

WHY IS CHINA EXHIBITING BELLIGERENT BEHAVIOUR?

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INTRODUCTION

Of late, China has been displaying a shift in its foreign policy. The change is perhaps its way of asserting itself and declaring to the world its new status, announcing its phenomenal rise as a great power.¹ China has also indulged in making use of paramilitary forces, economic sanctions, fishing and oil ventures. It exhibits an offensive outlook and uses intimidating means to deal with territorial disputes in the South and East China Seas. This development forces one to ponder over whether the Chinese leadership has abandoned the low profile diplomacy advocated by Deng Xiaoping. Or has China reoriented its foreign policy towards a more assertive direction as a symbol of its wealth and power?

It has been suggested by some scholars that China has emerged sooner and more assertively than was expected. It seems Beijing now asserts its interests and willingness to prevail even at the expense of appearing aggressive. China has been moving gingerly beyond the paradigm of developmental modesty.² But this hesitant approach leads one to wonder

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1. Matthew R. Costlow, "Gunboat Diplomacy in the South China Sea", [http://www.usafa.edu/df/inss/Research%20Papers/2012/Costlow%20South%20China%20Sea%20\(22%20Jan%202013\).pdf](http://www.usafa.edu/df/inss/Research%20Papers/2012/Costlow%20South%20China%20Sea%20(22%20Jan%202013).pdf), 2012, accessed on October 13, 2013, pp.5-6.
2. Suisheng Zhao, "Chinese Foreign Policy as a Rising Power to find its Rightful Place", *PERCEPTIONS*, vol. XVIII, no. 1, Spring 2013, pp. 101-128. pp.117-119.

For many years after the end of the Cold War, fully understanding that its geostrategic position just did not allow it to exert enough clout, China followed the policy of hiding its capabilities, focussing on national strength building and biding its time.

whether China is prepared to play the positive leadership role of a great power in the 21st century. This article dwells upon China's foreign policy behaviour, especially after the global downturn in 2008.

METAMORPHOSIS

For many years after the end of the Cold War, fully understanding that its geostrategic position just did not allow it to exert enough clout, China followed the policy of hiding its capabilities, focussing on national strength building and biding its time. The policy is aptly captured in a Chinese phrase *Tāoguāngyǎnghuì*

(韬光养晦).³ Deng Xiaoping was a strong proponent of this policy. In the 1990s, China kept its head low and avoided confrontation with the US and other Western powers. This was a well thought out posture in the wake of its vulnerability towards Western sanctions following the Tiananmen Square protests in 1989. As a result, Beijing followed a good neighbourhood *mùlín zhèngcè* (睦邻政策) policy to conduct relations with its Asian neighbours and create a peaceful regional environment conducive to its economic development.

As far as the major powers were concerned, China made lot of allowances to "learn to live with the hegemon". It made a lot of adjustments and policy adaptation to coexist with the reality of dominance in the international system. Since the US held the key to China's continuing modernisation efforts, it was important that the US was not offended. With rapid economic growth over the past three decades, China weathered the global economic slowdown that started from 2008, better than many Western countries. New China's foreign policy behaviour has shifted towards a more assertive direction. Chinese leaders and official publications have started talking

3. Suisheng Zhao, "A New Model of Great Power Relationship and China-US Competition in the Asia Pacific", ISPI Analysis Publication, Analysis No 211, November 2013, pp. 4-5.

about China's core national interests, defined as "the bottom-line of national survival" and essentially non-negotiable. Though some Chinese scholars advised that China should be more ambiguous in listing its core interests, in order to leave room for manoeuvre, the Chinese leaders made clear in their speeches that sovereignty and territorial integrity are among China's core national interests. They steadily included more and more controversial issues in the expanding list of China's core interests, signalling the resolve of China's rising power intent. This reorientation in its foreign policy resulted in damaging China's relations with the Western countries and many of its Asian-Pacific neighbours.

China no longer avoided appearing confrontational. It berated American officials for the global economic crisis. It refused to back a tougher climate change agreement in Copenhagen. It stood fast against American demands for tough new Security Council sanctions against Iran. The Western economies were floundering and the Chinese economic and diplomatic clout rising.⁴ The US was perceived in China as a country which, though in heavy debt to China, was still attempting to leverage its superiority to keep China down. This perception has made Chinese leaders less willing to make adaptations and more ready to challenge the US in defending what they call China "core interests".

Upping the ante with regard to the US arms sales to Taiwan, China lodged a strong protest in its dire sounding warning against the consequences of the arms sales as a serious challenge to China's core interests. RAdm Yang Yi openly stated that it was time for China to sanction the US defence firms behind the sales to reshape the policy choices of the US. When the Obama Administration notified Congress of the US \$ 6.4 billion arms sale to Taiwan on January 29, 2013, it faced unprecedented Chinese objections.⁵ In addition to what China did in the past by announcing the suspension of some military exchanges with the US, the Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman officially threatened, for the first time, to impose sanctions against American companies involved in the arms sales.

4. Zhao, "Hu Jintao's Foreign Policy Legacy", e-International Relations, December 8, 2012, pp1-2.

5. Zhao, n.2, pp. 104-105..

Chinese leaders expanded the core interests in 2009 to include the maritime territorial claims in the South China Sea, where China confronts a number of disputes over islands and seas. These water bodies are also claimed by other Asian countries.

When the Dalai Lama was scheduled to meet President Obama in early 2010, China, instead of following the low profile dictum, reminded the West of the tough sentiments once expressed by Deng Xiaoping that no one should expect China to swallow the bitter fruit that hurts its interests.⁶ China regularly raised its voice against the European countries when their leaders met the Dalai Lama in an official setting. China denounced German Chancellor Angela Merkel over her meeting with the Tibetan spiritual leader. It suspended its ties with Denmark after its prime minister met the Dalai Lama. When French President Nicolas Sarkozy met the Dalai Lama in his capacity as the president of the European Union (EU), Beijing abruptly cancelled the scheduled EU Summit in December 2008. It perhaps wanted to show that, even amidst the global economic crisis, it has the tenacity to confront the leaders of its biggest trading partner nations.

Reflecting on the maritime territorial sphere, one observes that though China's official statements on core interest convey its concerns involving sovereignty and territorial integrity, they refer almost exclusively to the three issues of Taiwan, Tibet and Xinjiang. In 2009, Chinese leaders expanded the core interests in 2009 to include the maritime territorial claims in the South China Sea, where China confronts a number of disputes over islands and seas. These water bodies are also claimed by other Asian countries. China made it a point to prevent Vietnamese and Philippine vessels from exploring oil and gas in the disputed waters in the South China Sea. These attempts provoked diplomatic crises during which China displayed its naval warships to support its sovereignty claims. China's relations with the Asia-Pacific countries have touched the lowest ebb in recent times.

6. Even Mac A Skill in Washington and Tania Branigan in Beijing, "Dalai Lama to meet Barack Obama as US Relations with China Worsen", *The Guardian*, February 4, 2010.

For several decades after its founding, the People's Republic of China (PRC) seemed to have adopted a strategy of maintaining China's claim to disputed territory. It, however, avoided using force to escalate the conflicts. The reasons were quite obvious. Its military forces were mostly land based and its naval capacity could rarely reach beyond its near seas. Facilitated by rapid economic growth, China carried out wide ranging modernisation, with adequate stress on building naval capacity. With the enhanced military capacity, the People's Liberation Army Navy's (PLAN's) mission expanded beyond primarily defending China's coastlines.⁷ It now included securing the resources and sea lanes from the East China Sea along the Ryukyu Islands chain, through Taiwan and the Philippines, and to the Strait of Malacca in the South China Sea. China modified its long time delaying strategy and plunged into a new pattern wherein it started aggressively asserting its suzerainty and sovereignty over the disputed maritime territories.

China's toughness was also evident in the renewed dispute with India over India's northeastern state of Arunachal Pradesh. China claims it to be a territory of southern Tibet. During the 1962 War, China had advanced deep into the region, and then withdrew after a brief occupation. Although Arunachal Pradesh achieved statehood in 1987, China has continued to lay claim to this territory. China has started using increasingly strident language to object to any Indian assertion of sovereignty over the area, in the recent years. In 2009, China blocked the Asian Development Bank from providing a US \$60 million multi-year loan meant for infrastructure improvements in the state. When India had no other choice left, it decided to fund the project itself.⁸ In retaliation, China sent more troops to the border. The Dalai Lama's trip to the state in November 2009 caused Indo-China relations to deteriorate. Beijing was antagonised because the Dalai Lama did not restrict his visit to Itanagar, the state capital. He also visited Tawang which is the main bone of contention between India and China. It is the piece of Indian real estate that China covets the most in the border dispute. In Indian eyes,

7. Thomas J Christensen, "The Advantages of an Assertive China: Responding to Beijing's Abrasive Diplomacy", Brookings, March/April 2011.

8. Annual Report to Congress, 2013, available at http://www.defense.gov/pubs/2013_china_report_final.pdf, accessed on December 25, 2013.

China has become increasingly provocative over the long running dispute in the Himalayas.

On the night of April 15, 2013, a platoon strength (50 personnel) contingent of China's Army came 19 km inside the Indian territory in Burthe in Daulat Beg Oldi (DBO) sector, which is at an altitude of about 17,000 ft in the Depsang valley, and established a tented post there. The Indian side got the first indication of the gradual Chinese build-up when the troops noticed three vehicles moving between the Chinese tents and their nearest back-up location 25 km away, suggesting replenishments of supplies. Troops from the Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP) also established a camp approximately 300 m opposite the location.⁹ The Ladakh Scouts, an infantry regiment of the Indian Army, specialising in mountain warfare, was also moved towards the area where the situation was described as tense. Although small incursions are common across the Line of Actual Control (LAC), the *de facto* border that runs some 4,000 km across the Himalayas, it is rare for either country to set up camp so deep within disputed territory.

Differing perceptions about the disputed boundary, which is yet to be demarcated, was said to be the root cause of the problem and it was expected to be resolved amicably. DBO, located in northernmost Ladakh, is a historic camp site, located on an ancient trade route connecting Ladakh to Yarkand in Xinjiang, China. It lies at the easternmost point of the Karakoram range in a cold desert region in the far north of India, just 8 km south of the Chinese border and 9 km northwest of the Aksai Chin LAC between China and India. A landing strip was established at DBO during the 1962 War. At 5,100 m, the strip is one of the world's highest. Though the standoff was resolved 21 days later, with both the Chinese and Indian sides returning to their original positions behind the LAC, the exact motive of the Chinese incursion remains unexplained.

For the time being, the issue has been resolved through the Border Defence Cooperation Agreement (BDCA), signed between India and China during Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's official visit to China on October

9. Rajesh Kalia, "Chinese Troops Intrude into Indian Territory in Ladakh, Erect a Tented Post", *Hindustan Times*, April 19, 2013.

23, 2013. It contains 10 clauses that seek to maintain peace, tranquillity and stability along the 4,000-km-long Line of Actual Control. It reiterates that “neither side shall use its military capability against the other side and their respective military strengths shall not be used to attack the other side”. The agreement basically puts together the past mechanisms for establishing peace along their disputed boundary that has seen frequent intrusions, especially by Chinese troops, causing concern in India.

The agreement will facilitate exchange of information on military exercises, unmarked mines, aircraft and also in the non-military field on activities related to smuggling of wildlife and other contraband. Both sides are also to respond to natural disasters and work with each other. There would be an increase in the frequency and level of meetings – from the border level between military personnel, to the command level and at the level of their respective Defence Ministries. Both sides would also continue with their existing mechanisms – the Working Mechanism for Consultation and Coordination on India-China Border Affairs and the Meetings of the India-China Annual Defence Dialogue. Both sides are to establish personnel meetings between their border troops “in all sectors”.¹⁰ Now how much of the agreement is implemented on the ground and followed in letter and spirit remains to be seen.

The Chinese grand strategy resembles their national game, *Wéi Qí* (围棋), which is different from the US and Western premise of grand strategy based on the game of chess. In chess, there are 16 identified pieces of known capabilities, with each side on a playing board with 64 squares. The contest is for total victory, through checkmate. Translated into military strategy, chess identifies the adversary’s centre of gravity and seeks decisive points to eliminate the opponent through a series of head-on clashes. Both the intent and capabilities of each side are on the table.

Wéi Qí, on the other hand, has an expansive playing board with 361 squares. Each player is given a total of 180 stones of equal capabilities. Unlike chess, where a game starts with all the pieces fully displayed on the board, *Wéi Qí* starts with an empty board. The players take turns placing stones

10. Raj Mongia, “Hotline to China in New Border Pact”, October 24, 2013, available on CAPS website www.caps.india.org, accessed on December 25, 2013

The Chinese leaders are realists. Their making of Chinese foreign policy often starts with a careful assessment of China's relative power in the world.

at a point on the board, building up positions of strength while working to encircle and capture the opponent's stones. Multiple contests take place simultaneously in different portions of the board. At the end of the game, the board is filled with an interlocked area of strength. The margin of advantage at each point is small; only a *Wéi Qí* expert can assess victory through a multitude of contests. In military terms, *Wéi Qí* is about strategic encirclement and demands enormous patience and single-mindedness of purpose through strategic flexibility to achieve objectives.¹¹ This strategic thinking is in consonance with Sun Tzu's famous treatise on "The Art of War", where the premium on victory is through psychological advantage and by avoidance of direct conflict. The border incident amply indicates China's new found confidence and willingness to assert itself without any provocation, perhaps to drive home the point that in the Asian region, it is the lone dominant player.

CHINA : VICTIM OR CULPRIT?

The reasons for China's changing foreign policy are many. China's increasing confidence in its ability to deal with the West and the territorial disputes with its neighbours is one. Another reason is China's frustration over the perceived anti-China forces trying to prevent its rise to its rightful place. This frustration has sustained the nationalist sentiment to assert China's core interests and prevail. The uneasiness among Chinese leaders after the leadership change because of the slowdown of China's economic growth can be considered as the third reason. The new leadership had to meet any possible threat to the regime's authority with an unusually suppressive reaction. It is perhaps the amalgamation of feelings of confidence, frustration and uncertainty that has manifested in China's new found assertiveness.¹²

11. Ibid. Praveen Sawhney and Ghazala Wahab, "China's Age of *Wéi Qí*", *Force*, National Security and Defence News Magazine, May 2013.

12. "Changing Face", *The Economist* (Beijing,) March 23, 2013.

The Chinese leaders are realists. Their making of Chinese foreign policy often starts with a careful assessment of China's relative power in the world.¹³ China's perception of the global balance of power tilting in its favour implied that the Chinese leaders were now more confident of their ability to deal with the West and settle territorial disputes on their own terms. They are now more willing to participate in world affairs. The confidence has come after overcoming inhibitions and frustrations in a proactive manner. An attempt is made to enumerate the reasons of their frustrations in the succeeding paragraphs.

In 2003, China overtook Japan as the second largest oil consumer, next to the US, and in 2004, it overtook the US as the world's biggest consumer of grain, meat, coal and steel. China, therefore, had to search for resources overseas to sustain its rise.

The Obama Administration is believed to be working against China's rise and leaving no stone unturned to contain China. Although many Americans cite China's political system as one of the main points of friction and have pressed China on the issues of human rights and democracy, one wonders whether they would be favourable to them even if China became democratic, as the US would not want to see China, democratic or not, become richer and stronger.¹⁴

The second reason has its genesis in the Chinese policy-makers perceiving a Western conspiracy to slow down China's rise by blocking its global search for natural resources and acquisition of foreign assets. China's rapid economic growth has brought about an unprecedented resource vulnerability. In 2003, China overtook Japan as the second largest oil consumer, next to the US, and in 2004, it overtook the US as the world's biggest consumer of grain, meat, coal and steel. China, therefore, had to search for resources overseas to sustain its rise. The perceived attempts by the US and other Western countries to block

13. Suisheng Zhao, "Shaping the Regional Context of China's Rise: How the Obama Administration Brought Back Hedge in its Engagement with China", *Journal of Contemporary China*, vol. 21, no. 75 2012, pp. 377-379.

14. n. 2, p.110.

China in its global search for resources led to the frustrations of the Chinese policy-makers.¹⁵

The third reason was the intensified international scrutiny of many of China's awkward domestic and external challenges such as human rights, media freedom, Tibet, Taiwan, pollution and relationships with neighbouring countries. When China was in a jubilant mood after the successful preparation of the showcase of the Beijing Olympics Games, the Chinese government was caught by surprise when, in March 2008, angry Tibetans burned non-Tibetan businesses and attacked Han migrants. Perceiving the riots as organised by foreign forces trying to pull China down on human rights, including ethnic minority rights in Tibet, to embarrass China ahead of the Olympics, Beijing dispatched a large number of troops to suppress the protests. The stern handling of the issue put the spotlight on China's human rights and ethnic problems and led to wide Western media condemnation. It also invited demonstrations by international human rights groups and Tibetan exiled communities. The conduct of the Olympic torch relay was hindered in London, Paris and San Francisco.¹⁶ The perception that much of the foreign media took a clear anti-China stance on the issue not only frustrated but also angered the Chinese government and the Chinese people.

In February 2009, the then Vice President Xi Jinping, the heir-apparent to President Hu Jintao, used extraordinarily strong language at a meeting with representatives of the Chinese community during a visit to Mexico city. He said: "Well fed foreigners have nothing better to do than keep pointing fingers at China, even though China is not exporting revolution, poverty, hunger or making troubles for other countries."¹⁷

This sense of frustration was used by the Chinese government to their advantage, by exploiting it to sustain a popular nationalist sentiment and also to compensate for the declining appeal of Communism. With a deeply

15. Hongshan Li, Zhaohui Hong, *Image, Perception, and the Making of US-China Relations*, (University Press of America, 2013), pp. 5-6.

16. Suisheng Zhao, "China's New Foreign Policy Assertiveness: Motivations and Implications", *ISPI Analysis*, no.54, March, 2011, pp 5-6.

17. Malcolm Moore, "China's 'Next Leader' in Hardline Rant", *The Telegraph*, (Shanghai,) February 16, 2009.

rooted suspicion of the USA and a desire to avenge past humiliations, the Chinese government found itself under heavy pressure to take a confrontational position against the Western powers and to adopt tougher measures to claim its maritime territories. Popular nationalism reached a crescendo in 2008-09 because a marginalised West signified a gratifying target for pent-up feelings.¹⁸

A popular nationalist book, *China is Not Happy Zhōngguó bù gāoxìng* (中国不高兴) has been written by the authors of *China Can Say No Zhōngguó bù kěyǐ bù shuō bu* (中国 不可以不说不). They intended their book to be a sequel to *China Can Say No*, with the difference — according to one of the authors — that while the latter asserted only that China was capable of leading itself, the new book takes the view that China is capable of leading the world. According to an interview with the authors in the official *Canton Daily Guǎngzhōu rìbào*, one of the main themes of the book is that “if we still do not get rid of the culture of being slaves to foreigners, then we have no way to save ourselves” *Zàibu pāoqì yángnú wénhuà, wǒmen jiù méi déjiùle* (再不抛弃洋奴文化，我们就没得救了). With regard to France, the authors advocate “punitive diplomacy” *chéngfá wàijiāo* (惩罚外交) and revenge as a response to the disruption of the Olympic torch relay last year. The book also condemns the so-called “elite” *Jīngyīng* (精英) (i.e. the faction seen as “cosmopolitan” or “liberal”, which the authors maintain have hegemony over public discourse) and corruption in academia. The five authors of this book are Song Qiang, one of *China Can Say No*’s main authors), a nationalist ideologue Wang Xiaodong, the military analyst Song Xiaojun, the sociologist Huang Jisu, and the journalist Liu Yang.¹⁹ The book sold half a million copies within a few months of its release in early 2009, not counting online piracy. It immediately shot to the top of the bestseller list.²⁰

Dai Xu, who is a prolific Chinese author and social commentator, is also a proponent of similar sentiments. He is also a professor at the China National Defence University and holds the rank of senior colonel in the

18. Jean-Pierre Cabestan, “The Many Facets of Chinese Nationalism”, *Chinese Perspective*, 2012, pp.3-4.

19. Website <http://chinasaysno.wordpress.com/2009/03/16/new-book-chinas-not-happy/> accessed on December 3, 2013.

20. Raymond Zhou, “Why is China Angry?”, *China Daily*, April 24, 2009.

People's Liberation Army (PLA). Through his popular book in late 2009 and his provocative speeches that were among the most popular videos on China's Internet, Xu has claimed that China was encircled in a C-shape by hostile countries beholden to the United States. He further opined that China could not escape the calamity of war in the not-too-distant future. He argued that since the US had lit a fire in China's backyard, the Chinese leaders should light a fire in the US backyard.²¹

The pressure, therefore, built up upon the Chinese government to flex its muscles in defending its core interests.²² Although China's authoritarian political system gives the state immense power to drive foreign policy, the country is no longer headed by charismatic leaders like Mao Zedong or Deng Xiaoping, who had the authority to arbitrate disputes in the leadership or personally set the country's course. Current Chinese leaders have to cater to a range of constituencies. The power of the Chinese government has become more and more conditional on its ability to defend China's national interests as the Communist ideology is losing its charm. Social controls loosened by market-oriented economic reforms and nationalist appeals of prosperity and power have become the new bases for regime legitimacy.

While China's assertiveness was primarily driven by growing confidence, its frustration and the economic and political uncertainties at home also played an important part. Though China was a relatively bright spot in the global downturn, its rapid economic growth led to huge social, economic and political tensions. It also raised the expectations of the Chinese people about the government's performance. Serious challenges emerged due to the growing public demands related to the government's policies on economic and social inequality, endemic corruption, epidemic pollution, emaciated healthcare, shredded social services, entrenched industrial overcapacity, ethnic conflicts and ageing population.²³

21. Dai Xiu, "C Shape Encircle, China's Breakthrough with Internal Concerns and External Dangers", *Wenhui Chubanshe*, (Beijing), 2009.

22. 王焜生 (Wang Yusheng), "中美建立新型大国关系可能么?" (Is it Possible for China and the US to Build a New Type of Great Power Relationship?) 《外交》 *Foreign Affairs Journal*, no. 1, 2013, p. 102.

23. D.M. Lampton, "The United States and China in the Age of Obama: Looking Each Other Straight in the Eyes", *Journal of Contemporary China*, vol. 18, no. 62, November 2009, p. 727.

When the global financial crisis started, little did the Chinese leaders anticipate that it would produce unrest in society. The high profile unrest in Tibet in 2008 and in the Muslim region of Xinjiang in 2009 caught them by surprise. They were routinely facing tens of thousands of civil and ethnic protesters—those robbed of their lands for development, laid off workers and those suffering from the side-effects of environment despoilment. Millions of migrant workers lost their jobs as labour intensive industries, churning out cheap products for export, closed down because of the financial meltdown sweeping the globe. A similar dilemma was posed on account of the many white collar workers who were laid off or had their bonuses and wages cut. The only way out for the Chinese government to deploy its enormous state capacity to pull its economy out of the downturn was to attribute the financial meltdown entirely to economic mismanagement by the Western countries.²⁴ The masterstroke was to take a more assertive position to defend China's core interests. This way, the Chinese government could not only avoid charges of incompetence but also divert public attention from its domestic problems.

BEING ACCEPTED AS A GLOBAL POWER? YES. SHOULDERING GLOBAL POWER RESPONSIBILITY? NO.

Although a more powerful China has been more than willing to leverage its growing capabilities to shift the global power balance in its favour and vigorously pursue its core interests, It does not seem to be ready to take on the role of global leadership and assume more international responsibilities as a rising global power. China's three core interests are:

- To maintain its fundamental system and state security.
- To maintain state sovereignty and territorial integrity.
- Continued stable development of its economy and society.²⁵

24. 袁鹏 (YUAN PENG), 中国真正的挑战在哪里 (Where are the True Challenges to China), 人民日报海外版 (People's Daily, Overseas Edition), July 31, 2013, http://news.xinhuanet.com/world/2012-07/31/c_112575005.htm. accessed on December 28, 2013.

25. <http://www.chinanews.cn/gn/news/2009/07-29/1794984.shtml>, accessed on December 1, 2013

Beijing's coffers may be bulging with \$2.1 trillion in foreign currency reserves, but its willingness to spend that cash on common crises outside China is not commensurate. Besides propagating a new international reserve currency, China has mostly remained taciturn on how to reform the global financial system.

These are narrowly defined interests having more to do with the Chinese leaders' preoccupation with regime survival and national security than with China's great power aspirations. The survival of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) is the paramount core interest. Because of the authoritarian nature of the Chinese political system, the challenges to regime legitimacy would always be a concern for the CCP. A combination of foreign forces with domestic discontent could seriously threaten the regime.

The second core interest of state sovereignty and territorial integration refers almost exclusively to the Taiwan and Tibet issues. Both are extremely sensitive issues, taking into account the stakes and profiles of the players involved.

The general perception about China is that it is reluctant to take on a broad international responsibility to be a visionary and magnanimous global player. The willingness to look beyond its own narrowly focussed core interests is yet to be exhibited. China is often accused of being a "global free rider" because Beijing remains unwilling to take on more burdens — be these economic, political or military²⁶. At the G-20 summit in April 2009, the only thing China cared about was keeping Hong Kong off the list of offshore tax havens being scrutinised. Beijing's coffers may be bulging with \$2.1 trillion in foreign currency reserves, but its willingness to spend that cash on common crises outside China is not commensurate. Besides propagating a new international reserve currency, China has mostly remained taciturn on how to reform the global financial system.²⁷

26. Stephanie T. Kleine-Ahbrandt, "Beijing, Global Free-Rider", *Foreign Policy*, at http://www.foreignpolcy.com/articles/2009/11/12/beijing_global_free_rider accessed on December 1, 2013.

27. Minxin Pei, "Why China Won't Rule the World", *Newsweek*, December 7, 2009.

As a reflection of its position, Chinese scholars and policy-makers have been debating and expressing distinct views on China's changing international role. The three most prominent views are elaborated below:

- The Chinese government should abandon the passive '*Tiaoguang Yanghui*' policy and take a great power (*daguo*) responsibility to ensure a just world order.
- The government should adopt a modified *Tāoguāngyǎnghuì* policy to give more emphasis on *Yǒushuō Zuòwèi* (striking some points/successes) and take a more active role in pursuing certain policy objectives, particularly in China's core interest issue areas.
- Continue the low-key policy and avoid taking a leadership position on most issues.

The growing confidence of China in its increasing power and influence is combined with its frustration and the regime's fear of many political, social and economic issues at home.

The first view has received the most attention in the Western media and is also popular among the Chinese people. But this is not the official position of the Chinese government, which has taken the third view. In practice, the second view is the actual policy.

CONCLUSION

Having dwelt on various phases and aspects of China's behaviour, it emerges that China raised its head during the global economic downturn in 2008-09 when the Western countries' inability to deal with recession effectively propelled China to review its relations with the Western powers.²⁸ This proved that China's growing national strength could alter, and to an extent has already altered, its foreign policy behaviour. In comparison to the past years, Chinese foreign policy in 2009 witnessed an important change. China would no longer bend to Western pressures

28. Jin Cnarong and Liu Shiqiang, "*Guoji Xinshi de Shangke Biandong Jiqi dui Zhongguo de Yingxiang* (The Significant Change in International Situation and its Impacts on China)", *Xiandai guoji guanxi* (Contemporary International Relations), December 2009, pp.1-3.

and give importance to what the West thought of its behaviour.²⁹

The growing confidence of China in its increasing power and influence is combined with its frustration and the regime's fear of many political, social and economic issues at home. The new assertiveness has, however, focussed on pursuing its immediate interests and Beijing is still hesitant to use its rising power status to contribute to the global common welfare.³⁵ China's foreign policy agenda is still to find a balance between taking on broad responsibility as a great power and focussing on its narrowly defined core interests. Though definitely well on an upward trajectory, China is still trailing far behind the US. It is not yet in a position to dislodge the US from its position of global dominance. The continuing growth of China's national strength may eventually eliminate the contradiction when the Chinese leaders come to view their country less as a poor nation and more as a great power. Until then, the Chinese foreign policy remains in a transitional stage, from a reluctant rising power to a true great one.

29. Wang Xiaodong, " *Wo Kanhao Zhongguo* (I look Well at China)", *Zhongguo Gaige Wang* (China Reform Net) at <http://www.chinareform.net/2010/0212/12486.html>, accessed on December 2, 2013.