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The New “Selective Diplomacy” of the People’s Republic of China: towards a “partial” interference in global affairs?

Introduction

This paper aims at analysing the implications of China’s rise to world power status and its transition to a greater interdependence in global affairs, which in necessity require a general revision of the country’s diplomacy guidelines. In particular, as the People’s Republic of China (PRC) is increasing its influence in the world and is expanding its global interests, it is becoming more and more evident that the traditional stance of non-interference in internal affairs of other states (*bugansheneizheng* 不干涉内政) is not tenable anymore and needs to be revised. More generally, in the last few years, after the decline of American power in the wake of the Global Financial Crisis and the extraordinary performances played instead by the PRC, some Chinese scholars have started to challenge the current relevance of Deng Xiaoping’s foreign policy prescriptions, considering them as out of date and inadequate for China’s newfound international status. In particular, Deng’s main dictum “conceal our capacities/keeping a low profile” (*taoguang yanghui* 韬光养晦) has increasingly been coming under discussion, since China cannot continue to ignore the growing number of global challenges and expectations of the international community. If China wants to maintain its role and image as a major world power, it must live according to its international responsibilities and “make some contributions” (*dasuo zuowei* 打所作为). In other words,

the Chinese leadership is called to adjust its low-key position and non-involvement policy and to take a more proactive direction in international affairs, while at the same time continuing to strive for the realization of a harmonious world (*hexie shijie* 和谐世界). This means that China should have the courage to assume greater international responsibilities and carry out a “constructive interference policy” when necessary, as it has already partially done in dealing with the crisis management of specific cases, such as those represented by Libya and Sudan.

Nonetheless, there are several obstacles that might inhibit any dramatic re-evaluation of the PRC’s official stance in foreign policy, starting from its historical memory. In China, much more than in other countries, history is *magistra vitae*. Most Chinese take a negative view of external intervention in the light of their historical memory of the suffering inflicted by the imperialist powers during the notorious *bainian chiru* 百年耻辱, that is, the “century of shame and humiliation”. Similarly, the Chinese have learned from history that countries who challenged the most powerful state in the international system for the sake of seeking leadership, eventually ended in failure (Zhu Liqun, 2010, pp. 46, 52). That is why the Deng Xiaoping’s principle of “keeping a low profile and making *some* contributions” continues to be seen, especially within the Chinese community of international relations scholars, as a wise counsel to follow for China in the 21st century (Li Dan, 2010, p. 157).

The Foreign Policy Principles of China

Since the 1950s the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence (*heping gongchu wuxian yuanze* 和平共处五项原则), that is: mutual respect for each other’s territorial integrity and sovereignty (*huxiang zunzhong zhuquan he lingtuwanzheng* 互相尊重主权和领土完整); mutual non-aggression (*huxiang buqinfan* 互不侵犯); non-interference in each other’s internal affairs (*huxiang buganshe neizheng* 互不干涉内政); equality and mutual benefit (*pingdeng huli* 平等互利); and peaceful coexistence (*heping gongchu* 和平共处) have constituted the PRC’s fundamental and everlasting norms in foreign policy.¹ It is on the basis of these principles that

¹ Originally proclaimed in 1954 as a part of the agreement between China and India (the “Agreement on trade and intercourse between Tibet Region of China and India”), in 1955 they were incorporated in a modified form in a statement of ten prin-

China has established diplomatic relations and carried out trade, economic, scientific, technological and cultural exchanges and cooperation with the greater majority of countries in the world, and has resolved the boundary issues with most neighbors and maintained peace and stability in its surrounding areas. In more recent years, these principles have represented the basis of the Beijing *modus operandi* towards the developing countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America which consisted of providing economic and technical aid with no political strings attached (*bufujiazhengzhitiaojian* 不附加政治条件), fostering the emergence of a “China model”.

From the very beginning, the principle of non-interference in internal affairs of other states, designed to reflect solidarity with newly independent post-colonial states and to indicate respect for territorial sovereignty, acquired a fundamental role in China’s handling of foreign affairs. This fundament was regularly violated by China during the 1960s and 1970s when the communist government was engaged in supporting revolutionary movements across Africa and Asia. It then reassumed a central position in the 1980s when China started to pursue the so-called “independent foreign policy for peace”, though it was strictly respected only in the 1990s when the Beijing government was committed to a low-profile foreign policy. At that time China was trying to recover from the post-Tiananmen international isolation and Deng Xiaoping formulated a new foreign policy largely inspired by prudence. The so-called “28-characters” guidelines (“*ershi bazi*” *fangzhen* “二十八字”方针) urged the country to: watch and analyse developments calmly (*lengjing guancha* 冷静观察); secure their own positions (*wenzhu zhenjiao* 稳住阵脚); deal with changes with confidence (*chenzhuo yingfu* 沉着应付); conceal our capacities (*taoguang yanghui* 韬光养晦); be good at keeping a low profile (*shanyu shouzhuo* 善于守拙); never become the leader (*juebu dangtou* 绝不当头); and make some contributions (*yousuo zuowei* 有所作为). The significance of the new foreign policy guidelines was that in that critical moment (after the implosion of the Soviet Union and the beginning of the U.S. – unipolar moment) China had better take a “low profile” and concentrate on its own affairs while coping with international affairs calmly and making full use of advantages, trying to avoid disadvantages. In other words, in spite of some speculations, the new guidelines, and especially

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 ciples issued at the historic Asian-African Conference in Bandung. Later, they formed the basis of the Non-Aligned Movement.

the warning to *taoguang yanghui*, often mistranslated as “hiding one’s capabilities and biding one’s time”, was not “a calculated call for temporary moderation until China has enough material power and confidence to promote its hidden agenda and challenge the U.S. global dominance”. Instead, it was rather an admonition for China to remain modest and low-key while building a positive image internationally and achieving specific gains in order to avoid suspicions, challenges or commitments that might undermine the long-standing emphasis on domestic development made by China (Wang Jisi, 2011). We should not forget that China’s national priorities for domestic and foreign policy were dramatically changed from the Mao era to the Deng Xiaoping era. While for Mao the key word was “revolution”, with Deng Xiaoping the emphasis was put on “modernization”, from which political and social stability depended on (Zhao Quansheng, 1996, p. 4).

In that crucial phase, the doctrine of non-interference started to be perceived by the Chinese government as the core of sovereignty, used to provide justification for its adherence to a strict view of sovereignty which rejected interference in the international affairs in the name of human rights or humanitarian interventions as had frequently been adopted by many Western countries, starting from the United States. The contemporary growing integration of the PRC into the international community through, among others, its support of the major international institutions; its participation to UN peacekeeping operations (UNPKO); the abandonment of the previous aversion to multilateralism which facilitated the entrance to nearly all multilateral and regional organizations and associations, just served the national interests of the country and did not imply any endorsement of the liberal principles which underlie many institutions such as the UN and the WTO.

The PRC’s U-Turn in Foreign Policy

Both the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence and the Deng Xiaoping low-profile guidelines had never been seriously questioned until recently. Rather, the prudent and pacific diplomatic strategy adopted by Beijing in the last decades brought to several diplomatic successes, both in the surrounding areas and in the global arena. China has gradually emerged as a “responsible” country, and in the meantime the success

of its developmental path along with the peculiarities of Beijing's *modus operandi* contributed to make it a "model" to which one can refer to (Congiu, Onnis, 2013, pp. 72–5).

However, since the end of the 2000s, the PRC has undertaken a kind of U-turn from a cautious, low-profile, responsibility-shirking posture to a more confident and assertive one. Besides the brilliant performances played by the Chinese government which facilitated the rapid recovery of the country from the global financial crisis, many factors contributed to fuel this tendency: the growing energy consumption needs; the rising nationalism (further fostered by the so-called dissatisfaction literature)²; the incipient leadership transition; and the distrust of the Obama administration (strictly related to some specific episodes which hurt China's national interests, such as the decisions to meet the Dalai Lama at the White House in July 2011 and to sell a new substantial arms package to Taiwan in September 2011). Whatever the causes that may have contributed to such a shift in Chinese diplomacy the most relevant point for the present analysis is that, as the global economic crisis spread across the West in the period just after the Beijing Olympics, new voices in China, both unofficial and quasi-official, began to challenge the thesis of China's 'peaceful and low-key path'. Some of its opponents started to contend that the main objective of China should not be economic prosperity but power itself. Additionally, they also voiced the opinion that in order to become powerful and achieve international recognition it should not only be concerned with economic development but also with military power. They were rather in favour of a more assertive stance, especially towards the United States, accordingly to its new gained status (Zhu Liqun, 2010, pp. 8–9).

As a matter of fact, the maintenance of the low-profile diplomatic posture and the continuing respect of the non-interference principle started to be increasingly complicated by China's expanding global interests and the subsequent multifaceted challenges the country had to cope with. As pointed out by Wang Yizhou, from the Beijing University, one of the most dramatic changes that occurred in Chinese foreign policy is strictly related

² Symbolized mainly by the two bestsellers *Zhongguobugaoxing: da shidai, da mubiaoji women de neiyuwaihuan* 中国不高兴大时代, 大目标及我们的内忧外患 [China is Unhappy: the Great Era; the Grand Goal, and our National Anxieties and External Challenges] and *Zhongguo meng: hou Meiguoshidai de daguo siwei yu zhanlue dingwei* 中国梦后美国时代的大国思维与战略 定位 [China Dream: Great Power Thinking and Strategic Posture in the Post-American era], published in 2009 and 2010 respectively.

to the fact that China now has to protect the interests and safety of its citizens around the world (Leonard, 2012, p. 21). Nowadays, more than 70 million Chinese citizens travel abroad every year that includes not only official representatives but also ordinary citizens, such as students, migrant workers, businessmen, and tourists, while on the eve of the launch of the reform and opening-up policies, they were only about 9,000 (*ibid.*, p. 107). In addition, every year China sends about 5 million workers abroad, mostly in geopolitically insecure regions characterized by social and political instabilities and civil wars where other countries refuse to go or dare not to venture (Duchâtel, Bill, 2012). Consequently, the Chinese government is under mounting pressure, particularly among Chinese bloggers³, to provide for their off-shore security. This is not a simple task since, as mentioned above, China's state-owned companies and the Chinese citizens are often based in some of the most difficult trouble spots in the world. This would require a vigorous stance from Beijing, that the Chinese government is reluctant to adopt given its traditional adherence to the rule of non-intervention in the domestic affairs of other countries. In these circumstances, it is becoming increasingly difficult for China to continue to abide by its long-standing foreign policy principles, in particular its non-interference policy, even if it continues to remain part of the official rhetoric.

“Non-interference”: aluxury not affordable anymore

It is the increasingly recurring “hostagecrisis” (*renzhi weiji* 人质危机) that especially affects Chinese citizens working abroad and one that has recently triggered a hot debate about the continuing value of the non-interference doctrine. According to Jian Junbo, from the Fudan Institute of International Studies, in the past five years over 100 Chinese citizens have been kidnapped or attacked in numerous countries such as Afghanistan, Cameroon, Columbia, Ethiopia, Myanmar, Pakistan, Nigeria, Sudan, Thailand and Yemen (JianJunbo, 2012). At the end of the 2000s,

³ Microblogging can be considered as one of the most relevant legacies of the Fourth Generation of Chinese leaders. Almost non-existent at the beginning of the Hu-Wen decade, by the end of June 2012, China had become the country with the most microblog users in the world. According to the 2012 Blue Book of New Media, released by the China Social Science Academic Press, there are currently over 274 million users (Liu Sheng, 2012)..

China was second only to the U.S. in the world in terms of accidents among overseas citizens (Fang Wei, 2008, p. 43).

Kidnapping represents quite an unprecedented challenge for Beijing, which in part explains the inability of the Chinese government to develop a comprehensive strategy to protect Chinese citizens and companies in times of tumult. Actually, China has historically relied on international organizations to help its citizens abroad, as it happened in 2007 when the International Committee of the Red Cross negotiated the release of 7 oil workers held hostage in Ethiopia (“Rebels ‘release’ Chinese hostages”, 2007).

The growth in crises for Chinese citizens abroad is related to several factors, starting from the growing numbers of Chinese working abroad, which increases the probability for them to be kidnapped or attacked, especially in those states where political and social instability prevails (which actually coincide with those emerging markets where the PRC has the main economic interests). For example, more than 1 million Chinese citizens are currently working in African countries, up from 100,000 less than a decade ago (Zenn, 2012). The way the Beijing government deals with its relations with these countries also contributes to making Chinese citizens vulnerable as targets. In most cases it develops relations only with the ruling parties, while it neglects to foster ties with the opponent forces or rebel groups and, more generally, with the civil societies as a whole. Another relevant factor pertains to the relatively low levels of security that increase the possibility for Chinese workers to become an easy target for ransom and thus an alluring target for kidnappers. Actually, in order to limit costs, the Chinese state owned companies usually require workers to live in special encampments where their security staff is often inexperienced and underequipped (*ibid.*). In these conditions, the Chinese workers are often adrift and left at the mercy of the local events.

As a rising power with growing global interests, China cannot afford this persisting condition and the Chinese government is actually under growing pressure in order to develop a flexible involvement strategy to protect its overseas interests and those of its citizens working abroad. So, on the one side, there is concern about how the “overseas interests” of China can be protected in the event of political and economic instability. On the other, the Chinese leadership is getting lot of pressure to reevaluate the non-interference principle as it does not appear to be a policy appropriate for a global power with growing international “responsibilities”.

The concept of “overseas citizen protection” (*haiwai gongmin baohu* 海外公民保护), which refers to the efforts made by a range of Chinese institutions to assist or evacuate Chinese citizens abroad, first came to prominence almost a decade ago. To be more exact, the idea came about in 2004 when deadly attacks killed 14 Chinese workers in Afghanistan and Pakistan (Duchâtel, Bill, 2012). Since then, the number of attacks on overseas Chinese citizens has grown significantly. Between 2006 and 2010, a total of 6,000 people were evacuated from upheavals in Chad, Haiti, Kyrgyzstan, Lebanon, the Solomon Islands, Thailand, Timor-Leste and Tonga. In 2011 alone, China had to evacuate 48,000 of its nationals from Egypt, Libya and Japan. In October 2011, 13 Chinese merchant sailors were murdered on the Mekong River in Northern Thailand. A few months later, in two separate kidnappings more than 20 workers were taken hostage by rebels in the South Kordofan Province of Sudan and by Bedouin tribesmen in the Sinai Peninsula within the borders of Egypt, respectively. The list could continue with numerous other less publicized crises involving overseas Chinese citizens, often motivated by local resentments of Chinese investments or the management of those investments. The last one in order of occurrence took place on August 5, 2012, in Zambia, where some local miners killed their Chinese manager by pushing a mine trolley at him during a pay protest at a coal mine (“Zambian miner skill Chinese manager”, 2012).

In the past, China has adopted some important, albeit insufficient, measures in order to give more guarantees to its citizens working abroad. For example, in 2006 the Ministry of Foreign Affairs created a Bureau of Consular Protection (*Lingshi baohu chu* 领事保护处) within the Department of Consular Affairs, to handle and coordinate consular protection work. In November 2011 the China Consular Service Network was launched (*Zhongguo lingshi fuwuwang* 中国领事服务网) in order to disseminate nonstop security information through a website; at the same time it concluded an agreement with Chinese mobile phone operators to ensure that Chinese nationals receive a text message with basic security information upon arrival in a foreign country (Duchâtel, Bill, 2012; Fang Wei, 2008). More recently, the State Council issued a new set of rules to regulate the export of labor and protect the rights of workers abroad, the so called “Control regulations of Foreign Labor Cooperation” (*Haiwai Laodong Hezuo Guanli Tiaoli* 海外劳动合作管理条例), which were officially implemented on August 1, 2012. Interestingly, the new regulations, which consist of 53 articles, emphasize a “soft” tact towards protecting

workers, rather than a “hard” approach that would involve the deployment of the military. A significant provision included in art. 12, for example, requires companies to arrange for laborers to gain knowledge of the foreign languages where they work, as well as for companies to teach their workers about the relevant laws, religions and customs of the host country before deploying them abroad.

In light of these considerations, there are numerous analysts in China who believe that the principle of non-interference is becoming a sort of “burden”. This is due to the fact that the fast growing economy of the PRC and the consequent growing need for energy, resources and foreign markets, forces Beijing to engage ever more deeply with supplier and customer countries, no matter how stable or unstable they may be. In these conditions, the constant persistence to adopt a non-interference approach risks harming the national interests of the country. Put in another way, China has become too “big” to maintain its traditional policy of non-interference and its aversion to economic sanctions; too “big” to preserve friendly diplomacy towards international *pariahs* such as Sudan, Iran and North Korea; and too “big” to continue to fall back on its developing country status as a way to resist making sacrifices to stabilize the world economy and mitigate the environmental damage (Christensen, 2011, p. 57). In summation, “non-interference” is becoming a “luxury” that China cannot probably afford anymore.

For the time being the Chinese leadership perceives “non-interference” as a “dilemma” given the lack of consensus of how to balance the growing Chinese overseas interests and international responsibility with this traditional doctrine.

Besides the lack of consensus, there are several factors that work against any dramatic reevaluation of their official stance. Firstly, the lack of capabilities and resources. The coercive tools of the PRC have still not been fully modernized and the country is not ready to project its “hard” power in the world. So far, the largest mission that China has deployed to protect its workers abroad came in early 2011 when it had to evacuate more than 35,000 citizens from Libya after the eruption of anti-government protests and rebellions. Actually, although it was simply a rescue mission with no shots fired, it revealed both the capabilities and deficiencies of China in protecting their national power far from home. The rescue operation marked, in fact, the first time China deployed military assets to protect citizens of the PRC overseas. Nonetheless, military operations

in far-flung theaters remain logistically difficult for China, especially as it lacks the extensive intelligence networks in developing countries that the Western countries have taken several decades to build. Moreover, the expeditionary military capabilities of China are currently limited, even if it must be recognized that the Chinese military is making great efforts to become an expeditionary force. The anti-piracy deployment to the Gulf of Aden in 2009 and the use of naval and air assets to support the evacuation from Libya in 2011 have demonstrated a real potential in this arena (Collins, 2011). China is gradually building up a cadre of soldiers with significant international operating experience gained through participations in UN peacekeeping operations (UNPKO), many of which either took or are still taking place in locations with a security environment similar to areas where the PLA might be called to intervene in the future to support the evacuation of other overseas Chinese nationals (Lecarte, 2013). Another factor is related to the firm belief that non-interference has been a valuable policy tool in building precious relations with African and other developing countries exhausted by the prescriptions and the conditions imposed by the Western countries. The non-interference policy is actually one of the most appreciated pillars of the so-called “Beijing consensus”. If China changes its mind and starts to accept the principle of intervention, not only its influence on the third world countries may well be jeopardized, but also it may face more international pressure to shoulder greater responsibilities to which it currently does not have sufficient capacity. Strictly related to this, there is the “comprehensible” worry that an interventionist China might be perceived as a new “colonialist” power, contributing to confirming the foreign perceptions that the economic expansion of China is imperialist in nature, and at the same time further fostering the infamous “China threat” theory (*Zhongguoweixielun* 中国威胁论).

Last but not least, another important factor that might inhibit any serious intervention to protect Chinese citizens abroad resides in the lack of coordination between institutional players. Actually, the growing complexity of the current foreign policy making process in China, due to the cacophony of voices and the downgrading of the Foreign Ministry by other governmental and local agencies which pursue their own interests, represents one of the most crucial challenges the new leadership is called to cope with (Jakobson, 2013, pp. 13–4).

The “Creative Involvement” Concept of Wang Yizhou

In line with these considerations, some Chinese scholars have developed new paradigms to describe how China could be more active and play a constructive role in international relations, without a complete denial or giving up of its traditional foreign policy principles. In particular, Wang Yizhou coined the concept of “creative involvement” (*chuang zao xing ji-eru* 创造性介入), directly inspired by Joseph Schumpeter’s notion of “creative destruction” (*chuang zao xing pohua i* 创造性破坏) that describes how China could further expand its role in international affairs or support international interventions through the engagement with international norms rather than by narrow economic self-interest.

Wang Yizhou’s starting point is that China is now experiencing the implications of being a great power. Along with the increasing responsibilities related to its growing interdependence in international affairs and its increased physical presence across the world, China also has to respond to the higher expectations of the international community. Consequently, it cannot afford to continue to remain a free rider of the international system; rather, it is called on to change the course of its diplomacy and give its own contribution to the world, shouldering bigger responsibilities. However, Wang does not lean towards a *tout court*, denying the traditional foreign policy principles. On the contrary, he agrees that Deng Xiaoping’s main dictum of “keeping a low profile” should not be changed. Actually, in his view, the idea of “creative involvement” represents an enrichment of Deng’s policies (which proclaim the necessity to “keep a low profile” and also “do something”). In fact, it stresses a new and proactive attitude (*jiji taidu* 积极态度) with a stronger sense of participation in international affairs that should characterize the new diplomatic posture of China.

Although advocating an active participation in foreign affairs, Wang’s new diplomatic concept differs essentially from interventionism. First of all, it calls for active contact and involvement instead of intervention by force (as it is usually the case in Western interventionism). According to Wang, “creative involvement” should be conducted on the basis of international legitimation. This implies the respect of some fixed principles, that is: obeying the UN Charter; being invited by the local people or a majority of political parties in the state concerned; and conforming to the wishes of most of its neighboring countries. Furthermore, the strategy should be carried out according to Chinese capabilities after cautious deliberation, and only when dealing with affairs concerning its vital or “core

interests" (*hexinliyi* 核心利益).⁴ From this point of view, Wang Yizhou's position reflects the ideas of the so-called "selective multilateralist" school (one of the seven schools of thinking within the Chinese international relations community). According to this school of thought, China should selectively expand its global involvements, commensurate with its newfound position and power, though only on issues that directly involve the national security interests of China (Shambaugh 2011, pp. 17–20). Last but not least, Wang's concept stresses diplomatic mediation and economic assistance (which pertain to the "soft power" realm) instead of a military-first approach.

In his book specifically dedicated to the new concept and to its implications for the Chinese diplomacy, entitled *Chuangzao xingjieru. Zhongguo waijiao xinqu xiang* 创造性介入中国外交新取向 [Creative Involvement. A new direction in China's diplomacy], Wang presents eight case studies from recent Chinese diplomacy (addressing both global concerns and Chinese vital interests) where some elements of "creative involvement" were at play. The scope of the presented case studies include examples such as: encouraging the political reform in Myanmar after the 2007 crackdown; providing massive humanitarian aid to Sudan; creating the "Six-Party talks" to contain the North Korean nuclear ambitions; and the more recent evacuation from Libya (Wang Yizhou, 2011, chap. 2). The last one is particularly interesting as the evacuation of more than 35,000 Chinese citizens in a relatively short period of time (from February to March 2011), revealed not only the growing capabilities of China in overseas citizen protection, but also Beijing's good relations with related countries, outstanding negotiating ability, strong financial power and impressive ability of mobilization, organization, and coordination. In fact, the Libyan evacuation mission, referred to in Chinese both as *guojia xingdong* 国家行动 (national action) and *guojia jiushou* 国家救援 (state rescue), was jointly conducted by the Chinese military, some government departments and the companies involved in the African country. According to the author, the Libyans rescue is a case of "creative involvement" that is "worth ana-

⁴ State Councilor Dai Bingguo (in charge of international relations) publicly defined the general elements of China's core interests in July 2009, during a session of the U.S.-China Strategic and Economic Dialogue (S&ED), including three components: 1) preserving China's basic state system and national security (*weihujibenzhidu he guojiaanquan* 维护基本制度和国家安全); 2) preserving national sovereignty and territorial integrity (*guojiazhuquan he lingtuwanzheng* 国家主权和领土完整); and 3) safeguarding the continued stable development of China's economy and society (*jingjishehui de chixu wending fazhan* 经济社会的持续稳定发展) (Swaine, 2011).

lysing” as it created several records in the diplomatic history of the PRC. In fact it was the first time the PRC evacuated citizens from a conflict-ridden foreign country using land, air and ocean passages; it was the first time the Chinese government rented civil aircraft, foreign ships and planes on a large scale; the first time it ferried its citizens to third countries before repatriating them; and the first time embassy officials issued emergency travel documents in order to prove the identities of the evacuees (*ibid.*, pp. 74–5). Actually, the official media referred to the Libya mission as “the largest and most complicated overseas evacuation ever conducted by the Chinese government since 1949” (Wang Guanqun, 2011). At the same time, the rescue operation in Libya represented for the Chinese leadership an “unusual” combination of challenges, contributing to clearly show China “the burdens of being a great power” and the growing unsuitableness of its non-interference posture (Parello-Plesner, 2011).

Similarly, the patient and meticulous work of the PRC implemented in Sudan starting from the second half of the 2000s constitute another interesting example of “creative involvement” by Chinese diplomacy, which helped the Beijing government to maintain good relations with both Sudan and South Sudan (after the referendum that sanctioned its independence in January 2011), safeguarding its economic interests in the country, on the one side, and partly “sacrificing” its hallowed doctrine of non-intervention, on the other (Rafferty, 2010; Zhang Chun 2012).

The fact that the case studies presented by Wang are mainly related to crisis management does not imply that the “creative involvement” should be limited only to difficult situations. According to the author it should instead become the rule in the handling of ordinary diplomatic affairs. In other words China needs to play a constructive role in addressing topical issues globally and regionally and in tackling various global challenges (many of which clearly require an intervention policy from China in order to be solved). This means that China should have the courage to assume more international responsibilities and carry out a “constructive interference” policy, when necessary.

Conclusions

China’s foreign policy has faced many important challenges in the last decades. One of the most dramatic ones is related to the growing presence of its citizens around the world that the Chinese government has the duty

to protect. Such a duty is becoming increasingly urgent since the overseas Chinese have become one of the most preferred targets for kidnappers, not only in Africa, but also in some Asian and Latin American countries. In these circumstances, the “non-interference” stance of the PRC that has worked well in the past does not appear tenable anymore. As a rising power with growing global interests China needs to develop a flexible involvement strategy to protect its overseas interests. This does not imply the adoption of an opportunistic approach. Rather, China should develop a strategy that is complimentary to its non-interference policy based on the principles of the UN charter. At the same time, it should aim to win the respect of foreign countries by playing its due role as a major and responsible country, while also working jointly with other countries to meet global challenges. This will not only help China to consolidate an image as a responsible major power, but it will also satisfy its own needs to be integrated into the current international system and play a constructive role. However, there are several obstacles that might encumber any dramatic reevaluation of the official international behavior towards a more responsible major power willing to consider the downgrading of its non-interference policy when necessary, and play a more constructive role in foreign affairs. The most urgent and with potential far-reaching consequences is probably the lack of coordination among the multiple actors (institutional and not) that strive to influence Chinese foreign policy to the detriment of not only the Foreign Ministry but also the national interests of the country.

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