

# The Changing Ecology of Foreign Policy-Making in China: The Ascension and Demise of the Theory of “Peaceful Rise”

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**ABSTRACT** China’s rapidly proliferating global interests and evolving political environment have begun to change the international and domestic context for its foreign policy-making. This article explores the changing inputs into and processes associated with foreign policy-making in China today. It does this by analysing the shifting fortunes of “peaceful rise,” one of the first new foreign policy concepts to be introduced under the Hu Jintao administration. The authors draw several implications from this narrow debate for understanding contemporary foreign policy-making in China. It provides an example of how new foreign policy ideas and strategies can come from outside the formal, central government bureaucracy, and underscores the growing relevance of think-tank analysts and university-based scholars. Finally, the authors argue that the Chinese leadership’s decision to eschew “peaceful rise” in favour of “peaceful development” was fundamentally a question of terminology and thus preserved China’s strategy of reassuring other nations.

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As policy makers and business leaders all over the world increasingly focus on the substance of China’s global activism and its “new diplomacy,” a lesser-noticed phenomenon is the gradual evolution of the forces shaping foreign policy formulation in China.<sup>1</sup> China’s rapidly proliferating global interests combined with an evolving political environment have begun to change the external and internal context for its foreign policy-making. Whereas past Chinese debates were principally internal deliberations among a narrow elite, current debates increasingly possess a more public dimension, with multiple inputs from actors not commonly involved in these traditionally insular processes.

\* The authors wish to thank Michael Glosny, Eric Heginbotham and Alastair Iain Johnston for their comments on an earlier draft. Ms Glaser would also like to thank all the Chinese scholars who agreed to share their views on a not-for-attribution basis.

1 Given the continued sensitivity in China of discussing policy-making processes, Chinese sources remain rare. There is ample Western research including David M. Lampton, *The Making of Chinese Foreign and Security Policy* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002); Lu Ning, *The Dynamics of Foreign Policy Decision-making in China* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1997); and A. Doak Barnett, *The Making of Foreign Policy in China* (Boulder, CO: Holt, Praeger, 1985).

This article explores the changing inputs into and deliberative processes associated with foreign policy-making in China today. It tackles such questions as: where do new and “correct” foreign policy ideas come from, how are they debated (and disagreements resolved), and how does the government translate such ideas into policy actions? In short, the article examines the ongoing evolution of the micro-processes of policy germination, formulation, debate and articulation on foreign affairs.

We seek to shed further light on these broader questions by analysing the shifting fortunes of the concept of “peaceful rise” (*heping jueqi* 和平崛起). This was one of the first new concepts to be introduced into China’s official foreign policy under the Hu Jintao (胡锦涛) administration. Its initial public articulation in autumn 2003, the propagation of the idea, the subsequent debate about its appropriateness as an official term, and the leadership’s initial embrace and later rejection followed a unique and tumultuous pathway – and one that was not as opaque as past deliberations about the orthodoxy of ideas in Chinese diplomacy. The circumstances surrounding the development of peaceful rise and its current role in government diplomacy illuminate key aspects of the changing nature of foreign policy formulation in China today.

The debate is particularly relevant because it concerned an idea that dictated the content of Chinese policies and defined China’s foreign policy interests and identity. By contrast, many previous Chinese debates, such as those regarding “multipolarity” and “peace and development as the main trend of the times,” focused on the nature of China’s external security environment. In this sense, the peaceful rise debate serves as an indicator of the broadening political space in China to formulate foreign policy.<sup>2</sup>

This article begins by tracing the development of peaceful rise from its origin to its subsequent modification as an accepted government foreign policy strategy. It then explains the concept’s main tenets and the contours of the debate.<sup>3</sup> Finally, it suggests several implications of this narrow debate for an understanding of the evolution of contemporary foreign policy-making in China.

### Peaceful Rise Takes Shape

The intellectual origins of the concept of peaceful rise are rooted in the gradual evolution of China’s reform-era foreign policy over the last 25 years. As China, beginning in the late 1970s, increased the number and quality of its interactions with the international community, Chinese officials and analysts became more attentive to foreign perceptions of China’s international behaviour; in particular they realized that some of their Asian neighbours viewed certain Chinese policies

2 Wang Jisi, “Peaceful rise: a discourse in China,” paper prepared for conference on “The rise of China: theory and practice,” Beijing University, Beijing, China, 5–7 January 2006.

3 Interviews were conducted by Bonnie Glaser in Beijing in August 2004, during subsequent visits to China in 2004–2005, and with Chinese scholars visiting Washington DC.

as a source of instability in East Asia. In other words, Chinese officials gradually came to recognize, albeit reluctantly, China's role in "security dilemma" dynamics in Asia.

During the 1990s, as diplomats sought to rebuild China's international image after Tiananmen, this sensitization process continued. Officials and analysts began to see that specific actions, such as the seizure of Mischief Reef in 1995 and the missile tests and military exercises in the Taiwan Strait in the mid-1990s, raised concerns among Asian nations about China's regional behaviour. In response, by the late 1990s Chinese leaders sought to address these concerns by adjusting China's regional diplomacy to focus more on engagement, confidence building and reassurance. These perceptual shifts manifested in qualitative improvements in China's bilateral and multilateral diplomacy in Asia, which has successfully allowed Beijing to present a much more benign image of itself to Asian nations.<sup>4</sup> Among Western analysts and officials, perceptions ran the gamut between the "China threat" thesis, which viewed China as a potential revisionist state and potential peer competitor to American military dominance in Asia, and the "China collapse" thesis which claimed that China's "house of cards" economy could easily collapse and plunge the country into a vortex of political and social chaos.

These discussions in Asia and the West about future challenges posed by China set the international context for the emergence of peaceful rise. Chinese officials and analysts paid close attention to Western debates and in particular the growing uncertainty about the type of rising power it would become. Beginning in the late 1990s, Chinese scholars and analysts began to appropriate Western thinking and terminology by publicly writing and talking about "China's rise" and these ideas increasingly became part of Chinese popular discourse around 2002.<sup>5</sup>

### "Peaceful rise" emerges

The origins of the peaceful rise theory lie in a December 2002 trip to the United States by Zheng Bijian (郑必坚) and a delegation from a Chinese Communist Party (CCP)-affiliated research unit called the China Reform Forum (*Zhongguo gaige kaifang luntan* 中国改革开放论坛). Zheng is a former executive

4 Tang Shiping, "Lijie zhongguo de anquan zhanlue" ("Understanding China's security strategy"), *Guoji zhengzhi yanjiu* (*Studies of International Politics*), No. 3 (September 2002), pp. 128–35; Tang Shiping and Zhang Yunling, "Zhongguo de diqu zhanlue" ("China's regional strategy"), *Shijie jingji yu zhengzhi*, No. 6 (June 2004), pp. 1–8. Also see Avery Goldstein, *Rising to the Challenge: China's Grand Strategy and International Security* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005). David Shambaugh, "China engages Asia: reshaping the regional order," *International Security*, Vol. 29, No. 3 (2004/05), pp. 64–99.

5 One of the first books on the subject of China's rise was Yan Xuetong *et al.*, *Zhongguo de jueqi: guoji huanjing de pinggu* (*An Assessment of the International Environment for China's Rise*) (Tianjin: Tianjin renmin chubanshe, 1999). One of the first articles to use the term "peaceful rise" is Lu Zhongwei, "Baowo bianhua, zhongshi weilai," ("Firmly grasp change and value the future"), *Xiandai guoji guanxi*, No. 8 (2002), p. 4. See also Huang Renwei, *Zhongguo jueqi de shijian yu kongjian* (*The Time and Space for China's Rise*) (Shanghai: Shanghai shehui kexue yuan chubanshe, 2002).

vice-president of the Central Committee's Central Party School and is now chairman of the China Reform Forum; at that time he was believed to be a confidant of Hu Jintao, who was then the Party School's president.

Zheng's delegation met numerous senior Bush administration officials and scholars to discuss American views on China's emerging role in global affairs. Following these discussions, Zheng concluded that there was pervasive uncertainty and polarized views in the United States about China's future as a major power, and that these views would complicate US–China relations and undermine Beijing's pursuit of great power status. Whether expressed as concern about Chinese intentions to alter the prevailing international system and deliberately threaten American interests, or as apprehension about China imploding due to entrenched weaknesses, Zheng concluded that American officials and intellectuals harboured little confidence about China's future path and its implications for global stability.

Following his return to Beijing, Zheng submitted a report to the Central Committee under the moniker of the Central Policy Research Office in which he detailed his concerns about American perceptions of China's rising status.<sup>6</sup> In the report, Zheng advanced the concept of “the development path of China's peaceful rise” (*Zhongguo heping jueqi de fazhan daolu* 中国和平崛起的发展道路).<sup>7</sup> He proposed launching a study project to investigate and publicize “the relationship between the construction of socialism with Chinese characteristics that began in the late 1970s and its process of integration with the region and the world,” which was CCP code-language for researching the implications of China's rise for regional and global security. Chinese interlocutors say that Zheng passed his report to Hu Jintao, with whom he had worked closely when Hu headed the Party School. The project was approved and funded with two million yuan (about \$244,000) and a task force was established to develop a comprehensive theory of China's peaceful rise.<sup>8</sup>

Little progress was made in 2003 due to the SARS epidemic, but peaceful rise made its initial debut in November 2003 at the Boao Forum (*Boao luntan* 博鳌论坛) for Asia.<sup>9</sup> Zheng Bijian delivered a speech entitled “The new road of China's peaceful rise and the future of Asia” in which he explained that China's development path is “not only a path of striving for rise, but also a path of adhering to peace and never seeking hegemony.” Zheng advanced three core principles of his new concept: China must unswervingly advance economic and

6 Zhang Liwei, “Personal and official contacts between Zoellick and Zheng Bijian have subtly and profoundly improved Sino-US relations,” *Shiji jingji baodao*, 7 January 2006, Open Source Center (OSC) CPP20060130050001. The Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS) was re-named the Open Source Center on 1 November 2005.

7 This is the full and formal name of the peaceful rise concept which is referred to throughout this article.

8 The task force included the China Reform Forum, the Central Party School's Institute of Strategic Studies, the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences, and the China Institute of International Studies (CIIS).

9 For a comprehensive English language collection of Zheng's speeches on peaceful rise see *China's Peaceful Rise: Speeches of Zheng Bijian 1997–2005* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2005).

political reforms centring on the promotion of socialist market economy and socialist democracy to ensure an institutional guarantee of its peaceful rise; China must boldly draw on the fruits of human civilization while fostering Chinese civilization to ensure cultural support for its peaceful rise; and China must carefully balance the interests of different sectors, securing a co-ordinated development between urban and rural areas, between different regions, between society and the economy, and between man and nature, to create a social environment for China's peaceful rise.<sup>10</sup>

According to Zheng Bijian, China's "development path with a peaceful rise" refers to the historical period extending from the third plenum of the 11th Central Committee (December 1978) to the middle of the 21st century. Peaceful rise emphasizes participating in rather than detaching from economic globalization, with the goal of lifting China's population out of a state of underdevelopment. In other words, China has been pursuing the pathway of peaceful rise since the initiation of the reform and opening period, and will not change course as it seeks to build a "well-off society" by further integrating with the international community.

Peaceful rise holds that in the process of achieving economic development and raising the standard of living of the Chinese people over the next half century, China will not destabilize the international order or oppress its neighbours. In Zheng Bijian's writings, he acknowledges that historically the rapid rise of countries to great power status has resulted in drastic changes in the world order and has even triggered world war. Citing the examples of Germany during the First World War, Germany and Japan leading up to the Second World War and the Soviet Union at the end of the Cold War, he concludes that striving for national aggrandizement by relying on territorial expansion and military aggression is doomed to failure.<sup>11</sup>

According to Zheng, China's rise will avoid the fate of colonialists and imperialists of the past because it will not seek external expansion, but instead will uphold peace, mutual co-operation and common development, assert the advocates of peaceful rise. To reassure its neighbours, he stresses that China's peaceful rise not only benefits from the experiences of other countries in Asia, but will also "bring about tremendous historic opportunities, rather than threats to the Asia-Pacific region."<sup>12</sup> For Zheng, the foundation of China's strategic interaction with regional states is China's new security concept (*xin anquan guan* 新安全观), which was first articulated in 1997 and was one of China's initial attempts in the 1990s to shape the regional security order in Asia. According to Chinese specialists, the goal of the new security concept is to achieve collective

10 Zheng Bijian, "A new path for China's peaceful rise and the future of Asia," 3 November 2003, [http://history.boaforum.org/English/E2003nh/dhwj/t20031103\\_184101.btk](http://history.boaforum.org/English/E2003nh/dhwj/t20031103_184101.btk).

11 Interview with Zheng Bijian, "Peaceful rise: the most important 'Chinese characteristic' in socialism with Chinese characteristics," *Xuexi shibao*, 14 June 2004, FBIS, CPP20040614000309.

12 Zheng Bijian, "China's peaceful rise and opportunities for the Asia-Pacific region," speech at the Roundtable Meeting between Boao Forum for Asia and China Reform Forum, 24 April 2004.

security through co-operation among Asia-Pacific countries – even though the initial articulation of this concept sought to draw a stark contrast with the US-led security order in Asia.<sup>13</sup>

In Zheng's view, the peaceful rise theory will also ensure that China avoids confrontational relations with the major powers. Zheng explains that by pursuing a peaceful rise path, socialism and capitalism can compete with each other while enjoying peaceful relations and learning from each other.<sup>14</sup> In a paper on lessons of the US–Soviet strategic confrontation in the Cold War, Beijing University's Wang Jisi (王缉思) argues that the United States and China are not destined to vie for hegemony. It is not inevitable that China will challenge American global hegemony, or that the United States will attempt to contain China's rise.<sup>15</sup> Ruan Zongze (阮宗泽), vice-president of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) think tank called the China Institute of International Studies (CIIS), also insists that China's rise will not disrupt the global balance and trigger a war. Rather than seeking to challenge or to replace the existing powers, China seeks "an equal status as a big country in the international community so as to contribute more to world peace," Ruan claims.<sup>16</sup>

### *Why Zheng Bijian?*

One of the most important aspects of the germination of peaceful rise was its originator and promoter, Zheng Bijian. We maintain that Zheng's professional experience, Party credentials, credibility in the Chinese system and *guanxi* (关系) network are all central to understanding the evolution of peaceful rise, in particular its rapid ascent into the Party lexicon. Although no longer a government official, Zheng's experience and connections were critical to the propagation of the idea. He leveraged his relationships with senior leaders, his knowledge of the Party system and his credibility as a Party theorist to inject peaceful rise into the system at the highest levels.

Zheng Bijian, a renowned political theorist who does not shy away from controversy, has been an influential policy adviser to many Chinese leaders, including serving as a key drafter of important speeches and Party documents. In the late 1970s debate over "practice being the sole criterion of truth" that challenged the school of "two whatevers," Zheng wrote articles in support of Deng Xiaoping's line of reform and opening up. He also played a prominent role in drafting two key resolutions on spiritual civilization.<sup>17</sup> In the early 1980s,

13 For the linkage between the NSC and peaceful rise see "Wen Jiabao zongli zai Boao Yazhou luntan zuo zhuzhi yanjiang" ("Premier Wen Jiabao makes the keynote speech at the Boao Forum for Asia"), Xinhuanet, 2 November 2003.

14 Zheng Bijian, "Peaceful rise: the most important 'Chinese characteristic'," pp. 1–2.

15 Wang Jisi, "Will China and the United States 'contend for hegemony'?" speech delivered at the Boao Forum, April 2004, published in *Huanqiu shibao*, 28 May 2004, FBIS, CPP2004060200026.

16 Ruan Zongze, "What are the implications of China's peaceful rise to the world," Boao Forum, April 2004, <http://www.crf.org.cn/peacefulrise/ruanzongze1.htm>.

17 Tao Lan, "Zheng Bijian: CPC's authoritative theorist and drafter of important documents," *Ching pao*, No. 6 (25 September 1997), FBIS, FTS19970925001577.

Zheng was a personal secretary to Hu Yaobang (胡耀邦). When Deng Xiaoping made his famous southern tour in 1992, Zheng wrote his key speeches.<sup>18</sup> In 1992 he was elected to the CCP Central Committee and became Ding Guangen's executive deputy director at the Central Propaganda Department. He also took part in the editing of Mao Zedong's works, the compilation of the *Selected Works of Deng Xiaoping* and the drafting of the document that evaluated the mistakes committed in the Cultural Revolution.

To the surprise of many Chinese, after reaching the mandatory retirement age of 70 Zheng was not re-elected to the Central Committee at the 16th Party Congress in autumn 2002 and was not offered an official position (such as a seat in the National People's Congress) after he stepped down as vice-president of the Central Party School. While Zheng is no longer working within the state or in the Central Committee bureaucracy, he still possesses much credibility within the Party system and retains an extensive personnel network. He remains a key policy adviser to China's top leaders and is actively involved in policy discussions through his role as China Reform Forum chairman, dean of the Humanities and Social Sciences in the graduate school of the Chinese Academy of Sciences and as a member of the Sino-Japanese Friendship Committee.

### Rising and Demising

After its initial articulation in late 2003, peaceful rise rapidly travelled along a curious and atypical pathway for Party slogans. It was first formally accepted and used by China's top leaders, then, after only a few months, dropped in spring 2004 from official statements following public and internal opposition. Yet China's leaders continued to use it in a modified form, with similar, if not identical, conceptual substance. Furthermore, the original idea remained an active part of public discourse on foreign policy and continues to be commonly used by scholars and policy analysts. This unfolding of events is detailed below and provides further insight into the evolving context for and mechanisms of policy germination, deliberation, formulation and articulation in China on foreign policy.

Soon after Zheng's initial speech outlining the concept of peaceful rise at Boao in November 2003, the idea rapidly began to assume the trappings of official Party lexicon. China's top Party and military leaders publicly used the term several times, signalling official endorsement. Such usages may well have been part of Zheng Bijian's political marketing strategy to ensure that the term became a key CCP slogan, thereby enhancing his stature. The rapid transition from initial articulation to endorsement by the top leadership indicates Zheng's influence but also suggests that policy co-ordination with the MFA and PLA may have been quite limited.

18 According to one PLA source, Deng rejected speeches written by others and was only satisfied with the speeches that Zheng Bijian wrote.

In December 2003, Premier Wen Jiabao (温家宝) became the first senior Chinese leader to endorse the peaceful rise theory publicly. In a speech at Harvard University, Wen declared that China is:

A rising power dedicated to peace ... While opening still wider to the outside world, we must more fully and more consciously depend on our own structural innovation, on constantly expanding the domestic market, on converting the huge savings of our citizens into investment, and on improving the quality of the population and scientific and technological progress to solve the problems of resources and the environment. Here lies the essence of China's relative peaceful rise and development.<sup>19</sup>

Wen also reiterated Zheng Bijian's "multiplication and division problems" which are at the heart of his peaceful rise theory. Since China has 1.3 billion people, any difficulty in economic and social development, however small, will become a large-scale problem if it is multiplied by 1.3 billion. Similarly, despite China's impressive accumulation of financial and material resources, when divided by 1.3 billion people, it is quite low.

Then, on 26 December 2003, while addressing a symposium marking the 110th anniversary of the birth of Mao Zedong, President Hu Jintao embraced "peaceful rise." He told an audience that included many of his Politburo standing committee colleagues that China must "insist on taking the road of peaceful rise, insist on getting along with all other countries on the basis of the five principles of peaceful co-existence, actively develop exchanges and co-operation with other countries on the basis of equality and mutual benefit, and contribute to the lofty causes of mankind's peace and development."<sup>20</sup> Two months later, on 23 February 2004, Hu Jintao further expounded the peaceful rise theory at the tenth "collective study" session of the Politburo. He urged his fellow leaders to "persist in the development path of peaceful rise and the peaceful foreign policy of independence and self-reliance."<sup>21</sup>

Chinese leaders then further clarified the meaning of the peaceful rise theory, indicating even wider development of and support for this new foreign policy concept. In response to a reporter's question in the Premier's annual press conference following the Tenth National People's Congress in mid-March 2004, Wen Jiabao asked, "what are the connotations of China's peaceful rise?" and then explained five aspects of the new theory. First, China must take full advantage of the opportunity of world peace to develop and strengthen itself, and at the same time safeguard world peace with its development. Secondly, the rise of China must be based on its own efforts and resources as well as the innovation of its system as a result of reform. Thirdly, China's rise can't be achieved without the rest of the world, and the country must maintain its opening-up policy and develop economic and trade exchanges based on mutual

19 *China Daily*, 10 December 2003, [www.chinadaily.com](http://www.chinadaily.com).

20 Gu Ping, "China's 'peaceful rise,' which emphasizes achieving modernization through self-reliance, will benefit mankind," *Renmin ribao*, 17 February 2004, FBIS, CPP20040217000059.

21 *Ta kung pao*, 4 March 2004, FBIS, CPP20040304000096; Xinhua, 24 February 2004, FBIS, CPP20040224000264. China Foreign Affairs University Professor Qin Yaqing and CASS researcher Zhang Yuyan made presentations.



benefit. Fourthly, China's rise will require a long time and the hard work of many generations. Finally, the rise of China will not pose a threat to any other country or be achieved at the expense of any particular nation. China does not seek hegemony now, nor will it ever seek hegemony even after it becomes more powerful, Wen stated.<sup>22</sup>

Another key leadership endorsement of the theory came in a March 2004 statement by the minister of national defence, Cao Gangchuan (曹刚川), who discussed the concept during his visit to Thailand on 31 March 2004. Cao pledged that China would not follow the path of Western powers in expanding externally after their national strength increased. He also stressed the importance of gaining the international community's support for China's rise, especially the preservation of social stability and "the motherland's unity." Finally, he asserted that peace is the ultimate goal of China's peaceful rise and promised that the interests of other countries, including peripheral countries, would not be harmed, but rather would benefit from China's rise.<sup>23</sup>

To publicize the peaceful rise theory and win domestic and international support for its content, Zheng Bijian and the China Reform Forum organized a roundtable discussion on "Peaceful rise and economic globalization" at the Boao Forum for Asia in late April 2004. On the opening day of the forum, a Xinhua (新华) report noted that the mention of peaceful rise by Chinese leaders Hu Jintao and Wen Jiabao "indicated that peaceful rise had formally become China's national strategy."<sup>24</sup>

### *The fall from grace begins*

Signs soon emerged that China's leaders had concerns about the new peaceful rise theory. In the keynote address to the Boao conference on 24 April, Hu Jintao eschewed the phrase "peaceful rise," even though his remarks echoed similar themes. He mentioned "peace and stability," "peace and tranquility" and "peaceful co-existence," but not "peaceful rise." Instead, he promised that China would "follow a *peaceful development* path (*heping fazhan* 和平发展) holding high the banners of peace, development and co-operation, joining the other Asian countries in bringing about Asian rejuvenation, and making a greater contribution to the lofty cause of peace and development in the world."<sup>25</sup>

A few days later, Politburo standing committee member Zeng Qinghong (曾庆红) endorsed the concept of peaceful rise but did not use the term, instead

22 Premier Wen Jiabao's press conference at the conclusion of the second session of the Tenth National People's Congress (NPC), 15 March 2004. <http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/zxxx/t80119.htm>.

23 Luo Qinwen, "Chinese National Defence Minister expounds on the 'peaceful rise' road," *Zhongguo xinwen she*, 31 March 2004, FBIS, CPP20040401000025.

24 Xinhua Backgrounder, 23 April 2004, FBIS, CPP20040423000068.

25 Hu Jintao, 23 April 2004 Boao Forum speech. Xinhua, 24 April 2004, FBIS, CPP20040424000082. The similarity between Hu's "peaceful development" and Deng's famous axiom of "peace and development" being the main "trend of the times" is probably not a coincidence. In this sense, Hu is putting forward a slogan that appears to differ little in terminology from Dengist foreign-policy thought.

embracing Hu's new formulation. During remarks at the opening ceremony of the ministerial segment of the 60th session of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, Zeng promised that China would "never seek hegemony, no matter how well-developed it becomes," and labelled China's path as *peaceful development*, not peaceful rise.<sup>26</sup>

So what happened to peaceful rise? According to several Chinese experts, a Politburo standing committee meeting was held in early April before the Boao Forum to discuss the theory. At that meeting, Zheng presented the findings of his research in the form of a 200,000-character report to the leadership.<sup>27</sup> Chinese sources say that the top leadership made a decision to permit continued research and discussion of peaceful rise in academic circles, but no longer to use the term in leadership speeches or government and Party documents. China Reform Forum analysts insist, however, that the senior leadership remained interested in Zheng Bijian's project and did not discourage continued development and exposition of the theory.

In subsequent months, the CCP's decision on no usage by Chinese leaders and in official statements and documents prevailed. In December 2005, the State Council issued a white paper entitled "China's peaceful development road" that eschewed the term peaceful rise.<sup>28</sup> Yet, the phrase was and continues to be used in numerous mainstream Chinese publications.<sup>29</sup> It has decidedly not vanished from public discourse. This provides a stark contrast to China's Leninist political culture which places priority on developing and enforcing unified language and would have banned usage of a rejected phrase in all public discourse.

Nevertheless, a decline in usage of the term was evident in Chinese publications. Based on a search in the China Academic Journals database of political journals, there were zero articles with the term "peaceful rise" in the title/text published in 2001, 0/1 in 2002, 8/41 in 2003, 191/1054 in 2004, 130/1444 in 2005 and 59/865 in 2006. The pattern is slightly different for newspapers. In

26 Zeng's speech was titled "Take the path of peaceful development, seek prosperity in common in the Asia-Pacific region," *Xinhua*, 26 April 2004, FBIS, CPP20040426000112. See also Shao Zongwei and Zhang Yong, "Zeng: nation will not seek hegemony," *China Daily* (Internet Version—WWW), 27 April 2004, FBIS, CPP20040427000016. A China Reform Forum scholar said the spirit of Zeng's speech came from the report that Zheng Bijian had given to the leadership a few weeks earlier. Interview, 11 August 2004.

27 According to one source, the "interview" with Zheng Bijian that was published in the Party School's *Study Times* in June was based on this report. See Zheng Bijian, "Peaceful rise: the most important 'Chinese characteristic'."

28 *China's Peaceful Development Road* (Beijing, China: State Council Information Office, December 2005); <http://www.china.com.cn/english/features/book/152684.htm>.

29 For example, several new books emerged in late 2004 that explored various dimensions of China's rise and one prominent book by Shanghai authors was even entitled *China's Peaceful Rise*. Jiang Xiyuan and Xialiping, *Zhongguo heping jueqi (China's Peaceful Rise)* (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, July 2004). The next two volumes are part of a three-book series on rising powers. Zhang Youwen and Xu Mingqi (eds.), *Qiangguo jingji: Zhongguo heping jueqi de zhanlüe yu daolu (Powerful Economy: The Trend and Objective of China's Peaceful Rise)* (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, March 2004); Zhang Youwen and Xu Mingqi (eds.), *Jingji qiangguo: Zhongguo heping jueqi de qushi yu mubiao (Economic Power: The Trend and Objective of China's Peaceful Rise)* (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, March 2004).

the text of articles, “peaceful rise” first appeared in *People’s Daily* (mainland edition) and *Renmin wang* in November 2003 (with two and five instances respectively). Its appearance peaked in April 2004 (19 and 111 instances respectively). In *People’s Daily*, usage rapidly declined after April 2004, with one to two instances per month for the last five months of 2004. The total number of references in 2004 was 53. In 2005, the total in *People’s Daily* declined to 14 instances, with no discernable monthly pattern. Yet in *Renmin wang*, usage of peaceful rise continued throughout 2004 and 2005, with a monthly average of 36 usages after April 2004. Interestingly, the English-language *China Daily* did not begin using peaceful rise until January 2004, and then its usage continued sporadically (with no instances in some months) through 2004 and into 2005, but with no clear pattern.<sup>30</sup>

Moreover, and perhaps most importantly, the decision to use peaceful development instead of peaceful rise does not appear to have affected the thrust of the diplomatic strategy embodied in Zheng’s original concept. Despite the mid-April leadership decision to eschew official use of peaceful rise, subsequent speeches by Hu Jintao, Wen Jiabao and Zeng Qinghong continued to highlight the themes of reassurance and the mutual benefits of China’s rise, especially within Asia. In the words of Beijing University’s Wang Jisi, “in substance, both peaceful rise and peaceful development carry the same message that China’s growing power will not be threatening to the outside world and therefore the many variations of the ‘China threat theory’ are to be rejected.”<sup>31</sup> Thus, the leadership’s debate over peaceful rise was more about determining the “correct” terminology to use so that the Party could agree on unified official language – a common requirement of Leninist political systems. The change to peaceful development did not reflect disagreement with the overall policy orientation that Zheng Bijian outlined in his original conception of peaceful rise. In the words of Party School international theorist Liu Jianfei (刘建飞): “Scholars probably need not waste their energies trying to figure out which is more politically correct, peaceful rise or peaceful development. Besides, there is no essential difference between the two. Both are just two ways of expressing the same process.”<sup>32</sup>

## China Debates Peaceful Rise

What explains the leadership’s initial embrace and subsequent rejection/modification of this new foreign policy concept, together with its unusual willingness to allow its continued usage in non-official publications and settings? The answer to the former question is ultimately unknowable in the absence of an

30 The data and frequency counts were graciously assisted by Alastair Iain Johnston. In each instance, the frequency counts were the number of articles in each publication that contain reference to the term “peaceful rise” in the full text.

31 Wang Jisi, “Peaceful rise: a discourse in China.”

32 Liu Jianfei, “Wei heping jueqi zhengming” (“A rectification of peaceful rise”), *Liaowang xinwen zhoukan*, 2 January 2006, p. 62.

authoritative account of the Politburo standing committee meeting in which the decision reportedly occurred. We argue that, at a minimum, the intensive debate (in key institutions like the MFA and the PLA as well as among elite analysts and scholars) about this new idea shaped the environment in which the leadership in April 2004 made their decision. This case study underscores the growing impact of public discourse on leaders when choosing among competing policy options.

Many Chinese experts and institutions began to conduct research on peaceful rise in 2003 and 2004 because they were encouraged by leadership attention to the concept and the provision of government funding. Newspapers and leading Chinese journals published articles that explored various facets of the theory – including its feasibility, challenges to its realization and its theoretical soundness. Universities and think tanks held internal seminars to discuss peaceful rise. Initially, domestic and foreign reaction was largely positive.

In early 2004, however, criticism of the theory mounted and by spring public debate was full blown. Attacks on peaceful rise emanated from many different quarters and the objections were numerous. The MFA, retired ambassadors and the PLA raised concerns about the wisdom of the peaceful rise theory; these arguments emerged through varied official channels that reportedly reached the ears of China's top leadership. University-based scholars and think-tank analysts were among the most publicly vocal critics. According to interviews, their published arguments reflected those being made internally, and, through various channels, these arguments were brought to the attention of Chinese leaders.<sup>33</sup> Supporters also expounded their views, both in published articles and internally. At least eight major criticisms were levied against "peaceful rise." They are summarized below.

### *Weaken China's ability to deter Taiwan independence*

Many Chinese analysts and scholars questioned whether peaceful rise would undermine China's ability to deter moves by Taiwan towards independence. Such concern became acute in the lead-up to and following the re-election of Taiwan president Chen Shui-bian (陈水扁) in March 2004. This event triggered a significant challenge to peaceful rise advocates at the very moment when the theory was first being debated. According to a Central Party School professor who acknowledged that Chen's unexpected victory had a negative impact on the discussion of China's peaceful rise, "some experts criticizing 'peaceful rise' claimed that the adoption of the theory would constrain China's policy options in dealing with Taiwan's pro-independence forces and make it more difficult to make the decision to use force when necessary." An analyst from the China Institute of Contemporary International Relations (CICIR) said that too much

33 On the various channels used to communicate such views to leaders see Bonnie S. Glaser and Phillip C. Saunders, "Chinese civilian foreign policy research institutes: evolving roles and increasing influence," *The China Quarterly*, No. 171 (2002), pp. 601–20.

emphasis on peaceful rise could give Taiwan the wrong signal: “Peaceful rise could be interpreted as meaning that China is giving up its resolution to use force to prevent independence.”

Several Chinese analysts addressed the problem of whether the use of force to deter Taiwan independence contradicted a peaceful rise strategy, and thus that Zheng’s theory was untenable. People’s University Professor Shi Yinhong (时殷弘) contended that China’s rise would be blocked if it “cannot keep ‘Taiwan independence’ at bay for long or resort to force to stop or smash ‘Taiwan independence’.” He argued, however, that local military conflicts are not at odds with a peaceful rise and can facilitate it if properly managed.<sup>34</sup> Zhang Wenmu (张文本) charged that those who believe that reunification can be achieved peacefully are “very naïve,” and urged the Chinese government to learn lessons from the United States, which used force at the end of the 19th century to occupy Hawaii, the Philippines and Cuba.<sup>35</sup>

Some Chinese argued that advocacy of a peaceful rise strategy could not only affect Taiwan but also cause the Japanese to interpret incorrectly China’s tolerance of Japanese nationalists who illegally land on the Diaoyu islands and directly challenge Chinese sovereignty. An editorial in Hong Kong’s *Ming pao* (*Mingbao* 明報) stated that “We approve of Beijing’s ‘peaceful rise’ foreign policy ... However Japanese right wingers are growing in strength” and “China’s forbearance may be regarded as cowardice.”<sup>36</sup>

### *China’s “peaceful rise” may not be possible*

Many sceptics argued that peaceful rise was not an attainable goal because the theory lacks an historical precedent and China’s external security environment is unfavourable, citing threats to China from the US–Japan alliance, US unilateralism, NATO expansionism and the negative impact of globalization. One of the harshest attacks on the peaceful rise theory was launched by Beijing University Professor Pan Wei (潘维) who argued that “peaceful rise has never occurred on earth.” The rise of the United States to great power status, then to superpower status, and its efforts to maintain its hegemonic position “has clearly been a history of war,” Pan claimed. Posing the question “is it possible that a sheep can ‘rise’ before a lion,” he concluded that no existing great power would welcome another country’s rise.<sup>37</sup>

Qinghua University Professor Chu Shulong (楚树龙) warned that China would encounter big obstacles to its development “if the thinking of ‘containing China’ became the mainstay of the national strategies and policies of the US and

34 Shi Yinhong, “Basic trials and essential ‘platforms’ for China’s peaceful rise,” *Ta kung pao*, 14 March 2004, FBIS, CPP20040315000111.

35 Zhang Wenmu, “Great powers’ historical experience and China’s choice,” *Strategy and Management*, No. 2 (2004).

36 *Ming bao*, 25 March 2004.

37 Pan Wei, “‘Peaceful rise’ has never happened on the earth!” March 2004, as posted on [www.irchina.org](http://www.irchina.org).

some other countries.”<sup>38</sup> Some Chinese experts opposed the peaceful rise theory as unrealistic because the use of force to achieve great power status may be not only unavoidable but necessary. Yan Xuetong (阎学通), the head of the Institute of International Studies at Qinghua University, argued that rise is China’s only choice and “all peace strategies that would prevent China’s rise must be excluded.”<sup>39</sup>

### *The term “jueqi” will intensify concerns among China’s neighbours*

The term *jueqi* (崛起) became the target of considerable criticism because it was seen as provocative rather than reassuring. The character *jue* (崛) in *jueqi* contains the radical for mountain (*shan* 山) and carries the connotation of abruptness, Chinese experts explained. It suggests that “something comes out of nowhere and does so violently, like the rise of a mountain,” indicated one scholar. “*Jueqi* sounds like a challenge,” said a CICIR analyst. “If there is a flat horizon and the something rises on the horizon, then it will pose a threat to the pre-existing situation – the existing balance among powers. Using the term *jueqi* will easily cause suspicion and wariness among other countries.”<sup>40</sup> Experts claimed that countries using Chinese characters, such as Japan and Korea, expressed concern about the phrase.

A PLA major general averred that when foreigners hear the term peaceful rise they emphasize the *rise*, not its *peaceful* aspects and associate it with a possible Chinese challenge to the international order. MFA officials specifically objected to use of the slogan on the grounds that it “gives people the impression that China is getting strong and therefore creates uneasiness” – undermining MFA efforts to repudiate the “China threat” theory. MFA officials emphasize that China is a developing country and still has many problems. A group of retired ambassadors also strongly opposed the term because it “reflected a position of arrogance,” according to the MFA source, who noted that retired ambassadors still “have their influence” on the leadership.<sup>41</sup>

### *It is premature to discuss “China’s rise”*

Many Chinese scholars stressed the numerous domestic obstacles to China’s rise and argued that it is too early to talk about a China that is rising. One expert

38 Chu Shulong, cited in “What to do after becoming a big power,” *Renmin ribao*, 26 June 2004, FBIS, CPP20040628000074.

39 Yan Xuetong, “Peaceful rise and safeguarding peace – on strategy and tactics of China’s peaceful rise,” *Guoji wenti yanjiu*, No. 3 (13 May 2004), FBIS, CPP20040616000261.

40 This was among several criticisms cited by Zhang Hongxi, former consul general in New York, who harshly condemned the concept of peaceful rise in *Shijie zhishi*, 16 August 2005, FBIS, CPP20050901000267.

41 An advisory group composed of retired ambassadors was established by Jiang Zemin in September 1998 called the ambassadors consulting mechanism (*dashi zixun jizhi*). Sources say that Hu Jintao has not followed Jiang’s practice of meeting the ambassadors group, but its members continue to meet sporadically and send reports to the leadership.

cited the need first to reform state-owned enterprises and China's immature capital markets, narrow the income gap in Chinese society, improve the functioning of the government, address energy shortages that slow economic development, cope with the deteriorating environmental situation, address challenges from international society, and reform China's political system. A PLA researcher said that China's rise is inevitable, but would be a very long process. Since China aspires to become a medium developed country in the year 2050, "it is not appropriate to use the term peaceful rise now," he asserted.

*"Peaceful rise" is contrary to Deng Xiaoping's guidance on foreign affairs work*

The debate over peaceful rise was also influenced by the ongoing debate among Chinese analysts over how to interpret Deng Xiaoping's statement in the early 1990s that China should on the one hand "bide its time and hide its capabilities" (*tao guang yang hui* 韬光养晦) while at the same time "accomplish some things" (*you suo zuo wei* 有所作为).<sup>42</sup> A Beijing University professor said that some of the critics of peaceful rise cited the first part of Deng's maxim and emphasized that China should focus on its own problems. "To some, there are contradictions with Deng's *tao guang yang hui*. China should be more modest."<sup>43</sup>

*"Peaceful rise" could undermine support for military modernization*

Some in the PLA worried that a commitment to emerge peacefully as a great power would diminish domestic support for the continued allocation of greater resources to military modernization.<sup>44</sup> Senior PLA officers argued publicly that national defence is an indispensable element of China's national security. In an article published in early 2004, Lieutenant General Li Jijun (李际均), former director of the Central Military Commission General Office and vice-president of the Academy of Military Sciences, noted that the peaceful rise of China is "surrounded by geopolitical strategy. This has at least two implications: one is to take the path of peaceful development and not threaten others; two is to have the capability to defend our country against aggression," an argument in favour

42 For an authoritative explanation of these phrases, see Qian Qichen's entry in Wang Taiping (ed.), *Deng Xiaoping waijiao sixiang yanjiu lunwen ji* (Collected Papers on the Study of Deng Xiaoping's Diplomatic Thought) (Beijing: Shijie zhishi chubanshe, 1996.) The authors are grateful to Taylor Fravel for highlighting this important source.

43 According to CICIR America expert Yuan Peng: "The debate in China over 'peaceful rise' or 'peaceful development' is in part associated with whether to continue the 'low profile' policy or to change over to a stance of 'striving for some achievements in world affairs ....' This suggests that some Chinese experts attempted to use the peaceful rise debate to promote a more active foreign policy. Yuan Peng, "China's rise and the external circumstances," *Contemporary International Relations*, Vol. 15, No. 10 (October 2005), p. 10.

44 According to China's official statistics, the defence budget has quadrupled in real terms since 1995 and its share of annual GDP has grown accordingly. This has occurred as the government has run a budget deficit.

of the consistency between peaceful rise and continued funding for military modernization.<sup>45</sup>

### *Promoting “peaceful rise” could incite domestic nationalism*

Another objection was that promotion of China’s peaceful rise could incite domestic nationalism and create political problems for China’s new leadership. One expert noted, for example, that “people could get stimulated and think that we are better than others.”<sup>46</sup> Resentment runs deep against foreigners for exploitation of China during the “century of humiliation,” when foreign powers divided and subjugated China from the mid 19th century until 1949. Experts suggested that the leadership feared that discussion of China’s rise might lead to demands for retribution.

### *Slogans are not policies*

Finally, for many scholars and officials, the problem with the peaceful rise theory is in the approach (common in Chinese statecraft) of relying on a slogan with limited policy prescriptions, instead of on actual policies, to achieve foreign policy objectives. They argue that mere rhetorical refutation of the “China threat theory” and verbal pledges that China will not strive for hegemony are insufficient to persuade China’s neighbours that it will not threaten their interests as its power accumulates. A senior MFA official applauded the concept, but complained that Chinese diplomacy should not be reduced to simple phrases. “China needs to do tangible things to allay the fears of other countries,” he asserted. Whether the issue is managing the South China Sea dispute, the exchange rate of the RMB or trade disputes, he said, “China should be responsible and capable.”

## **The Alchemy of Foreign Policy-Making in China: “Peaceful Rise” and Beyond**

The unique fate of peaceful rise raises several implications for the contemporary understanding of foreign policy formulation in China. The origin and debate about peaceful rise suggest new external and internal dynamics that are influencing the micro-processes of policy germination, debate, formalization and articulation of foreign policy.

First, the evolution of peaceful rise provides an example of how a new policy line (and, importantly, one that dictates the substance of actual policy, as opposed to assessing China’s security environment) can arise from varied and non-traditional sources. Zheng Bijian identified the need for a new policy, solicited scholars to conduct preliminary research, coined a new phrase,

45 Li Jijun, “Need to bolster traditional, non-traditional security,” *Liaowang*, 9 February 2004, FBIS, CPP20040414000056.

46 See also interview with Shi Yinhong in *Nanfeng chuang*, 1 February 2006, OSC, CPP20060216050009.



publicized it, presented the research findings to China's top leaders and deftly manoeuvred to have them publicly endorse his term.

This unique evolutionary pathway adds a layer to Western understanding of the policy germination and formulation processes in China. Past Western research of foreign policy decision-making in China sought to explain interactions between government officials and analysts from government-backed research institutes; those debates were for the most part initiated and concluded within such circles. Prominent examples include China's post-Cold War debate about the United States' projected demise and the degree of multipolarity in the international system; the MFA's development of "the new security concept" in the mid to late 1990s; and the 1999 debate about whether "peace and development" remained the main trend of the times.<sup>47</sup>

The tale of peaceful rise underscores the growing relevance of think-tank analysts and especially university-based scholars to foreign policy-making in China. While the former used to regularly parrot government policy in their commentary and the latter used to be completely marginal to foreign policy discussions, much has changed in the last decade. Analysts and scholars now regularly interact with and advise government officials, and many commonly appear in China's print and broadcast media to comment on current international topics, including peaceful rise. They are thus both opinion-makers and conveyors of public opinion. As Robert Suettinger argued: "Whereas central leadership endorsement of an idea in the past might have been sufficient to have it widely praised and disseminated, China's intellectual climate has changed considerably since then, and for the better."<sup>48</sup> This shifting public discourse increasingly has a bearing on Chinese foreign policy, and an influence that the government recognizes. A contributing factor may be a changing political climate in China: there is a greater tolerance for a multiplicity of competing views on foreign policy topics and occasionally a willingness to re-evaluate government policy based on expert criticism and/or recommendations.<sup>49</sup>

It remains unclear, however, to what extent these analysts and scholars influenced the leadership's decision to cease official use of the term peaceful rise. Opposition by the MFA and the PLA was certainly important. The publication of articles in China's largely state-controlled media – both in favour and critical of peaceful rise – suggests that both positions may have had high-level backing.

47 The seminal work on the peace and development debate is David M. Finkelstein, *China Reconsiders Its National Security: The Great Peace and Development Debate of 1999* (Washington, DC: CNA Corporation, December 2000). Also see Ren Xiao, *The International Relations Theoretical Discourse in China: A Preliminary Analysis* (Sigur Center for Asian Studies, George Washington University, Asia Paper No. 9, <http://www.gwu.edu/~sigur/pubs/SCAP9-Xiao.pdf>); Denny Roy, "China's pitch for a multipolar world: the new security concept," Honolulu, HI: Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies, Vol. 2, May 2003.

48 Robert L. Suettinger, "The rise and descent of 'peaceful rise.'" See also Evan Medeiros, "China debates its 'peaceful rise' strategy," *YaleGlobal Online*, 22 June 2004, <http://yaleglobal.yale.edu/display.article?id=4118>.

49 On this point see Evan S. Medeiros, "Agents of influence: assessing the role of Chinese foreign policy research organizations after the 16th Party Congress," in Andrew Scobell and Larry Wortzel (eds.), *Civil-Military Change in China* (Washington, DC: The American Enterprise Institute, September 2004).

In the end, the critics prevailed, but only to a very narrow degree: the conceptual content was not altered and the term continues to be used.

Given these considerations, especially the changing political climate in China, a further implication of the peaceful rise debate is that timing and external events clearly matter. They were at least as important as the intense domestic debate in influencing the leadership's shift to peaceful development as the official slogan. The re-election of Chen Shui-bian in March 2004 and China's substantially increased anxiety created a political milieu in which many were immediately concerned about the implications of peaceful rise for China's ability to manage the Taiwan Strait issue. A Central Party School professor predicted that "if the Taiwan issue calms down, then perhaps the leadership will consider 'peaceful rise' again."

Another possible factor in explaining the official modification of peaceful rise is domestic political considerations, specifically the supposed opposition from Jiang Zemin.<sup>50</sup> His role in the debate cannot be conclusively determined, however. Jiang never spoke publicly in support of or against peaceful rise, but well-informed scholars say that he used the term in internal speeches. Yet he also reportedly later objected to its use. He apparently believed that it was being promoted as a new grand strategy that could aid the early consolidation of power by the fourth-generation leadership; this could, in turn, diminish his political influence over China's foreign and security policy. A CICIR analyst asserted that "Zheng Bijian raised the peaceful rise concept too early – only one year after Hu Jintao and Wen Jiabao took power." Based on currently available information, Jiang's role in the standing committee deliberations as well as the leadership's specific reactions to Jiang's moves cannot be verified.

Apart from the implications for the process of foreign policy-making in China, the evolution of peaceful rise theory directly informs our understanding of new trends in the *substance* of Chinese diplomacy. The essence of peaceful rise is strategic reassurance to China's neighbours and major powers that China's ascension will not threaten their economic or security interests. According to Zheng's concept, China's "peaceful intentions," its limited national capabilities, favourable security environment, cultural disposition towards harmony and peace, and development strategy all predispose China's rise in global affairs to be a peaceful one. Regardless of the accuracy of these claims, the arguments reflect an important recognition by China that it is nested in several overlapping security dilemmas and that it needs to manage external perceptions of its rise in order to avoid the development of balancing coalitions. As demonstrated in the debate about peaceful rise, Chinese scholars and policy makers are increasingly aware that Beijing's behaviour has an impact on the policies of other nations, especially China's neighbours. Chinese policies, such as those towards South-East Asian nations, increasingly reflect this insight.

50 See Suettinger, "The rise and descent of 'peaceful rise'."

Interestingly, criticism of peaceful rise in early 2004 centred far more on the implications for the Taiwan issue and the appropriateness of the specific phraseology than on the larger concept of reassurance embodied in the idea of a peaceful rise. Indeed, the leadership's final decision to use the term "peaceful development" reiterated the core goal of reassuring other nations that China is not a revisionist state that will destabilize the international system as it revitalizes itself. While the words may have changed, the conceptual substance has largely remained the same. The point is not that China's rise would not ultimately create complications in international relations, but rather that Chinese policy makers recognize the complications associated with China's changing global role, and they are nominally seeking to manage this process with an understanding of the historically determined challenges Beijing faces.

## Conclusion

The purpose of this article was to examine the evolution of the concept of peaceful rise in order to illuminate the traditionally opaque process of foreign policy formulation in a rapidly changing China. The article sought, in particular, to highlight the changing domestic context in which Chinese diplomatic strategies and actions are being forged. Our research offers several insights. We argue that that new foreign policy ideas and strategies can be injected from outside the formal central government bureaucracy, albeit by actors who have channels to the leadership and extensive knowledge of the right buttons to push within the Party and government systems. While such atypical intervention occurred in China's economic policy-making for years dating back to the 1980s, it appears to be a relatively new trend in foreign policy-making. This conclusion underscores that some aspects of policy-making in China remain loosely institutionalized, and thus create room for policy entrepreneurs with connections and knowledge of the system to make their mark.

Furthermore, we maintain that opinions and debates among Chinese think-tank analysts and university-based scholars can influence government policy – albeit at different times and to varying degrees. Determining the occasion, type and extent of such influence remains a long-term research challenge for international China watchers, however. In the case of peaceful rise, the intensive disagreement about the theory's implications probably contributed to a political climate in which acceptance of the original formulation of the phrase was too controversial for China's new leadership – especially in light of external events that heightened national anxieties about Taiwan policy. The influence of these experts was exerted through their growing and higher quality interactions with policy makers (including on some occasions with Politburo members) as well as via China's media. As the media liberalize and the political climate becomes more conducive to openly debating traditionally sensitive foreign policy and national security questions, the roles of these experts in both shaping and

conveying public opinion will be likely to continue to grow – making assessment of their influence event more difficult.

Nevertheless, there are limits to our analysis. First, this is one case study with admittedly narrow boundaries. Additional examples of similar foreign policy debates need to be examined to determine the degree to which a trend exists or whether this case is unique. Secondly, our arguments mainly rely on selective accounts by Chinese involved on the margins of the leadership's deliberations. They also rely on the correlation of government decisions with these public debates. Without access to accounts by senior Chinese policy makers, the ultimate reasons for the rejection/modification of peaceful rise as official policy cannot be known with certainty, limiting our ability to draw strong causal linkages between public debates and leadership decisions.

This article suggests several future avenues for research in the field of Chinese foreign policy studies. The influence of various interest groups and public opinion appears to be on the rise in foreign policy-making, albeit from a low baseline. Assessing the degree of their influence and the manner in which they exert it will be central to understanding the factors shaping the direction of Chinese foreign policy in the future.