

Book Review

Future in Retrospect: China's Diplomatic History Revisited, Vol. 2

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Yaqing, Qin and Chen Zhirui (eds). 2016.
Future in Retrospect: China's Diplomatic History Revisited, Vol. 2. Hackensack: World Century. 321pp.

Research on Chinese diplomacy has sought to analyze what occurred in the political and economic spheres after the rise of Deng Xiaoping to the central position of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), and consequently to the People's Republic of China (PRC), in 1978. The periodization chosen by extant scholarship uses the ascension of Deng Xiaoping to the central position of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in 1978 as its starting point to explain China's behavior in its diplomatic relations. It is a mistake to assume that before Deng Xiaoping these diplomatic relations were incipient. To scholars who make this assumption the results obtained by People's Republic of China (PRC) after its opening and modernization period in 1978 are historically more relevant than the period before. However, there are important historical records raised by authors regarding Chinese diplomacy, such as the initial phase of the rapprochement of diplomatic relations with the United States, the conduct of relations with the Soviet Union (URSS) (Burr 2001) and, data on relations with Vietnam and North Korea. Edited by Qin Yaqing and Chen Zhirui, *Future in Retrospective: China's Diplomatic History Revisited*, volume 2 of the China Foreign Affairs Review Series, aims to treat Chinese diplomatic history through distinct lenses analyzing cases that precede the rise of Deng Xiaoping. The book presents case-study and a problem-oriented approaches to zoom in both sides of above mentioned Chinese bilateral relations.

The chapters of the book show that China has established bilateral relations with surrounding countries, with countries of Central Asia and even a movement of rapprochement with the USA. Models based on the observation and analysis of historical narratives are inadequate and superficial. A documentary approach merely through the lens of the Chinese may compromise the understanding of the historical details pertinent to each

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case and of the process leading to the constitution of diplomatic relations. To contribute to a better understanding of China's international relations and Chinese diplomacy the chapters in *Future in Retrospect*: (i) take a problem-oriented approach, focusing on subjects neglected and in the process of establishing bilateral relations; (ii) try to demonstrate the complex reasoning and logic behind the process when fledgling and self-sustaining New China integrated itself into the international community; (iii) adopt an interdisciplinary approach, combining political science and international relations with the study of diplomacy. This approach reinforces the dominance of Chinese ideology in its decision-making in foreign policy; and (iv) take the efforts to collecting data (official documents) about each case handled. The editors underline that such approach expands analytical horizons. The further exploration of the facts, the causal relationships reveal a new face of Chinese diplomacy. The unique features of the Chinese policy and its diplomatic action emerge from the application of that methodology approach used in the texts.

The book has eight chapters, in which each chapter contributes to the analysis of specific cases in the history of Chinese diplomacy. The chapters highlight historical moments in bilateral relations between China and countries as diverse as Vietnam, Albania, the USA, the URSS and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK). Yaqing and Zhiri are aware that using only Chinese sources might bias the analysis. To avoid such issue, the editors asked the authors in the volume to bring primary sources from the countries researched in the chapters, a considerable effort and compilation because of the careful data and archival collection the authors perform. There is vast and robust usage of primary sources, such as official and local records obtained in the archives of the ministries of foreign affairs.

The composite of the chapters showed by the cases is not restricted to military (geopolitical) issues. Chinese diplomacy at that time spread over alliances, financial aid, technical assistance and training of foreign workers. There is a significant contribution which is worth mentioning. Through the meticulous work done by the authors, one can discern that the argument of China as a closed country to the world falls apart when a careful observation of their diplomatic relations is carried out. The case of the diplomatic rapprochement with the USA is representative (chapter 4 by Han Changqing and Wu Wencheng). The diplomatic history and literature concerning the relations between China and USA tend to attach greater importance to the visit of Zbigniew Brzezinski in 1978 (during Jimmy Carter's administration) and eventually give little attention to the visit of Cyrus Vance in the previous year, who opened the dialog between the countries. The case of UPU (Universal Postal Union) (chapter 1 by Han Changqing and Yao Baihui), one of the special agencies of the United Nations, shows that the diplomatic activity in China already combined their political intentions and their alliances. There is, in this case, a substantial ideological component that analyses based on realist theory tend not to perceive. One can see how this Chinese ideological component was (and still is) a relevant element in its decision-making process beyond its borders (Carlsnaes 1986; Levi 1970). Such a case is a clear example of how the relationship between domestic politics and foreign policy in the design of politics should not be dissociated when studying the Chinese political process (Changqing and Baihui 2016: 165).

The book has significant contributions to future research on the history of Chinese diplomacy. Firstly, it consists of an effort to seek new research subjects, not yet considered in the depth that the cases require. Chapter authors present a thorough analysis of cases less known to those researching on Chinese diplomacy. The cases presented show how China's diplomatic engagement – based on foreign aid or with military actions – has generated long-lasting effects in the East Asia neighborhood. These cases contribute to undoing the misunderstanding that China is more actively diplomatic after its period of reform and opening up. I see a significant contribution when the authors present a big picture and, gradually, getting in the particular examination of cases. They recognize the relevance of history – path dependence – and associate this analysis to the understanding of political interests. Among the articles that make up the book, there are cases of failures and successes in Chinese initiatives. Even so, whether considering the cases of failure, such as the China's economic aid to the DPRK (1961-1965) (chapter 5 by Dong Jie) and the alliance with Albania (chapter 3 by Cheng Xialohe and chapter 6 by Jiang Huajie), it is observed that China, despite paying the costs of the alliance and suffering economic losses (Wenzhao 2008), proactively sought its goals through its diplomacy.

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Received on 5 October 2018, and approved for publication on 8 May 2019.



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