (national security, sovereignty, and economic development).<sup>15</sup>

Wang Jisi, Wang Zaibang, and Qin Yaqing all argue that 'keeping a low profile' is a basic framework that is not meant to be abandoned. In their view, keeping a low profile is like a birdcage, and playing a certain role is like the bird inside the cage. We might potentially expand the size of the cage to give the bird more space, but we must not allow the bird to fly out of the cage.

Regarding the relationship between 'keeping a low profile' and 'play a certain role', Major General Luo Yuan, Professor Shi Yinhong of China Renmin University, and the authors of this article maintain a slightly different point of view—that the two phrases operate in parallel. Luo Yuan notes that 'keeping a low profile' is a tactic, and that it must be combined with 'playing a certain role' in order to be called a strategy. Think about our national military strategy: active defence strategy. If we drop the word 'active', 'defence strategy'

12 Wang Jisi, 'Zhongguo de guoji dingwei wenti yu "taoguang yanghui, yousuo zuowei" de zhanlue sixiang' ('The Question of China's International Position and the Strategic Thinking of "Keeping a Low Profile, Playing a Certain Role"'), *Guoji wenti yanjiu (China International Studies)*, No. 2 (2011), p. 7.

13 *Ibid.*, p. 9.

14 Wang Zaibang, 'Lun chuangzaoxing jianchi taoguang yanghui, yousuo zuowei' ('On Creatively Continuing the Principle of Keeping a Low Profile, Playing a Certain Role'), *Xiandai guoji guanxi (Contemporary International Relations)*, No. S1 (2010), pp. 48, 50, 52.

15 Qin Yaqing, 'Continuity through Change: Background Knowledge and China's International Strategy', *Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol. 7, No. 3 (2014), pp. 285–314.

ceases to have any specific meaning. In Luo Yuan's view, both 'keeping a low profile' and 'playing a certain role' are of service in safeguarding China's core national interests, and KLP does not mean that the government should forget national security problems.<sup>16</sup>

In a 2010 interview with *South Reviews*, Shi Yinhong pointed out that keeping a low profile is not a doctrine but only a transitional strategy, and that it cannot apply for one hundred years. It is hence critical that China's foreign policymakers consider how to apply the principle on a case-by-case basis. China exercises modesty and caution at all times, but this does not imply that it must always keep a low profile. Although it is still important for China to maintain a low profile at times, the necessity to do so is far less frequent than in the past. On the whole, China must play a certain role more frequently. This is a trend, but one that in no way contradicts keeping a low profile.<sup>17</sup>

In an article published in 2013, Xu Jin, one of the authors of this article, argued that while keeping a low profile and playing a role appear to be two sides of the same coin, the relationship between the two is not so simple. In fact, there exists a dynamic relationship between them whereby China often needs to keep a low profile while at the same positively playing a certain role. Although it is becoming more difficult for China to keep a low profile, based on China's current capacities and the international pressures that it faces, it cannot simply abandon this principle. Even the United States, despite being the world's sole superpower, has to keep a low profile in certain international affairs.<sup>18</sup>

### Non-alignment

Non-alignment is a core foreign policy principle established during the Deng Xiaoping era. It is a corollary to the KLP principle, in that a state that is keeping a low profile should avoid military alliances with other states to ensure that it does not become embroiled in a war or armed conflict. During Deng's time, this was indeed a key foreign policy innovation, as in human history alliances had been fundamental elements of political struggles. Until Deng Xiaoping's time, China had never abandoned alliance policy, and it is indeed impossible to identify any major power in modern history that has renounced it. Over the past thirty years, China has embraced and strictly applied the non-alignment principle at all levels. Chinese diplomats often refer to alliance policy and Cold War mentality in the same breath, both being the objects of routine criticism. For example, China's *White Paper on Peaceful Development* states that the Cold War mentality and contentious confrontations among alliances should be abandoned, and that China will uphold common security through multilateral cooperation, so coordinately preventing conflict and war. The White Paper also restates China's opposition to alliance policy: 'Develop friendly relations with all states on the basis of the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, and do not make alliances with any state or group of states.'<sup>19</sup>

16 'Scholars Vigorously Debate Keeping a Low Profile'.

17 'Dui taoguang yanghui yao juti fenxi' ('Applying the Principle of keeping a Low Profile on the Case-by-case Basis'), *Nanfeng chuang* (*South Reviews*), No. 22 (2010), pp. 35–36.

18 Xu Jin, 'Zai taoguang yanghui he yousuo zuowei zhijian: Zhongguo zai baozhang guoji anquan zhong de zuoyong' ('Between Keeping a Low Profile and Playing a Certain Role: China's Role in Guaranteeing International Security'), *Guoji anquan yanjiu* (*Journal of International Security Studies*), No. 4 (2013), p. 100.

19 "'Zhongguo de heping fazhan" baipishu' ('"China's Peaceful Development" White Paper'), 6 September, 2011, <http://politics.people.com.cn/GB/1026/15598626.html>.

Chinese IR scholars and foreign policy analysts have long seen this strategy as sacred, and it has received majority support from academia. Professor Wang Cungang of Tianjin Normal University considers China's continued adherence to its policy of non-alignment from the perspective of history, pragmatism, and the consequences of alliances. He holds that non-alignment is a fundamental principle and significant characteristic of contemporary Chinese diplomacy, and that it plays a critical role in diplomatic practice. Taking into consideration the historical lessons since 1949, the current international situation, and China's future, abandoning the principle is not feasible, and making any alliance is impractical. That China might do so is either wishful thinking or a pure logic deduction. Even if China were to abandon the principle, the most likely consequence would be a surge in suspicions and in status quo power enmity, especially from the United States, which would worsen China's external environment, which is what China sought to avoid through the non-alignment policy in the first place.<sup>20</sup>

Dr Ling Shengli of the China University of Foreign Affairs analyses the appropriateness of China's opposition to alliance from the standpoint of the diminishing effectiveness of military alliances in the aftermath of the Cold War. He points out that China treats alliance as an outdated strategy. Although alliance served a military purpose in the past, the non-alignment policy, under the current international context, functions to ensure national security and maintain a stable and peaceful external environment. The effectiveness of military alliances has dwindled; military alliances are not capable of responding to diverse security threats because states now exist in an environment characterized by high interdependence. China continues to maintain its proactive defence strategy, which calls for enhancing security through the new security concept, building a hospitable environment within a multipolar international situation, and safeguarding state sovereignty. As this follows from the needs of its national interests, according to this logic, China should not adopt an alliance strategy.<sup>21</sup>

Xu Guangyu, council member of the China Arms Control and Disarmament Association, assesses the necessity of China's persisting in non-alignment policy through cost-benefit analysis. In his view, all alliances come with costs, and it is critical that the drawbacks of alliances are carefully considered, especially during times of peace. Weak states that ally with a great power are often stuck in an unautonomous position. Why did so many states in modern history seek self-autonomy and refuse to join alliances? A key reason is that refusing to ally with great powers expands one's freedom of policy choice, making it easier to maintain independence and autonomy within a complex, constantly changing international environment and to exert all-dimensional diplomacy. It offers states flexibility and space to take strategic steps forwards or backwards, and prevents states from having to worry about different opinions among allies, or being drawn unwillingly or passively into difficult situations because of alliance obligations. If China abandons the non-alignment policy, it may 'be forced to be a hegemon', or 'be forced to take the lead', which would entail many new burdens and costs.

- 20 Wang Cungang, 'Lun Zhongguo wajiao tiaozheng: jiyu jingji fazhan fangshi zhuanbian de shijiao' ('On China's Diplomatic Adjustments: A View Based on the Transformation of Economic Model'), *Shijie jingji yu zhengzhi (World Economics and Politics)*, No. 11 (2012), p. 131.
- 21 Ling Shengli, 'Zhongguo weishenme bu jiemeng' ('Why Doesn't China Form Alliances?'), *Wajiao pinglun (Foreign Affairs Review)*, No. 3 (2013), pp. 29–30.

Even if China were to form an alliance with a peer power, it would likely backfire and incur high costs for both members.<sup>22</sup>

In recent years, the non-alignment principle has drawn criticism from a small number of foreign policy scholars, and its sacrosanct status shows signs of cracking. These critics demand that China soften its non-alignment policy, arguing that, given changes in the international situation and in China's capabilities, there is no need for its strict application. Associate professor Sun Degang of the Shanghai Foreign Studies University asserts that China should find a middle way between alliance and strategic partnership, or adopt a quasi-alliance strategy. The latter strategy refers to utilizing sub-level security management frameworks for security cooperation or coordination—a grey area between alliance and neutrality. The benefits of a quasi-alliance strategy are that it involves not conflict but cooperation, and makes friends rather than foes.<sup>23</sup> In a multipolar world, China should attempt to engage in 'Three Pronged Alliance Diplomacy' (through multilateral organizations, emerging modes of cooperation, and traditional friendships).<sup>24</sup>

Wang Haiyun, a senior advisor at the China Institute for International Strategic Studies, is also in favour of China's replacing non-alignment policy with 'quasi-alliance strategy'. Wang argues that, in the face of continuously escalating hostility from the United States, should China continue its policy of non-alignment the United States will inevitably adopt a more reckless strategy to contain China, so further damaging China's security environment and development space, or even placing China in potential danger of war or of being drawn into a large-scale conflict. However, a sudden embrace of alliance strategy is not feasible. What is needed is a gradual strategic shift from the non-alignment policy to an alliance strategy.<sup>25</sup>

Associate Professor Yin Jiwu of the Beijing Foreign Studies University argues for the concept of 'weak alliances' based on political and economic cooperation, in favour of the concept of 'hard alliances' associated with military partnership. Yin holds that the risk of war among great powers has greatly diminished in the present international situation, and that although the value of military alliances has not been entirely lost, it is not possible to count on assistance from 'allies'; instead it is necessary to make preparations by internal balancing. At the same time, the content of alliances must be expanded to focus more on political-economic aspects, while gradually shifting away from the traditional military style 'hard alliances' as characterized by the Cold War period. 'Hard alliances' are simply too dangerous, while 'soft alliances' are flexible, and focus on protecting national interests rather than providing military assistance.<sup>26</sup>

22 Xu Guangyu, 'Fangqi bu jiemeng Zhongguo huo "bei chengba" taoguang yanghui buguoshi' ('Abandoning Keeping a Low Profile Could Cause China to be a Hegemon, thus the Principle is not Outdated'), *Huanqiu shibao* (*Global Times*), 8 June, 2010.

23 Sun Degang, 'Lun "zhun" lianmeng zhanlue' ('On a Quasi Alliance Strategy'), *Shijie jingji yu zhengzhi* (*World Economics and Politics*), No. 2 (2011), p. 55.

24 Sun Degang, 'Lun xin shiqi Zhongguo de "zhun" lianmeng waijiao' ('On China's "Quasi" Alliance Diplomacy in a New Era'), *Shijie jingji yu zhengzhi* (*World Economics and Politics*), No. 3 (2012), p. 57.

25 Wang Haiyun, 'Ruhe pojie mei duiwo zhanlue weidu bian "bu jiemeng" wei "zhun Jiemeng"' ('How to Break America's Containment of China? From "Non-alignment" to "Quasi Alliance"'), 11 March, 2012, [http://news.xinhuanet.com/world/2012-03/11/c\\_122815157.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/world/2012-03/11/c_122815157.htm).

26 Yin Jiwu, 'Zhongguo xuyao shenmeyang de lianmeng waijiao' ('What Type of Alliance Strategy does China Need?'), *Lianhe zaobao*, 29 July, 2010.

Professor Li Daguang of the National Defence University argues that strictly following the policy of non-alignment places China at a disadvantage when it comes to developing diplomatic ties and friendships. He, however, points out that completely rejecting non-alignment policy is perhaps going a step too far. But China's unwillingness to engage in a cold war style alliance does not imply that it is unwilling to court friends. Establishing sound relations with other states presents great benefits to China, with respect to undermining the efforts of certain great powers to encircle China, and ensures that China does not become a lonely great power.<sup>27</sup>

There is hot debate in recent years over whether or not China should seek an alliance with Russia. Russian expert and senior fellow of the Institute of Russian, Eastern European and Central Asian Studies of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences Jiang Yi argues that an alliance between China and Russia is not practical. His scepticism relates largely to who would lead the alliance. His criticism is that scholars who imagine a China–Russia alliance are incapable of answering this question. Should two major powers with considerably different cultural and historical backgrounds have a difference of opinion, will it be possible for one power to accommodate or obey the other? In Jiang's view, by maintaining diplomatic autonomy, the two sides can cooperate more comfortably and with greater sincerity. As such, alliance strategy completely violates the principles of China–Russian cooperation, and does not conform to the mode of cooperation accepted by the two states.<sup>28</sup>

Professor Zhao Huasheng of Fudan University does not completely reject the possibility of a future alliance between China and Russia, but argues that imposing an alliance before the two states have completed the political preparation necessary for such an alliance would not enhance the level of cooperation between them, but instead damage their existing diplomatic ties. What is more, a China–Russia alliance is really just wishful thinking on the Chinese side. As the Russians also hold to a non-alignment policy, there is strong domestic resistance to the idea of allying with China. Further, Russia is not willing to accept a secondary position within any such alliance, nor is it willing to lend a helping hand to China as it rises to become a leading global power.<sup>29</sup>

### Never Taking the Lead

The phrase 'never taking the lead' is in Deng Xiaoping's 28 character policy guideline, and is also a logical extension of the KLP principle. In order to keep a low profile, a state must avoid taking the lead and the leadership role. The guideline 'never taking the lead' was proposed under the background of the collapse of the Soviet Union, in response to other socialist states' demands that China take a leading role in promoting socialist ideology around the world and in reorganizing the socialist camp. Deng Xiaoping correctly pointed out that China lacked the capacity to reorganize and lead the socialist camp because economic development was its most pressing need at that time. Over the next decade, 'never taking the

27 Li Daguang, 'Bu jiemeng, bu yiwei bu jiaoyou' ('Non-alignment Does not Imply not Making Friends'), *Huanqiu shibao* (*Global Times*), 27 February, 2012.

28 Jiang Yi, 'Bukaopu de "Zhong'E jiemeng" shuo' ('Is a 'China-Russia Alliance Tenable?'), *Shijie zhishi* (*World Affairs*), No. 5 (2012), p. 53.

29 Zhao Huasheng, 'Zhong'e jiemeng weihe quefa xianshi kexingxing: Jiyu liangguo guanxi lishi he xianshi de kaoliang' ('Why Does China-Russia Alliance Lack Feasibility? Historical Relations and Empirical Considerations'), *Renmin luntan-xueshu qianyan* (*People's Tribune-Academic Currents*), No. 5b (2013), pp. 68–69.

lead' became mainstreamed within China's diplomatic and foreign policy research circles, primary arguments in support of the principle being that China lacked necessary capacity, and that the costs of taking over leadership responsibility were greater than the benefits.

Professor Liu Jianfei of the Central Party School has pointed out that, as a beneficiary of the prevailing world order, China does not want to lead revolutionary efforts to topple it and establish a new one. It is for these reasons that 'never taking the lead' has become a guiding principle of Chinese foreign policy. There are major differences between China and the West with respect to ideology, culture, and social structure that make it likely the West will try to check or even obstruct China's rise.

China's taking on a leading role, whether willingly or unknowingly, in the course of its ascent may well cause Western states to unite against it and prevent it from rising. What is more, only a small group of disparate actors are interested in establishing a new order, and it will be very difficult to link them, especially as some developing states seek opportunities to lean closer to the West. If China takes this path, its strategic environment will rapidly deteriorate, and its peaceful rise will be significantly delayed. Not only will taking a leading role come at the cost of sacrificing China's peaceful rise, there is also no guarantee that it can bring about a change in the world order.<sup>30</sup>

Zhou Suyuan of the Social Sciences in China Press has pointed out that China's implementation of the never taking the lead policy is one reason why China has achieved such a remarkable success over the past thirty years. It is critical for China to make more friends, fewer enemies, and provide appropriate foreign aid while seeking as much external aid as possible. If we look at America's diplomatic experience, we know that taking the lead costs more and will bring China few benefits. The consequences of America's leadership are that it has been drawn into an extremely difficult situation, and has borne unthinkable costs. Even if China becomes a peer superpower, it should not endeavour to play a leading role. Never Taking the Lead is thus one of the arch-principles of China's foreign strategy.<sup>31</sup>

Wang Zaibang has gone so far as to treat the never taking the lead principle as traditional Chinese thinking. He argues that the internal logic of never taking the lead shares common roots with the Chinese philosophy 'China will never be a hegemon'. Taking the lead brings nil benefits and loses China many strategic initiatives. What is more, the principle also stems from traditional Chinese political philosophy, which holds that 'the bird that is exposed will be the first to be shot' and 'the rafter that is exposed is the first to be destroyed'.<sup>32</sup>

30 Liu Jianfei, 'Guoji jinrong weiji weijingxia de zhongguo duiwai zhanlue' ('China's Foreign Policy Strategy under the International Financial Crisis'), *Tansuo yu zhengmin (Exploration and Free Views)*, No. 3 (2009), p. 6.

31 Zhou Suyuan, 'Jianshou "budangtou" fangzhen tuidong jianshe guoji xin zhixu' ('Holding to the Principle of "Not Taking the Lead": Promote a New International Order'), *Xiandai guoji guanxi (Contemporary International Relations)*, No. 9 (2008), p. 32.

32 Wang, 'On Creatively Continuing the Principle of Keeping a Low Profile, Playing a Certain Role', p. 49. Both 'the bird that is exposed will be the first to be shot' and 'the rafter that is exposed is the first to be destroyed' mean that the nail that sticks up is mostly to get hammered down.

### Priority to China–US Relations

That China gives priority to China–US relations in its diplomacy is in reality also an extension of the KLP principle. The decision to place the relationship with the United States at the core of Chinese foreign policy was made under the background of the turmoil of June 4, 1989 and the end of the Cold War. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the United States emerged as the sole superpower. Maintaining good relations with the United States and ensuring that the two states cooperated more than they came into conflict was seen as essential to creating an international environment conducive to China's economic development. At the same time, though, China, as a major power, faces the entire world and not just the United States. As such, China's overall guiding principle in its diplomacy might be summarized as follows: major powers are the priority, neighbouring states are important, developing states are the foundation, and multilateral spaces are an important platform. In practice, however, China often runs into difficulties when balancing relations with major powers and with neighbouring states, in particular when balancing the Sino–American relationship and China's relations with its neighbours. In this regard, we find that most Chinese foreign policy analysts emphasize the supremacy of the China–US relationship. In practice, when tensions arise between China's relations with the United States and its relations with neighbours, Chinese officials place most emphasis on and give primary consideration to bilateral relations with the United States.

Twenty-five years have passed since the June 4 incident, and in recent years China has gradually closed the capacity gap between it and the United States. Consequently a debate has taken shape on whether or not China should continue to follow the principle of giving priority to China–US relations. A considerable number of scholars argue that China should continue to follow the policy. Professor Wang Yizhou of Peking University points out that as the United States will maintain its position as the world's sole superpower for a significant period of time and is the primary state shaping and maintaining the structure of the international system, and as the United States is China's most important strategic security partner (or competitor) and trade partner (or competitor), China should throughout this period of strategic opportunity continue to hold its relationship with the United States as its most important bilateral relationship.<sup>33</sup> Professor Jin Canrong and Dr Duan Haowen of China Renmin University both argue that China–US relations remain the centrepiece of China's foreign diplomacy, and that to cooperate is China's only choice. For the foreseeable future, China and the United States will remain in a sensitive space wherein China is rising while the United States is in decline. Whether China–US relations take on a nervous or more harmonious tone will not only have impact on their future development as individual states but, more important, as they are the most powerful states within the international community, will have impact on the direction of the entire global order.<sup>34</sup> Dr Yu Jun of the China National School of Administration has pointed out that China–US relations is the most critical element of Chinese diplomacy during this period of strategic opportunity. The importance of China–US relations determines that the focus and task of Chinese

33 Wang Yizhou, 'Zhongguo waijiao de sikao yu qianzhan' ('Reflections and Predictions on Chinese Foreign Diplomacy'), *Guoji jingji pinglun (International Economic Review)*, No. 4 (2008), p. 8.

34 Jin Canrong and Duan Haowen, 'Houweiji shidai de daguo guanxi geju yu xindongxiang' ('New Trends in Major Power Relations in the Post Crisis Era'), *Hubei daxue xuebao (Journal of Hubei University)*, No. 1 (2013), p. 63.

diplomacy is to endeavour to construct a stable framework for China–US ties.<sup>35</sup> Dr Ren Jingjing of the Institute of Contemporary Chinese Studies of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences argues that whether or not China can play a greater role in East Asian regional co-operation is conditional upon whether or not it has the understanding and support of the United States to do so. How to respond to and coordinate with the US hegemonic influence in East Asia is a long-term challenge faced by Chinese diplomacy. China's dependency on the United States far exceeds the dependence of the United States on China and, as such, the United States occupies the proactive position in bilateral relations between the two states.<sup>36</sup>

Yuan Peng, senior fellow at the China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations, argues that although China–US relations continue to be the core focus of Chinese diplomacy, the relative importance of the relationship has diminished. As Yuan puts it, in the overall scheme of Chinese diplomacy there will likely be a transition from emphasizing China–US relations as supreme to emphasizing 'comprehensive diplomacy' and 'balanced diplomacy'. The reason for this is that the importance of the United States has declined since the immediate end of the Cold War, while China and other states have continued to rise.<sup>37</sup> Yuan also holds that as the gravity centre of global power continues to shift to the East, China's diplomacy with its neighbouring states and with major powers has become deeply intertwined. China has discovered that there are elements of China–US relations within its relations with its neighbours and vice-versa. As such, it is critical that we consider fully the 'third party' element of China–US relations, and the US element of China's relations with its neighbours.<sup>38</sup>

### China Will Not Become a Superpower

Since the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949, China has harboured all types of pains, sorrows, loves, and hatreds towards two superpowers—the United States and the Soviet Union. For years, China sometimes criticized the United States, sometimes criticized the Soviet Union, or simultaneously shook its fists at both powers. This may be why China came to associate superpowers with hegemony, and why the Chinese term for superpower, an objective word describing the comprehensive power of a state, has taken on a highly ideological, and largely negative connotation. Since China initiated its reform and opening, the ideological connotation of superpower has gradually (but not completely) faded. However, as China self-identifies as a developing country, both the Chinese

35 Yu Jun, 'Zhanlue jiyuqi yu Zhongguo de waijiao zhanlue yu celue xuanze' ('The Period of Strategic Opportunity and China's Foreign Strategy and Tactics'), *Guojia xingzheng xueyuan xuebao (Journal of Chinese Academy of Governance)*, No. 5 (2003), p. 82.

36 Ren Jingjing, 'Xin diquzhuyi shijiao xia de zhongguo dongya quyu hezuo waijiao' ('China's Cooperative Diplomacy in East Asia: From the Perspective of a New Regionalism'), *Dongbeiyi luntan (Northeast Asia Forum)*, No. 1 (2007), p. 37.

37 Yuan Peng, "'Hexie shijie" yu Zhongguo "xinwaijiao"' ('A "Harmonious World" and China's "New Diplomacy"'), *Xiandai guoji guanxi (Contemporary International Relations)*, No. 4 (2007), p. 4.

38 Yuan Peng, 'Guanyu dashidai yu dazhanlue de sikao: jianlun xin shiqi Zhongguo waijiao xuyao chuli de shidui guanxi' ('Strategic Visions of the Great Times: Ten Relationships that China Must Manage in the New Era'), *Dangdai shijie yu shehui zhuyi (Contemporary World and Socialism)*, No. 4 (2012), p. 14.

government and the Chinese people feel that until it completes its 'three step development' strategy, China has absolutely no chance of becoming a superpower.

An article by Ruan Zongze of the China Institute of International Studies notes that, unless it determines to reinvent the wheel, China cannot possibly become a superpower. Instead China is expending tremendous efforts on integrating into and further building the existing international system. In no way is it refuting or undermining the prevailing order. The reality is that the United States is the world's last superpower, as the distribution of global power continues to become more diffuse, and as the trend away from hegemony towards multiple and disparate power centres becomes more evident.<sup>39</sup>

Zhao Haijian argues that 'China becoming a superpower' is a false proposition. A look at economic data makes clear that referring to China as a 'superpower' is a misnomer. China still faces tremendous challenges with respect to economic development and improvement of the livelihoods of its citizens. The theory that 'China will become a great power' is a sugar-coated Western [pill?] bullet to make China take on the burden of the great damage that Western diplomacy has created. The title 'superpower' would also make China the target of attacks from many directions, including the playing-up of the China threat theory.<sup>40</sup>

A report issued by the Institute for International Strategy and Development of Tsinghua University argues that in order to become a real superpower, a state must achieve 'comprehensive power' status in at least three of the following four areas: economic power, military power, and global political and cultural influence. Looking into the future, China may reach or approximate world class power status with respect to economic and military power, but it is hard to see China achieving this with respect to political and cultural influence. As such, it is impossible, for at least the time being, for China to become a superpower.<sup>41</sup>

General Luo Yuan of the Academy of Military Science argues that in eight years (by 2023), China's economy will reach the approximate size of that of the United States, but because of other constraints, especially related to GDP per capita, it cannot be considered a superpower. China still has a long way to go before it can achieve parity with the United States as regards its military capabilities, and it is hence overly optimistic to predict that China can match the United States as a superpower within a period of eight years.<sup>42</sup>

Professor Guan Quan of China Renmin University predicts that for the next fifty years (before 2062), China will lack the conditions necessary to become a superpower, and should not seek to become one, nor should it come into conflict with the United States. Instead it should keep a low profile and develop its capabilities. Given the complexities of

39 Ruan Zongze, "Zhongguomeng" bushi "chaoji daguomeng" ('The "Chinese Dream" is not a "Superpower Dream"'), *Renmin ribao-haiwai ban (People's Daily-Overseas Edition)*, 5 September, 2013.

40 Zhao Haijian, "Zhongguo cheng chaoji daguo" shi ge weimingti' ('"China as a Superpower" is a Misnomer'), *Guangzhou ribao (Guangzhou Daily)*, 21 December, 2009.

41 Institute of International Strategy and Development of Tsinghua University, 'Shangsheng zhong de zhongguo guoli, guoji diwei yu zuoyong' ('The National Power, International Position and Role of an Emerging China'), *Guoji jingji pinglun (International Economic Review)*, No. 6 (2009), p. 12.

42 Luo Yuan, 'Zhongguo shifou chengwei chaoji daguo' ('Can China Become a Superpower?'), *Lingdao wencui (Leadership Digest)*, No. 22 (2013), p. 121.

the international environment and great power rivalries, China needs to focus on overcoming challenges, and on striving for time and space to achieve development. This is a long-term task, and China cannot afford to lose track of it for the sake of some petty interests lest it lose the opportunity to truly 'rise'.<sup>43</sup>

### Diplomacy Serving Economic Development

Following the Third Plenary Session of the 11th Central Committee of the CPC, the central work of the Party shifted from class struggle to economic development. To create an environment hospitable to domestic economic development and international openness, China made comprehensive adjustments to the principles guiding its foreign diplomacy. One key change identified as a core task of diplomacy was that of supporting domestic economic development and creating a peaceful international environment. In other words, diplomacy was to serve the purpose of economic development.

Over the thirty plus years that followed, support for continuing the practice of diplomacy to serve economic development remained strong. In an article published in 2004, Professor Ye Zicheng of Peking University expressed his view that China's highest national interest can be summarized as that of its development, or the country's modernization. It is this that has enabled China to realize what Deng Xiaoping defined as the most important national interest: becoming developed, strong, and advanced. Over the long term, China must continue to give top priority to this task, to which all others are secondary.<sup>44</sup>

In an article published in 2012, Prof Liu Jianfei observed that the core objective of China's national strategy is achieving national modernization. The task of Chinese diplomacy, therefore, is to create an external environment conducive to the realization of the national strategy, i.e., shaping a peaceful international context for modern development. China has not yet reached the point where change in the strategic direction of its diplomacy is needed. Even though China's GDP growth has progressed to the point of gaining status as the world's second largest economy, it is still far from achieving its strategic development objectives. Even after China reaches middle income status, it will still need to develop, because developed states continue to grow. Precisely because modernization is a long-term process, Deng Xiaoping emphasized again and again that 'this path will not change for one hundred years'. Given that the national strategic objective has not changed, there is no need for any change in the core tasks of Chinese foreign diplomacy. There may be a need to review and reflect on China's foreign diplomacy, but not at the strategic level.<sup>45</sup>

In an article published in 2013, Niu Xinchun, research fellow at the Chinese Institutes for Contemporary International Relations, observed that the chance of damage to China's

43 Guan Qian, 'Zhongguo yiran xuyao taoguang yanghui: cong jingji fazhan jiaodu kan daguo xingshuai' ('China Needs to Continue to Keep a Low Profile: The Rise and Fall of Great Powers from a Perspective of Economic Development'), *Renmin luntan xueshu qianyan* (*People's Tribune Academic Currents*), No. 10 (2012), p. 63.

44 Ye Zicheng, 'Zai xin xingshixia dui Deng Xiaoping waijiao sixiang de licheng, fazhan he sikao' ('Continuities, Developments and Reflections on Deng Xiaoping's Foreign Policy Theory in a New Situation'), *Shijie jingji yu zhengzhi* (*World Economics and Politics*), No. 11 (2004), pp. 9–10.

45 Liu Jianfei, 'Guanyu jin ji nian Zhongguo waijiao de fansi' ('Reflections on Chinese Diplomacy in Recent Years'), *Tansuo yu zhengming* (*Exploration and Free Views*), No. 4 (2012), p. 40.

sovereignty or political institutions from external threats is small, but the chance of political or social turmoil as a result of economic decline are more likely and extremely serious. As such, given that China does not face any substantial threats vis-à-vis its national security and sovereignty, diplomacy should have people's needs at its core through placing primary emphasis on economic development and enhancing livelihoods. With regard to China's core interests, the most pressing need is undoubtedly economic development, whose importance should supersede that of sovereignty and political institutions.<sup>46</sup>

### Intellectual Foundations of the Dominant Thinking Sets

'Thinking sets' refer to aspects of knowledge or ideas, which upon accumulation and dissemination are institutionalized as a means of understanding a certain phenomenon or actor.<sup>47</sup> In the case of the formation of dominant thinking sets within Chinese foreign policy research, just what types of knowledge and values play a role?<sup>48</sup> In Table 1, the authors attempt to list the knowledge basis of the thinking sets discussed above. As the table shows, one or more supporting branches of knowledge or norms are necessary to establish a thinking set. In addition, it is also clear that the supporters of thinking sets within Chinese foreign policy research may use different types of knowledge or values to support the same thinking set. For example, in the text above, we saw that Wu Jianmin voiced support for KLP on the basis of political beliefs, while Wang Jisi made his argument on the basis of dialectical materialism.

Political beliefs are based on the logic of appropriateness, and not on a causal logic.<sup>49</sup> Wu Jianmin offers a classic example of this in his use of political beliefs to support KLP. Wu Jianmin is a steadfast supporter of Deng Xiaoping's foreign diplomacy. He not only argues that the 'keeping a low profile, playing a certain role' policy accurately reflects China's needs with respect to capacity and external environment over the last twenty years, but also steadfastly maintains that China will not face any significant changes in its international environment over the coming several decades, and that the rise of Chinese national power will not have impact on China's continuing support for KLP.

Although ideology ranks near the bottom as regards factors influencing Chinese diplomacy practice and research, it still plays a role with respect to the thinking set whereby China should not become a superpower. In Chinese, the word superpower has an extremely negative ideological connotation, and is basically a synonym for hegemon. Although Chinese people do not believe that only superpowers can be hegemonic, they do hold that all superpowers are hegemons. We cannot deny that when people argue against China becoming a superpower, opposition to hegemony is a key factor supporting this thinking set.

46 Niu Xinchun, 'Zhongguo waijiao xuyao zhanlue zhuanxing' ('Chinese Diplomacy Needs a Strategic Turn'), *Xiandai guoji guanxi* (*Contemporary International Relations*), No. 1 (2013), p. 2.

47 Such knowledge and ideas are not the content of thinking sets, but the tools and medium for their establishment.

48 The authors admit that thinking sets in Chinese foreign policy research and the actual practice of foreign policy reinforce one another. While successful policy design and implementation is certainly helpful for developing and strengthening thinking sets, this article is concerned with knowledge and concepts on a theoretical level.

49 Martha Finnemore, *National Interests in International Society* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), chapter 1.

**Table 1.** Intellectual Foundations of the Thinking Sets within Chinese Foreign Policy Research

	Keeping a Low Profile	Non- alignment	Never Taking the Lead	Priority to China-US Relations	China Will not Become a Superpower	Diplomacy Serving Economic Development
Political Beliefs	✓					
Ideology					✓	
Historical Experience		✓	✓			
Logical Analysis	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Marxist Philosophy	✓			✓	✓	✓
Traditional Culture or Wisdom	✓		✓			

Lessons from historical experience represent another key cognitive resource in the formation of a thinking set, especially as regards foreign policy analysis, which places great value on historical experience. The oppositions to alliances and to a China–Russia alliance, which have broad popular support, are deeply rooted in the Chinese experience of the Sino–Soviet split of the 1950s. Supporters of the policy of not taking the lead also take historical examples from China and other powers’ diplomatic lessons to demonstrate that the costs of taking the lead outweigh the benefits. In some cases, these historical examples include gems from ancient philosophy, for instance, ‘the bird who takes flight first shall be shot down’.

Rational analysis is based on the comparison of costs and benefits combined with considerations of likelihood. Among the various forms of analysis, it is that most often applied to Chinese foreign policy research, and has often been observed to play a supporting role in Chinese foreign policy thinking sets. As a supporter of KLP, Qu Xing argues that as long as the West is strong and China is weak, and as long as China is a developing country, there are sufficient reasons to continue implementing the policy. Most supporters of the non-alignment principle argue that the net benefits of non-alignment, as opposed to alliance, are positive. Looking specifically at the debate over China’s relations with Russia, Jiang Yi argues that there is no possibility of such an alliance. Most supporters of the never taking the lead principle also argue that the risks of taking the lead are too great and the benefits too small. At the same time, China’s limited capacities determine that taking the lead is neither feasible nor necessary.

Supporters of the principle that China–US relations are supreme argue that because the United States is the world’s only superpower and the main state that sets and regulates international institutions, getting China–US relations on the right footing is most important for a China that seeks development, and that there is no possibility of China’s relations with another state or region surpassing in importance of its relations with the United States. Supporters of the principle that China should not become a superpower generally hold that until China completes its ‘three steps’ to development, it will be a developing country and, this being the case, how could it possibly be a superpower?

Marxism is the official ideology in China. Since the establishment of the People’s Republic, China has resolved that all citizens study Marxism starting from elementary school. This means that, provided they have attended middle school, all of China’s officials and ordinary citizens have some level of understanding of Marxist philosophy. Chinese

officials and scholars will either consciously or subconsciously apply Marxist theory to understand the world and solve problems. In the Chinese foreign policy thinking sets discussed above, it is not difficult to find evidence of the influence of Marxist theory.

Take KLP for example, and to which dialectical materialism can be applied to determine how to balance keeping a low profile and playing a certain role. We might say that keeping a low profile and playing a certain role are two contradictory forces within a system, the former dominant and the latter inferior. Within this system, this implies that playing a certain role cannot break through the 'glass ceiling' demarcated by keeping a low profile. If you feel that there is a parallel or horizontal relationship between keeping a low profile and playing a certain role, then whether to keep a low profile or play a certain role must be considered on a case-by-case basis.

The principle that China-US relations are supreme is deeply influenced by focal theory, which means to say that as Chinese foreign diplomacy faces various contradictions, the relationship between China and the United States is most important. In the contradiction between China-US relations and China's relations with its neighbouring states, therefore, the former is more important than the latter. By tackling the key contradiction it is thus possible to resolve the crux of all problems. Most supporters of China not becoming a superpower base their arguments on China's domestic situation.<sup>50</sup> They argue that whether or not China's internal development goes smoothly determines whether or not China can become a superpower. At the present and for a significant time into the future, China must resolve many pressing domestic political, economic, and social issues, which means that it is not practical for China to become a superpower.

Supporters of the diplomacy serving economic development principle generally follow the line of thinking wherein 'economic development is a foundation for higher level needs'. In this view, economic development is the core task of the Chinese government, and it is only logical that foreign diplomacy serves this task. That economics is fundamental to higher level institutions is a key Marxist principle. If China cannot become a global economic power, it will be impossible for it to become a major global power, and in the absence of this status its diplomacy can only be soft and cannot be sustained. China thus remains a developing state, and China's economic base determines the extent to which the objectives and direction of its diplomacy works at higher levels.

Chinese traditional culture plays a role in the establishment of certain thinking sets. Many Chinese terms, especially idioms, are crystallizations of traditional culture and wisdom. Traditional culture can be said to be at work when certain terms or idioms are chosen to describe or name a policy. For example, Keeping a Low Profile expresses the flexibility, restraint, and stoicism inherent in Chinese culture, while the cultural background of Never Taking The Lead is so-called traditional wisdom, such as 'the bird that is exposed will be the first to be shot' and 'the rafter that is exposed is the first to be destroyed'.

The cognitive foundations of the thinking sets serve as tools that shape and solidify scholarly thinking and that will continue to be used; researchers depend on certain historical lessons in their work. Similarly, most researchers will use some form of rational

50 In his writing on the relationship between internal and external factors, Mao Zedong points out that internal factors are the root causes of a phenomenon, while external factors are conditions that cause change. External factors hence function through internal factors. Mao Zedong, 'Maodun Lun' ('The Contradiction Theory'), *Mao Zedong xuanji* (*The Selected Works of Mao Zedong*), Vol. 1, (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1991), p. 302.

analysis. In China, given the position of Marxist ideology, scholars will undoubtedly continue to apply dialectic materialism to foreign policy analysis. Of course, the ways in which scholars apply thinking sets and the conclusions that they draw are subject to change. For example, is the relationship between keeping a low profile and playing a certain role hierarchical, or do the two factors balance one another? How do we understand the history of alliances? How do we understand the lessons of the collapse of the Sino–Soviet alliance? Are the benefits of taking the lead or of avoiding a leading role greater? Is it more beneficial for China to give greater priority to its relations with neighbours than to relations with the United States? Can we conclude that diplomacy should serve economic development based on a philosophy that economics is the foundation of all higher objectives?

### Critics of the Dominant Thinking Sets

Every dominant thinking set has its critics. Although critics are in the minority in Chinese IR academia, once their voice corresponds to the new direction of China's foreign policy, the dominant thinking sets will face serious crisis, and many scholars will change from being proponents to opponents. Therefore, critics are worth listening to.

#### Critics of KLP

Professor Yan Xuetong of the Modern Institute of International Relations of Tsinghua University argues that these thinking sets should be abandoned. For several years, Yan Xuetong has argued that China should abandon 'keeping a low profile, playing a certain role' and instead look to the Chinese strategic culture of modesty and caution as a guiding principle. This has long been a minority point of view within international relations circles in China, yet after the Working Conference on Neighbouring State Diplomacy and the speech Xi Jinping delivered at that conference, Yan Xuetong argued that China had replaced 'keeping a low profile' with 'striving for achievements' (SFA). Yan argues that 'striving for achievements' is much more assertive than 'playing a certain role' and that, from a linguistic point of view, it represents the exact opposite of keeping a low profile; i.e., that it not possible for the two to operate in parallel, or for there to be a continuum between them. In this sense, according to Yan, the Working Conference resulted in a fundamental change in Chinese foreign policy principles, which now emphasize China playing a role.<sup>51</sup> As Yan argues: 'In the past we had to keep a low profile as we were weak while other states were strong, and we signalled this weakness to the international community to indicate that we were not able to get involved in anything. Now, with "striving for achievements", we are indicating to neighbouring countries that we are strong and you are weak. This is a change at a very fundamental level.'<sup>52</sup>

In an English language article published in 2014, Yan Xuetong used the concept of moral realism to analyse in detail the differences between 'keeping a low profile' and 'striving to achieve'. He found that the main difference lies in the emphasis of the former on

51 Yan Xuetong, 'Zhongguo waijiao quanmian gaige de kaishi' (The Beginning of a Comprehensive Reform of Chinese Diplomacy), *Shijie zhishi* (*World Affairs*), No. 24 (2013), p. 15.

52 Yan Xuetong, 'Cong taoguan yanghui dao fenfa youwei, Zhongguo jueqi shibukedang' ('From Keeping a Low Profile to Striving for Achievement: China's Rise Cannot be Contained'), 11 November, 2013, <http://www.ceweekly.cn/2013/1111/68562.shtml>.

economic benefits and of the latter on political interests. In Yan's view, since China began implementing the 'strive to achieve' principle in the summer of 2012, it has seen great successes in its foreign diplomacy, including stabilized relations with the United States and improved bilateral relations with most major European states, and also with developing states. Although it has not proven possible for 'striving to achieve' to prevent the deterioration of relations between China and Japan, it has managed to isolate Abe and to improve relations with states at odds with Japan (Korea, Russia). Yan Xuetong has said with much confidence that although we need more time to evaluate the long-term effectiveness of the new principle, 'strive to achieve', it is much more effective than 'keeping a low profile' when it comes to moulding an international environment that is conducive to China's rise.<sup>53</sup>

### Critics of Non-alignment

There are also those who advocate China's abandonment of its non-alignment policy, among whom Professor Yan Xuetong is one of the most vocal. Professor Yan views the issue primarily from the vantage point of China's rise. He argues that non-alignment is a policy for a weak state, and that if China does not immediately abandon this policy the ultimate consequences will mean facing a growingly problematic international security environment. Many people mistakenly believe that by not forming alliances, China can avoid falling into a zero-sum relationship with other states. The reality is that by not adopting alliance strategy, and by failing to provide neighbouring countries with security guarantees, neighbouring states will grow to fear China, thus resulting in a zero-sum relationship.<sup>54</sup> Yan goes on to point out that China makes no allies precisely because of the non-alignment policy, and that this absence of allies has become the greatest obstacle to improving China's relations with neighbouring states. If China is able to adjust its policy of non-alignment, it can increase its strategic allies and cause the international system to shift in a way that is favourable to China.<sup>55</sup> He also optimistically predicts that China will have twenty allies or global strategic partnerships by the year 2023. Although far fewer than America's total military allies, this still constitutes a preliminary alliance system. In his view, although it will be difficult politically for China to explicitly abandon its policy of not forming alliances, it is feasible for China to use other conceptual terms in place of 'ally'. For example, it is highly likely that the phrase 'all-weather strategic partnership' is a politically tenable alternative to 'ally'.<sup>56</sup>

Dr Wu Xu of the University of Arizona (United States) also argues that the non-alignment policy leads to China's failure to make true friends. In his critique, he refers to the majority of China's strategic partners as little more than 'drinking buddies', who will provide China with negligible support during times of need. As such, as the United States makes a

53 Yan Xuetong, 'From Keeping a Low Profile to Striving for Achievement', *Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol. 7, No. 2 (2014), pp. 153–84.

54 Yan, 'From Keeping a Low Profile to Striving for Achievement', <http://www.ceweekly.cn/2013/1111/68562.shtml>.

55 Yan Xuetong, 'Quanli zhongxin zhuanqi yu guoji tixi zhuanbian' ('Power Transition and the Transformation of the International System'), *Dangdai yatai (Journal of Contemporary Asia Pacific Studies)*, No. 4 (2012), p. 21.

56 Yan Xuetong, *Lishi de guanxing: weilai shinian de Zhongguo yu shijie (Inertia of History: China and the World in the Next Decade)*(Beijing: Zhongxi chubanshe, 2013), p. 194.

strategic pivot back to Asia, China has little choice but to sit in isolation. He holds that the policy of non-alignment amounts to China 'waiving its diplomatic rights', and although this practice may seem successful at surface level, in reality it creates great difficulties. For example, states may feel that China, a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council, lacks principles and points of view, while observers tacitly read China's detached position as deceptive or unreliable. Over time, not only will it fail to make new friends, but also alienate old ones.<sup>57</sup>

Yan Xuetong further argues that whether or not a China–Russia alliance will be dependable will hinge on China's credibility. Should China and Russia form an alliance, and as the relative power balance between the two has tilted towards China, the credibility of the alliance will depend more on China than on Russia. This is similar to the way in which the US–Japanese alliance depends more on the credibility of the United States than on Japan. It is incorrect to say that a China–Russia alliance will cause China and the United States to erode into a Cold War style confrontation or that China will be pulled into war by Russia. These fears may stem from a desire for a multipolar system and fears of a bipolar world. Since the end of the Cold War, China has maintained policies of 'keeping a low profile' and 'opposition to alliances', yet the China threat theory has nonetheless continued to abound, while the Thucydides Trap between China and the United States remains, and has deepened since the 2008 financial crisis. Since the US global strategy needs to treat China and Russia as the common security threats to its allies and itself, the Thucydides Trap between China and the United States will always exist, regardless of whether or not China and Russia make an alliance.<sup>58</sup>

### Critics of Never Taking the Lead

Professor Yan Xuetong is also among the critics of the Never Taking the Lead policy. His criticism is that the policy has resulted in vast strategic losses that greatly exceed any economic benefits the policy might offer. By following such a policy, China not only sacrifices its ability to construct an international image as a modest and cautious power, but also isolates itself from the rest of the world. In an increasingly polarized international environment, small- and medium-sized states can lean towards China for support and aid, or obtain the same from the United States. If the United States has abundant allies across the world, and China's relations with other states are 'moderate and restrained', China will undoubtedly become seriously isolated. For this reason, China has no choice but to abandon the policy of never taking the lead and to turn to global leadership for foreign policy guidance.<sup>59</sup>

### Critics of Priority to China–US Relations

Naturally, there are more outspoken critics of the principle of Priority to China–US relations. Professor Tang Shiping and Dr Qi Dapeng refer to the principle as US centrism, arguing that it reflects extremely naïve thinking: as long as China maintains good relations with the United States, China can basically ensure its international security, or at least will not

57 Wu Xu, 'Zhongguo yinggai fangqi bu jiemeng zhengce' ('China Should Abandon the Non-alignment Policy'), *Zhongguo xinwen zhoukan* (*China Newsweek*), 10 January, 2012.

58 Yan Xuetong, 'E'luosi kekao ma?' ('Is Russia Reliable?'), *Guoji jingji pinglun* (*International Economic Review*), No. 3 (2012), p. 25.

59 Yan, *Inertia of History*, pp. 184–5.

face any turmoil. Such thinking on the part of Chinese experts illustrates how we tend to use decidedly simple logic to consider an incredibly complex international system; it might be summed up as ‘if we grasp the so-called primary contradiction, all other problems will vanish’. The reality is that if we want to be able to respond to the complexity of the international order, we need a systemic lens through which to view it.<sup>60</sup> The two scholars go on to note that extreme adoration of the United States will inevitably have impact on both scholarly research and the news media, excessively expanding the public’s perceptions of American power. American centrism has far-reaching negative impact on Chinese diplomacy.<sup>61</sup>

Yan Xuetong has long called for abandonment of the principle of ‘priority to China-US relations’ and for more emphasis on the importance of neighbouring state diplomacy. He observes that when contradictions appear between China’s relations with its neighbouring states and US–China relations, maintaining a good US–China relationship takes priority as a matter of course. According to his analysis, China has over the past twenty years consistently perceived the United States as its number one priority, almost as if appeasing the United States is equivalent to creating a good surrounding environment. Unfortunately, historical experience shows that the United States cannot be appeased, and that the Thucydides Trap indeed exists between China and the United States. Regardless of what China tries to do, it cannot prevent the United States from trying to block China’s rise. We know from the Working Conference on Neighbouring State Diplomacy that diplomacy vis-à-vis neighbouring states will replace the United States to become the Chinese foreign policy priority.<sup>62</sup>

### Critics of China-will-not-become-a-Superpower

The ‘China will not become a superpower’ principle has also come under dispute, Professor Yan Xuetong in particular voicing considerable concerns. Over the past several years, Professor Yan Xuetong has advanced his judgment that the international status quo is shifting from a single superpower and multiple major powers towards a bipolar scenario, with China likely to emerge as the other superpower.<sup>63</sup>

In 2013, he explicitly pointed out in his book *Inertia of History* that we shall see a bipolar world by the end of the year 2023, with China as the other pole. In his analysis, China’s cumulative national power will balance out over the coming ten years, with military and political power growing as quickly as the economy. At the same time, the United States is not able to block the trend whereby China reduces the gap in relative capacities.<sup>64</sup> In spite of this optimism, he maintains some reservations, arguing that by 2023 the gap in relative comprehensive power between China and the United States can only be narrowed to a

60 Tang Shiping and Qi Dapeng, ‘Zhongguo waijiao taolunzhong de “Zhongguo zhongxin zhuyi” yu “Meiguo zhongxin zhuyi”’ (‘“Chinese Centrism” and “American Centrism” in Chinese Foreign Policy Debates’), *Shijie jingji yu zhengzhi* (*World Economics and Politics*), No. 12 (2008), p. 66.

61 *Ibid.*, p. 67.

62 Yan, ‘The Beginning of a Comprehensive Reform of Chinese Diplomacy’, p. 16.

63 Yan Xuetong, ‘“Yichao duoqiang” kaishi xiang “liangchao duoqiang” yanbian’ (‘One Superpower and Several Great Powers’ Begin to Transform into a Bipolar System’), *Huanqiu shibao* (*Global Times*), 30 December, 2011.

64 Yan, *Inertia of History*, chapter 1.

certain level, and that it will not be possible for China to catch up completely with the United States.<sup>65</sup>

He is also critical of the following two points of view dominant in both academic circles and in the public sphere: (i) because China faces so many domestic challenges, it is not capable of becoming a superpower; (ii) as long as China can get things right domestically, it will automatically become a superpower. He argues that both of these views are based on a highly deterministic logic. A state's rise to superpower status is a long historical process, its success or failure dependent on the power gap between a rising state and the hegemon. This implies that both internal and external factors are equally important in determining the outcome. Over the coming decade, China sees the possibility of becoming a superpower, in large part because China has sustainable capacity for growth, while the United States is in relative decline.<sup>66</sup>

### Critics of Diplomacy Serving Economic Development

As might be expected, the Diplomacy Serving Economic Development principle has been challenged by certain experts in recent years. Wang Yizhou admits that the objectives of Chinese foreign policy need to be more diverse, and expresses certain reservations about goals that are focused exclusively on economics. He argues that Chinese diplomacy needs to continue striving towards the creation of an external environment supportive of development and reform, but at the same time to reasonably increase its international contributions, so creating a balance between the three core needs of 'development', 'sovereignty', and 'responsibility'.<sup>67</sup>

Yan Xuetong has also long been a critic of the view that foreign diplomacy must serve economics. As early as 2004 he expressed his concern that foreign diplomacy should serve comprehensive national interests, and not exclusively economic interests. Since initiating the policy of reform and opening, China has maintained that economic development is the core national task, and placed China's economic interests ahead of its foreign policy interests. In practice, this caused China to abandon security interests in favour of economic interests—the view that economic interests are supreme and guide all Chinese policies. National interests are comprehensive in nature, and a bias towards any particular interest will result in policies not favourable to the overall national interest.<sup>68</sup>

In his book *Inertia of History* published in mid-2013, Yan Xuetong predicts that if China insists on economic pragmatism to guide foreign policy thinking over the coming decade, not only will China's international image gradually erode, it will also face economic conflicts with other states across the globe. Over the coming ten years, China will face ever greater security and political threats. This will force Chinese diplomacy to pay more attention to politics and less to economics. Politically guided foreign diplomacy must meet needs related to strategic and political influence, and not economic interests. Moving

65 *Ibid.*, p. 22.

66 *Ibid.*, p. 25.

67 Wang Yizhou, 'Zhongguo waijiao shi tese: jianlun dui waijiao yanjiu de qishi' ('Ten Characteristics of Chinese Diplomacy and Lessons for Foreign Policy Research'), *Shijie jingji yu zhengzhi* (*World Economics and Politics*), No. 5 (2008), p. 18.

68 Yan Xuetong, "'Heping jueqi" de fenqi, yiyi ji celue' ('"Peaceful Rise": Different Visions, Significance and Strategies'), *Zhongguo shehui kexue* (*Social Sciences in China*), No. 5 (2004), p. 52.

forward, and as China continues to develop, a foreign policy guided by economics will become more and more untenable.<sup>69</sup> At the end of 2013, Yan Xuetong wrote another article which noted that President Xi Jinping's speech at the Working Conference on Neighbouring Country diplomacy marks the Central Government's shift from the principle of diplomacy serving economic development to diplomacy serving the strategic objective of the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. Achieving the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation and taking economic development as the central task are fundamentally different, as the latter alone cannot realize national rejuvenation.<sup>70</sup>

As an opponent of all of the thinking sets discussed above, Yan Xuetong regularly presents his arguments based on rational analysis and historical examples. For example, he argues that by following the policy of never taking the lead, China incurs strategic costs that are far greater than the economic costs of taking on a leading role. As such, by continuing to follow the principle that foreign diplomacy serves economics, China faces serious damage to its international image, and an escalation of international economic conflicts. He argues that history demonstrates that it is only in rare instances that great powers do not form alliances, and that they are always temporary. He asserts, therefore, that by not forming alliances over the long term, China violates the laws of history. Yan Xuetong also has a unique point of view with respect to the 'relationship between endogenous and exogenous causes'. He argues that both exogenous and endogenous factors are equally important because the absence of either makes forward progress impossible. For example, whether or not China can become a great power depends not only on an increase in its capabilities, but also on whether or not the capabilities of other powers increase or decrease at the same time. Considering only domestic factors in determining whether or not China can become a great power, therefore, is not correct.

## **Dominant Thinking Sets and the Transformation of China's Foreign Policy**

Thinking sets have a life circle of formation, stability, and transformation. How a thinking set will transform (by being weakened or replaced by another) in the future depends essentially on the changes in the external environment.<sup>71</sup> From the summer of 2010 until the Working Conference on Neighbouring State Diplomacy in the autumn of 2013, China's foreign policy was constantly undergoing transformation. This caused the appearance of more debates within foreign policy research circles on transitions in Chinese diplomacy and its future development directions, which loosened a number of thinking sets. How these dominant thinking sets transform will depend on how researchers see the relationship between the 28 character guidelines and the spirit of the Working Conference on Neighbouring State Diplomacy. If the mainstream view is largely one of continuity, with innovation as secondary, shifts in Chinese foreign policy will largely be seen as tactical, and the thinking sets will continue to dominate, any adjustments being peripheral. If, on the other hand, innovation becomes mainstream and continuity secondary, there will be a key

69 Yan, *Inertia of History*, pp. 182, 190.

70 Yan, 'The Beginning of a Comprehensive Reform of Chinese Diplomacy', p. 16.

71 Generation change is another key factor in the change of dominant thinking sets. But generation change is a slow process. We do not find that Chinese IR academia is experiencing a generation change.

strategic shift in Chinese foreign diplomacy, and the thinking sets discussed above will be either abandoned or seriously weakened.

Although these thinking sets have just entered a process of transition, the directions remain uncertain. The authors of this article would like to make a bold prediction: it will be almost impossible for these thinking sets to be aligned with the spirit of President Xi Jinping's speech on the occasion of the Working Conference on Neighbouring State Diplomacy, and over the coming decade the influence of these thinking sets will gradually weaken, or even disappear entirely. This prediction is based on the authors' reading of the spirit of President Xi's speech, and assessment that it surpasses the 28 character guidelines. In the coming decade starting from 2015, Chinese foreign policy will undergo a strategic adjustment characterized by a shift in direction rather than a change in degree.

'Striving for achievement' is on the verge of replacing KLP as the cornerstone of Chinese foreign policy. Throughout his speech, President Xi made no mention of 'keeping a low profile, playing a certain role', instead replacing it with 'strive to advance our neighbouring state diplomacy', and proposing that 'our neighbouring state diplomatic strategy and practice must keep up with the times, and be more proactive'.<sup>72</sup> As such, from now on China's foreign policy will be more proactive, adapted to the new environment, and positively enterprising. Even if some continuity with 'keeping a low profile, playing a certain role' is retained, it will relate to playing a certain role and not to keeping a low profile. Keeping a low profile and being proactive apply to different types of states: the former applies to the policies of a weak state, the latter to that of a rising power.

A policy of 'substantive' alliance will replace non-alignment policy, as it follows historically that great powers cannot eschew alliance strategy over the long term. A rapidly rising power that does not adopt alliance policy will cause itself to be contained by a network of allied status quo power so generating considerable security pressures. China only participated in the multilateral security cooperation regimes, such as the East Asia Regional Forum (ARF), the East Asia Summit, the Six Party Talks, etc., after the Cold War. All of these cooperative security arrangements are characterized by 'an abundance of talk with little action' and face substantial barriers to progress.<sup>73</sup> Although there is space for improvement, from China's vantage point, deepening security cooperation will require a change in thinking and a shift in direction. In his speech, President Xi proposed deepening security cooperation between China and its neighbours; this cannot be understood simply as a deepening of multilateral security cooperation. China must begin by initiating bilateral security cooperation, using bilateral cooperation to promote multilateral cooperation.<sup>74</sup> Although it may be difficult for China to publically abandon the non-alignment policy, this should not prevent China from taking practical steps to place its relations with certain neighbouring countries on the track of a future alliance, and using a different terminology with which to refer to such relations, such as a 'community of shared destiny', which is fundamentally

72 'Important Speech by Xi Jinping at the Working Conference on Neighbouring States Diplomacy'.

73 Xu Jin, 'Dongya duobian anquan hezuo: wenti yu qianjing' ('The Multilateral Security Cooperation in East Asia: Problems and Prospects'), *Dangdai yatai (Journal of Contemporary Asia Pacific Studies)*, No. 4 (2011), pp. 91–95.

74 Xu Jin, 'Weilai Zhongguo dongya anquan zhengce de "silun" jiagou shexiang' ('On the Future of China's East Asian Security Policy: The Concept of the "Four Pillars"'), *Dangdai yatai (Journal of Contemporary Asia Pacific Studies)*, No. 1 (2014), pp. 4–20.

based on security. If two states cannot assist one another with respect to politics and security, it is very difficult to speak of their destinies as closely linked, and even more so to say that they are a community sharing a destiny.

Guiding other states will replace the policy of 'never taking the lead', which is a policy suitable for weak states, or a policy that signals weakness. This is no longer appropriate for China given its international position. As regards economic cooperation, China has proposed infrastructure interconnectivity, the Silk Road economic belt, the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road, Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, and other key policy initiatives. All of these require that China take a leading role. In terms of security cooperation with its neighbours, China needs to be more assertive and proactive, to take a stand more often, and to take on greater responsibility.

The importance that China places on its relations with its neighbours will surpass that accorded China-US ties. The Working Conference illustrated that neighbouring states will become the priority focus of Chinese diplomacy. In a broad sense, the United States might also be thought of as a neighbour, as China-US relations are part and parcel of China's relations with its neighbouring states. But this element of the China-US relationship must follow from and be subservient to China's relations with its neighbours as a whole. We might predict that, should the United States come into conflict with a country who is not its ally in the Asia Pacific, there is a far greater likelihood that China will support that country rather than the United States. That the importance of China's relations with its neighbours has increased illustrates that the Chinese government realizes that for a state to rise, it must first rise in the region to which it belongs. If it cannot establish a favourable regional order, building good relations with a distant country will be of limited use.

The so-called great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation is actually the equivalent of becoming a superpower. The term is by no means a new one, but China has been quiet about the extent to which it will accomplish such rejuvenation. A so-called superpower refers to the most powerful state in the world (and corresponds to a unipolar world), or one of the two most powerful states (in a bipolar world). If the Chinese nation cannot or does not need to rejuvenate as one of the two superpowers, then the Chinese government's citing of great rejuvenation as a strategic objective is pointless; or we might also say that the mission of rejuvenation has been accomplished, because China has already become a powerful state in a system characterized by one superpower and several powers. In the future, the focal point of the debate will not be over whether China can become a superpower, but at what point before 2049 China will become a superpower. In which year will China pass the threshold and join the ranks of superpowers?

'Diplomacy serves the function of realising the rejuvenation of the nation' shall replace 'diplomacy serves economic development'. 'Diplomacy serving economic development' is a strategy appropriate for the period of time during which Chinese economy was undeveloped, which has already come to a close. Based on President Xi's speech, we argue that from this point forward the objective of Chinese diplomacy is to serve the realization of the two one-hundred-year goals, and the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. Taking national rejuvenation as the central task and taking economic development as the central task are fundamentally different. The former takes the rise of national power as its benchmark, while the latter focuses on the increase of GDP and GDP per capita. Additionally, President Xi's proposal of a new concept of justice and benefit also supersedes the notion that 'diplomacy serving economic development'. The two are fundamentally different as each implies a different ranking of interests. 'Diplomacy serving economic development' places

economic interests as supreme, while a new concept of justice and benefit places political interests and security interests above economic interests. This, therefore, demands that when necessary China sacrifices its benefit for the sake of justice, or in other words, abandons its economic interests in order to safeguard political or security interests.

The dominant thinking sets will not immediately fade away, and will continue to influence the thinking of a significant number of scholars of Chinese foreign policy over the medium term. For example, KLP may cause some scholars to formulate strong pacifist ideologies, and argue that building good bilateral relations is in China's best interest. This may be particularly the case when it comes to the Sino-Japanese relationship. 'Diplomacy serving economic development' will cause scholars to argue that economic cooperation between China and Japan is paramount, yet over the past two years relations between China and Japan have remained dismal.

In analysing the Sino-Japanese relationship and China's policy towards Japan, a number of Japanese experts in China are heavily influenced by the notion that pacifism and economic cooperation should guide China's policy towards Japan. For example, Jin Yongming of the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences argues that improving China-Japan relations requires that China and Japan deepen their level of interdependence through expanded economic cooperation, thereby realizing the objective of friendly neighbour relations and long-term development. As such, China and Japan should transcend the Diaoyu Islands dispute, and enrich and deepen their cooperation in other areas.<sup>75</sup> Professor Liu Jianguo of Tsinghua University argues that the key to good relations between China and Japan is for the two sides to engage one another politically in positive terms, and make a special effort to diffuse the debate over the Diaoyu Islands.<sup>76</sup>

Actually, pacifism and diplomacy based on economic cooperation make it even more difficult for us to analyse the Sino-Japanese relationship. The real reason for the worsening relationship between China and Japan is the intensification of the structural contradiction between the two countries. The Diaoyu Islands dispute is really a strategic pawn, first played by the Japanese government, and later by the Chinese government. Those who hope that the two sides come to terms or even transcend the Diaoyu Islands issue are not thinking practically about the situation, while those who hope that China and Japan use bilateral trade ties to strengthen their relationship have fundamentally misread the policies of the two governments. In reality, both China and Japan have placed political and security interests above economic interests in the context of their relations, and both believe that the benefits of struggle are greater than those of cooperation. In this way, we can explain why the two sides are willing to damage the relationship to a controllable extent.

With regard to a number of specific issue areas, some thinking sets have already started to weaken. For example, with respect to the North Korean nuclear issue, a number of analysts are no longer advocating that China play the role of a neutral mediator on the basis of KLP, but instead that China engage positively as a stakeholder. Zhang Tuosheng points out that although China was the primary force behind the Six Party Talks, its policy was not particularly successful, one of the key reasons being that China sought only to be a

75 Jin Yongming, 'Gaishan ZhongRi guanxi de jidian sikao ji jianyi' ('Several Considerations and Suggestions for Improving Sino-Japanese Relations'), *Dongfang zaobao (Oriental Morning Post)*, 5 December, 2013.

76 Liu Jianguo, 'chuyu shizi lukou de ZhongRi guanxi' ('Sino-Japanese Relations at a Crossroads'), *Shishi baogao (News Report)*, No. 2 (2013), p. 44.

mediator and a bridge for dialogue; it lacked a more positive, assertive role in pushing for a means of and formula for resolution.<sup>77</sup>

## Conclusion

This article presents a typology and summary overview of several dominant thinking sets in China's foreign policy research circles today, which include: keeping a low profile; non-alignment; never taking the lead; China will not become a superpower; China-US relations are paramount; and diplomacy serving economic development. All of these thinking sets are deeply rooted in Deng Xiaoping's '28 character foreign policy guidelines'. Twenty years later, as China's comprehensive national power continues rapidly to expand, and as a new central collective leadership emerges under Xi Jinping, the question arises of whether or not these thinking sets are helpful in our understanding and observations of China's foreign policy in the present and future.

The vitality of these thinking sets depends on how Chinese foreign policy circles understand the relationship between the 28 character foreign policy guidelines and the spirit of the Working Conference on Neighbouring State Diplomacy, or more directly stated, the relationship between 'keeping a low profile' and 'striving for achievement' (*fenfa youwei*). Are the two meant to be complementary, or is the former meant to transcend the latter? The assessment of this author is that Xi Jinping's speech delivered on the occasion of the Working Conference on Neighbouring State Diplomacy represents a step beyond the '28 character foreign policy guidelines', and signals the beginning of a comprehensive transformation of Chinese diplomacy. This means that the policy basis for the thinking sets reviewed above will gradually disappear and fade into history.

## Acknowledgements

The authors are thankful for the anonymous reviewers' helpful comments.

77 Zhang Tuosheng, 'Chaohe wenti yu zhongguo de zhengce' (The North Korean Nuclear Issue and China's Policy), *Guoji anquan yanjiu (Journal of International Security Studies)*, No. 5 (2013), p. 59.



Article

# China Debates the ‘New Type of Great Power Relations’

Qi Hao<sup>†,\*</sup>

<sup>†</sup>Qi Hao is Assistant Professor at Institute of American Studies, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences

\*Corresponding author. Email: kev15030@126.com.

## Abstract

The proposal to forge a ‘new type of great power relations’ is one of the most important diplomatic innovations this Chinese administration has made. Although popular in official discourse, Chinese scholars diverge greatly on how to define the new concept. Debates focus on who the great powers are and what the new relations feature. All are rooted in the vagueness of this concept in official discourse. As the official interpretation of the concept is changing, the debate is also narrowing to that of the goals of the new relations. However, the revision of this concept makes it less practical due to its disconnectedness with the reality of China–US relations. The revised expression also diminishes the uniqueness of the new relations proposal, which implies that it may no longer be a feasible guide to China–US relations or an effective framework for academic studies on the power transition between existing and established powers.

Having surpassed Germany and Japan in succession to become the world’s second biggest economy, China imposes greater influence than ever on regional and global affairs, not just in economy, but also in politics and security. There has consequently been more discussion on China’s rise both in Western and Chinese studies. Debates on China’s rise have extended from relatively simple narratives on the ‘China threat’ in the 1990s to more neutral and specific ones, such as whether there could be a peaceful rise of China, whether China could adapt to the existing international regimes and norms, and, most specifically, how China as a rising power would manage disputes and conflicts with other major powers.<sup>1</sup> The answers

1 Regarding discussions on the influence of China’s rise, see Barry Buzan, ‘China in International Society: Is ‘Peaceful Rise’ Possible?’, *Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (2010), pp. 5–36; Feng Huiyun, ‘Is China a Revisionist Power?’, *Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol. 2, No. 3 (2009), pp. 313–34; Charles Glaser, ‘Will China’s Rise Lead to War’, *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 90, No. 2 (2011), <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/67479/>

to these questions differ greatly when viewed through the different lenses of IR theories and schools. Unsurprisingly, most of these discussions unfold around or involve China-US relations, for China is considered the destined competitor for US hegemony, and this bilateral tie would to a great extent determine the development of the international order.

In light of potential competition with the United States, China's top leaders have put forward a new concept that they call the 'new type of great power relations' (*xinxing daguo guanxi*) which they have tried to endow with concrete meaning. In the middle of the second China-US Strategic and Economic Dialogue in May 2010, then State Councillor Dai Bingguo made the proposal that China and the United States initiate an era of globalization with the new type of great power relations of mutual respect, harmonious existence, and win-win by states of different social systems, cultural traditions, and levels of development.<sup>2</sup> On his visit to the United States in February 2012, then vice president Xi Jinping said that the United States and China should expand their common interests and mutual beneficial cooperation and strive to shape a new type of great power relations in the 21st century.<sup>3</sup> In May 2012, at the beginning of the fourth China-US Strategic and Economic Dialogue, President Hu Jintao put forward five recommendations for building the new type of major powers.<sup>4</sup> In June 2013, when he met with Obama at Sunnylands in California, President Xi Jinping summed up the new relations in the three points: 'no conflicts or confrontations, mutual respect, and win-win cooperation',<sup>5</sup> which later became the official definition of the new type of great power relations.

When reviewing the initiation and evolution of this new concept since 2010, it has on most occasions applied to China-US relations. Although at first the United States seemed to echo the Chinese leader's proposal to build new relations, the United States and China still disagree over the idea in some respects, such as the necessity of creating such a new concept, what it means, and how it can be achieved.<sup>6</sup> It is believed that these disagreements stem

charles-glaser/will-chinas-rise-lead-to-war; John J. Mearsheimer, 'Can China Rise Peacefully', *The National Interest*, 25 October, 2014, <http://nationalinterest.org/commentary/can-china-rise-peacefully-10204>.

- 2 'State Councillor Dai Bingguo's Speech at the Opening Ceremony of the Second China-US Strategic and Economic Dialogue', 25 May, 2010, <http://www.chinanews.com/gn/news/2010/05-25/2302977.shtml>.
- 3 Xi Jinping, 'Yaoba ZhongMei guanxi suzao cheng 21 shiji xinxing daguo guanxi' ('We Should Shape US-China Relations into a New Type of Great Power Relations of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century'), 16 February, 2012, <http://gb.cri.cn/27824/2012/02/16/2225s3559315.htm>.
- 4 Hu Jintao, 'ZhongMei ying dapo daguo duikang luojì' ('China and US Should Break the Logic of Great Power Confrontation'), 4 May, 2012, <http://news.sina.com.cn/o/2012-05-04/033424365185.shtml>.
- 5 'Xi Jinping gaikuo ZhongMei xinxing daguo guanxi, bu chongtu, bu duikang, xianghu zunzhong, hezuo gongying' ('Xi Jinping Sums up China-US New Type of Great Power Relations as No Conflicts and Confrontation, Mutual Respect, Cooperation with Win-Win Benefits'), 10 June, 2013, [http://news.xinhuanet.com/politics/2013-06/10/c\\_116107914.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/politics/2013-06/10/c_116107914.htm).
- 6 Wang Jisi and Wu Shengqi, 'ZhongMei dui xinxing daguo guanxi de renzhi chayi ji Zhongguo duiMei zhengce' ('Different Understandings of the New Type of Great Power Relations by US and China and China's Policy toward U.S.'), *Dangdai shijie (Contemporary World)*, No. 10 (2014), pp. 2-7; Wang Yiwei, 'Xinxing daguo guanxi, ZhongMei renzhi you chayi' ('China and US have Different Understandings of the New Type of Great Power Relations'), 16 November,

largely from suspicions on the part of the United States side about China's intentions in proposing the concept. It is quite natural that China and the United States should have certain disputes over the new concept, in view of the lack of mutual trust that is generally used to justify the failure of the two countries to cooperate.<sup>7</sup> What is most odd is the divergence over the concept within the Chinese academic community, which goes beyond the disagreements between the United States and China.

Chinese academics and policy makers have at best reached consensus in a negative way which distinguishes the new type of great power relations from other types of relations in history, but which gives no clear definition of the key parts of the concept. To gain an understanding of this concept, it must be clear who the great powers are and what kind of relationship can be called 'new type'. On these two questions, we find serious disagreements within the Chinese academic community that may send contradictory messages to those whose focus is on China's rise and its incentives. This article aims to address the debates on several key points of the new concept, including the definition of 'great powers' and the nature of 'new type', and why and how this relationship should be constructed. On these questions, Chinese scholars have diverged to varying degrees.

### Who Are the Great Powers?

Most Chinese scholars of international studies consider the new type of great power relations as Chinese leaders' reflection on China's growing strength and the future scenarios for its relationship with other countries. However, as a diplomatic proposal for implementation, the first thing to make clear is with whom China would construct the new relationship. As to academic meaning, we have to know who qualify as great powers, and how to understand great powers from the perspective of theory building. Unfortunately, there exists no uniform understanding of the new relations. Do they refer to a certain relationship or to general ones that China wishes to develop? Reflecting the vagueness of this concept in their application of it, Chinese scholars diverge greatly on what a great power means. I give in this article a detailed description of the different ideas within the debate, and go on to assess them from the perspective of logic and real policy.

The first point of view takes this new concept as a diplomatic tool to deal with China's foreign relations generally. Upholding this idea, Pang Zhongying in the first explains the risk of not generalizing the concept, and elaborates on China's main purpose in proposing it. As regards US-China relations, he asserts that China would be involuntarily pitted against the United States if the 'new type' were to be restricted to relations with the United States, so providing endorsement for those who play up China's threat to US dominance; as regards China's relations with other countries, it is not wise to make them perceive China as placing the US-China relations above all others, as this would damage China's foreign relations as a whole. Besides pointing out the potential risk of limiting the 'new type' to

2014, [http://opinion.huanqiu.com/opinion\\_world/2014-11/5192710.html](http://opinion.huanqiu.com/opinion_world/2014-11/5192710.html); Diao Daming, 'Meiguo xuejie dui ZhongMei xinxing daguo guanxi de taolun' ('The Discussion of the New Type of Great Power Relations in American Academic Circle'), *Quarterly Journal of International Politics*, No. 1 (2015), pp. 78–99.

7 Kenneth Lieberthal and Wang Jisi, *Addressing US-China Strategic Distrust*, March 2012, [http://www.brookings.edu/~media/research/files/papers/2012/3/30-us-china-lieberthal/0330\\_china\\_lieberthal.pdf](http://www.brookings.edu/~media/research/files/papers/2012/3/30-us-china-lieberthal/0330_china_lieberthal.pdf).

US–China relations, Pang also notes that, as elaborated in the report of the 18th People’s Congress, China could improve and develop relations with developed countries, expand the space for cooperation, and manage disputes properly, so promoting a long and healthy new type of great power relations. Based on the official standpoint, he holds that the ‘new type’ is designed not only for the United States and China, but could also apply to China’s relations with Russia, the EU, India, Brazil—even all G20 countries. As to the shape of the new relations, to Pang’s thinking, either bilateral or multilateral ties would work.<sup>8</sup>

Chen Zhimin admits that the concept was originally created and applied in the context of US–China relations, a bilateral tie entailing many conflicts of interest and difficulties. But, similar to Pang, Chen recognizes that proposing a unique new type of great power relations between China and the United States would seem to the rest of world to be reminiscent of a G2, although that might not necessarily be the case.<sup>9</sup> Therefore, the new type of great power relations should be applied to China’s relations with all major countries, including developed and developing countries and various international organizations. Chen has even suggested that the concept be rephrased ‘new model of relations between major powers’.<sup>10</sup>

Besides the above arguments based on logic and real policy, certain other studies go further, to the extent of neglecting the debate on whether ‘new type’ should be used generally or with a designated target, instead elaborating on how China should construct the new relationship with different countries. Wu Xinbo takes the Chinese official position on the new type of great power relations of ‘no conflicts and confrontation, mutual respect and win-win cooperation’ between great powers as a starting point. In his view, relations with different countries must be tackled in various ways to fulfil China’s purpose in constructing the new relations by underlining different emphases in specific bilateral ties.<sup>11</sup> Certain other scholars raise China’s relations with specific countries as examples of the new type of great power relations, the best case scenario be that of China–Russia relations, which from their point of view set a good example of what building the new type of a great power relations can achieve.<sup>12</sup> To justify their judgment, they cite how the mutual trust between China and

- 8 Pang Zhongying, ‘Xinxing daguo guanxi bu zhuanzhi ZhongMei’ (‘The New Type of Great Power Relations Does Not Solely Refer to China-US Relations’), 9 September, 2013, [http://opinion.huanqiu.com/opinion\\_world/2013-09/4335238.html](http://opinion.huanqiu.com/opinion_world/2013-09/4335238.html).
- 9 G2 was firmly denied by Chinese leaders and academics for its discordance with China’s advocacy of multi-polarization. Wei Ling, ‘Guanyu ZhongMei G2 de jidian sikao’ (‘Some Thoughts on China-US G2’), *Zhongguo gaigebao (China Reform Newspaper)*, 15 March, 2010, [http://www.crd.net.cn/2010-03/15/content\\_5144653.htm](http://www.crd.net.cn/2010-03/15/content_5144653.htm).
- 10 Chen Zhimin, ‘Xinxing daguo guanxi de xingtai fenxi’ (‘Shape Analysis of the New Type of Great Power Relations’), *Guoji guancha (International Review)*, No. 5 (2013), pp. 14–20.
- 11 Wu Xinbo, ‘Xinxing daguo guanxi shi pan daqi’ (‘The New Type of Great Power Relations is a Grand Chess Game’), 11 January, 2013, [http://opinion.huanqiu.com/opinion\\_world/2013-01/3472577.html](http://opinion.huanqiu.com/opinion_world/2013-01/3472577.html).
- 12 Ji Zhiye, ‘ZhongE guanxi shi goujian xinxing daguo guanxi yangban’ (‘China-Russia Relation is a Model of the New Type of Great Power Relations’), 22 March, 2013, [http://news.xinhua.net.com/2013-03/22/c\\_124489905.htm](http://news.xinhua.net.com/2013-03/22/c_124489905.htm).

Russia, in terms of politics, security, and economic cooperation, is escalating to a level to which China has long aspired in its relations with other great countries.<sup>13</sup>

Through a generally positive outlook on the China–Russia relationship, other scholars have even made a concrete analysis of the impediments and incentives confronting China and Russia on their way to the new relations, including various negative factors such as imbalances of power and trade relations. In their view, based on the universal rule of international relations, the checks and balances conducted in China–Russia relations would also appear as a main challenge to accomplishing the new type of relations.<sup>14</sup> Extending the application scope of the new concept, the China–India relationship is also incorporated into this case study by certain scholars, so denoting the significance of the country’s relations with developing countries in the process of China’s rise. The favourable conditions for China and India to develop the new relations, as illustrated in the study, are rooted in both countries’ common appeal for a new international order and their ever deepening economic relationship.<sup>15</sup>

Similar to the first view on the new relations, the second view or study approach also discusses the new concept as a general diplomatic term, but goes beyond the range of China’s foreign relations and extends to the relationships between rising non-Western countries and established Western powers, aiming to shed some light on how well these countries would live. In this way, the big countries are categorized according to the traditional standard of political economy. In Zhang Xiaoming’s view, China’s proposal to build the new relations can be regarded as a collective strategic appeal by non-Western rising powers to maintain an international order in tandem with Western powers, mainly based on international institutions. From this perspective, all the relations between non-Western and Western powers can be studied within the framework of the new type of great powers relations.<sup>16</sup>

The third view, based on its understanding of the new relations, strongly opposes applying the concept widely among major countries of the world. Yan Xuetong insists that the new type of great power relations refers only to new relations between an emerging and established power. Thus the concept cannot be applied to any other bilateral ties but China–US relations,<sup>17</sup> which implies the uniqueness of the United States and China as established and emerging powers. Zhao Suisheng draws the same conclusion as Yan does, but through

- 13 Gao Zugui, ‘ZhongE guanxi shi xinxing daguo guanxi de dianfan’ (‘China-Russia Relation is an Example of the New Type of Great Power Relations’), 4 July, 2013, <http://v.ifeng.com/mil/annals/201307/c25e27bb-1188-4f6e-b1d0-1457d122a230.shtml>.
- 14 Wang Sheng and Luo Xiao, ‘Goujian ZhongE xinxing daguo guanxi de jichu he lujing’ (‘The Basis and Approaches for Building China-Russia New Type of Great Power Relations’), *Xiandai guoji guanxi (Contemporary International Relations)*, No. 7 (2013), pp. 41–49.
- 15 Hu Erjie, ‘Guanyu goujian ZhongYin xinxing daguo guanxi de ruogan sikao’ (‘Some Reflections on Building the China-India New Type of Great Power Relations’), *Heping yu fazhan (Peace and Development)*, No. 3 (2014), pp. 52–63.
- 16 Zhang Xiaoming, ‘Dui xinxing daguo guanxi de yizhong jiedu’ (‘An Interpretation of the New Type of Great Power Relations’), *Guoji zhengzhi yanjiu (International Politics Quarterly)*, No. 1 (2014), pp. 49–58.
- 17 Yan Xuetong, ‘MeiE guanxi yu ZhongRi guanxi dou bushi xinxing daguo guanxi’ (‘Neither the US-Russia nor China-Japan Relations is the New Type of Great Power Relations’), 26 June, 2014, [http://www.guancha.cn/YanXueTong/2014\\_06\\_26\\_241158.shtml](http://www.guancha.cn/YanXueTong/2014_06_26_241158.shtml).

a comparison of the China–US relations with other China-foreign relations. He notes that although China has showed the will to build the new relations with various emerging powers, including Russia, India, and South Africa, when it comes to practical policy, none of these relations parallels with US–China relations because, economically, only US and China can be called ‘great powers’, and it is therefore of vital importance that the two countries overcome the tragedy of great power politics.<sup>18</sup>

It is noteworthy that most scholars who oppose a general use of the new concept have used the exclusive method when presenting their arguments. But the different understandings of power contrasts among great powers engender slightly different thoughts on what relations should be excluded. Qu Xing’s opinion represents a somewhat mixed perception of the new type of great power relations within the Chinese community. He regards China’s proposal of the new relations as a reflection of the country’s good wish to evade the predestined tragedy of emerging and established great powers, which is a mainstream point among Chinese scholars. From the perspective of China’s foreign relations, he considers US–China relations as the core of the new concept, thus excluding the possibility of or necessity for China to build the new relations with other powers. Although Qu holds a universally accepted view on China’s key purpose in constructing the new relations, he nevertheless differs greatly from the views of Yan and Zhao on what qualifies countries to build the ‘new relations’. In terms of capabilities, he also ranks the EU and Russia as great powers, but does not treat the EU as a potential target for China’s building of the new relations. The reason he gives for excluding China–EU relations as a candidate for the ‘new type’ is that the EU does not consider China a potential strategic threat. Based on the same logic, he believes the ‘new type’ can be applied to US–Russia relations, as Russia is still a great power militarily and perceived by the United States as a great threat.<sup>19</sup>

It seems reasonable for Russia and Europe to be regarded as major powers due to their status in international society. But Qu Xing’s logic as to why the EU does not see China as a potential threat while the United States does needs to be clarified. If we follow this logic, Russia and Europe are also in the need of some sort of new relations, as the security dilemma between the two countries has worsened since NATO’s eastward expansion. Another question related to Qu Xing’s idea is that of whether a nation’s capability correlates with the threat it poses to other countries—an old question in international relations, and a key factor in understanding that the new type of great power relations in the 21st century is not neatly black and white.

Bridging the gap among various ideas about who are the players in the new type of great power relations, Yang Jiemian attempts to make a comprehensive and objective summing up of the concept by sifting out dual implications from the academic discussions and diplomatic practice of this new concept which advocate international norms of morality and aim to get real problems settled. According to his understanding, although the new type was initiated for US–China relations, all the traditional Western powers and emerging powers as represented by BRICS can be included in the category of great powers when constructing

18 Zhao Suisheng, ‘ZhongMei ying gongtong mouqiu shijie quanli tianping xinde pingheng’ (‘China and US Should Seek a New Balance of World Power’), *Renmin luntan (People’s Forum)*, No.18 (2013), pp. 6–25.

19 Qu Xing, ‘Zhongguo xuyao zenyang de xinxing daguo guanxi’ (‘What Kind of New Type of Great Power Relations Does China Need’), 15 June, 2013, <http://www.bjnews.com.cn/opinion/2013/06/15/268374.html>.

the new type of relations. Through proposing this new concept, China hopes to promote the fairness, justice, and rationality of international relations, so implying a general applicability of this new concept. In support of his argument, he notes that China's relations with other great powers have been classified under different categories based on their achievements and potential to form a new type of relations, and that it is necessary for China to underline a different focus and make different efforts in its relations with these great powers.<sup>20</sup>

Reviewing all these debates on the application of the new concept, it can be concluded that the lack of consensus on the purpose of building the new relations mainly accounts for the disputes among Chinese scholars. If China's purpose in proposing this concept lies in the wish to get away from the so-called Thucydides Trap, characterized by the strategic confrontation between established and emerging powers, the leading target could be no other country than the United States. However, according to the same logic, Qu Xing and Zhang Xiaoming have different ideas on who qualify as great powers eligible for the 'new type'. Qu adds the factor of threat to decide which countries need the 'new type', and Zhang attempts to view the definition of great powers within a long time span, from a perspective of international order.

Different from the approaches above, other scholars use the principle of 'equality, mutual respect, and win-win cooperation' as standards through which to distinguish the 'new type' from other great power relations, which implies theoretically that the 'new type' can be formed between any two big countries, though with different levels of difficulty and pre-conditions. However, the imprecise use of this term in the study of China's foreign relations makes the new concept a vague one characterized by two drawbacks.

First, although some scholars regard the new relations as a generalized term in China's foreign policy, they make no clear division among different 'new type' of great power relations. It is natural that different major countries may respond differently to the rise of China, which is indeed the background for proposing the concept. If the concept were applied when referring to the relations between China and all major countries without division, it would offer no effective framework through which to provide insights or theoretical guidance for China's diplomacy in the era of China's rise. Secondly, there is no authoritative illustration of the goal in achieving the new type of great power relations, or as debated by some Chinese scholars, the new concept is created with multi-goals, then some questions would arise, including what is the main goal with the new relations, what is the relationship between different goals, and how to realize different goals. The drawbacks specified above may bring troubles for both academic study and diplomatic practice. Obviously, to achieve different goals with different target, China has to take different paths and create different conditions.

## How can the New Relations be Characterized?

Another argument about the new concept is that of what the new type of great power relations would look like, or how the content of the new relations should be defined. The debate on this question relates closely to who the main players in the new relations would be.

20 Yang Jiemian, 'Xinxing daguo guanxi lilun zhanlue he zhengce jiangou' ('New Type of Great Power Relations—Theory, Strategy and Policy Formulation'), *Guoji wenti yanjiu* (*International Studies*), No. 3 (2013), pp. 9–19.

If the 'new type' is regarded as a general shape of the relations between great powers, it is to be expected that the new relations between different countries may take on different features that would undoubtedly reflect the diversified nature of this new type of relations.

As to the nature of the new type of great power relations, four points of view are apparent within Chinese academic circles. The first partly equates the new type of relations with the partner relationship that China has been promoting with other big countries. Therefore, the new type of great power relations is not taken as a brand-new concept in the history of China's foreign relations. Pang Zhongying puts all China's various partnerships with other big powers into the basket of new type of great power relations, including the strategic cooperative partnership (*zhanlue xiezuo huoban*), strategic partnership (*zhanlue hezuo huoban*), and comprehensive and cooperative partnership (*quanmian hezuo huoban*).<sup>21</sup> Chen Zhimin holds a similar idea, based on his prescribed view of the nature of the new type of relations. He categorizes the relations between big powers into seven shapes: those that are enemies in hot war, rivals in cold war, cut-throat competitors, traditional allies, benign competitors, partners, and community members. Out of all of these, he selects the last three as the potential shapes for the new relations. As the Chinese government has made great efforts in the last decade to develop various partnerships with other countries, the new relations proposal cannot be regarded as a new diplomatic discourse or practice.<sup>22</sup>

The second view underscores strategic competitiveness in the relations between great powers as a prerequisite for building the new relations. Most scholars holding the second opinion prefer to describe the 'new type' as a stable relationship of peaceful competition. Zhou Fangyin insists that the new type must be built upon strategic competition between great powers, but with stable development of their relations. In his view, there is no need for new type relations where there is no strategic competition, and the purpose of building the new type is to prevent malignant competition from eroding a bilateral tie. As to the new type of relations between the United States and China, he pictures this as a long-term stable relationship endowed with strategic significance, but not for expediency. To achieve this goal, the two sides must specify their bottom line with respect to certain key national interests, and no one attempts to challenge or test the other's resolve to defend these key interests.<sup>23</sup>

Yan Xuetong gives a more straightforward two-fold definition of the new type, one that aims to sheer away from any military confrontation similar to that between United States and former Soviet Union during the Cold War, but which in the meantime is not directed towards strategic cooperation like that of the United States and UK. In short, a new type should feature peaceful strategic competition, neither getting too close nor too far to fall apart.<sup>24</sup> Addressing the concern that the new type proposal might be equated with the G2, so causing unwanted trouble for China's foreign relations, Yan thinks this is a result of misunderstanding of the new type. He considers the competitive part of the new relations as its

21 Pang, 'The New Type of Great Power Relations Does Not Solely Refer to China-US Relations'.

22 Chen, 'Shape Analysis of the New Type of Great Power Relations'.

23 Zhou Fangyin, 'ZhongMei xinxing daguo guanxi de dongli lujing yu qianjing' ('The Motivation, Approach and Prospect of China-U.S. New Type of Great Power Relations'), *Dangdai yatai (Journal of Contemporary Asia-Pacific Studies)*, No. 2 (2013), pp. 4–21.

24 Yan, 'Neither the US-Russia Nor China-Japan Relations is the New Type of Great Power Relations'.

core nature, largely different from the G2, which is based on positive cooperation between great powers.<sup>25</sup>

Shi Yinhong's idea is something of a combination of Zhou and Yan's opinions, though he understands the new type from a slightly different perspective. He imbues the two key phrases, 'new type' and 'great powers' with strategic meaning wherein the two sides in the new relations have to respect each other not as ordinary sovereign powers, but in terms of certain key interests and the dignity that unique big powers possess in the international community. Shi does not explicate the interests and dignity of the unique big powers that command such respect, but it is certain that the list of such interests would go beyond those that traditional powers cherish. Meanwhile, to protect and convince each other of these key interests, the two sides must negotiate their way around the so-called 'Peloponnesian Trap' characterized by face-to-face confrontation.<sup>26</sup>

The third view or study approach attempts to define the new type according to the attitude of big powers and the kind of cooperation between them, namely the new type passive safeguarding and positive management. Big powers under the former category have no choice but to strive to maintain a peaceful status-quo devoid of large-scale conflicts or war, while the focus of those with a positive management attitude is on the cooperative aspect to achieve a win-win result.<sup>27</sup> This division seems also to imply two levels of new type through which big powers may escalate their relationship. As a matter of fact, these two new types can be regarded as two forms coexisting in the relations between big powers. Yan Xuetong makes a persuasive argument for such coexistence, using the example of the US-China relationship. He observes the diversified interests between the United States and China, including common interests, complementary interests, and conflicting interests, in light of which the two countries cooperate in different ways to achieve their common goals. With respect to common and complementary interests, the United States and China can develop positive cooperation, while preventive diplomacy is indispensable to avoid conflicting interests that could ruin the relationship.<sup>28</sup> This simple dichotomy, however, depends on a clear definition of what constitutes complementary and common interests between great powers. Although all relationships among different countries of the world feature coexistence of various forms of interests and cooperation, the precondition for such coexistence is they are not of strategic significance, as otherwise neither passive safeguarding nor positive management can be integrated into the foreign policy of any great powers.

The last view is a somewhat philosophical perspective that idealistically regards the new type of relations as a state of harmony between great powers in which there are no conflicts or cooperation. Studies holding this view usually reflect on the new type of relations through the lens of constructivism, wherein the new type of relations is a 'harmonious symbiosis', possibly rooted in the change of common perception among great powers of the

25 Yan Xuetong, 'Xinxing daguo guanxi yu G2 butong' ('The New Type of Great Power Relations is Different From G2'), 18 April, 2014, <http://cn.nikkei.com/columnviewpoint/41-viewpoint/8917-20140418.html>.

26 Shi Yinhong, 'Goujian xinxing daguo guanxi de hongguan sikao' ('Macro Thinking on Building the New Type of Great Power Relations'), *Qianxian (Frontier)*, No. 7 (2014), pp. 47-49.

27 Yang, 'New Type of Great Power Relations.'

28 John Mearsheimer, *Daguo zhengzhi de beiju (The Tragedy of Great Power Politics)*, trans. Wang Yiwei and Tang Xiaosong (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 2014), p. 441.

inevitability of the emerging and established powers' descent into vicious competition for dominance. Wang Yiwei conceives of 'three transcendences' to be achieved to build new relations with regard to cultural conflict, zero-sum game, and ideological confrontation. As to the theoretical meaning of the new relations, he construes it as a substitute for traditional Western IR theories through the ontology of the 'harmonious world' idea, the methodology of coevolution, and the epistemology of 'human concern and great power responsibility'.<sup>29</sup> Su Changhe holds a similar view to Wang, asserting that the development of a symbiotic relationship reduces the possibility of great power confrontation. According to his observations, a new international system featuring a paralleling of various partnerships and traditional military alliances is looming. He asserts that the prospect of new relations would be closely bound to the development of partnerships, rather than the more traditional alignments, the cohesiveness of which would be a decisive factor in whether partnership or alignment prevails. Citing the competition between the United States and China in the Asia-Pacific, he proposes that the partnership diplomacy that China initiated has subtly reshaped the US alliance system.<sup>30</sup>

The debates above involve the key elements on how to define the new relations. To understand the debates against the background of China's diplomacy, all the discussions above actually relate closely to the ongoing debate about whether China should give up its long-held principle of 'keeping a low profile' and carry out great power diplomacy, or strive for achievement, as advocated by a few scholars.<sup>31</sup> The disagreements on the subject and nature of the new type of great power relations reveal that some Chinese scholars are still in support of the 'keeping a low profile' principle as advocated by Deng Xiaoping, and believe that the reasons for doing so remain prevalent. Therefore, the new type proposal should be embedded in China's overall foreign relations with all the major powers in the world, and characterized by win-win cooperation.

### The Significance of and Obstacles to Building the New Relations

As China's new foreign policy initiative, the new type of great power relations needs to display its uniqueness in the process of being constructed if it is to exert long-term influence on China's diplomacy. In other words, the real significance of this new concept lies in its goal, which would go beyond the reach of other Chinese diplomatic appeals. Also, through their different understandings of it, Chinese scholars provide three perspectives for understanding the significance of this proposed concept.

- 29 Wang Yiwei, 'Yi hehe gongsheng shixian sanchong chaoyue, Zhongguo de xinxing daguo guanxi lilun jishi' ('Achieving Triple Transcendence Through Peaceful and Harmonious Coexistence, the Cornerstone for the Chinese Theory of New Type of Great Power Relations'), *Renmin luntan (People's Forum)*, September 2013, <http://theory.people.com.cn/n/2013/0916/c40531-22938665.html>.
- 30 Su Changhe, 'Gongsheng xing guoji tixi de keneng zai yige duoji shijie zhong ruhe goujian xinxing daguo guanxi' ('The Possibility for a Symbiotic International System - How to Construct New Type of Great Power Relations in a Multi-polar World'), *Shijie jingji yu zhengzhi (World Economics and Politics)*, No. 9 (2013), pp. 4–22.
- 31 Yan Xuetong, 'From Keeping a Low Profile to Striving for Achievement', *Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol. 7, No. 2 (2014), pp. 153–84.

The first one elaborates on the meaning of building the new relations from the perspective of a rising power. Zhang Xiaoming holds that the new type with regard to China's foreign relations is in reality a preventive diplomacy whose aim is to avoid direct confrontation with the United States.<sup>32</sup> In a similar way, Zhao Suisheng regards the new relations as the Chinese government's rephrasing of the principle of 'peaceful coexistence'. He believes that the Chinese leadership is totally aware of the gap between China and the United States in terms of overall capabilities, and hence of the irrationality of an all-round confrontation with the United States while China is pursuing its dream of building 'an overall well-off society' and 'the great rejuvenation of the nation' in the first two decades of the 21st century, for which a prolonged span of 'strategic opportunity' is necessary.<sup>33</sup> As a common ground for the ideas above through which China seeks to make its way with a new type of US-China relations, the potential danger of conflicts due to China's growth is perceived more than ever in contemporary international politics. Slightly different from the ideas above, certain other scholars underline China's rise mainly in terms of its economic prosperity. Zhong Feiteng prefers to view China as a great economic power that differs greatly from great powers in Western history. According to his idea, China's giant economic achievement cannot be sustained without a desirable external environment, which building the new type of great power relations would ensure.<sup>34</sup>

Besides the strategic meaning of building the new relations, certain scholars add more details to make the new concept operational, such as referring to concrete mechanics for communication and cooperation. Zhang Yun sees the practical part of the new concept as making US-China relations more institutionalized and predictable. Nevertheless, according to his idea, it would be unrealistic to demand that the two powers follow one another's logic in their relations, for the conduct of both sides can be strongly justified in terms of their respective logic and rationality. Taking this into account, a feasible expectation of the new type counts on mutual respect or acknowledgement of the other's logic, mainly through the institutionalization of regular communication at different levels, which can help reduce risk and prevent crises from escalating.<sup>35</sup>

The second approach views the new type from a much broader perspective that lifts the new concept beyond the bilateral relationship between the United States and China and connotes promotion of China's diplomatic thinking, its undertaking of great power responsibilities, and maintaining the regional order. Ruan Zongze conceives of three connotations of establishing the new type that can be seen at different levels. The first lies in manifestation of the idea of a harmonious world, which is a necessary component of achieving the 'Chinese Dream'. The second is justified by the need for a new mentality through which to develop the relations between great powers in a highly interdependent world. According to Ruan's idea, taking the lead in promoting a win-win new type of great power relations shows the sense of duty inherent in Chinese leadership. The last but not the least

32 Zhang, 'An Interpretation of the New Type of Great Power Relations'.

33 Zhao, 'China and US Should Seek a New Balance of World Power'.

34 Zhong Feiteng, 'Xinxing daguo guanxi gongtong fazhan yu Zhongguo waijiao xin linian' ('The New Type of Great Power Relations, Joint Development and China's New Diplomatic Ideas'), *Guoji luntan (International Forum)*, No. 1 (2014), pp. 34-39.

35 Zhang Yun, 'ZhongMei xinxing daguo guanxi de mubiao' ('The Goal of China-US New Type of Great Power Relations'), 22 June, 2013, <http://www.aisixiang.com/data/65037.html>.

connotation regards the new relations, or the way in which China and the United States get along, as a decisive factor in the future of the Asia-Pacific.<sup>36</sup>

The last one is reflected in a Chinese foreign policy outlook that considers the new type of great power relations as the debut of new international relations. As pictured by Chen Zhimin, the new type of great power relations is only part of China's diplomacy, the core spirit of which should be taken as a base for seeking entirely new international relations. As an emerging power, China's new international relations diplomacy should consist in a new type of relations with great powers, small powers, and non-state actors.<sup>37</sup>

Just as argued at the beginning of this part, the meaning of the new relations proposal as a diplomatic innovation lies in its indispensability to realize a unique goal. The first argument above underscores the meaning of the new relations as United States and China achieving peaceful power redistribution, which is obviously beyond the appeal of other initiatives. The second one endows the new relations with more meanings with regard to China's international responsibility as illustrated by Ruan Zongze and to the spirit of China's overall diplomacy advocated by Chen Zhimin. The question with the second arguments is that if imbuing the new relations with meanings of which they conceive, the new relations proposal would make no difference with some other diplomatic appeal like the idea of 'harmonious world', which aims to promote good relations among all the countries. Another question pertained to Chen's argument lies in whether China could use the spirit of new type of great power relations to tackle its relations with other type of entities.

Assuming the significance of building new type relations, the next question is how to realize this concept, or how likely that is. Although the question of whether or not the new type concept refers specifically to US-China relations is intensely debated in China's academic circles, most studies on the possibility, conditions, or impediments involved in building the new type concept are conducted around US-China relations, so tacitly equating it with US-China relations.<sup>38</sup>

In probing the possibility of building new type relations, most Chinese studies base their analyses or predictions on the conditions and impediments of US-China relations. With respect to favourable conditions for building new type relations, much of the consensus that exists among Chinese scholars is characterized by the following points. The first focuses on the change of time and nature of state. Zhou Fangyin holds that the new type proposal is not just wishful thinking on the part of the Chinese government, but one well justified by norm changes in the new era and concern about real interests. In his view, a state of no war among great powers has appeared in international politics due to the deterrent effect of nuclear weapons, the burgeoning of nationalism, deepening recognition of sovereign rights, and high economic interdependence. In this era, the competition for power in a peaceful way characterizes the relations between great powers.<sup>39</sup> Jin Canrong draws a similar

36 Ruan Zongze, 'ZhongMei neng jianli xinxing daguo guanxi me' ('Will China and US Manage to Build the New Type of Great Power Relations?'), 30 December, 2013, [http://www.dangjian.cn/gjgc/201312/t20131230\\_1667401.shtml](http://www.dangjian.cn/gjgc/201312/t20131230_1667401.shtml).

37 Chen, 'Shape Analysis of the New Type of Great Power Relations'.

38 When searching for 'new type of great power relations' in the CNKI Index, 178 articles from 2012 to 2014 are listed, among which 148 focus on the possibilities, conditions, and impediments for China-US new type great power relations.

39 Zhou, 'The Motivation, Approach and Prospect of China-US New Type of Great Power Relations'.

conclusion through his interpretation of the uniqueness of state nature. In his view, the United States and China are not traditional nation states but a new type of civilized state actors, who differ greatly from emerging and existing powers in history, so constituting a natural precondition for the United States and China to build the new type of relations.<sup>40</sup>

The second point lies in the necessity of US–China cooperation in the field of global governance, an integral part of the ‘pluses’ in US–China relations, according to certain Chinese scholars. Tao Wenzhao is optimistic in his figuring out of the great space for close cooperation between the United States and China in tackling such global threats as climate change, infectious disease, and terrorism. He sees US–China cooperation on these issues as a good way of averting zero-sum competition.<sup>41</sup>

The third condition depends upon the communication mechanisms at various levels between the two countries. Jin Canrong gives much weight to the role of communication in stabilizing US–China relations. He is aware that the most useful part of various dialogues lies in their ability to exert control over conflicts or crises, but that this cannot be expected to achieve their resolution. In achieving their basic goal, communication mechanisms are designed to create a good atmosphere and strengthen mutual strategic trust, based on which appropriate solutions catering to the interests of both parties can be found.<sup>42</sup>

As to the impediments in building the new type of relations, there are three kinds of issues whose resolution presents different difficulties. The first relates to the inevitability of US–China competition for power. Zhou Fangyin believes it natural that the United States should exert intense resistance to a potential power transition and take preventive measures to lower any loss of interests that the process of power transition might entail. As for the scramble between the United States and China, Zhou believes that, apart from security and economic interests, the two countries also compete for international standing, which is of a zero-sum nature.<sup>43</sup>

The second kind consists in specifically creating or increasing tensions in US–China relations, the list of which changes and expands as the United States and China make more connections in both traditional and new fields. The traditional flashpoints usually refer to the Three Ts (Taiwan, Tibet, and Trade), which are to some extent being replaced by new conflicts in maritime and cyberspace. The rebalanced strategy initiated by the United States to tackle these new disputes and the involvement of its allies in the Asia-Pacific region, however, increases tensions between the two countries. The accumulation of these traditional and newly emerged conflicts engenders an irresolvable lack of trust which may in turn block the efforts of both countries to ease their tensions.

With regard to the influence of these issues on building the new type of relations, there is great disparity among the studies of Chinese scholars. Some attribute the erosion of

40 Jin Canrong and Zhao Yuanliang, ‘Goujian ZhongMei xinxing daguo guanxi de tiaojian tansuo’ (‘Exploration of the Conditions for Building a China-US New Type of Great Power Relations’), *Shijie jingji yu zhengzhi* (*World Economics and Politics*), No. 3 (2014), pp. 50–68.

41 Tao Wenzhao, ‘ZhongMei yuanhe keyi goujian xinxing daguo guanxi’ (‘Why China and the US could Build the New Type of Great Power Relations’), *Zhongguo guoqing guoli* (*Chinese National Conditions and Strengths*), No. 1 (2014), pp. 64–65.

42 Jin and Zhao, ‘Exploration of the Conditions for Building a China-US New Type of Great Power Relations’.

43 Zhou, ‘The Motivation, Approach and Prospect of China-US New Type of Great Power Relations’.

US–China relations to the US’s misconduct.<sup>44</sup> Pang Zhongying illustrates his idea by citing the Snowden incident. He holds that the United States will not give up its cyberspace monitoring program because the United States would not trade its dominance in this field for cooperation on the cyber issue with other countries. It is consequently almost impossible for the United States and China to form a new type of relations in the sphere of cyber security.<sup>45</sup> Han Zhaoying regards the rebalancing strategy as an overreaction by the United States to China’s rise, and an exaggeration of the potential risk in the process of power redistribution that could bring the United States and China into an adversarial relationship.<sup>46</sup> Contrary to the above ideas, certain other scholars disagree with the totally negative view on all of these seemingly negative issues. In Yan Xuetong’s view, the lack of mutual trust is no excuse for the failure of US–China cooperation. Even without mutual trust the United States and China could still develop positive cooperation on common interests, and preventive cooperation to avoid conflicts might indeed engender more trust between the two countries.

The third impediment, as argued by some scholars from the perspective of the United States, lies in the ambiguity of the new concept, which makes it less attractive than it appears. According to Xue Litai and Zhu Huizhong’s idea, it is possible for the United States and China to break the Thucydides Trap in the nuclear era, which may be characterized by the new type of great power relations. But before that China must elaborate on the details of the concept, which is at present just a bundle of principles with no clear content or guidelines for implementation. The vagueness of the concept may mislead the United States into taking it as an expedient without serious consideration.<sup>47</sup>

## Approaches to Realizing the New Relations

No matter how the new type of great power relations is defined, it makes no sense if it cannot be implemented. Based on the discussions above, it can be said that the new type of great power relations is a strategic concept that must be addressed in tactical detail, which means the new relations should be linked with specific aims. Studies by Chinese scholars on how to realize the new relations hence attempt to figure out the right approach to achieving different aims.

Shi Yinong holds that a clear visualization of ‘strategic destination’ is necessary when selecting an approach to the new type, and that it should figure out how the United States

44 Wang Yusheng, ‘ZhongMei jianli xinxing daguo guanxi keneng ma?’ (‘Is it Possible for China and the US to Have a New Type of Great Power Relations?’), 29 December, 2012, [http://opinion.huanqiu.com/opinion\\_world/2012-12/3431583.html](http://opinion.huanqiu.com/opinion_world/2012-12/3431583.html).

45 Pang Zhongying, ‘Zhongmei xinxing daguo guanxi shuoyi xingnan’ (‘The China-US New Type of Great Power Relations Is Easier Said Than Done’), 3 July, 2013, <http://www.aisixiang.com/data/65332.html>.

46 Han Zhaoying and Wang Shishan, ‘Meiguo de yatai zai pingheng zhanlue ji qi fumian yingxiang’ (‘U.S.Asia-Pacific Rebalancing Strategy and its Negative Effects’), *Renmin luntan* (People’s Forum), No. 17 (2012), pp. 6–13.

47 Xue Litai and Zhu Huizhong, ‘Lun xinxing daguo guanxi de xianshixing ji tiaozhan’ (‘Comments on the Feasibility and the Challenges of New Type of Great Power Relations’), *Lingdao* (The Leader), June 2013, [http://www.21ccom.net/articles/qqsw/zwj/article\\_2013090491299.html](http://www.21ccom.net/articles/qqsw/zwj/article_2013090491299.html).

and China can make a change in their power distribution. According to his idea, the United States should have a more balanced or rational understanding of the change in its power and influence in different functional and geographical areas, thus aspiring to 'selective preponderance' but not 'overall dominance'. For instance, he suggests that the United States acknowledge China's advantage with regard to trade and economy, especially in Asia, and that China should be clearly aware of American military superiority to it and the US's diplomatic advantages compared to China. In short, within the framework of various financial and security institutions, the contrasting shares of power and influence between the United States and China should be commensurate with their capabilities and respective contributions.

On how redistribution of power and responsibilities can be realized, Shi holds that both the United States and China should change their diplomatic behaviour to strike a balance between give and take. The United States should make every effort to eradicate various disturbances at home and abroad, take on more responsibilities, and acquire corresponding payback in terms of power and influence. As far as China is concerned, Shi believes it necessary for the country to exert a 'strategic push' that gradually forces compromises from the United States and so eventually, over time, arrive at a 'final settlement'.<sup>48</sup>

Similar to Shi's idea, Zhou Fangyin also pictures an 'ultimate shape' of the new type of great power relations. He believes there is no easy-access for the new type, given the sophisticated relations between the United States and China concerning various conflicts of interests. Adopting a realistic view, he visualizes the new type of great power relations as a strategic stalemate featuring high stability that is immune to wishful thinking on the part of either country to change the status quo.<sup>49</sup>

Based on his vision of the prospect, Zhou puts forward specific policy recommendations. On the one hand, as US-China relations move nearer to the critical point of power transition, he believes there is more pressure on both countries to take practical measures that place the bilateral tie under control. China should take a good grasp on its policy changes to make the process of power transition stable and predictable. In the process, both the United States and China can resort to innovations of certain measures, such as intent interpretation, cognition adjustment, change of behaviour, and institutional arrangements, for purposes of reducing possible damage to their relations. On the other hand, to forge a new type of great power relations of greater stability, China needs to take a moderate but tough position that shows firmness in protecting its vital interests, especially when confronted with unreasonable conduct by the United States. This would be helpful in making the United States adopt a more practical attitude and adjust its expectations of the new type of great power relations.<sup>50</sup>

Taking a different path, Da Wei attempts to match different measures and the new type goals at different levels. He views President Xi Jinping's 'three points' summing up<sup>51</sup> as the three levels of developing the new type of great power relations. On the first level, which he

48 Shi, 'Macro Thinking on Building the New Type of Great Power Relations'.

49 Zhou, 'The Motivation, Approach and Prospect of China-US New Type of Great Power Relations'.

50 *Ibid.*

51 Da Wei, 'Goujian ZhongMei xinxing daguo guanxi de lujing xuanze' ('The Approach Selection for Building the China-US New Type of Great Power Relations'), *Shijie jingji yu zhengzhi* (*World Economics and Politics*), No. 7 (2013), pp. 59-73.

regards as the lowest, the strategic interdependence of the United States and China is a staple that consists in the four integral pillars of nuclear equilibrium, economic interdependence, common confrontation of global threats, and social and cultural connections. As to the goals, he believes that the United States and China are already on the threshold of the new type of great power relations. On the second level—mutual respect—Da Wei believes it would be extremely difficult for the United States and China to muster sufficient strategic trust to address their respective core concerns. Therefore, in promoting the new relations at the middle level, China should lower its expectations and seek to move forward gradually while striking a consensus with the United States. At the third level, in Da Wei's view this would require that the United States and China go beyond their parochial definition of national interests, and lift the aims of their cooperation to that of constructing and maintaining international institutions.

Chen Zhimin also categorizes the new type of great power relations under different levels, but more academically. He depicts three potential shapes for the new type, including the relations of benign competition, partnership, and community membership, which would coexist and evolve in sequence, according to his idea. Firstly, to achieve the initial shape of benign cooperation, he recommends that China accept four points. The first is to expand common interests while reducing the space for vicious competition. The second requires China to cooperate with the United States to produce a set of rules for benign competition. The third is to face international competition or soft balancing by other countries with a light heart. The last requires China to clarify its strategic bottom line and so deter vicious competition. Secondly, in terms of developing partnership, he acknowledges the effectiveness of China's policy over the last two decades of constructing partnerships at different levels with great powers. Lastly, he considers the goal of sharing membership of a community as an ideal, which may not be realized in view of the reality of international politics.<sup>52</sup>

All of the above scholars focus their studies on how the United States and China should interact to realize the new type of great power relations, which depends upon whether the United States and China could achieve a peaceful power transition that keeps conflicts and crisis under control, and takes further steps towards win-win cooperation. Wang Jisi has a totally different understanding of how to achieve the new relations. In his view, the state of mutual distrust may last for quite some time. Worse still, the United States and China may not live up to sharing mutual trust in its true sense. Based on this daunting prospect, he claims that the key to building the new relations has little to do with the way in which the diplomats of both countries handle their relations.<sup>53</sup>

He notes that the United States constantly diverts its attention from certain specific concerns to others. For instance, when thorny issues such as Iraq, Libya, Al Qaeda, or the RMB exchange rate are either resolved or relieved, the United States then focuses on other issues like Iran and the DPRK's nuclear plans, cyber espionage, and maritime disputes in the East and South China Seas. It is natural for a great power to have to address endless concerns as new problems appear, but Wang fears that the United States and China will lose track if they relate the new type of great power relations to various specific issues that

52 Chen Zhimin, 'Shape Analysis of the New Type of Great Power Relations'.

53 Wang Jisi, 'ZhongMei huo yongyuan da budao zhenzheng de huxin' ('China and US May Never Have Real Mutual Trust'), 18 November, 2013, <http://news.takungpao.com/world/exclusive/2013-11/2046992.html>.

are constantly changing. He asserts, therefore, that the United States and China should follow and pay more attention to their respective path towards building a prosperous, democratic, civilized, and harmonious country, and not be too distracted by external troubles. He cites Henry Kissinger's opinion that the United States and China should be engaged in a non-zero-sum relationship of co-evolution.<sup>54</sup>

### Concept Development in Chinese Official Discourse and Its Policy Implications

From the debates within Chinese academic discourse, it can be concluded that there is low consensus on the meaning of new type of great power relations, especially as regards what we can expect from them. Therefore, it is necessary to explore why Chinese scholars have diverged so greatly on how to define the concept. Although some scholars recognize the academic significance of studying the concept, and hope to make it a framework for creating Chinese IR theory, the concept is in the first place a diplomatic term, and debates on it within academic circles are largely attributable to the continual change of expression or interpretation of this term in official discourse.

Looking through the history of China's diplomacy, it is noteworthy that the new type of great power relations is not a brand new concept. In an inner speech in 2000, Jiang Zemin put forward a similar concept characterized by non-alignment, non-confrontation, and not directed against any third country.<sup>55</sup> But compared with the new type of great power relations proposed by Xi Jinping, it is clear that the new concept today imbues a different meaning of 'great power' as regards capability, for China's growth has effected a change in international power contrast which is the premise for proposing the new type of relations.

When the new type of great power relations was first proposed, it was widely acknowledged that the concept was designed specifically for the US-China relations, but was later indeed applied on different occasions by Chinese high leaders in reference to the relations between China and other major countries, such as Russia and India. The wide use of this concept made it the most popular term in China's diplomatic discourse throughout the years 2012 and 2013. In spite of its prevalence, the new term has little practicability in directing China's foreign relations due to its absence of clear targets and goals. In this respect, the new concept is something of a setback from the partnership diplomacy, which could at least make a difference in China's foreign relations. The diplomatic practice of this concept somewhat misled Chinese academic studies as to why the concept was created and what its practice might achieve. Thus there appeared lots of discussions on building new relations with other big powers, not only with Russia and India as mentioned by high leaders, but also with other big powers like Germany and France.

However, other than Xi Jinping's clear description of the new relations, the interpretation of the concept was subjected to continuous changes in official discourse. In an article

54 Wang Jisi, 'ZhongMei xinxing daguo guanxi fendao yangbiao haishi shu tu tonggui' ('The China-U.S. New Type of Great Power Relations - Going Separate Ways or Achieving the Same Ultimate Goal by Different Routes'), *Guoji zhanlue yanjiu jianbao (International Strategic Studies Briefing)*, 16 March, 2014, <http://www.ciss.pku.edu.cn/ueditor/net/upload/file/20140813/6354349448281485577423276.pdf>.

55 Zhong, 'The New Type of Great Power Relations, Joint Development and China's New Diplomatic Ideas'.

in August 2013, State Councillor Yang Jiechi, in charge of China's diplomacy wrote, 'Pushing for constructing a new type of great power relationship between China and US and achieving healthy interactions and win-win cooperation with other big powers are important ideas of the Party's Central Committee led by Party Secretary Xi Jinping in operating major power relations.'<sup>56</sup> This statement makes clear that the new type of great power relations would refer solely to China-US relations. Later, in November 2013, the concept was for the first time mentioned by Susan Rice, National Security advisor, in a public speech at Georgetown University.<sup>57</sup>

Nevertheless, the use of the term seemed to diminish after receiving cold feedback from the United States.<sup>58</sup> It was suspected that China's declaration of an air defence identification zone (ADIZ) over the East China Sea in November, and an ensuing risky confrontation between US and China vessels in the South China Sea in December 2013 had negative effects on the US attitude towards the new relations proposal. Certain changes then appeared on China's side concerning the new relations. At China's Central Meeting on Foreign Affairs Work at the end of 2014, a new concept entitled the 'new type of international relations' was created.<sup>59</sup> It was also noted at that meeting that in his speech Xi Jinping placed neighbouring diplomacy before great power diplomacy, saying little about the new type of great power relations and nothing about China-US relations, which was taken as a sign that China was focusing more on its neighbouring countries and reducing the weight of US-China relations in its diplomacy.<sup>60</sup>

On a visit to Russia in April 2015, foreign minister Wang Yi claimed that China and Russia had succeeded in building the new type of international relations,<sup>61</sup> implying that the new type of international relations would be used in terming China's relations with other major countries. But it was not clear then whether China would continue to stress the new type of great power relations between the United States and China given US high officials had rejected the concept.

- 56 Yang Jiechi, 'Xin Xingshi xia Zhongguo waijiao lilun he shijian chuangxin' ('The Innovation of Diplomatic Theories and Practice under New Situation'), *Qiushi zazhi* (*Seeking Truth*), No. 16 (2013), p. 9.
- 57 Susan Rice, 'American Future in Asia', 21 November, 2013, <http://www.voltairenet.org/article181088.html>.
- 58 'Briefing on Obama Trip to East Asia and Pacific Region', 7 November, 2014, <http://iipdigital.usembassy.gov/st/english/texttrans/2014/11/20141108310720.html?CP.rss=true#axzz3K1P8jbnN>.
- 59 'Xi Jinping chuxi zhongyang waishi gongzuo huiyi bing fabiao zhongyao jianghua' ('Xi Jinping Attends the Central Meeting on Foreign Affairs Working and Delivers Important Speech'), 29 November, 2014, [http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_chn/zyxw\\_602251/t1215440.shtml](http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_chn/zyxw_602251/t1215440.shtml).
- 60 'Waimei ping Xi Jinping waishi jianghua waijiao zitai fangdi haishi fangqi taoguang yanghui' ('Comments by Medias abroad on Xi Jinping's Speech on Foreign Affairs, Lower the Diplomatic Profile or Give up the Principle of Keeping Low Profile'), 2 December, 2014, [http://news.ifeng.com/a/20141202/42616007\\_0.shtml](http://news.ifeng.com/a/20141202/42616007_0.shtml).
- 61 Wang Yi, 'ZhongE wei jianli xinxing guoji guanxi jinxing chengong shijian' ('China and Russia Succeeded in Building New Type of International Relations'), 7 April, 2015, <http://www.chinanews.com/gn/2015/04-07/7189804.shtml>.

The new type of great power relations seemed to be activated again in China's discourse before Xi Jinping's state visit to the United States, when Chinese leaders and high officials met with US officials on various occasions.<sup>62</sup> After Xi's visit to the United States, the list of results of Xi Jinping's state visit reveal that the two leaders arrived at a consensus on the new type of great power relations,<sup>63</sup> although the US side made no mention of the term in their fact sheet on Xi's visit.<sup>64</sup> Also noteworthy is that China revised the previous expression of the new type of great power relations by deleting 'no conflicts and no confrontation'.<sup>65</sup> According to the interpretation of certain Chinese scholars, the deletion of the first principle signifies that both leaders achieved a new strategic consensus whereby China and the United States would not fall into a 'Thucydides Trap'. Therefore China-US relations should be elevated to the new level of 'mutual respect and win-win cooperation'.<sup>66</sup>

The new type of great power relations has thus recently been changed in official discourse in two respects. Firstly, it has been made clear that the concept refers only to China-US relations, after being used generally in China's diplomacy for a while. Secondly, Xi Jinping's original expression of the new relations has been revised to read 'mutual respect and win-win cooperation'. Although whether it will be changed again is not certain, the academic debate about the concept has been effectively reduced as to who the main players in the new relations are. But as the expression of the new relations is revised, certain new problems may arise regarding the concept itself and China-US relations.

As to the outlook of the concept, the rephrasing of the new relations concept may reduce its feasibility, taking into account the US's scepticism in this regard. Of the three principles in the new relations that Xi Jinping advocated, only 'no conflicts and no confrontation' received straightforward US endorsement, and is regarded by certain scholars as the core of the new relations.<sup>67</sup> The deletion of this principle implies a change of emphasis. The outlook of the new relations proposal may thus depend upon the achievements with regard to the latter two principles. Unfortunately, in exploring the reasons for US reluctance to accept

62 'Xi Jinping huijian Meiguo zongtong guojia anquan shiwu zhuli Laisi' ('Xi Jinping meets with US National Security Advisor Susan Rice'), 28 August, 2015, <http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/web/zyxw/t1292052.shtml>; 'Wang Yi huijian Meiguo guowuqing Keli' ('Wang Yi meets with US Secretary of State Kerry'), 5 August, 2015, <http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/web/zyxw/t1286523.shtml>.

63 'Xi Jinping zhuxi dui Meiguo jinxing guoshi fangwen zhongfang chengguo qingdan' ('China's List of Results for President Xi Jinping's State Visit to US'), 26 September, 2015, [http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_chn/zyxw\\_602251/t1300767.shtml](http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_chn/zyxw_602251/t1300767.shtml).

64 'Fact Sheet: President Xi Jinping's State Visit to the United States,' 25 September, 2015, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2015/09/25/fact-sheet-president-xi-jinpings-state-visit-united-states>.

65 'China's List of Results for President Xi Jinping's State Visit to US'.

66 'Zhuanjia chanshu ZhongMei xinxing daguo guanxi biao shu wei he shaole liugezi' ('Expert Explains Why Six Words Are Deleted from the Expression of the New Type of Great Power Relations'), 28 September, 2015, <http://world.people.com.cn/n/2015/0928/c1002-27643499.html?t=1443497327912>.

67 Yan Xuetong, 'ZhongMei xinxing daguo guanxi de hexin shi bu duikang bu chongtu' ('The Core of the China-US New Type of Great Power Relations is "No Conflicts and No Confrontation"'), 2 September, 2015, <http://news.163.com/15/0922/07/B43NJAS200014SEH.html>.

the new relations proposal, some studies conclude that 'the key barrier for the White House is its suspicions towards Chinese intentions. Washington is not fond of Chinese designs to obtain foreign recognition of its "core interests", which the administration sees as a murky jumble of territorial demands'.<sup>68</sup> Concerned that China intends to gain US recognition of its interests through mutual respect, there would be fewer chances of the United States accepting the revised expression of the concept.

Regarding real policy, the revised concept may become disconnected from the development and real situation of China-US relations. Even though it is said that both leaders have reached the consensus that the two countries should not fall into a 'Thucydides Trap', there are nonetheless great chances that China and the United States will become involved in conflicts, especially on security issues. The United States has long expressed concern about China's claims to islands in the South China Sea, and the US military is demanding to get within the 12 nautical miles of China's artificial islands.<sup>69</sup> Whether or not the United States takes any substantial action in the near future, the dispute between China and the United States in the South China Sea will be a long-standing flashpoint for the bilateral tie, as long as China insists on its claim of sovereignty over these islands and waters. Also, on the issue of cyber security, it seems impossible for the United States and China to manage their disagreements effectively due to their different perception of cyber security and espionage. Different from the traditional troubles between China and the United States, like the Taiwan and Tibet issues, these newly emerged security problems are closely related to power redistribution and rule-making, and so pose a challenge to the dominant status of the United States. Taking all these issues into account, it would be unwise for both countries to underestimate the potential danger in their relations. Therefore, managing their disputes with great caution and keeping conflicts under control remains a vital task for the two countries.

Beside the disconnection of the concept and reality, rephrasing the concept may increase the illusion with what China continues to have unrealistic expectation from the United States, thus maintaining the pattern of high instability of China-US relations for a while. The revised new relations of 'mutual respect and win-win cooperation' may signify a continuation of the false-but-nice description of China-US relations, defined by Yan Xuetong as superficial friendship.<sup>70</sup> As argued by Yan Xuetong, the policy of pretending to be friends would make countries more disappointed and upset when confronted with the break out of shelved conflicts of interests.

It seems China strives to push China-US relations to higher level through the revision of the concept, but lowering the risk for China and the United States to get into conflict would only increase their hostility to each other were the conflicts not handled appropriately. In terms of security, China's statements are expanding the gap of perception between China and the United States. For instance, Xi Jinping said during his state visit that China does

68 Cheng Li and Lucy Xu, 'Chinese Enthusiasm and American Cynicism Over the "New Type of Great Power Relations"', 4 December, 2014, <http://www.brookings.edu/research/opinions/2014/12/05-chinese-pessimism-american-cynicism-great-power-li-xu>.

69 'US May Dispatch Planes and Ships near Disputed South China Sea Islands', 13 May, 2015, <http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2015/05/13/asia-pacific/pentagon-may-dispatch-planes-ships-near-disputed-south-china-sea-islands/#.Vhz3PrE7PnB>.

70 Yan Xuetong, 'The Instability of China-U.S. Relations', *Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol. 3, No. 3 (2010), pp. 263-92.

not intend to pursue militarization of Nansha Islands in South China Sea.<sup>71</sup> This statement may be somewhat misperceived by the United States that China would bring a halt to its military deployment on the islands of South China Sea, which is not the real case.<sup>72</sup> In the same way, in the respect of economy, both China and the United States attempt to convince each other that they intend not to isolate the other side in forging new regional economic and trade institutions. But as a matter of fact, both China and the United States aim to acquire more economic clout through building their respective institutions and rewriting the rules for regional economic development.<sup>73</sup> The superficial friendship and real competition may gradually bring tougher policy by both countries towards the other side, implying a de facto decline of the relations. In that case, the revised new relations proposal would only be used to hide the competitive nature of China–US relations.

## Conclusion

This article reviews the debates among Chinese scholars about the concept of a new type of great power relations. There exist many disparities within Chinese academic circles on the subjects and features of the new relations. The debates are concentrated on two points. The first is how to define a ‘great power’. Does it refer to major countries in general, or countries facing a power transition? The second is that of what the new relations feature. Is it a relationship of strategic competition, or cooperation? The academic debates could be largely attributed to the vagueness of the diplomatic practice with regard to this concept, which has been subjected to continuous and ambiguous changes. As the official use of the concept has been narrowed to refer solely to US–China relations, it could be predicted that the debate among Chinese scholars on who the great powers are will come to an end, but the debate on how to characterize the new relations will continue in its way as no clear direction of US–China relations exists.

With the expression of the new relations revised after Xi’s visit to the United States, there is still no consensus within Chinese discourse on the nature of US–China relations, which implies that the revised version of the new relations may become disconnected from the real situation and academic study. As to the nature of US–China relations, some scholars still prefer to view it from the perspective of power transition that may get out of control unless the United States and China address the various conflicts or flashpoints in their relations with sufficient caution. But on how to achieve mutual respect and win–win cooperation, there exist no consensus or even no feasible suggestions.

Although China and the US leaders may have achieved a consensus that they would not get into overall confrontation like those happened between emerging and established powers in history, the revised new type of great power relations still offers no effective guidance for China–US relations. Just as debated by some Chinese scholars above, mutual respect may not be accessible in the foreseeable future due to the lack of mutual trust. In addition, the new type of relations that features only the latter two principles would

71 ‘China Not to Pursue Militarization of Nansha Islands in South China Sea: Xi’, 26 September, 2015, <http://english.cntv.cn/2015/09/26/ART11443227316849618.shtml>.

72 ‘Foreign ministry Spokesman Hu Chunying hosts the press conference’, 14 October, 2015, [http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/web/fyrbt\\_673021/t1305835.shtml](http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/web/fyrbt_673021/t1305835.shtml).

73 ‘U.S. Should Write Laws of Global Economy, Not China’, 17 April, 2015, <https://www.rt.com/business/250497-obama-economy-china-trade/>.

make it a Chinese version of G2, which was formerly rejected by China, or more precisely C2, which was used by Chinese high officials as an alternative of G2.<sup>74</sup> Thus the uniqueness of the new relations proposal may disappear, or as analysed by some scholars, the new relations proposal is a way of justifying China's domestic need to be recognized by the United States as a great power.<sup>75</sup>

Based on the existing academic studies and official interpretation of the new relations concept, it is unclear how Chinese leaders would perceive the direction of China-US relations. If China were to insist on its 'striving for achievement' policy initiated by Xi Jinping, the two countries would inevitably be confronted with more competition. The revised version of the new relations would thus be more symbolic than practical for China-US relations. But that does not mean that China and the United States cannot achieve the new relations in its true sense, which may require reflection and compromises on both sides.

74 Dai Bingguo, 'ZhongMei bugao G2, dan keyi gao C2' ('China and U.S. Should Make a C2 Instead of G2'), 4 May, 2012, <http://china.huanqiu.com/politics/2012-05/2686598.html>.

75 Li and Xu, 'Chinese Enthusiasm and American Cynicism Over the "New Type of Great Power Relations"'.



Article

## Debates in IR Academia and China's Policy Adjustments

Xu Jin\*

Xu Jin is senior research fellow at the Institute of World Economics and Politics, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences

\*Corresponding author. Email: xuj@cass.org.cn

### Abstract

Researchers have seldom focused on the interaction between China's foreign policymakers and its international relations (IR) academia. Since new policies trigger various responses among scholars, it will help us to watch the diversification process within the academic sphere and see the different ideas behind different schools. Furthermore, observing the debates is an interesting way to gain a better understanding of China's foreign policy. By comparing the five key diplomatic transitions since 1979 with the five key debates in IR circles during the same period, this article articulates an interaction model between academia and government based on the consistency of ideas. This article also identifies six possible topics that Chinese IR scholars may debate in the future. It forecasts that the influence of certain minority schools of thought on these issues will grow, because policymakers are gradually changing their fundamental ideas.

All kinds of policy debates break out among Chinese international relations (IR) academics, especially when major policy changes occur. Early April 2016 saw a heated argument over China's diplomacy between the retired ambassador to France, the Netherlands, and the United Nations in Geneva Wu Jianmin, and chief editor of *Global Times* Hu Xijin. Wu accused Hu of ignorance of China's international situation and mainstream world politics, apparent in the frequent appearance in *Global Times* of radical, hawkish editorials and opinion pieces. Hu, in response, dismissed Wu as a dove diplomat with outdated thinking who expected the media to either parrot the official Foreign Affairs Ministry line or keep quiet.<sup>1</sup>

1 'Bei Hu Xijin cheng jiu waijiaoguan siwei, yuan zhuFa dashi Wu Jianmin ju huiying' ('Wu Jianmin Refused to Respond to Hu Xijin's Criticism of Him as a Diplomat with Outdated Thinking'), <http://news.china.com/domestic/945/20160408/22393462.html>.

This debate raises the critical question: what is the relationship between China's foreign policy insiders and outsiders?<sup>2</sup> It further bifurcates into the two highly relevant questions: How do policy changes influence IR academics? And what kinds of policy proposals does the government most readily support and accept? This article tries mainly to answer the former while touching on the latter.

Since the end of the Cold War, Chinese IR academics have not exhibited a unified view on major international issues or major foreign policies, but rather maintained at least two or more points of view. This raises the question: what is the nature of the interaction between these different views and the major shifts in Chinese foreign policy? For example, when President Xi Jinping announced at the Neighbourhood Diplomacy Work Conference on October 25, 2013 that China's diplomacy would follow the '*fenfa youwei*' (striving for achievement) approach, the mainstream view within Chinese IR academia still accorded with the principle of '*taoguang yanghui*' (keeping a low profile and biding one's time). Relatively few scholars argued that China should abandon the latter. When new policies differ from the mainstream view among IR scholars, therefore, what inference should we make as regards the impact academia has on such changes in foreign policy?

This article provides a theoretical framework for answering these questions. Its core argument is that the consistency of ideas between policymakers and scholars has significant impact on foreign policymaking. When the ideas held by IR scholars are consistent with the ideas behind the foreign policy of a given period, those scholars will command more influence in IR academia, wherein the new policy will gain even more support. At the same time, another possible consequence is that the government will more readily support and accept such scholars' policy proposals. However, we must not neglect the minority whose ideas are not consistent with the new policy, because their critical views could become popular should the government put forward a new policy in the future.

Based on analyses of several major adjustments and debates in Chinese foreign policy during the reform and opening up period, this article generates an interaction model between adjustments in Chinese foreign policy and Chinese IR scholarship.<sup>3</sup> 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 handful of political elites and professional bureaucrats and hence, relatively speaking, not easily accessible, if we are able to understand the relationship between policymakers and scholars the difficulty of accessing the relevant literature and information regarding a particular foreign policy will be eased somewhat.

Two additional points should be stressed here. First, this article deals with major adjustments in foreign policy, and not regular policy decisions or crisis decisions. Examining major policy shifts is useful in that before the government decides to adjust a given policy, it must undertake a comprehensive policy review, and demonstrate the appropriateness of new policy directions. Thus, the rationale and motivations behind its decisions at such junctions deserve consideration. Second, due to the present limited accessibility of data, information, and literature, the interaction model identified below may not fully account

2 Insiders are policymakers and diplomats. Outsiders are, broadly speaking, IR scholars, mass media, and individuals interested in foreign policy. However, this article uses the term 'outsiders' to refer to IR scholars.

3 This article offers an academic explanation for the relationship between academia and the government in China; it does not address the details of Beijing's foreign policymaking process—who does what, when, and why.

for certain aspects of the relationship between Chinese IR research and policy adjustments. Therefore, the model is limited as regards robustness.

### **China's Foreign Policy Insiders and Outsiders: An Interaction Model**

Conducting a literature review of the relationship between Chinese IR academia and policy-makers is difficult, because there are hardly any articles or monographs that specifically address this topic. One possible but indirect account is David Shambaugh's article, 'Coping with a Conflicted China',<sup>4</sup> 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 '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 thus the twin of the 'New left' in domestic policy debates.<sup>5</sup> Here we can easily pinpoint the ideas behind these 'ism' labels, and their corresponding policy tendencies. However, Shambaugh does not connect his categorization with China's policymaking process, although he does explore its implications for US policy towards China.<sup>6</sup>

The main theme of this article is China's foreign policy debates that are centred on ideas. Each policymaker and scholar has their own idea that directs respectively their policymaking and academic research. On the one hand, since IR scholars have different responses to new policies according to their ideas, this will help us to watch the academic diversification process. Meanwhile, policymakers make use of certain scholars' views to popularize new policy, because policymakers and their chosen scholars share some ideas. On the other hand, any theory, concept, or policy proposal that scholars present 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 policymakers. The end result is that some scholars' views will gain more influence in academia, to the extent even of becoming the mainstream view, while the view that is at odds with a new policy, even if it has previously been the mainstream one, will be gradually marginalized. Taken as a whole, the match of ideas between policymakers and scholars will help us to know the distribution of ideas among academics, and hence the delicate change of ideas among policymakers.

From 1978 to 2012, the main ideas the Chinese government held 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. They ranged from 'class struggle' (a central Marxist concept) on the left to 'democratic peace' (a typical liberal idea) on the right. Discussing the ideas that guide China's foreign policymaking and academic research is important, because they are at the centre of the core policy discourses and debates among IR academics. If one does not consider or understand the real meaning of these ideas, then one probably cannot truly grasp what is being debated.<sup>7</sup>

4 David Shambaugh, 'Coping with a Conflicted China', *Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 34, No. 1 (2011), pp. 7–27.

5 *Ibid.*, p. 10.

6 *Ibid.*, p. 27.

7 An anonymous reviewer termed these 'guiding concepts' as futile slogans and suggested that they not be discussed. However, these ideas hit the core of this article's topic as regards unravelling who does what, why, and when. Hitting the core is beyond my capability,

What this article does in the following sections is to compare academic debates with policy adjustments. First, it chooses five diplomatic policy adjustments and the corresponding five debates within IR academia in China since 1979. These five policy adjustments are: (i) In the mid-1980s, Deng Xiaoping and the Central Committee of the CPC judged that the theme of the time was peace and development; (ii) In the mid-1990s, the Chinese government maintained that national interest was irrelevant to social class; (iii) In the mid-1990s, the Chinese government maintained that the existing international structure is that of 'one superpower and many powers'; (iv) In the summer of 2004, the Chinese government changed its diplomatic objective from 'peaceful rise' to 'peaceful development'; and (v) In October 2013, President Xi Jinping put forward '*fenfa youwei*' (striving for achievement) as the new basic principle of diplomacy. The five debates in IR academia are: (i) the debate on whether or not the theme of the time is peace and development; (ii) the debate on whether or not national interest is interlinked with social class structure; (iii) the debate as regards the structure of the international system after the Cold War; (iv) the debate on 'peaceful rise' or 'peaceful development'; and (v) the debate on whether or not China should stick to the diplomatic principle of 'keeping a low profile and biding one's time'.

There have arguably been more than five foreign policy adjustments in China and more than five debates in Chinese IR academia in the past 30 years. But I believe that the importance of these five adjustments and five debates is self-evident, respectively, covering such critical aspects as the theme of the time, national interest, the structure of the international system, diplomatic objectives, and diplomatic principles. These aspects have featured in all essential aspects of China's diplomatic strategy and its development direction.

This article 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 or not the government's decision to adjust a policy preceded or followed academic debates, that is, whether or not the debates influenced or were influenced by the policymakers. 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 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, it can be divided into: the existence of a mainstream school that stands with the government; the existence of a mainstream school that stands against the government; and no mainstream school, with a portion of scholars standing with the government. The correlation between these five debates and five policy adjustments is summarized in [Table 1](#).

and not my intention. But 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 towards watching and understanding China's foreign policymaking.

**Table 1.** The Correlation between Academic Debates and Policy Adjustments

	Time Sequence	Government Tendency	The Possible Impact of Debates on Policies	The Result of the Debates
The Theme of the Time	The government's decision occurs before the academic debate.	The views of the government and academia are different, but the former sticks to its own judgment.	No impact	A mainstream school standing with the government gradually takes shape.
National Interest	The academic debate occurs before the government's decision.	The government's views are consistent with the minor school in academia.	Adopted	The minor school whose views are adopted by the government becomes the mainstream school.
International Structure	The academic debate occurs before the government's decision.	The government shares its view with some scholars.	Adopted	A mainstream school standing with the government takes shape.
Diplomatic Objective	The academic debate occurs before the government's decision.	The government shares its view with some scholars.	Initially adopted, later abandoned	The debate is still ongoing and most scholars maintain distance from the government.
Diplomatic Principle	The academic debate occurs before the government's decision.	The government's views are consistent with the minor school in academia.	Ongoing	The debate is still ongoing and various schools believe they share their views with the government.

## Peace and Development: Reality or Goal?

'The theme of the time' is a special topic of discussion in the IR of socialist countries. It refers to a certain fundamental characteristic of a particular period in international history. It moreover reflects the major strategic problems in the world and the fundamental direction and mainstream trend of world development, so distinguishing that period from others. Socialist countries usually believe that scientific observation and analysis of the characteristics of the era and accurately estimating and mastering the theme of the time serve as the bases on which a country decides on domestic and foreign policies. For example, Lenin's judgment that the theme of his time was 'war and revolution' constituted the theoretical basis for the October Revolution in Russia, the Chinese Revolution, and the national independence and liberation movements in Asia and Africa after WWII.<sup>8</sup> Stalin further proposed the theory of 'the general crisis of capitalism'.<sup>9</sup> During the Cultural Revolution period, Chinese leaders believed that the basic characteristic of the time was that 'imperialism is heading for total collapse and socialism is approaching a world-wide victory'.<sup>10</sup>

The theme of the time is always changing along with changes in the international situation. During the period of China's reform and opening up, it was Deng Xiaoping who first made a judgment that the theme of the time had changed. From the late 1970s onwards, Deng Xiaoping keenly monitored the changes in the international situation and gradually formed new judgments on the theme of the time. At the end of 1977, he first proposed his judgment that 'we can try to postpone the outbreak of wars'.<sup>11</sup> In March 1985, he said that 'The two really great issues confronting the world today, issues of global strategic significance, are: first, peace, and second, economic development. The first involves East-West relations, while the second involves North-South relations. In short, countries in the East, West, North and South are all involved, but the North-South relations are the key question.'<sup>12</sup>

Deng Xiaoping's argument that the theme of the time was peace and development clearly denied the judgment, maintained from 1949 to 1979, that 'war and revolution' was the theme of the time. The judgment made by Deng Xiaoping was quickly adopted by the Central Committee of the CPC, and became the new consensus on the international situation reached by the CPC and the government. The Report to the 13th National Congress

- 8 Lenin, 'Diguozhuyi shi zibenzhuyi de zuigao jieduan' ('Imperialism: the Highest Stage of Capitalism'), in *Liening xuanji-Dier juan (Selected Works of Lenin-Volume 2)* (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 2012), p. 639.
- 9 Stalin, 'Sulian shehuizhuyi jingji wenti' ('Economic Problems of Socialism in the USSR'), in *Sidalin xuanji-Xiajuan (Selected Works of Stalin-Volume 2)* (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1979), pp. 561–66.
- 10 'Zhongguo gongchandang dibajie kuoda de dishierci zhongyang weiyuanhui quanwei gongbao' ('Communiqué of the 12th Expanded Plenary Session of the 8th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China'), 31 October 1968, <http://cpc.people.com.cn/GB/64162/64168/64560/65355/4442085.html>.
- 11 *Dengxiaoping wenxuan-Dier juan (Selected Works of Deng Xiaoping-Volume 2)* (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1994), p. 77.
- 12 *Dengxiaoping wenxuan-Disan juan (Selected Works of Deng Xiaoping-Volume 3)* (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1993), p. 233.

of the CPC, held in 1987, proposed for the first time that ‘the theme of today’s world is peace and development’ and this judgment was subsequently reiterated by every CPC National Congress. Even so, whether or not the theme of the time was indeed ‘peace and development’ sparked two rounds of heated debate in IR academia.

The first started at the end of 1987 and lasted until the end of the Cold War. At the end of 1987, not long after the Report to the 13th National Congress of the CPC put forward that ‘the theme of the present world is peace and development’, *World Affairs* journal convened a conference on ‘the era we are living in’. Three schools of scholars were represented at the conference, including the Supportive School, the Cautious School, and the Compromise School. He Fang, then Director of the Institute of Japanese Studies of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, represented the Supportive School. He pointed out that, due to a past misjudgment on the theme of the time, China had paid a high price. He argued: ‘The theme of the present world is peace and development . . . (it) is a general summary of the basic characteristics and development trend of the era we are living in. Other formulations are either outdated or incomplete and inaccurate.’ According to He Fang, both peace and development should be gained by hard struggle, and are a reality of the process of historical development. He asserted: ‘If we still do not have a clear understanding of the nature of our era and continue to miss opportunities, China will become more undeveloped and lose its international status, and even be disqualified from existing in the world.’<sup>13</sup>

Pu Shan, then Director of the Institute of World Economics and Politics of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, represented the Cautious School. Although he believed that the old judgment whereby ‘imperialism is heading for total collapse and socialism is approaching a world-wide victory’ was obviously not appropriate, and that ‘the situation of a world revolution does not exist’, he disagreed with ‘calling our era the time of peace and development’, ‘because this can easily cause misunderstandings, as if peace and development will arrive spontaneously’, and ‘as far as the goals and tasks of the international struggle are concerned, . . . we need to propose that we should strive for peace and development’.<sup>14</sup>

Huan Xiang, then Director-General of the Centre for International Studies of the State Council, tried to strike a compromise between the views of the two schools. He said: ‘According to my understanding, Comrade Deng Xiaoping means that we should strive for peace and development rather than that we have already entered the stage of peace and development. This can be seen from the context of his words. Only by opposing hegemony and imperialism can we safeguard world peace. I believe the present era is an era of competition and co-existence, which happens not only between the two systems but also within them.’<sup>15</sup>

- 13 He Fang, ‘Zhongshi he jiaqiang guoji wenti yanjiu zhengque renshi women suo chu de shidai’ (‘Stressing and Strengthening the Research on International Issues and Correctly Understanding the Era We are Living In’), *Shijie zhishi (World Affairs)*, No. 3 (1988), pp. 28–31.
- 14 Pu Shan, ‘Dangqian shidai de renwu shi zhengqu heping he fazhan bunneng renwei shi heping he fazhan de shidai’ (‘The Task of the Present Era is to Strive for Peace and Development, But We Cannot Believe that We are Already Living in the Era of Peace and Development’), *Shijie zhishi (World Affairs)*, No. 3 (1988), p. 7.
- 15 Huan Xiang, ‘Yige shijie liangzhong zhidu zhengjing duoqi jingzheng gongchu’ (‘One World, Two Systems, Political and Economic Multipolarity, and Competition and Co-existence’), *Shijie zhishi (World Affairs)*, No. 3 (1988), p. 32.

In general, though most Chinese scholars at that time denied the judgment that their era was one of 'war and revolution', they still remained rather cautious as to whether or not the theme of the time should be 'peace and development'. The consensus seemed to be that China should try to enter a time of peace and development rather than that it was already living in such a one. We can find from this round of debate that most IR scholars at that time still held quite strong (or at least some remnant of) Maoist ideology, which directly guided their perception and understanding of the new definition of the theme of the time, even though eight years had elapsed since the beginning of reform and opening up to the outside world. Those in the minority, for example, He Fang, were usually the party's reformists, and so might be expected to support Deng Xiaoping's new policy.

In the early 1990s, the great change in China's international environment severely challenged the judgment that 'the theme of the time is peace and development'. However, in March 1990, Deng Xiaoping stated that the change of international structure was insufficient to change his new judgment on the nature of the era. He clearly expressed: 'Many of our past ideas on international affairs are still valid.'<sup>16</sup> The Reports to the 14th and 15th CPC National Congress hence maintained the judgment that 'the theme of the time is peace and development'.

The second round of debate occurred between 1999 and 2002, after NATO's launch in 1998 of the Kosovo War targeting the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, and the bombing by the US air force in 1999 of China's embassy in Yugoslavia. The resultant tense international situation and damage to China's national interests triggered another debate in IR academia on the theme of the time.

The Pessimistic School publicly expressed that 'peace and development face severe challenges', and emphasized that insecure factors in the world were expanding.<sup>17</sup> Wang Jincun indirectly questioned Deng Xiaoping's view on the theme of the time, stating: 'peace and development are a goal rather than reality'. He pointed out that Deng Xiaoping had raised peace and development as the two strategic problems which the world needed to face, and the goal towards which people of the world must strive, but that neither of the two problems had been resolved. Hegemony and power politics were the most dangerous sources of war in the present world and the biggest barrier to achieving peace and development. He argued that the present era was still a period of transition from capitalism to socialism, and that no evidence could be found in Deng Xiaoping's views on peace and development to prove that the nature of the time had really changed. NATO's invasion of Yugoslavia further proved that peace and development were the goals of struggle rather than a current reality.<sup>18</sup>

Zhang Ruizhuang sharply criticized the judgment that 'the theme of the time is peace and development', based on the theory of structural realism. According to his view, wars

16 *Selected Works of Deng Xiaoping-Volume 3*, p. 353.

17 Zou Jiayi, 'Kesuowo weiji: guanyu heping fazhan de jige zhanlue wenti' ('Kosovo Crisis: Several Strategic Issues on Peace and Development'), *Shijie jingji yu zhengzhi (World Economics and Politics)*, No. 8 (1999), p. 7.

18 Wang Jincun, 'Shijie jinru le "heping yu fazhan de shidai" ma?—Xuexi dengxiaoping "heping yu fazhan sixiang" de jidian sikao' ('Has the World Entered the Time of Peace and Development?—Several Thoughts on Studying Deng Xiaoping's Thoughts on Peace and Development'), *Shijie jingji yu zhengzhi (World Economics and Politics)*, No. 7 (1999), pp. 61–62.

and turbulence are most likely to occur when the balance of power or hegemony is about to collapse. For most countries, the world since the Cold War had become more unstable and insecure and less peaceful. Thus, ‘the theory of peace and development’ was a wrong judgment which made the government ‘talk only about peace and cooperation without mentioning the threat of war and hegemony; talk only about the economy and development without mentioning politics and security; talk only about globalization and interdependence without mentioning national interests and sovereignty’.<sup>19</sup>

The Optimistic School firmly believed that China did not need to change the judgment on the theme of the time. According to He Fang, who published several articles refuting the various views denying the ‘era of peace and development’, the Pessimist School ‘have over-reacted to the Kosovo War and its impact and overestimated the changes in the international situation, hence shaking the fundamental belief in the world situation and international environment over the years’.<sup>20</sup> He pointed out that although the serious challenge to peace meant the threat of a world war, we could find no country in the world preparing to fight such a war.

*World Affairs* once again organized in 2000 a conference on the theme of the time, entitled *Reflections: The Big Debate on ‘Peace and Development’ over the Past Year*. Major figures from the Optimistic and Pessimistic Schools attended and the debate was extremely intense. The Pessimistic scholars directly portrayed peace and development as ‘a romantic ideal and the kind-hearted wish of people’. The Optimistic scholars argued that the *Selected Works of Deng Xiaoping* indeed did not mention that the ‘theme’ of the time is peace and development, but the Reports to the 13th, 14th, and 15th CPC National Congress clearly maintained that peace and development are the ‘two major themes’. If we were still living in the era of war and revolution, then how could we have shifted the work priority to that of economic development?<sup>21</sup>

Though the Optimistic School did not gain the upper hand during this debate, they ultimately won after China’s national leaders clarified the official position—that the theme of the time remained peace and development. After China’s embassy in Yugoslavia was bombed, then Chinese Vice-president Hu Jintao reiterated the judgment of ‘peace and development’ in two televised speeches. Half a year later, at the Central Economic Working Conference in November 1999, President Jiang Zemin reaffirmed that the theme of the

19 Zhang Ruizhuang, ‘Chonggu Zhongguo waijiao suo chu zhi guoji huanjing–heping yu fazhan bingfei dangdai shijie zhuti’ (‘Reassessing the International Environment for China’s Diplomacy—Peace and Development are not the Theme of the Present World’), *Zhanlue yu guanli (Strategy and Management)*, No. 1 (2001), pp. 20–30.

20 He Fang, ‘Shijie zaoyi jingru le heping yu fazhan de shidai’ (‘The World Has Long Since Entered the Era of Peace and Development’), *Shijie jingji yu zhengzhi (World Economics and Politics)*, No. 4 (2000), pp. 56–61; He Fang, ‘Zailun heping yu fazhan shidai’ (‘Revisiting the Era of Peace and Development’), *Guoji zhengzhi yanjiu (International Politics Quarterly)*, No. 1 (2000), pp. 18–23; He Fang, ‘Cong “zhanzheng yu geming” dao “heping yu fazhan”—dui shidai zhuti de zai renshi’ (‘From “War and Revolution” to “Peace and Development”—the New Understanding on the Theme of the Time’), *Guoji zhanwang (International Outlook)*, No. 17 (2000), pp. 4–7.

21 ‘Fansi: yinianlai de “heping yu fazhan” dabianlun’ (‘Reflection: the Big Debate on “Peace and Development” over the Past Year’), *Shijie zhishi (World Affairs)*, No. 15 (2000), pp. 8–9.

time had not changed.<sup>22</sup> Finally, the 16th CPC National Congress held in 2002 reiterated once more the established judgment. Thereafter, the debate in IR academia on the theme of the time came to an end.

After about 15 years of watching and two rounds of debate, most IR scholars in China gradually came to believe that peace and development had become the theme of the time. It is obvious that scholars whose ideas were at odds with those of the government mainly based their analysis on traditional Marxism.<sup>23</sup> It is ironic that although Marxism is the official ideology of China, the Chinese government has made almost no foreign policies based on Marxism since 1978. The reason why is that class struggle is no longer the government's central policy idea. Therefore, when such scholars could no longer update their ideas, they were doomed to marginalization because the government encouraged the publication in main mass media outlets and academic journals of articles supporting its judgment on the theme of the time. As a result, the voices of those scholars who stood against the government could not easily be heard.

### National Interest: Irrelevant to Class Nature?

National interest is a fundamental concept in IR theory and foreign policy making. But for a long time, national interest, which had been severely denounced in China and other socialist countries, was a topic that could not be freely discussed. According to traditional Marxism–Leninism ideology, the working class does not have a motherland. Proletariat internationalism and world revolution are the highest interest of socialist countries which they all should unselfishly serve.<sup>24</sup> The Chinese government held to the two concepts of 'interest of the Chinese people' and 'interest of the people of the world' for a long time after the founding of the People's Republic of China. It was for decades a political taboo in China to talk openly about national interest.

Although IR academia began to discuss the concept of national interest in the 1990s, the government's critical attitude in this regard hindered academic research on China's national interest. Accordingly, many academics followed the standpoint of government authorities and criticized national interest as a 'capitalist international relations concept'.<sup>25</sup> An influential IR textbook published in 1990 pointed out that, according to Marxist doctrine, national interest in international politics related to class nature, and was the interest of the ruling class, because the state 'is the tool for the ruling class to realize its own interest . . . any state's pursuit of foreign economic profit first of all reflects the pursuit of economic profit of the ruling class'.<sup>26</sup> Another equally influential book, published in 1992, also

22 'Zhongyang jingji gongzuo huiyi' ('Central Economic Working Conference'), 15–17 November 1999, <http://dangshi.people.com.cn/GB/151935/176588/176597/10556630.html>.

23 Zhang Ruizhuang is an exception because his analysis is based on structural realism.

24 The last sentence of the *Communist Manifesto* is 'workers of all lands, unite'.

25 The preface written by Huan Xiang to *Contending Theories of International Relations*. James Daugherty, *Zhengyi zhong de guojiguanxi lilun (Contending Theories of International Relations)*, trans. Shao Wenguang (Beijing: Shijie zhishi chubanshe, 1987).

26 Zhang Jiliang, *Guoji guanxixue gailun (Overview of International Relations Study)* (Beijing: Shijie zhishi chubanshe, 1990), p. 58.

contended that 'the ruling class masters the state apparatus, exercises the state power, and commands the military . . . it represents the national interest'.<sup>27</sup>

Such a phenomenon of IR academia closely following the official standpoint did not change until the publication in 1996 of Yan Xuetong's book, *Analysis of China's National Interest*.<sup>28</sup> The main aim of this book was not to clarify certain views regarding China's national interest, but rather to push Chinese academic research on national interest from the traditional stage to a social scientific stage. Based on the utilitarian approach, the author proposed a set of scientific methods to analyse the national interest and provided an objective standard through which to measure it.<sup>29</sup>

Unexpectedly, this book sparked intense debate in IR academia because it said that 'national interest belongs to all the people in the country and is irrelevant to class nature'.<sup>30</sup> According to supporters such as Zhang Liangui, national interest refers to the interest of the whole nation, is a part of the interest of the people of the whole nation, and acts as the flag mobilizing people to strive for it. National interest does not belong to a particular class; rather it is the overlap of the interests of various classes within a nation, and is hence irrelevant to class nature.<sup>31</sup>

But according to opponents such as Tang Yongsheng, since the state is the tool for realizing the interest of the ruling group, national interest must be influenced by the concept and ideology of the dominant class which pursues the national interest they represent through the state apparatus they control.<sup>32</sup> Some other scholars tried to reach a compromise between the new and old views by admitting that national interest is indeed enjoyed by the people of the whole nation but that it is also relevant to class nature. According to Song Xinning, national interest belongs to the people of the whole nation, but this is not to deny that it is relevant to class nature, because 'the state controlled by the ruling class represents the national interest mainly composed of the interests of the ruling class'.<sup>33</sup>

In the late 1990s, although the Chinese government did not publicly deny that national interest was related to class nature, it increasingly began to stress that national interest is

27 Jin Yingzhong and Ni Shixiong, *Guojiguanxi lilun bijiao yanjiu (Comparative Study of International Relations Theories)* (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 1992), p. 118.

28 Yan Xuetong, *Zhongguo guojia liyi fenxi (Analysis of China's National Interest)* (Tianjin: Tianjin renmin chubanshe, 1996). Yan Xuetong once repeatedly talked to some scholars including the author of this article about the frustrations he experienced before the publication of the book *Analysis of China's National Interest*.

29 Please refer to the preface and the content summary of the book. An English translation is available at [mercury.ethz.ch/serviceengine/.../Analysis+of+China's+National+Interests.pdf](http://mercury.ethz.ch/serviceengine/.../Analysis+of+China's+National+Interests.pdf).

30 Yan, *Analysis of China's National Interest*, pp. 4–10.

31 Zhang Liangui, 'Guojia liyi bianxi' ('Differentiation and Analysis of National Interest'), *Zhonggong zhongyang xuexiao xuebao (Journal of the Party School of the Central Committee of CPC)*, No. 4 (1998), pp. 99–107.

32 Tang Yongsheng, Liu Jingbo and Zhang Zhizhong, 'Guojia liyi de fenxi yu shixian' ('Analysis and Realization of National Interest'), *Zhanlue yu guanli (Strategy and Management)*, No. 6 (1996), pp. 71–72.

33 Song Xinning, 'Guojia liyi de lilun renshi' ('Theoretical Understanding of National Interest'), *Zhongguo shehui kexue jikan (China Social Sciences Quarterly)*, Autumn Volume (1997), p. 126.

the basis for foreign policymaking. IR academia immediately responded with a unanimous denial that national interest relates to class nature. For example, Liu Jianfei asserted: 'National interest in the scope of international politics is the sum of the interests within an entire nation.'<sup>34</sup> According to Wang Yizhou, national interest reflects the needs and interests of the people of the whole nation and various interest groups.<sup>35</sup> The debate on whether or not national interest is related to class nature thus concluded, and Chinese academia reached a shared consensus that national interest is irrelevant to class nature.

Why did the Chinese government stand with Yan Xuetong? Of course, I have no way of knowing the inside story. But according to my personal communication with Yan Xuetong, he has never written any policy report advocating his own ideas on national interest. It was instead the government that took the initiative in selecting his idea. The reason may be that, since the 1980s, the Chinese government had advocated that 'diplomacy should serve economic development' rather than serving international class struggle, which the diplomatic service had abandoned through to the mid-1990s, yet the government had failed to find a new theory to replace the old claim that 'national interest relates to class nature'. *Analysis of China's National Interest* was thus published at the right time, and the government found precisely the new theory they sought in the book. Thereafter, theory and practice were perfectly matched. In this case, one must conclude that it was the decision makers who actively sought new theories to match the changes in diplomatic practice, and that it was not the scholar who took the initiative in trying to influence decision makers with his particular theory.

### The International Structure: Unipolar, Bipolar, or Multipolar?

In China, the term 'international structure' refers to the power distribution and strategic relations among great powers. Since the beginning of reform and opening up, debates among Chinese IR scholars on the international structure, triggered by the collapse of the Soviet Union and the outbreak of the international financial crisis in 2008, have merited our attention. And the debate goes on.

The first round occurred after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. Its disintegration meant the end of bipolarity. The United States became the sole superpower and the new international structure began to take shape. There was much disagreement among Chinese scholars on how to view the international structure after the Cold War. They hence formed the Multipolar School, the Unipolar School, and the School of One Superpower and Many Powers.

Most Chinese scholars who insist that the world has entered a period of 'multipolar structure' believe that the United States as the global economic pillar is in relative decline. Compared with the early stages of the Cold War, the American proportion of world GDP has substantially shrunk. In the early 1970s, the US balance of payments crisis led to the collapse of the Bretton Woods System and the disappearance of US dollar hegemony. Although the United States remained an economic world power, the loss of its relative advantage was indisputable. Particularly in view of the rise of Germany and Japan, it

34 Liu Jianfei, 'Lun yishixingtai yu guojia liyi de guanxi' ('On the Relationship between Ideology and National Interest'), *Xiandai guoji guanxi (Contemporary International Relations)*, No. 7 (2000), p. 33.

35 Wang Yizhou, 'Rethinking National Interest', p. 161.

appeared that the situation might worsen.<sup>36</sup> Wang Huaining commented: ‘Since the end of the bipolar structure, the world has entered the multipolar era’, and as regards future developments and changes, ‘as long as they do not transcend the general framework of multipolarity, they will remain in the multipolar structure’.<sup>37</sup>

Very few Chinese scholars agreed that the world had entered a unipolar era after the Cold War, because this assertion was somewhat politically incorrect in China. Although few Chinese scholars wrote articles that directly acknowledged the actuality of unipolarity, some emphasized that the United States held superpower status in the international system. Despite having analysed certain problems in US power in an article in 1991, Zi Zhongyun said that she believed, in general, that since the Cold War, ‘in terms of comprehensive power and its influence in international affairs, the US is still far ahead of other countries’. She stated: ‘The comprehensive power of the US is far from the weakening track’, and pointed out the US’s incomparable advantages with regard to education and talent.<sup>38</sup>

In 1991, Chinese scholar Zhou Jirong raised the concept of ‘one superpower, many powers’.<sup>39</sup> It delicately acknowledged the superpower status of the United States, but denied the existence of a unipolar world. This concept was consistent with the reality of the international power structure and nor did it violate political correctness in China. So once put forward, it won the support of most scholars because they believed it was a relatively accurate judgment of the extant international structure.

However, among its supporters there existed two schools of thought. One believed that ‘one superpower and many powers’ was not a transitional period but a fixed international structure. A firm realist, Yan Xuetong asserted in 1997: ‘After the Cold War, the transition from the bipolar structure to the structure of one superpower and many powers ended. The international power structure and great power relations have basically taken shape.’ ‘The US can still maintain its superpower status over the next fifteen years, during which time other powers will be hard-pressed to achieve power parity with the US.’<sup>40</sup> In 1999, he reiterated that the Kosovo War further clarified the international structure of ‘one superpower, many powers’.<sup>41</sup> To sum up, Yan Xuetong believed that ‘one superpower, many powers’

36 Shanghai International Relations Association, *Guoji geju-shijizhijiao de zhuanhuan (International Structure—Transformation at the Turn of the Century)* (Shanghai: Shanghai shehui kexueyuan chubanshe, 1992), p. 46.

37 Wang Huaining, ‘Guanyu yanjiu shijie zhengzhi yu jingji de jidian sikao’ (‘Several Thoughts on the Study of World Politics and Economy’), *Shijie jingji yu zhengzhi (World Economics and Politics)*, No. 7 (1993), p. 4.

38 Zi Zhongyun, ‘Meiguo zhixia de heping’ (Pax Americana) hui chuxian ma? (‘Will Pax Americana Emerge?’), in Yuan Ming, *Kuashiji de tiaozhan: zhongguo guoji guanxi xueke de fazhan (Cross-century Challenges: Development of the Discipline of China’s International Relations)* (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2007), p. 82.

39 Zhou Jirong, ‘Shijie geju bianhua de qushi’ (‘Trend for the Changes in the World Structure’), *Xiandai guoji guanxi (Contemporary International Relations)*, No. 2 (1991), pp. 3–7.

40 Yan Xuetong, ‘Report on the 1996-1997 International Situation and China’s Foreign Relations’, in *Collection of Reports on the International Situation* (Beijing: China Institute of Strategy and Management, 1997).

41 Yan Xuetong, ‘Guoji huanjing ji waijiao sikao’ (‘The International Environment and Diplomatic Thinking’), *Xiandai guoji guanxi (Contemporary International Relations)*, No. 8 (1999), pp. 7–8.

would be the fundamental characteristic of the international structure for the next thirty to forty years, a conclusion he reached based on structural realism.

Another school believed that 'one superpower and many powers' was a transitional phenomenon which appeared during the shift from a bipolar structure to a multipolar structure, and so would not be stable. In fact, even Zhou Jirong, original advocate of this concept, believed so. Shortly after putting forward the concept of 'one superpower and many powers' in 1991, he said in another article: 'The world continues to develop toward multipolarity and conflicts are complicated and interwoven. Based on the reality of international politics, we must admit that the US is a superpower and that the relatively powerful country bloc consisting of the US, Europe, and Japan plays an important role in establishing the new international order. However, China, the independent countries from the third world, and regional and subregional organizations will play the most important role if they can take coordinated actions.'<sup>42</sup> Advocating one superpower and many powers on the one hand while saying that the world is developing towards multipolarity on the other, Zhou Jirong was clearly hesitant about giving a clear description of the direction in which the international structure would develop. According to Gu Guanfu, the emergence of the 'one superpower, many powers' structure was the result of deepening multipolarization, and the transitional structure would exist for a long time. The 'one superpower, many powers' structure was imbalanced and unstable because the world would develop towards multipolarity, although it would take a long time.<sup>43</sup> In fact, the view that 'one superpower, many powers' is a transitional phenomenon is a variant of multipolarity, meaning that although the present international structure is still 'one superpower and many powers', the world is developing towards multipolarity in the long run.

The most important reason why scholars supporting the judgment of 'transitional phenomenon' could become the mainstream school was that they believed in what the Chinese government advocated—that the world is developing towards multipolarity. That is to say, these scholars shared the same idea (emerging multipolarity) as the government, one that had been widespread since 1992, when President Jiang Zemin pointed out in the Report to the 14th CPC National Congress: 'The world is developing towards multipolarity. The formation of the new structure will be a long-lasting, complicated process.' The 15th CPC National Congress held in 1997 once again reiterated that 'the multipolar trend enjoys new development in the global and regional scope and in such fields as politics and the economy'. The Chinese government believed that the international structure would develop towards multipolarity, but it failed to give a clear answer to such questions as how long it would take and what the present international structure was. The argument that 'one superpower, many powers is a transitional phenomenon of the international structure' could exactly and perfectly explain the government's attitude, because it answered such questions as what the present international structure was and what the future international structure would be, while at the same time continuing to maintain a vague position as to the duration

42 Zhou Jirong and Wang Ling, '90 niandai guoduxing shijie geju de tedian jiqi dui jianli guoji xinzhiyu de yingxiang' ('The Characteristics of the Transitional World Structure in the 1990s and Its Impact on Establishing the New International Order'), *Waijiao xueyuan xuebao* (*Journal of Foreign Affairs College*), No. 4 (1991), pp. 19–22.

43 Gu Guanfu, 'Lengzhanhou de shijie geju' ('The Post-Cold War World Structure'), in Lu Yi et al., *Xinshiqi Zhongguo guojiguanxi lilun yanjiu* (*Study of the International Relations Theories in the New Age*) (Beijing: Shishi chubanshe, 1999), pp. 250–58.

of multipolarization. The Chinese government accepted the concept of ‘one superpower, many powers’ and particularly appreciated the judgment of ‘transitional phenomenon’, because both could best explain and safeguard the government’s position.

The second round of debate occurred after the outbreak of the international financial crisis in 2008. The most prominent feature of this debate was the diversification of views among scholars. Chu Shulong insisted that ‘one superpower and many powers’ would not change. He argued: ‘the financial crisis has not and is unlikely to change the basic structure of the international economy and politics’. The basis of this argument was that as major countries and regions across the world had all suffered heavy losses during the crisis, the United States, Europe, and Japan’s status and role in international affairs had not been particularly affected; they remained the dominant force and focus of international politics. That the United States and Europe still advocated and hosted the G20 summit proved this. Moreover, the financial crisis had limited impact on the economic power of the United States and exerted even less influence on its comprehensive power.<sup>44</sup>

Scholars who believe that the one superpower and many powers structure will deteriorate, generally hold that the international financial crisis somewhat weakened the status of the ‘one superpower’. At the same time, they believe that the general ‘one superpower and many powers’ structure has not changed, although the statuses of the great powers have been revised, with China now enjoying a higher rank among them. For example, at the end of 2008, Yan Xuetong explained his view on the future international structure. He predicted that during the three years from 2009 to 2011, the general trend of the international structure would be ‘a weakened superpower and position-swapped great powers’, meaning that the financial crisis had weakened the hegemony of the United States and the comprehensive power of Japan, and that the EU would display a downward trend, while China and Russia’s power would improve after the financial crisis. But the financial crisis could not push the United States into a complete decline.<sup>45</sup>

The argument that ‘the emerging economies will rise in groups’ can be viewed as derivative of the argument that ‘one superpower and many powers will weaken’. The underlying argument is that as the sole superpower status of the United States weakens, developing countries represented by the emerging economies will rise in groups. Together, both phenomena push the world towards multipolarity. Wei Zongyou pointed out: ‘The rise of emerging countries in groups such as the BRICS—China, India, Brazil, Russia, and South Africa—is a prominent phenomenon in today’s international politics. The rise of emerging countries is not only changing the global political and economic structure, but has also raised challenges to the global governance system dominated by the West.’<sup>46</sup> According to Gu Yuanyang, the emerging economies constitute the new impetus for global economic

44 Chu Shulong, ‘Jinrong weiji yu shijie zoushi’ (‘The Financial Crisis and the World Trend’), *Xiandai guoji guanxi (Contemporary International Relations)*, No. 4 (2009), pp. 9–10.

45 Yan Xuetong, ‘Shijie geju zouxiang ji zhongguo de jiyu’ (‘Trend of the International Structure and China’s Opportunities’), *Dangdai yatai (Journal of Contemporary Asia-Pacific Studies)*, No. 5 (2008), pp. 7–9.

46 Wei Zongyou, ‘Xinxing daguo quntixing jueqi yu quanqiu zhili gaige’ (‘The Rise of Emerging Economies in Groups and Global Governance Reform’), *Guoji luntan (International Forum)*, No. 2 (2011), p. 8.

growth, and the balance of global economic power is tipping from the traditional developed economies towards the emerging economies. Multipolarization hence seems irreversible.<sup>47</sup>

The spread of the argument regarding the rise of emerging economies in groups closely relates to support from the Chinese government, because the core idea behind the argument is multipolarization, which the government highly commends. According to a commentary in the *People's Daily* entitled 'Emerging Powers Rise in Groups and Become an Important Force to Promote Common Development', published on June 29, 2009, the emerging economies represented by BRICS are taking up increasingly important positions in the world economic structure, and their rise in groups brings new opportunities to the international community. The emerging powers distributed in various regions throughout the world have become the pillars of peace and prosperity, and emerging powers following different development paths have provided the world with diversified models of success.<sup>48</sup>

In 2010, Le Yucheng, then Director of the Department of Policy Planning of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, praised the argument in an article. He argued that the rapid rise of emerging countries is causing the serious imbalance in the international power structure to change, and the distribution of international power to become increasingly balanced. The 'Asian Tiger', 'African Lion', and 'American Leopard' are jointly promoting a revolution in the world power structure. However, he admitted that Western countries still play the dominant role in international affairs, and that it is still too early to talk about the decline of the West. There is still a long way to go to truly achieve multipolarization and a real balance of power.<sup>49</sup>

In contrast, Yan Xuetong may be the most enthusiastic proponent of the argument that the world is heading towards bipolarity. While at the end of 2008 he still held that 'one superpower has weakened', he soon came to believe that the future international structure would absolutely not develop towards multipolarity, but rather towards bipolarity.<sup>50</sup> At the end of 2012, he said in an article that the rise of China as a superpower would make East Asia the centre of the world. His assessment of China's rise was based on the rapid increase of comprehensive power rather than the increase of a single power factor (such as the economic one). He predicted that China would become a superpower within a decade, its global strategic influence second only to the United States. He also argued that although

47 Gu Yuanyang, 'Xinxing jingjinti jueqi ji shijie geju biandong' ('The Rise of Emerging Economies and the Change in the International Structure'), *Yafei zongheng (Asia & Africa Review)*, No. 1 (2010), p. 1.

48 The author of the article is Zhong Sheng, but in fact it represents the ideas of *People's Daily* or even the ideas of the national leaders.

49 Le Yucheng, 'Dui guoji xingshi he Zhongguo wajiao de yixie kanfa he sikao' ('Some Views and Thoughts on the International Situation and China's Diplomacy'), *Wajiao pinglun (Foreign Affairs Review)*, No. 6 (2010), p. 2.

50 Yan Xuetong may be the first scholar in Chinese IR academia to propose that China will rise as a superpower. As early as 1998, he published a book analysing the changes in the international environment for China in the process of China's rise. Upon its publication, however, this book met with severe criticism from academia and opponents who believed it was impossible for China to rise in the foreseeable future, and that it was therefore not meaningful to study the international environment for China's rise. Yan Xuetong et al., *Zhongguo jueqi—guoji huanjing pinggu (China's Rise—Evaluation of the International Environment)* (Tianjin: Tianjin renmin chubanshe, 1998).

the power of the United States was in relative decline, its status as a superpower would remain unchanged for at least 20 years. This meant that China and the United States would become dual superpowers, so making the world bipolar once more.<sup>51</sup> In 2013, Yan further analysed in another book the trend of change as regards the great powers over the next decade, confidently asserting that China would become a superpower and that the bipolar structure would take shape before 2023.<sup>52</sup>

This bipolarity argument, which differs sharply from the official standpoint, makes Yan Xuetong once again a member of the minority school. What so distinguishes him from other scholars is his observing reality through the lens of structural realism, while scholars from the majority school do so through the lens of mixed isms. And most importantly, they are reluctant to admit that China is rising at such a rapid pace. Here, we can see once more shades of Keeping a Low Profile.

The 17th and 18th CPC National Congresses maintained the established argument that ‘the world is developing towards multipolarity’, so reflecting the government’s cautious attitude with regard to the speed and progress of China’s rise at that time. However, the new stance on China’s rise held by the new generation of the Central Committee of CPC represented by President Xi Jinping deserves our attention. On November 29, 2012, President Xi led the new members of the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau on a visit to the National Museum to the exhibition entitled ‘Road to Rejuvenation’. After the visit, he said in his speech that through more than 170 years of unremitting endeavours since the Opium War, the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation now witnessed a bright prospect. He stated that we are now closer than ever before to realizing the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation, and more confident and capable than in any previous period in history of achieving this goal.<sup>53</sup>

The author of this article believes that ‘the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation’ is another way of expressing China’s rise. Therefore, President Xi’s speech seems to imply that the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation will take place in the near future, and that the rise of China as a superpower is approaching. Thus over the next five years, the way in which the Chinese government chooses to address the implicit tension between the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation and the multipolarization of the international structure deserves our attention.

## Diplomatic Objective: Peaceful Development or Peaceful Rise?

The notion of China’s peaceful rise was first formulated by Zheng Bijian, former Vice President of the Central Party School of the CPC, in a speech on December 9, 2002 at the Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) in Washington DC. He stated that,

- 51 Yan Xuetong, ‘Quanli zhongxin zhuan yi yu guoji tixi zhuanbian’ (‘Shift of the Power Centre and Transformation of the International System’), *Dangdai yatai (Journal of Contemporary Asia-Pacific Studies)*, No. 6 (2012), pp. 9–10.
- 52 Yan Xuetong, *Lishi de guanxing: weilai shinian de zhongguo yu shijie (Inertia of History: China and the World in the Next Ten Years)* (Beijing: Zhongxin chubanshe, 2013).
- 53 ‘Zhonghua minzu de weida fuxing shi zui weida de zhongguomeng women bi renhe shiqi dou geng jiejin zhege mubiao’ (‘The Great Rejuvenation of the Chinese Nation is the Greatest Chinese Dream and We are Closer than in Any Period to this Goal’), *Renmin ribao (People’s Daily)*, November 30, 2012.

‘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.’<sup>54</sup> Later, towards the end of 2002, in Zheng Bijian’s summary of his visit to the United States in which he 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.’<sup>55</sup> 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 a 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 will 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.’<sup>56</sup>

The notion of ‘peaceful rise’ attracted much positive attention from the Central Committee of the CPC, and was soon accepted by national leaders. On December 10, 2003, Premier Wen Jiabao made the statement, ‘China today is a power of reform, opening up, and peaceful rise’ in a speech delivered at Harvard University.<sup>57</sup> On December 26 of the same year, President Hu Jintao 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.<sup>58</sup> On February 23, 2004, Hu Jintao stated once more as 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’.<sup>59</sup>

- 54 Zheng Bijian, ‘Zhonggong shiliuda he zhongguo heping jueqi xindaolu’ (‘The 16th National Congress of the CPC and the New Road of China’s Peaceful Rise’), in *Zhengbijian zixuanji* (*Selected Works of Zheng Bijian*) (Beijing: Xuexi chubanshe, 2007), p. 469.
- 55 Zheng Bijian, ‘Jianyi jiu zhongguo heping jueqi de fazhan daolu’ (‘Suggestions for Research on the Development Path of China’s Peaceful Rise’), in *Selected Works of Zheng Bijian*, p. 479.
- 56 ‘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](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*. Zheng Bijian, ‘China’s ‘Peaceful Rise’ to Great-Power Status’, *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 84, No. 5 (2005), pp. 18–24.
- 57 ‘Wen Jiabao hafo yanjiang tichu guangfan wenmin duihua he wenhua jiaoliu’ (‘Wen Jiabao Delivers Speech at Harvard University and Proposes Extensive Civilization Dialogue and Cultural Exchange’), [http://news.xinhuanet.com/world/2003-12/11/content\\_1224824.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/world/2003-12/11/content_1224824.htm).
- 58 ‘Hu Jintao zai jinian Mao zedong tongzhi danchen 110 zhounian zuotanhui shang de jianghua’ (‘Hu Jintao’s Speech at the Symposium Commemorating the 110th Birth Anniversary of Comrade Mao Zedong’), *Renmin ribao* (*People’s Daily*), December 27, 2003.
- 59 ‘Hu Jintao zhuchi zhengzhiju dishici jiti xuexi bing fabiao jianghua’ (‘Hu Jintao Chairs the 10th Collective Study of the Political Bureau and Delivers a Speech’), *Renmin ribao* (*People’s Daily*), February 24, 2004.

The proposition of ‘peaceful rise’ elicited quick 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 or not a peaceful rise would be possible for China, and the strategies through which China could achieve the goal of a peaceful rise. More than 50 experts and scholars attended the conference, including almost all of the IR academia elite. 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 to the ‘China threat theory’.

Wang Jisi, then Dean of the School of International Studies at Peking University, voiced support for the notion, holding that it expressed a strong desire for China to develop and strengthen itself in a peaceful environment. However, he questioned how, if the United States insisted on disintegrating, westernizing, and curbing China, a peaceful rise could become a reality for China.<sup>60</sup> Yan Xuetong 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 asked: ‘if the means of peace does 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?’<sup>61</sup> In contrast, Luo Yuan held that peace and rise are mutually both the means and the end, as the goal of peaceful rise is peace, security, cooperation, and prosperity, while a peaceful environment is favourable for China’s rise.<sup>62</sup>

Other scholars, such as Zhang Minqian, believed that the key to ‘peaceful rise’ is peace rather than rise, and that the proposition is meant to react to the ‘China threat theory’. Emphasis on rise would give further impetus to the spread of this theory, whereas emphasis on peace would highlight that China’s foreign policy should stick to non-violent means featuring integration, win-win, sharing, consultation, and cooperation.<sup>63</sup> Meng Xiangqing argued that peaceful rise does not imply absolute elimination of armed forces, because whether or not a peaceful environment could be maintained over a long period does not completely depend on China’s wishful thinking.<sup>64</sup>

The 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 stimulate the ‘China threat theory’. For example, Liu Shenge expressed doubts as to whether or not China’s existent foreign and security policies are completely consistent with the international community’s response to ‘peaceful rise’. What is the relationship between the diplomatic principles as summarized by Deng Xiaoping in 28

60 Wang Jisi, ‘Heping jueqi tichu de yiyi’ (‘The Significance of Formulation of Peaceful Rise’), *Jiaoxue yu yanjiu* (*Teaching and Research*), No. 4 (2004), p. 7.

61 Yan Xuetong, ‘Dui heping jueqi de lijie’ (‘Understanding the Peaceful Rise’), *Jiaoxue yu yanjiu* (*Teaching and Research*), No. 4 (2004), p. 6.

62 Luo Yuan, ‘Heping jueqi de mubiao yu shouduan’ (‘Target and Means of Peaceful Rise’), *Jiaoxue yu yanjiu* (*Teaching and Research*), No. 4 (2004), p. 12.

63 Zhang Minqian, ‘Heping jueqi de mubiao zaiyu heping’ (‘The Goal of Peaceful Rise Lies in Peace’), *Jiaoxue yu yanjiu* (*Teaching and Research*), No. 4 (2004), p. 8.

64 Meng Xiangqing, ‘Heping jueqi yu anquan jueqi’ (‘Peaceful Rise and Secured Rise’), *Jiaoxue yu yanjiu* (*Teaching and Research*), No. 4 (2004), p. 15.

Chinese characters and the notion of peaceful rise? How would one define the relationship between 'the primary stage of socialism' and 'peaceful rise'?<sup>65</sup>

The foregoing debate shows once more that IR scholars in China read the notion based on different ideas. The realists explain it as a means (peace) plus end (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 stick to the notion of keeping a low profile.

However, 'peaceful rise' proved short-lived as a policy concept, as the summer of 2004 saw the Chinese government suddenly abandon it in favour of 'peaceful development'. The reason for this shift has not been publicly disclosed, and unsubstantiated conjecture would not be appropriate in this article. 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 to be at odds with 'keeping a low profile', which is another basic idea that has long been adhered to. Thus, it is not strange that the government replaced rise with development.

On November 29, 2012, during President Xi Jinping's visit to the 'Road to Rejuvenation' exhibition, he stated that 'achieving the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation is the loftiest dream of the Chinese people since modern history'. Moreover, he has reiterated on various occasions the notion of 'the Chinese Dream of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation'.<sup>66</sup> In my personal understanding, I believe that the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation is a synonym for the rise of China; as the Chinese government abandons the word 'rise', it is replaced by 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 have instead 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 early 1990s, when China's diplomacy sought to free itself from the shadows of the events of June 4, 1989, and while dealing with the new international situation after the end of the Cold War, Deng Xiaoping formulated the principles of China's diplomacy in the 28 Chinese characters: 'observe calmly; secure our position; cope with affairs calmly; keep a low profile; never claim leadership; and make some achievements'.<sup>67</sup> Guided by such principles, China withstood the shock at the time of drastic changes in

65 Liu Xige, 'Heping jueqi de jige wenti' ('Several Issues Concerning Peaceful Rise'), *Jiaoxue yu yanjiu* (*Teaching and Research*), No. 4 (2004), p. 17.

66 'Xi Jinping guanyu shixian zhonghua minzu weida fuxing de Zhongguomeng lunshu' ('Xi Jinping's Elaboration of the Chinese Dream of the Great Rejuvenation of the Chinese Nation'), <http://theory.people.com.cn/n/2013/1205/c40555-23756883.html>.

67 Qian Qichen, 'Shenru xuexi Deng xiaoping waijiao sixiang, jinyibu zuohao xinshiqi waijiao gongzuo' ('Deeply Understand Deng Xiaoping's Diplomatic Thinking and Achieve Further Success in Diplomatic Work in the New Era') in Wang Taiping, ed., *Dengxiaoping waijiao sixiang yanjiu lunwenji* (*Collection of Papers Researching Deng Xiaoping's Diplomatic Thinking*) (Beijing: Shijie zhishi chubanshe, 1996), pp. 6–7.

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 achievements’ not only became the main diplomatic principle followed by the Chinese government over a long period, but also won extensive support from IR academia.

Yet in recent years, strong disputes among Chinese academics have appeared regarding whether or not, and how ‘keeping a low profile’ should continue to be upheld. Three opinions are voiced: unswerving support, adjustment and development, and renouncement.<sup>68</sup>

As early as 2001, Qu Xing, a staunch supporter of the principle, wrote about the necessity for China to stick to ‘keeping a low profile’ over the long term, arguing that the key to 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, as China bases its foreign policy on the practice of one-fifth of the world’s population, rather than on elaborating from an ideological perspective the outlook, hopes, and advantages of socialism. The concept also refers to a bid for the time necessary for China’s rise and development as a socialist country, that is, to achieve modernization by the middle of the 21st century.<sup>69</sup> The necessity for China to stick to the strategy of ‘keeping a low profile’ lies in two fundamental facts: China does not face any danger of invasion, and peace and development remain the most important theme for today.<sup>70</sup>

In 2011, Qu Xing still persisted in this opinion, holding that there are three key words in Deng Xiaoping’s articulation of ‘keeping a low profile. They are: ‘*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, and 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. It is from these three perspectives that questions about the necessity of sticking to ‘keeping a low profile’ may be answered.<sup>71</sup>

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, so combining unchanging principles with flexible tactics. These scholars believe that the relationship between ‘keeping a low profile’ and ‘making some contributions’ is analogous to that of cage and bird: ‘keeping a low profile’ is compared with a cage while ‘making some contributions’ is the bird inside it. A larger cage may be designed to provide more room for the bird to flutter its wings, but it nevertheless cannot flee from the cage.

68 Xu Jin and Du Zheyuan, ‘The Dominant Thinking Sets in Chinese Foreign Policy Research: A Criticism’, *Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol. 8, No. 3 (2015), pp. 251–55.

69 Qu Xing, ‘Jianchi “taoguang yanghui- yousuozuowe” de waijiao zhanlue’ (‘Sticking to the Diplomatic Strategy of “Keeping a Low Profile, While Making Some Contributions”’), *Zhongguo renmin daxue xuebao* (*Journal of Renmin University of China*), No. 5 (2001), p. 14.

70 *Ibid.*, p.16.

71 ‘Zhuanjia jibian “taoguang yanghui”: heping jueqi bu paichu wuli fanji qinlue’ (‘Experts Heatedly Debate “Keeping a Low Profile”—Peaceful Rise Does Not Exclude Military Resistance of Aggression’), <http://china.huanqiu.com/roll/2011-12/2273974.html>.

That is to say, ‘making some contributions’ must not break free from the fundamental framework of ‘keeping a low profile’.

Wang Jisi held that the strategic thinking of ‘keeping a low profile’ is still highly relevant to the current reality China faces, and hence must be consistently followed rather than abandoned. Yet such consistence is by no means a synonym for scholasticism, for the essence of this principle would be unsustainable without supplementations and adjustments 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.<sup>72</sup>

Renmin University professor Shi Yinhong contended during an interview in 2010 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, and more contributions must be made.<sup>73</sup>

In contrast to these more moderate views, in recent years Yan Xuetong has advocated renouncement of ‘keeping a low profile while making some contributions’ as a diplomatic principle. In a speech at a conference in 2011, he claimed that China’s diplomatic principle should switch from ‘keeping a low profile’ to being ‘a responsible power’, because the former notion is more apposite to weak nations than great powers.<sup>74</sup> In his book *Inertia of History* (*Lishi de Guanxing*) published in 2013, he argued that China will become one pole of a bipolar world in the next decade; therefore, China needs to learn how to become a respected leader of the international community, and one that commands significantly more respect 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 is to be upheld.<sup>75</sup>

In October 2013, the Central Committee of the CPC held a work conference on neighbourhood diplomacy which was attended by all standing members of the Political Bureau. President Xi Jinping summarized in his keynote speech how China must strive for achievements in neighbourhood diplomacy in order to create a favourable external environment for its development.<sup>76</sup> Shortly after the conference, a heated debate on the relationship

72 Wang Jisi, ‘Zhongguo de guoji dingwei wenti yu “taoguang yanghui-yousuozuowei” de zhanlue sixiang’ (‘China’s International Status and the Strategic Thinking of “Keeping A Low Profile”’), *Guoji wenti yanjiu* (*International Studies*), No. 2 (2011), p. 7.

73 ‘Dui taoguangyanghui yao juti fenxi—zhuanfang zhongguo renmin daxue guoji guanxi xueyuan meiguo yanjiu zhongxin zhuren shiyinhong jiaoshou’ (‘Case-by-case Analysis is Necessary for “Keeping a Low Profile”—Interview with Professor Shi Yinhong, Director of Centre of American Studies, School of International Studies, Renmin University of China’), *South Reviews*, No. 22 (2010), pp. 35–36.

74 ‘Yan Xuetong: guoji geju yi chuxian liangjihua er bushi duojihua qushi’ (‘Yan Xuetong: International Structure is Already Characterized by Bipolarity Rather than Multi-polarity’), [http://www.china.com.cn/international/txt/2011-05/31/content\\_22683004.htm](http://www.china.com.cn/international/txt/2011-05/31/content_22683004.htm).

75 Yan, *Inertia of History*, p. 187.

76 ‘Xi Jinping zai zhoubian waijiao gongzuo zuotanhui shang fabiao zhongyao jianghua’ (‘Xi Jinping Delivers Important Speech at Symposium on Diplomatic Work with Neighbouring Countries’), *Renmin ribao* (*People’s Daily*), October 26, 2013. Despite the theme of diplomatic work with neighbouring countries, this symposium actually set the tone for China’s

between 'keeping a low profile' and 'striving for achievement' (*fenfa youwei*) as proposed by President Xi ensued between staunch supporters of 'keeping a low profile' and advocates for its renouncement.

Qu Xing 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.<sup>77</sup> Yan Xuetong, on the other hand, argues that the central government has replaced 'keeping a low profile' with 'striving for achievement', pointing out 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.<sup>78</sup> He continues to point out that 'keeping a low profile was necessary in the past because China was weak, or because China had to display its weakness to the international society. Striving for achievement aims at showing our neighbouring countries we are more powerful than they are. That is an essential change.'<sup>79</sup>

In a 2014 article, Yan Xuetong made an extended analysis of the difference between 'keeping a low profile', and 'making some contributions', based on moral realism. He contended 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 stated with confidence that although the mid- and long-term effects of 'striving for achievements' still await the test of time, the notion is, compared to 'keeping a low profile', far more conducive to creating a favourable international environment for China's peaceful rise.<sup>80</sup>

The debate over 'keeping a low profile' in Chinese IR academia is still far from concluding, as all schools are attempting to prove that their opinions are consistent with the central government's new policy. It is worth mentioning, however, that although on the one hand, the notion of 'keeping a low profile while making some contributions' has never once figured in speeches delivered by senior foreign policy officials, including the Foreign Minister since the beginning of the Xi Jinping administration, yet on the other, Mr Wu Jianmin's death after a car accident on June 18, 2016, which inevitably caused reflection on his dogged insistence on 'keeping a low profile', sparked once more a hot debate among Chinese scholars and diplomats, to the extent that both President Xi Jinping and Premier Li Keqiang sent wreaths to Wu's family. What can we surmise from these two facts? Do they imply that the Chinese government has been gradually phasing out this long-held principle,

diplomatic policies for the next 5–10 years, judging from its level and the essence of President Xi's speech,

77 Qu Xing, 'Linian gengxin wei zhongguo waijiao zhuru xinhuoli' ('Updated Mindset Injects New Vitality into China's Diplomacy'), *Shijie zhishi (World Affairs)*, No. 24 (2013), p. 27.

78 Yan Xuetong, 'Zhongguo waijiao quanmian gaige de kaishi' ('Commencement of Full-Scale Reforms in China's Diplomacy'), *Shijie zhishi (World Affairs)*, No. 24 (2013), p. 15.

79 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'), <http://www.ceweekly.cn/2013/1111/68562.shtml>.

80 Yan Xuetong, 'From Keeping a Low Profile to Striving for Achievement', *Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol. 7, No. 2 (2014), pp.153–84.

though not without resistance? If so, will those who advocate its renunciation become the mainstream in the next few years?

## **Six Questions for Possible Future Debates**

What debates will adjustments to foreign policies in the Xi Jinping era trigger? This section proposes for readers' reference several possible topics for debate. Whoever gains the upper hand in these potential debates will be largely decided by the match of ideas held by the government and scholars.

First, how long will the principle of 'keeping a low profile' remain valid? Currently, the debate on 'keeping a low profile' and 'striving for achievement' is ongoing both in IR academia and inside the government. As a policy unswervingly implemented for 30 years, it profoundly influenced at least two generations of diplomats and scholars of IR. Although the new central government has stated that China's diplomacy must shift towards striving for achievement, this extant mentality hampers both correct understanding and effective implementation of the new policy. Further study is needed on what impact the disappearance since 2013 of 'keeping a low profile' from publicly delivered speeches by China's national leaders and senior diplomats has had on the faithful followers of this principle.

Second, will the current principle of 'priority to China-U.S. relations' prevail? The overall strategic orientation of China's diplomacy can be summarized as 'major powers as the key, neighbouring countries as the priority, developing countries as the foundation, and multilateral relations as an important arena'. In practice, however, China often faces tension between balancing the key with the priority, that is, in balancing China-US relations and the relations between China and its neighbouring countries. Common practice in the past was that the priority should submit to the key, or that the relations between China and neighbouring countries should submit to China-US relations.

Since the Xi Jinping administration came to power, China has attained numerous diplomatic achievements in its relations with neighbouring countries while proposing establishment of a new model of great power relations with the United States. This is likely to prompt further debate over the relationship between China-US relations and China's diplomatic efforts with regard to neighbouring countries. In addition, determination of the essence of the new model of great power relations between China and the United States will also have a significant impact on the debate. Some may hold that the essence of such a new model is to maintain the bilateral relationship on a track of competition without collision. In other words, China is demanding that the United States gradually acknowledge its position as a superpower, and China-US relations will hence not remain the priority of China's diplomacy. Others may insist that the essence of the new model of great power relations between China and the United States is simply that of 'maintaining China-US relations as the priority of China's diplomacy' but formulated in another way, and that the current status quo will therefore continue to prevail.

Third, what are the prospects for the new model of great power relations between China and the United States? Despite the Chinese government's repeated emphasis on building a new model of great power relations between China and the United States, there is extensive dispute in Chinese academia over this issue. Topics in this debate include the subject, character, and path of the proposed new model of great power relations. With regard to subject, the debate centres on whether such a model refers specifically to China-US relations or whether it is a generalized reference for China's relations with all major

powers. With regard to character, the debate focuses on whether the new model of great power relations between China and the United States is dominated by strategic competition or strategic cooperation. Finally, with regard to its path, the debate considers whether such a model between China and the United States would be established through balanced power distribution or mutual agreement on a change in mentality, via either negative or positive security cooperation.<sup>81</sup>

Fourth, where is the development of international structure going? As overseas research institutes frequently make calculations and estimates as to when China's economic volume will catch up with that of the United States, some in Chinese IR academia deny China's prospects of becoming a superpower and the attendant likelihood of a return to a bipolar world. Such debates in IR academia on the future direction of changes in the international structure are set to continue, exhibited in disparate views as to the speed and extent of the rise of China. The mainstream viewpoint is that China will not become a superpower before achieving 'the two strategic one hundred year goals' by 2049, while a few optimists hold that China will become a superpower around 2023.<sup>82</sup>

The notion of superpower is almost a derogative term in China's official discourse, because the government usually equates it with hegemony. Thus, official documents do not choose it to describe China's power status. Instead, another term—'the Chinese dream of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation'—is officially used to imply China's ambition to rise and become a superpower. The problem, however, lies in the contradiction between the great rejuvenation and the trend of multipolarization, as the former implies that China will become the most powerful country in the world (or one of the two superpowers). It remains to be seen how the government will resolve this conceptual contradiction. However, it can be predicted that some new notions formulated by the government during the coming period will trigger disputes in IR academia. Examples might include how to understand the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation and whether the great rejuvenation is a synonym of rise.

Fifth, will China renounce its non-alignment policy? The non-alignment policy is a fundamental diplomatic policy inaugurated in Deng Xiaoping's time, and was then an innovation in diplomacy, because making alliances has been a common approach to political struggles in human society for millennia, and practiced by all the great powers since modern history. For the past 30 years, China has supported and conscientiously implemented the non-alignment policy. China's official voices usually equate alliances with so-called Cold War mentality, and hence a target for slating.

However, some practices and ideas formulated by the Chinese government have triggered debates in academia, such as the close diplomatic and military cooperation between China and Russia, and China's involvement in military exercises within the SCO framework, as well as China's formulation of the all-weather strategic partnership and community of common destiny, etc. Viewpoints on the extent and intensity of China–Russia cooperation and understanding of these new ideas will trigger debates in academia. For instance, should China maintain the non-alignment policy? Will China renounce this policy

81 Qi Hao, 'China Debates the "New Type of Great Power Relations"', *Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol. 8, No. 4 (2015), pp. 349–70.

82 The first strategic goal is that China will achieve its well-off goal (*Xiaokang*) in 2021, when the CCP celebrate its centenary. The second strategic goal is China's becoming a medium-level developed country in 2049, when China celebrates its centenary.

behind the scenes? Is Russia a reliable ally of China? Which countries are likely to become China's allies?

Sixth, should diplomacy serve the purpose of economic construction or the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation? Since reform and opening up, economic construction has been the centre and starting point of all government tasks. Creating a peaceful international environment, therefore, has become an important mission of diplomacy. Unswervingly sticking to the principle where diplomacy serves the purpose of economy is the mainstream voice in Chinese IR academia. The reason is quite simple: as long as economic construction remains at the centre of our work, it would be reasonable and rational that diplomacy serves the purpose of economic construction.

Since President Xi Jinping's statement that China's diplomacy goal in the future is 'to submit to and serve "the two 100-year goals" and achieve the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation', whether or not diplomacy should serve the purpose of economic construction or the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation might become a theme of academic debate. There is an essential difference between achieving the great rejuvenation of the nation and centring on economic construction, as success in economic construction does not necessarily lead to rejuvenation of the nation, which refers to improved comprehensive national strength in such essential factors as politics, economy, military forces, culture, etc. That diplomacy shall serve economic construction implies that diplomacy is economy-oriented, aimed at 'making money', whereas that diplomacy shall serve the rejuvenation of the nation means that diplomacy is politically oriented, aimed at 'making friends'.

## **Conclusion**

This article proposes a novel interaction model between Chinese IR academia and foreign policymakers, focusing on the debates in Chinese IR academia before and after key foreign policy changes over the past 30 years. The author believes that although an indirect approach, watching debates is quite a useful way for students to gain a better understanding of China's foreign policy, in that debates reflect the consistency of ideas between policymakers and scholars, and are, in a sense, the index of policy changes.

China's foreign policy adjustments since the 1980s have triggered five debates. They are: the theme of the time, national interest, international structure, the goal of diplomacy, and the principles of diplomacy. I argue that the consistency of ideas between scholars and the government can explain the evolution of these debates. I find that those who share the same ideas as policymakers gain an upper hand in the debates, which results in their views becoming the mainstream in IR academia, while those scholars whose ideas stand counter to those of policymakers will be gradually marginalized. When confronted with several different policy recommendations, policymakers will choose the one that shares their ideas in whole or part, and then take advantage of it to spread 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 article predicts that future debates will address (but not necessarily be limited to) the following issues: whether China should stick to the 'principle of priority of China-US relations'; whether the international structure is developing towards multipolarization or a resurgence of bipolarization; whether the non-alignment policy should be maintained; and whether diplomacy should serve economic development or the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. Scholars holding a minority opinion on these issues tend to exert more

influence and gain the opportunity for their views to prevail in IR academia. At the same time, lively scholarly debates over these issues provide the Chinese government with a diverse array of theories and concepts from which to choose.

### **Acknowledgment**

The author would like to thank Yan Xuetong, Kai He, Li Wei, Qi Haixia, Wendy Leudert, two anonymous reviewers and all the participants at the 2015 workshop on “Understanding the Rise of China through the Eyes of Chinese International Relations (IR) Scholars” for their helpful comments and assistance. The author thanks John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation (No. 16-1512-150509-IPS) and the National Social Science Fund of China (No. 15BFX187) for their financial assistance.