

Three perspectives on Chinese diplomacy: government, think-tanks and academia

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New philosophy of Chinese diplomacy [Jie du zhong guo wai jiao xin li nian]. By The State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China. Beijing: China Intercontinental Press. 2014. 226pp. £143.83. isbn 9787508524689.

China's new diplomacy and the changing world [Zhong guo wai jiao xin ju mian yu guo ji xing shi xin bian hua]. Edited by Qu Xing. Beijing: World Affairs Press. 2014. 389pp. \$26.00. isbn 9787501246779.

Ten issues in China's foreign affairs [Zhong guo wai jiao shi nan ti]. By Wang Yizhou. Nan Jing: Jiangsu People's Publishing House. 2015. 149pp. V17.00. isbn 978 7214145130.

With a population of 1.3 billion, China is the second largest economy in the world in aggregate terms. Chinese diplomacy is providing new opportunities for humanity to seek peace. What should one expect from Chinese diplomacy and specific diplomatic initiatives in the coming years and what impact will they have on the world? What have been the key changes in top-level foreign policymaking under Xi Jinping? What are the challenges and opportunities that Chinese diplomacy will face in the foreseeable future? China's government, think-tanks and scholars are exploring these questions from different perspectives, while the world waits for their answers. They all share the view that China will fulfil its responsibilities as a major power, but not at the expense of sovereignty

and territorial integrity. In the foreseeable future, Chinese attitudes towards this matter will remain unchanged. On the other hand, when it comes to dealing with the achievements and the weaknesses of Chinese diplomacy, the government, thinktanks and scholars propose differing tactics.

Diplomatic innovations: the governmental perspective

New philosophy of Chinese diplomacy is a well-researched volume compiled by the State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China. It is divided into two sections: 'top interpretations' and 'expert reviews' on Chinese diplomacy. The primary concern of the contributors to this volume is to stress the innovations in the theory and practice of Chinese diplomacy which, they argue, has held on to the essence of China's traditional culture while taking account of global developments.

There have been at least three recent important innovations in Chinese diplomatic practice. First, President Xi Jinping proposed the 'approach to upholding justice and seeking interests, (p. 28) as one of the guiding principles of diplomacy in the new era. As Wang Yi, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China (PRC), suggests, this approach can be summarized as 'valuing justice above interests' (p. 29). 'Giving more and taking less, as well as giving before taking', adds Yu Hongjun, Vice-Minister of the International Department of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (CPC) and President of the China Center for Contemporary World Studies. Following this guiding principle, when China engages with neighbouring countries, it carries out preferential policies in their interest. Second, a 'community of common destiny' has been another guiding principle of diplomacy in the Xi Jinping era, and one which holds essential significance for China's approach to neighbouring and developing countries. In the eyes of Liu Zhenmin, Vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs, it is not only 'a commitment made by China for Asia's future and fate', but also an innovation on China's policy of good-neighbourliness (p. 46). In practice, China will provide Asian countries with more public goods, including 'a peaceful and stable regional environment, prospects for common prosperity and development, and mutually beneficial cooperation partnerships' (p. 74).

Third, 'bottomline thought' in Chinese overall diplomacy especially concerns engagement with developed countries. Yang Jiechi, the State Counsellor of the People's Republic of China, explains that 'bottom-line thought' means that China 'never gives up legitimate interests or core national interests'; in other words, 'no country should expect us to swallow the bitter fruit that do harm to our sovereignty, security and development interests' (p. 12). This idea has been accepted by other high-ranking officials in China's diplomatic circles. In the case of Sino-US relations, Cui Tiankai, now ambassador to the US, and Pang Hanzhao stress that if the United States undermines the core interests of China, China 'will not be ambiguous in defending [its] independence, sovereignty and national dignity' (p. 71).

This volume leaves two questions open for discussion by scholars both at home and abroad. First, all the contributors see the United States as a 'hegemon'. For example, they insist that 'China has no intention to challenge the position and compete with hegemony of the United States' (p. 67). However, this view is 'neither accurate nor suited to the post-Cold War world'.¹ According to Simon Reich and Richard Ned Lebow, 'the United States has not been a hegemon for a very long time'—not since the immediate postwar period. As they explain, a hegemon should exercise three functions: agenda setting, custodianship and sponsorship.² At present, European actors focus more on agenda setting, which to a large extent relies on persuasion. At the same time, China has been acting as a lender of last resort to maintain the global economic system constructed by the United States. In contrast, the US has been 'a regular exploiter, rather than provider, of public goods'.³ It would be better for the government to re-examine its conception of 'hegemony'.

Second, will China's economic growth be stable in the longer term? In other words, without the stable growth of its economy, can China let awareness about the 'community of common destiny' take root in its neighbourhood? In the collection of essays *China's new diplomacy and*

¹ Simon Reich and Richard Ned Lebow, *Good-bye hegemony! Power and influence in the global system* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014), p. 176.

² Reich and Lebow, *Good-bye hegemony!*, p. 171.

³ Reich and Lebow, *Good-bye hegemony!*, p. 41.

the changing world, edited by Qu Xing, Chinese Ambassador to Belgium and former president of the China Institute of International Studies, many of the contributors believe that there are constraints to maintaining China's stable economic growth in the coming years.

Challenges for China's diplomacy in the Xi Jinping era: the think-tank view

China's new diplomacy and the changing world comprises essays written by scholars from a number of Chinese think-tanks. The volume is divided into five parts, each analysing a variety of challenges facing China's diplomacy in the twenty-first century. All contributions are equally thoughtful and considered. The authors ponder the fact that an international cooperation mechanism, one that is in accordance with global realities and meets the demands of all parties, has not come into being.

On the constraints of China's stable economic growth in the long run, Ding Yifan, Deputy Director of the Research Institute of World Development at the China Development Research Center, writes:

China has been pushing the idea of establishing development funds or development banks for infrastructure projects under the auspices of various organizations. When developed countries may tighten their monetary policies or when funds are in short supply on the world market, this idea of China may be more attractive (pp. 147—8).

However, Ding makes a cautious assessment of these efforts. He draws the conclusion that if macroeconomic stability in the country falters, it will not be able to maintain steady economic growth, let alone meet the expectations of others. Unfortunately, there are constraints on China's stable economic development. As Yin Chengde, research fellow at the China Foundation for International Studies, highlights, 'no major Western nation formally recognises China's market economic status' (pp. 78-9). Moreover, the contributors point out that China has been excluded from negotiations over the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) and the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP), both sponsored

by developed countries. For example, Chen Dezhaoh from the China Institute of International Studies places great emphasis on the TPP:

it has been settled that China has no chance of joining the TPP negotiation before its completion. Nevertheless, once the agreement is signed, America will adopt a 'welcome-in' attitude towards China, aimed at bringing China into already established regulation. (p. 93)

What is worse, according to Wang Yiwei, Director of the Center for EU Studies at Renmin University, is that 'the TTIP excludes China, which has no possibility of directly taking part in negotiations, (p. 123). Once the developed countries reach an agreement on the TPP and TTIP, these will form the foundation of a new international economic order and raise the costs of China accessing global markets. Chinese scholars thus have reason to believe that developed countries will take advantage of the TPP and TTIP to maintain their own position, while that of China is weakened.

Weaknesses in China's foreign policy: the view from academia

In *Ten issues in China's foreign affairs*, Wang Yizhou, Deputy Dean of the School of International Studies at Peking University, convincingly analyses the most significant challenges facing China's foreign policy-makers today and advances some important research topics at the same time. This book should be of interest to both the academic community and policy-makers in China. In addition to a brief introduction, this book has ten chapters, each of which raises a question related to China's foreign affairs. The author discusses the protection of China's new overseas interests; sovereignty disputes over land and sea territory; defence modernization; non-traditional security threats; global governance; foreign assistance and global public goods; the principles of non-intervention and nonalignment; non-governmental organizations; and how to promote the evolution of China's diplomatic institutions.

For this reviewer, one of the book's most valuable contributions lies in its analysis of the three weakest areas of China's foreign affairs. First, there is a tension between a limited diplomatic budget and unlimited tasks. This is an obvious problem, as China's diplomatic service is still

largely understaffed compared to other countries (e.g., the United States or Norway). For example, China's consular staff numbers roughly 5,000 and services a population of 1.3 billion. In contrast, the US consular staff has more than 15,000 members while the US population is 300 million; Norway has a population of five million, but it employs 1,500 consular workers (p. 8). In April 2015, according to Zhai Leiming (deputy director-general of the Department of Consular Affairs of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs), 'each employee [of Chinese consulates] is responsible for protecting 200,000 citizens. No nation in the world has ever dealt with such a huge task'.⁴ At the same time, China's diplomatic service is underfunded. As Wang argues, China's diplomatic budget only accounted for 0.6 per cent of GDP, and two per cent of the diplomatic budget was distributed to the diplomatic service; the rest was given as assessed contribution to international organizations (e.g., the United Nations) or spent on foreign aid. This is not worthy of China's major power status. As Wang suggests, the diplomatic budget should be gradually increased to 1.2-1.5 per cent of GDP in the coming decade (p. 137).

Second, China's diplomatic personnel are poorly equipped to identify and analyse non-traditional security issues—sometimes embarrassing to the government—such as transnational smuggling, drug-trafficking, maritime piracy and terrorism. In general, non-traditional security issues threaten human security rather than national sovereignty or territorial integrity. Third, China occasionally finds it difficult to balance domestic and international demands. As Wang shows, as a major power, China is responsible both for its citizens and for international society and countries throughout the world (p. 57). This raises an ethical question: when China's resources are too limited to fulfil its responsibilities both at home and abroad, will the government prioritize its citizens or its commitments to developing and undeveloped countries?

With regard to counter-measures to the above-mentioned weaknesses in Chinese foreign policy-making, Wang's arguments are thought-

⁴ Liu Xin, 'Private security companies struggle to go abroad due to legal restrictions', *Global Times*, 23 Dec. 2015, <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/960208.shtml>, accessed on May 2 2016.

provoking. China's diplomatic institutions should urgently receive more funding and recruit more staff. Failing that, Wang suggests that a second-best solution could be to establish a public-private partnership between China's diplomatic service, non-governmental organizations and the private sector. Public-private partnerships could mobilize the resources of the private sector and other institutions of the public sector to assist China's diplomatic service with personnel and funding. For example, the Ministry of Commerce and the industry associations could provide training for companies and self-employed workers; the International Department Central Committee, the United Front Work Department and the All-China Federation of Returned Overseas Chinese could support charities to provide assistance in regional and international hotspots. In addition, the Ministry of Public Security could collaborate with the diplomatic service on information sharing (p. 144).

But Wang's most valuable contribution is the concept of 'creative involvement'. He emphasizes reading the signs of the times: that is, China should wait for the opportune moment to act, as opposed to being swept along by other Great Powers, especially when its interests could be immediately threatened or damaged (pp. 94-5). In other words, integrating into existing international institutions is not China's sole policy option. It should set its own agenda, timetable and policy priorities. In the foreseeable future, 'creative engagement' will not only improve China's strategic depth and room for manoeuvre, but also puts the intentions of the top leadership into effect.

As for TTIP and the TPP, following the logic of 'creative engagement' China should maintain an open attitude, as long as others follow the principles of openness and transparency. With regard to TTIP, Europe is not a monolithic entity. While Brussels estimates that 'the treaty would ultimately increase Europe's GDP by 0.5 per cent', its critics argue that the treaty would lead to 'further loss of sovereign democratic control'.⁵ And last, if TTIP raises the costs of trade for China, it does the same for other countries such as Russia, Japan and Brazil.

⁵ Ambrose Evans-Pritchard, 'Let the TTIP trade pact die if it threatens parliamentary democracy', *Daily Telegraph*, 4 May 2016.

Conclusion and further avenues for research

There are several important topics that are not discussed in detail in any of the three books, three of which should be highlighted and would warrant further research. The first major omission is around non-traditional security issues which affect national sovereignty and territorial integrity, such as maritime piracy or oil and gas development in areas subject to territorial disputes (e.g., in the South China Sea), as well as terrorism and national separatism. There is no mention, either, of the use of child soldiers in China's neighbouring countries (especially Myanmar and Afghanistan). In the post-Cold War era, child soldiering is neither new nor rare—it occurs in many countries around the world. According to UNICEF, more than 300,000 children under 18 have been recruited in armed conflicts worldwide. The majority of child soldiers are 15-18 years old, but some are as young as young 7 or 8. It has been confirmed by the United Nations that Myanmar has the most child soldiers in the world. What is new is the extent to which the Myanmar Army and ethnic-based militias have increasingly recruited and used children as combatants. Chinese private security companies have also become increasingly active in the region. Local contractors have certain advantages over western private security companies, most importantly when it comes to pricing. For most potential employers, a Chinese private security contractor could charge RMB 3,000-6,000 per man per month (\$476 to \$952) and \$190 to \$381 a day for a group of twelve Chinese private security contractors. Western companies charge up to \$45,000 for a four-man team to escort vessels through high-risk areas.⁶ Chinese private security contractors also enjoy language and cultural advantages with Chinese citizens and commercial companies, which 'would greatly ease communication, particularly in an emergency'.⁷ If the editors and contributors had taken these three issues into account, their arguments would have been more inclusive.

This review article has considered three valuable contributions to our

⁶ 'Laws and guns', *The Economist*, 14 April 2012, <http://www.economist.com/node/21552553>, accessed 1 May 2016.

⁷ Andrew Erickson and Gabe Collins, 'Enter China's security firms', *The Diplomat*, 21 Feb. 2012, <http://thediplomat.com/2012/02/enter-chinas-security-firms/>, accessed 1 May 2016.

understanding of the perspectives of China's government, think-tanks and scholars on the country's diplomacy in the Xi Jinping era. *New philosophy of Chinese diplomacy* is a useful source for any reader interested in innovations at the top levels of policymaking. *China's new diplomacy and the changing world* is a very informative complementary volume. It will be especially useful for students and scholars wishing to learn about the challenges facing Chinese diplomacy today. *Ten issues in China's foreign affairs* is a thought-provoking book, written in straightforward and clear language. Both casual readers and academics should have it on their shelves. The three volumes together would be valuable reading for anyone interested in how Chinese diplomacy is evolving in response to a variety of external and internal factors and potential responses.