

Chinese engagement for Global Governance: aiming for a better room at the table?

O compromisso chinês para a Governança Global: almejando um lugar melhor à mesa?

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Ainsi se perpétuaient jusqu'à nos jours, une certaine vision du monde et une certaine conception des rapports de la Chine avec lui. L'idée que la Chine est par vocation une nation modèle, que son message s'adresse à tous les peuples, qu'elle doit convaincre autant que vaincre, marque aujourd'hui encore le contenu et le ton de ses rapports diplomatiques. (Guillermaz 1968, 644).

Introduction

Since its establishment in 1949, the People's Republic of China (PRC) has consistently attracted international attention. From its early economic and social projects (Great Leap Forward, Cultural Revolution)—persistently labeled by the international media as communist experiments of radicalization, it has been witnessed with amazement the return of the PRC to the international community (with the approval of the United States), so as when it regained its seat on the UN Security Council (UN/SC) in 1971, and also when it began its process of modernization and integration with the international trade system (1978).

This new development experiment, which involved introducing capitalist rules within a socialist system, naturally raised the prospect of the country's collapse. This perception arose from western's certainty that the two systems were incompatible and that, shortly, a serious and deep conflict would occur, leading the PRC into civil war again. The Tiananmen Incident (1989) was interpreted by the international media and observers as being evidence of this collapse's emergency.

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On the other hand, it was argued that this strategy of international insertion and, mainly, of a socialist market economy, was a result of Deng Xiaoping's personality and that, with his death, the succession struggle would lead to the Chinese collapse.

However, the death of Deng Xiaoping (1997) proved that the Modernization Project was not exclusive of Deng, but of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), with the support of the Provinces and of the Chinese society. The recoveries of Hong Kong (1997) and Macao (1999), the reduced impact of the Asian Crisis (1997/1998) in the Chinese economy and, finally, the PRC's accession to the World Trade Organization (WTO), in December of 2001, demonstrated the strength of China's development process and have provided grounds for this collapse prospect to be replaced by the China threat theory.

The threat theory derives from a regional and international awareness that China presents an ambitious global political project and that it is gathering real capabilities to assume a relevant role in regional and international affairs. In this sense, there is, among international actors, a perception that China, while expanding its space, is necessarily shifting or reducing the capabilities of other actors.

The PRC, however, continually ponders that it is satisfied with its territory, that it has no intentions of becoming a regional power or, even so, an international power. The expression of this political stance is the emphasis in the rhetoric of a peaceful rise and the search for a peaceful and harmonious development, present in Chinese official speeches for the last 20 years.

Apparently, the current slogan of Xi Jinping, beyond its domestic goals, "is a message for the world to assure people outside China that the 'Chinese dream' is to work for a 'harmonious world' and it not pose any threat to neighbours or other powers" (Mohanty 2013, 39).

Yet, in front of the latest international movements, such as the fragilization of the US with the 2007/2008 global financial crisis, with its setbacks in Iraq and Afghanistan and, even more, with the current American willingness to recover or expand its presence in the Asian space, some questions have emerged: does China see itself forced to take a reactive stance that is much more assertive and clear (at regional and global levels)? Or, simply, does China believe that it has reached a level of power that allows it to defend its interests in a more active and aggressive way?

Chinese foreign policy has so far been founded on a strategy of discretion and caution, on the basis of Deng Xiaoping's principle of "hiding its capabilities, focusing on national strength-building, and biding its time." However, do China's recent moves—as its more active stance in the South China Sea and the establishment of a zone of air defense in the East China Sea—represent isolated accidents or do they represent a change in its international strategy? Scathing criticism on arms sales to Taiwan or to the meetings with Dalai Lama are not new, but could the current criticism, followed with the application of sanctions, be indicative of a possible change in Chinese stance?

This text starts from the considerations that it is currently unquestionable the great Chinese relevance in international economy and international politics today and that, despite criticism to the global order, China does not present an alternative project. As pointed by Zoellick (2005), China does not believe that its future depends on a complete overturn of the International System, on the contrary, “Chinese leaders have decided that their success depends on being networked with the modern world.” Corroborating this argument, Nathan and Scobell (2012, 1) argue that

widespread perceptions of China as an aggressive, expansionist power are off base. Although China’s relative power has grown significantly in recent decades, the main tasks of Chinese foreign policy are defensive and have not changed much since the Cold War era: “to blunt destabilizing influences from abroad, to avoid territorial losses, to reduce its neighbors suspicions, and to sustain economic growth.” What has changed in the past two decades is that China is now so deeply integrated into the world economic system that its internal and regional priorities have become part of a larger quest: to define a global role that serves Chinese interests but also wins acceptance from other powers.

In this sense, China seeks, on the one hand, to readjust the rules to the current moment of redefinition of the International System in accordance with the roles and interests of new actors, as well as to challenge the rules that jeopardize its fundamental interests or, in its understanding, its survival. In this context, the text also makes the case that China is aware that its process of modernization, despite all progress achieved so far, is still embryonic, recent and needs more growth, maturation and consolidation of its economic and financial, political and diplomatic, and strategic and military resources to assume the role and responsibilities of a regional and even global leader.

Thus, the text assesses, firstly, the Chinese stance in regard to the negotiations for the redefinitions of the International Order and the International System (and, hence, Global Governance) and, secondly, the reactions of non-developed and developed countries in relation to Chinese strategies.

Briefly, it is sought a deeper understanding of PRC’s interests and strategies in respect to the current moment in the international and regional reordering process; which unfolds generically in the following questions: What does China think and want? What kind of world order does China seek? What are its interests and strategies?

China, leadership and Global Governance

Beside the repeated considerations on the impressive Chinese economic growth, the weightings around its classification as a new world power have widened significantly. In the international political imaginary, debates and assumptions

about the reality or possibility of a G2 (US-PRC) share space with an intense debate on issues of power transition, hegemony succession, rivalry or conflict between the US and the PRC, as well as probable repercussions on the current process of redefining the International System and the International Order. Nye (2014) categorically states that the US and the PRC are nations that still hold, despite the growth of the Chinese representativeness, immense differences in their objectives and, above all, in their capabilities.

The Chinese discourse of non-alignment, of not seeking hegemony and of not craving for leadership had a reasonable logic in the 1970s and 1980s. One can assume, perhaps, that such rhetoric had any logic until the end of the last century, but what about today? Could it stand together particularly after China's accession to the WTO?

However, it is quite logical if we consider that China is still a developing country with serious economic and social inequalities due to unequal distribution of wealth and to the fact that its development is concentrated in very specific areas of the country. Despite recent favorable economic results, it can be stated that its original goal is not yet consolidated. China considers that “ensuring the well-being and security of the Chinese people, together with the country's social and political stability already amounts to an act of global governance.” Thus, in the Chinese point of view, this is not “merely a domestic affair, but also one of international significance. It is the greatest contribution that China makes to humankind by working out solutions to internal problems such as development and stability” (Yephantong 2013, 356–357).

It is argued, therefore, that China's foreign policy is still primarily concentrated in the perspective of deepening its reform and its economic development (directed to the market), but now and each time more, aiming its interiorization, as illustrated by the last two Five Year Plans; secondly, but still holding a similar weight in the Chinese decision making strategic process, it focus on the defense of national sovereignty and national unity (integrity); and, thirdly, it aims its transformation into a great power (regional and international).

Medeiros (2009, 250), for instance, recognizes that the PRC “has become a truly global actor,” but questions if it is ready for it. He considers, initially, that China is already a global actor due to the fact that “there are few global problems for which Beijing is not a necessary part of the solution.” In this sense, any Chinese action affects the world and, from another angle, the world requires a more active and present stance from the emerging power that China is. However, he also ponders that even if “China may be a global actor, it does not yet see itself as a global power—even less a global leader.”

Mutatis mutandis, in the twenty-first century China “faces the historic test of success or failure in its rise to becoming a super-power, while the world is faced with the uncertainty that this might bring” (Yan 2013, 203).

It should be noticed that Chinese power is essentially national and that its transformation into international stems from two factors: the first corresponds to the political will of the actor to exercise its power internationally and, the second, relates to being recognized as such by other actors. In other words, to be an international power not only relates to prestige or to the ability to influence others, but it also requires to be accepted by other actors as such and to take responsibility (Carr 2001, 135–143).

For Deng (2008, 29), the PRC is acting under an international system dominated by Western powers which, in the twilight of the Cold War, have developed a group identity based on liberal democracy, free market capitalism and international responsibility. As a member of the outsiders group, China has constantly suffered political discrimination and faced criticism in what regards human rights issues and authoritarian characteristics of its government. Consequently, Chinese elites are frustrated and want to review the current international arrangement.

He also argues that China's strategy to reverse this status deficit comprises a mix of compliance and revisionism. Beijing selectively adapts to international norms and institutions; at the same time that it aims to change the international arrangements considered as prejudicial to its interests. Chin (2010) argues that China's growing capabilities are enabling it to take a more proactive approach and looking forward to engaging and participating of the major multilateral institutions. With the growth of its participation in the international arena, the PRC has been increasing the possibility of extending its influence, allowing itself to have greater power to intervene in both regional and global levels.

The argument developed by Chin (2010, 85–86) is that China behaves and pronounces itself in favor of a shift towards a balance with regard to global influence, aiming the purpose present in the discourse of multipolarity and not a break with the existing order. "The balancing of this broader systemic reform objective with allowance for a degree of contingency in institutions intentions and desired outcomes in current Chinese strategy suggest a need to rethink the conventional meaning of 'revisionist power'."

Therefore, the PRC promotes an "alternative global perception" (Deng 2008, 60), in which sovereignty remains an inviolable principle, different political systems are respected and all cultural beliefs and values are equally valid.

In this dynamic of threat, fears and doubts about China's role in international relations, Cui (2013) points out that China is now part of the main regional and international institutions, that it is integrated into the global system and that it follows international rules, although "these rules were set without much participation by China. You cannot say that the rules that were set up half a century ago can be applied without any change today." Thus, the rules require adaptations and China is willing to participate in this process, not in a revolutionary way, but in a cooperative way instead. "But what we want is not a revolution. We stand

for necessary reform of the international system, but we have no intention of overthrowing it or setting up an entirely new one.”

Now, nearly 25 years after the end of the Cold War, the world is faced with a new economic and financial crisis that presents itself as a global one, affecting, to a greater or lesser degree, to all countries.

By having its epicenter in the US and the developed countries, the crisis has made all too clear that we are facing a severe economic and financial crisis of global dimension still in an expanding momentum due, mainly, to the deregulation of the international financial system (Carvalho 2012) and that, on one hand, raises questions about the possibility of the International System’s smooth functioning in the way it is structured and, on the other, provides elements to re-discuss the International Order. The crisis also made clear the presence of new international actors¹, with increasing weight in the international economy.

In fact, more suitable than speaking in economic and financial crisis is to think about a systemic crisis that encompasses the different dimensions that make up the International System and the International Order. Consequently, it is an economic and financial crisis, but also a political and a strategic one due to the persistence of Cold War institutions, which emerged after the Second World War and which have no more grip to the new realities of the international distribution of power.

But this is not a specific perception of developing countries, Ikenberry (2014), even while advocating for international liberalism and for the vital role of the United States, argues that “the challenge over the next hundred years is to make the transition from an American hegemonic order to a more widely shared system of governance” (Ikenberry 2014, 18).

His affirmation derives from the recognition of the emergence of new actors who claim to participate in the international decision-making process:

Who makes decisions? Who sits at the table? How do we settle controversies between state sovereignty and the responsibility to protect civilian populations? The United States and Europe will need to make room for China and other rising non-Western states. But these states are already in the liberal order—the UN, the World Trade Organization, and the other global bodies. They are stakeholders. The challenge is to build new forms of collective action, redistribute rights and authority, and share decision making. (Ikenberry 2014, 18).

Narlikar (2014), however, does not consider it is only a matter of opening room for new players and that their presence automatically leads to a consensus and, especially, that international responsibilities will be heeded in the way that US and European Union (EU) want. “Recognizing key differences between the rising and the established powers is the first step toward building a coherent and balanced international order” (Narlikar 2014, 35).

¹ What Zakaria (2008) has called as the *rise of the rest*.

A basic difference is, undoubtedly, the principles of sovereignty and of non-interference. The Chinese official discourse greatly emphasizes the importance of an International System based on sovereign states and that “the global economic-governance system should not lead to any loss of national sovereignty and must accord with the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries.” It is placing exactly this emphasis on sovereignty and respect to differences that China “stresses the importance of achieving ‘win-win’ multilateral solutions to global problems, and emphasises that such solutions cannot be imposed on unwilling parties” (Shield 2014, 150).

If we visualize the doctrine of responsibility to protect, the differences get clearer, be it in Ikenberry’s (2014, 18) defense of which “states remain the repository of sovereign rights, but if gross violations of human rights or crimes against humanity occur, the international community has a stake and obligations in redressing and protecting these rights.” Or on the obvious opposition of Cui (2013) to this principle:

This kind of theory has not always proved successful. When the United States started the war in Iraq, people were also talking about the responsibility to protect the Iraqi people, or to eliminate weapons of mass destruction, but the end result is obvious. Who is protecting whom, and who is protecting what? This is still open to debate.

While overtaking Japan as the second leading international economy, China makes clearer an extremely important difference. When Japan was the locomotive of Asian economy, despite the trade disputes, it was always a partner of the United States and did not question Western values, whereas China has clearly and consistently maintained its Confucian values which differ from Western values based on Greco-Roman philosophy and, even though it officially denies it, China shows that it seeks regional and international power not to be again subdued, humiliated.

The existence of deep differences between developed and non-developed countries around the international economy is nothing new. In an unprecedented study in the International Relations literature², Krasner (1985) found that the basic strategy of non-developed (Third World) countries was to seek to change the rules of the game, emphasizing their participation in international forums and advocating the establishment or maintenance of international regimes that could reduce their weakness and vulnerability.

Krasner recognized that the common identity (surrounding the vulnerabilities and the unjust character of the International System) facilitated the formulation

² It is interesting to note that IR literature from the Cold War period has ignored the role of Third World countries. One of the few exceptions is the work of Stephen Krasner which, dedicated to the understanding of International Regimes, has had to focus on the analysis of the actions of non-developed countries in this process of definition, and even of formalization of regimes.

of policy proposals and strengthened the unity of developing countries, allowing them to exploit loopholes in the liberal discourse of the North (Leite 2011, 34).

In part, it can be considered that the current Chinese strategy shows a strong similarity with the previously strategy applied by the Third World, being referenced, in a generic way, by other emerging powers, appearing to have the goal of representing the aspirations of Southern countries in the global debate, in order to push for the reform of multilateral institutions.

Yuan (2012, 246) considers that neither the Western historical experience nor the current Theories of International Relations can explain China's rise. For him, unlike the Soviet Union, China does not have the military resources to confront the US, neither it has the ability to recreate an environment of bipolar stability based on nuclear deterrence. It is significant his affirmation that "rather than an isolated phenomenon, China's resurgence comprises a part of the collective rise of the non-Western world."

Even departing from the principle that the concept of global governance is relatively new and that it was developed by the West, especially by Europe, the issue of global governance has become a priority of Chinese foreign policy. By agreeing that many of the world's problems are global in nature, Chinese analysts equally defend the need for global solutions. "Thus, China seems to be transforming into a prominent driving force in the reshaping of the global governance system that has developed since the current global financial crisis of 2008" (Pang 2013).

Shield (2013, 149–150) visualizes three Chinese perceptions in relation to global economic governance. The first relates to the structure of the international system, seen as "unequal, undemocratic, and therefore unjust." Secondly, global economic governance is always subordinated to domestic concerns and, therefore, Chinese engagement with it will always be based "on a realpolitik calculation of the national interest." And, thirdly, any global governance must be underpinned by "the importance of realising a democratic international system of sovereign states."

China and the non-developed

PRC's foreign policy project, for Cornejo (2008, 10–11), derives from a paradoxical relationship with the rest of the world. In this respect, China departs from a self-representation based on the glories of its imperial past; the humiliation caused by the domination perpetrated by Western powers in the nineteenth and early twentieth century; and the national recovery through economic development led by the CCP. It seeks thus affirming its national autonomy and retrieving an international locus in accordance with this self-representation and with its current resources. However, the PRC has so far failed to get its political system to be recognized by major developed countries, which previously perceived China as a political threat by its radicalism and now see it as an important economic competitor with a political system that does not meet expectations of the Democratic West.

But it cannot be said the same for the majority of developing countries. By evaluating the Chinese strategy of relationships with developing countries, Strauss (2012, 135–137) highlights the positive effect of the consistency and continuity of Chinese rhetoric surrounding the Five Principles, mutual benefits, political equality, as well as the feeling that they have been “left behind” by the prescriptions and remedies applied in them by the North. So, while the speech of many Western analysts emphasizes the concerns, doubts and alarms about China’s rise, the most important issue in Africa, and even in Latin America, is how to maximize the opportunities and minimize the challenges caused by Chinese presence.

In this sense, it is understood that for a significant part of developing countries, China is now not only one of their major trading partners, a major source of investment and loans, but it is also a political partner in a myriad of multilateral mechanisms.

Thus, despite all the risks and challenges brought by China’s rise, China also presents “opportunities” to the developing world that were once denied or limited due to the excess of conditionalities required by Western countries and institutions. This perception was strengthened by the global financial crisis, which reinforced the positive image of the “Chinese model of development” and the awareness that the economic and trade relationship with China was one of the factors that allowed developing countries to suffer less from the crisis’ effects.

Without denying the importance of basic resources in the relationship between China, Latin America and Africa, it has to be understood that China has other interests regarding its relationship with the developing world. China equally seeks political support and emphasizes that its diplomatic strategy is a win-win policy for both partners. On the one hand, China gets major advantages from cooperation practices for ensuring the political support of almost all the non-developed countries in international fora’s negotiations, reinforcing the principle of “one China” and rejecting any form of separatism within its borders, especially in the case of Tibet.

On the other hand, the non-developed countries, besides guaranteeing economic benefits coming from Chinese foreign aid, also gain support for their political stances by having an international partner with veto power at the UN/SC, at the same time when they expand their room for maneuver and influence while negotiating collectively in the international arena. It is, thus, a strategic partnership based on political equality, trust and mutual gains. As Shambaugh (2011, x) points out, Latin America “represents an opportunity for China to demonstrate its expressed solidarity with developing countries and to foster a more multipolar world.”

Buzan and Cox (2013, 121) observe that the idea of harmonious growth, supported by China, is much more based on respect and preservation of differences than in the pursuit of homogeneity around some particular ideological line; and so it positively sensitizes African response and acceptance on the Chinese presence. Suisheng (2013, 108) similarly notes that “in parts of Asia, Africa and Latin America,

the China model or ‘Beijing consensus’ became more popular than the previously dominant ‘Washington consensus’.”

With regard to its diversification of partnerships strategy, China has been developing a policy of rapprochement in Africa that, by contemplating diplomatic, economic and military instruments, enables the strengthening of relations with African nations, which have been nurtured over six decades, facilitating China’s emergence as an international actor, as well as a leadership in the developing world³.

In this same line of reasoning, Jilberto and Hogenboom (2012, 184) stress that current Chinese efforts toward Latin America are non-ideological and strongly motivated by economic interests, but also promote its role in international politics and contribute with the construction of a South-South agenda.

And, even if they seek to emphasize the growth of leftist governments in Latin America, Jilberto and Hogenboom (2012, 191) argue that, as a result of this movement, “an interesting paradigmatic convergence with China has come about: the state is granted an important role in the economy (again).” The authors stress, however, that this does not mean the end of capitalism nor of market opening policies. And even considering that China did not develop a model of development, they also argue that, in Latin America’s view, a Beijing Consensus is much more interesting than the Washington Consensus.

It is important to emphasize the pragmatic character of Chinese foreign policy. Xu (2011, 45), for example, by analyzing the relationship between China and leftist governments in Latin America argues that, although it is “advantageous for anti-hegemonic struggles and the revival of socialism,” it should not be forgotten that “the development of foreign relations is decided essentially by national interest.” The same author adds that these governments tend to be deeply nationalist and, because of that, they can harm Chinese investments in Latin America. Furthermore, “the ‘American factor’ in China-Latin American relations could possibly complicate the issue because of worsening relations between the Latin America left-wing and the US.”

In respect to relations with Southeast Asia, it is unclear among analysts if there is the same consensus seen in Chinese relations with Latin America and Africa. Shield (2013, 159), for example, points out that, since the beginning of the global financial crisis, China has sought to strengthen its relationship with its neighbors, but “on the political level, this has largely failed, with Chinese assertiveness over issues such as sovereignty disputes in the South China Sea being perceived increasingly as a threat.” Moreover, these questions encourage regional actors’ pressures for greater US presence in the region⁴.

³ Part of these affirmations regarding the relationship between China and Africa has been previously approached by Sousa and Oliveira, 2013.

⁴ It could also be said that the demand for a higher North American presence in the region matches the political, economic and strategic US interests towards the region, as informed by the official foreign policy paper called US pivot to Asia.

Zangh (2012, 128), on the contrary, considers that despite the disputes' fluctuation in intensity and in severity over time, they have not become major military crises or armed conflicts due to "continued improvement of political and economic relations between China and the Southeast Asian countries."

In any way, China's relations with ASEAN countries (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) are more sensitive than those with African and Latin American countries due to its territorial proximity and their history of conflicts or alliances.

Despite the Chinese presence in the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) and the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation forum (APEC), the relationship between China and Southeast Asia was relatively cold during the first half of the 1990s, not only due to mutual distrust, but also to crises in the Taiwan Straits and the first conflicts over the sovereignty of islands and reefs in the South China Sea.

The Asian financial crisis (1997) led the PRC to be understood as a regional cooperative partner. By not devaluing the *renminbi* and by declaring that this was a contribution to regional security, China allowed itself to occupy a political space through the transmission of a caring image towards its region.

Both Japan and regional institutions such as ASEAN, APEC and even the ARF proved unable to solve the crisis. In this sense, China benefited from the vulnerabilities of key regional actors and, by not engaging in a competitive devaluation, China conveyed the image of a cooperative and peaceful power.

The Asian crisis can be seen as a turning point in Asian regional policies. It bared regional weaknesses, showing, on the one hand, that interdependence in itself has no ability to keep the region isolated from instabilities and, on the other, that the process of competition for economic power between EU, US and Japan, not only affected Japan, but ended up covering the whole region due to its strong regional interdependence.

In this sense, the expectations of developing a regional integration process, with essentially Asian characteristics and without the involvement of external actors were resumed and could be channeled into institutionalized structures to face common transnational issues. Or even so as a necessary response to European and American trends of deepening regionalism (Oliveira 2002, 133–134).

Accordingly, in an informal meeting of ASEAN in 1999, it was initiated the process that came to be known as ASEAN +3 (ASEAN plus China, Japan and South Korea), which aimed at expanding cooperation in East Asia, especially in economic issues⁵. Probably due to difficulties in implementing ASEAN +3, China took the initiative to establish bilateral arrangements with ASEAN. To this end, in 2003, China signed the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC), being the first country outside ASEAN to sign it. This action should be considered of utmost importance, because by accepting the principle of establishing the TAC, which

5 It should be stressed that the Asian crisis, beyond ASEAN+3, has also provided, in the financial dimension, the institutionalization of the Chiang Mai Initiative (after the frustrated proposal of the Asian Monetary Fund) and, along with all other financial crises of the 1990s, the creation of the Financial G20 (1999) as well.

establishes “the code of conduct for inter-state relations in the region,” China created an environment of trust among the different actors involved. TAC has as a basic guideline to serve as a “settlement of differences or disputes by peaceful means” and to enforce the “renunciation of the threat or use of the forces” (Wu 2012, 105).

All these Chinese actions fall under the Chinese good neighbor policy, showing, on the one hand, the Chinese interest in a more stable regional environment and, on the other, a concern to co-participate in the processes of regional governance.

Thus, it is so interesting the observation of a senior Singaporean diplomat, in 2004, that the influence rates in Southeast Asia are negatively signaling to the US, leaving it with less room for maneuver than it had had the last fifteen years; and positively signaling to China, showing that its image has improved significantly: “In the last decade the Chinese have not done anything wrong in Southeast Asia. The Japanese have not done anything right, and the US has been indifferent” (Kang 2007, 127).

Evidently that the latest accidents in the South China Sea and the East China Sea indicate, initially, a China that is more aggressive, uncooperative and not respecting of the provisions of the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea (DOC), signed in November 2002⁶. On one hand, the further escalation of the conflicts might be credited to the new US approach to encourage (and to fund) “actors to develop their own militaries and partner with each other to create a more viable and unified bloc opposing China.” This incentive might be behind Abe’s initiatives to strengthen Japanese relations with Vietnam (January, 2013), or even with the Philippines (February, 2013)—both Chinese competitors in the South China Sea—, which are perceived in the increase of donations to the Philippines to modernize its naval forces and in the funding for training Filipino and Vietnamese maritime safety agencies (Le Mière 2013, 34–35).

However, to what extent, objectively, is there a real American predisposition to contain China? Both recent incidents of Scarborough Shoal, in the South China Sea, in dispute with the Philippines, or in the Chinese declaration of an Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ), in the East China Sea, and in the Japanese dispute around Diaoyu/Senkaku islands, what has been observed was a rhetorical condemnation of China’s actions and nothing else.

Or, in fact, despite the severity of the disputes, the weight of economic interdependencies practically forces a more careful approach to avoid conflicts that could destabilize the region. Thus, China and other ASEAN countries are negotiating the adoption of the “Regional Code of Conduct in the South China Sea, a legally binding document that would augment the nonbinding declarations in the DOC,” without the ambition that this norms’ building process would resolve the deadlocks, “disputes and tensions [that] may arise from time to time, but serious military conflicts are unlikely” (Wu 2012, 108).

⁶ For additional details see Wiegand (2009).

China and the emerging powers

Currently, it has become relatively consensual to state that the 21st century tends to be an “Asian Century” due to the expansion not only of economic, but also of political and strategic capacity of Asian countries. But, to Haass (2013), there may be two very distinct Asian centuries: one of strong tensions, arms races and slow economic growth and, the other of stability, conflict-free and robust economic growth.

The stable century presupposes, in his vision, that “America’s strategic pivot to Asia thus needs to be substantial and lasting,” and the century of instabilities and economic decay would be one of “an Asia left to its own devices—and an Asian century that is dominated by China or characterized by frequent bouts of diplomatic tension or even conflict.”

In short, “to remain stable, the continent should promote regional pacts that include the US.” Evidently that, among other arrangements, especially in the political-strategic dimension, Haass is referring to the proposed Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) that associated with the other proposed US-EU Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP), demonstrate “an ‘anyone but China’ approach, and are aimed at keeping China out of a new wave of trade liberalisation and restricting its economic rise” (Shield 2013, 160).

Interestingly, on the other hand, is that the Asian economic power is not a phenomenon solely arising from China’s rise, by contrast, China’s economic growth was highly favored by having coupled itself to the Asian economic dynamics, led by Japan and already constituting an integrated productive network and, why not, a global productive chain.

Although the first concrete Asian initiative to develop a regional framework of cooperation or integration, in the mid-1960s, has not had formal success, it led to the development of a series of conferences (or epistemic communities) in order to reflect about the possibilities of regional cooperation. It is necessary to stress that these conferences, that characterize the Asian process, completely abandon the prospects of a free trade area and focus specifically on issues of cooperation and, even then, understanding cooperation not as integration, but as coordination of economic policies. This statement enables the questioning that “if the region has become the most dynamics economy in the world without elaborate regional institutions, why add them now?” (Kahler 2012, 88).

Do the TPP and the TTIP, besides being strategies to disqualify the WTO, also present the expectation of limiting Chinese capabilities? Both TPP and TTIP consist of economies which have China as the main or second trading partner; in that sense, will they be able to remain as institutions against China? If during the Asian crisis of the late nineteenth century, East Asia came to the conclusion that the Western economy and its financial institutions (IMF and WB) had a very strong connection with American values and that the US-Japan conflict undermined not

only Japan but also Asia as a whole, will not the current US-China dispute have the same result? The Asian crisis led, for the first time, the regional acceptance of the possibility/necessity of an essentially regional mechanism (ASEAN +3) and today, could an interdependent Asia dispense China?

To Le Mièrè (2013, 31), the term pivot used by Obama to demonstrate a renewed or resumed interest in Asia was very unfortunate or inappropriate. Pivot, in his understanding, indicates that the US was neglecting its role in Asia Pacific. Not even the term that soon began to be used, rebalance, cover all of Washington objectives in the area and, in its place, rebalance of burden in Asia should be adopted.

Having in mind the necessity of more assertive action and presence in the Middle East and in Africa, beyond the backlashes of the financial crisis, the US “is encouraging its allies to assume a greater burden of regional defense and security.” Without concentrating specifically in military, but also in diplomatic and economic issues, it is without doubt that one of the reasons of US actions is to “more effectively deter China.”

Etzioni (2013, 46–47) considers that China is emerging as a regional actor, without any interest in being a global power since it does not have the capacity nor the desire to impose a new world order, neither to export its model of authoritarian capitalism. In this sense, the US and its allies should accept some expansion of China’s regional influence. In so doing, it is much more likely “to lead to a peaceful, limited rebalancing of power than seeking to block China on all fronts by establishing counter-alliances.”

What actually is at stake is the extent to which China is prone to accept (and to submit) to American interests. It has already been pointed out that China does not demonstrate the same acceptance of American values, such as Japan does, questioning the pressure on other states to adopt these values.

In this sense, China recognizes the importance of the international system for a stable and prosperous environment and seeks to responsibly readjust the system to its interests and to those of the new actors. China even accepts to be named as a responsible stakeholder (Zoellick 2005), but wants to go further and to share in the decision making process.

In this tendency to seek changes in the International System, China is not alone. Before, it was the Third World, in the immediate post-Cold War, those who Kennan (1994, 143) termed as the monster countries and that are, currently, the countries called emerging powers.

In a paper written in the early 1990s, which evaluated the changes that were going on in the International System then, Huntington (1992, 19) grouped these changes in three titles (systemic changes, changes in the distribution of power and changes in relations between countries) and indicated, in the alterations in the distribution of power, among others, “the emergence of powers with local domain in many regions in the Third World; the wide diffusion of economic and military capabilities in the Third World.”

Relevant here is the fact that it was already present the perception, on the international agenda, that some countries had relative power, though insignificant at the global level, but with relative ability to influence, positively or negatively, global governance. It should be noted that they had ability to influence, but no to decide.

The concept of emerging country, though still subject to contestation, initially indicates the recognition of the existence of a set of countries which, due to their development processes, is reaching the so-called developed countries. But, more than that, they are also countries that besides having significant economic growth, demonstrate strong political will to co-participate in international decision-making processes, featuring both regional political ambitions as intensions of becoming great powers.

In this sense, one can also consider that emerging countries have become significant players in the international game, not only with greater economic expression, but also with a more offensive stance both in what regards the US and Europe as well as the poorest countries. It could also be reasoned that a relative displacement of the world center not only in economic, but also political and cultural terms, is taking place.

According to Cesarin (2009, 25–26), for China, emerging powers constitute a platform to build power and influence, combining efforts to sustain new rules of the game to a world level through a multilateral fora.

The pressure for China to assume a leading role internationally is softened by the fact that China is not the only one being demanded to do so, but the set of countries now entitled as emerging powers are also being called upon; although China has economic, political and strategic significance clearly superior to the ability of these other countries, they all have a relatively similar platform: they aim for a fairer distribution of power, reflecting a multipolar world and their growing position in the international hierarchy.

Politically, they are advocates of Multilateralism, opposing the hierarchic practice present in the main (formal or informal) institutions encompassed by developed countries, in particular the role played by the G7 or G8. But, on the other hand, they tend to constitute informal groups with the aim of finding more homogeneous positions to defend at formal international institutions. Example of this trend is the recent institutionalization of BRICS, of the new (trade) G20 founded in the Doha Round and the new role assumed by the old (finance) G20.

These trends indicate that the current concept of South-South Cooperation does not have the same meaning as it did during the Cold War period. What is advocated now is that there is a continuity of collective action (South-South), but this is now selective and hierarchical by (seeking to) including actors with greater economic and/or political expression, represented by the, not all too clear, concepts of emerging power and/or of regional power. Furthermore, the main goal of this collective action is exactly to take a common stance in the process of redefining the International Order.

Due to the fact that the concept of South-South cooperation have different connotations and interpretations, we work here with the perspective that strategies directed at the South have been continuously and primarily correlated with the expectation of generating more favorable political conditions to review, to adapt and to change the rules of the international system, in order to ensure a more conducive environment to the South development effort.

In this sense, for example, the informal organization of the BRICS represents one of the Chinese strategies for acting at the international level, whereas on a daily basis its members already worked together, so assuming the acronym BRICS represented the formalization of an existing reality from the beginning 1990s, expressed by the concept coined by Kennan (1994). Thus, the real BRICS has nothing to do with the acronym created by a financial analyst, its goals are clearly political and inserted in disputes within the redefinition of the International System and International Order.

Continuous and sharp criticism clearly indicate that the BRICS have bothered by disobeying guidelines and suggestions given by developed countries, especially the crisp American willingness to continue calling the shots internationally. The BRICS have, however, remained within international negotiating rules.

One of the main criticisms is the lack of unity of the group. Nye (2013), for instance, points out that “in political terms, China, India, and Russia are vying with each other for power in Asia. And, in economic terms, Brazil, India, and South Africa are concerned about the effects of China’s undervalued currency on their economies.” Nye critically notes that the fact that some members are democracies and others are authoritarian, and still questions Russia’s inclusion in the group, “it makes little sense to include Russia, a former superpower, with the developing economies. Russia lacks diversified exports, faces severe demographic and health problems, and [...] needs modernization.”

One could also ask why Russia was the eighth member of the G7. Was its economic and financial capacity which ensured its promotion? Long before the formalization of the BRICS there existed an awareness of the heterogeneity of the members, be it in terms of domestic political regimes or of divergent positions in international negotiation processes, as in the Doha Round of the WTO. But, the unit is done politically on the consideration that these are countries that are not participating in international decision-making processes and, therefore, they have reduced capacity to promote their interests, which are often conflicting with the demands of the developed countries.

It was only after the peak of the current international financial crisis that the strengthened G20 enabled the BRICS countries (non-members of the G8) to expand their participation in international financial decisions. And, similarly, despite different interests, they have shown strong interest in reactivating the WTO Doha Round in order to promote international trade adjustments that best meet the expectations of the South.

The most important thing here is to emphasize that China's active presence in many international organizations indicates that China has particular and collective interests and its strategy to implement them goes through South-South collective action and, more specifically, through the BRICS countries, which represent non-developed countries, with relative growing capacities but no room in international decision-making processes. Even though the financial G20 expresses this opportunity to participate in these processes, it is still an experiment in consolidation. Anyway, China is showing that it seeks to act in the processes of global governance, in accordance with international rules and strategies, or "new international groupings serves to improve governance and reform of the existing institutions" (Pang 2013, 55).

Conclusion

In January of 2014, US congress vetoed IMF's reform, proposed in the G20 meeting of 2010. This reform would augment the voting power of emergent countries and also diminish EU's ability to intervene in the IMF. "Asians are acutely aware that the IMF has intervened in the euro crisis with much greater support than it provided during the Asian financial crisis of 1997-98, and they understandably feel entitled to a larger say in how the Fund is run"

This fact, like thousands of others, demonstrates that the process of redefining the International Order is too slow and contentious, with shocks of diverse interests. But, it shows, especially, that China is disappointed (as are other emerging countries) and is trying to engage in this process and to act within the rules of the game in order to change it. But it still needs to gain political support or to acquire greater weight so it can achieve its goals in the international arena.

As a result of its economic performance and the increase of its importance on the international stage, it has been attributed to China a role of greater relevance at the regional and global levels. Linked to multilateralist discourse and to emerging countries' wishes of obtaining a position of greater capacity on the international agenda, China has come to play a role that transcends the defense of its own sovereignty and began to constitute itself as a partner for non-developed and emerging countries.

These countries of little influence in the setup of an international agenda that meets their needs, foresee the possibility of an action, led by the PRC, to review our current international institutions.

It is not being said here that China is ready to assume global leadership positions or that it is the vector of change, but it can be stated that China, with its actions, has shown a pragmatic presence on the use of global political and economic apparatus. One example is the gradual increase of its participation in major international organizations and its presence in major regional and global groups such, as ASEAN, BRICS, G20 and its alternatives strands to the policies

of the IMF and WB.

Proof of the alteration in the Chinese profile in international politics is its relationship with different types of countries. If, on one hand, the PRC presents itself to the developed countries as an important global player, having key positions within the political and economic game; to the non-developed countries, China has placed itself as a nation sympathetic to their problems, providing them all sorts of aid, be it through financial aid or through cooperation practices. Meanwhile, to emerging countries, China is a force that represents the possibility of them having their interests considered in the international game of forces, and of having greater participation in international decision-making processes.

Regionally, since last century's financial crisis, China has acted as a stabilizing pillar, especially in the economic area. With the 2007/2008 global financial crisis it was no different. Despite some disagreements regarding territorial issues and spatial domains, China has guided itself by the search (and the discourse) of harmonious growth/rise and has not placed itself as a postulant of hegemonic power, even with its economic results and political resurrection. Rather, what is observed is a continuous improvement in its political and economic relations.

Resuming Zoellick (2005) and Ikenberry (2014), the PRC aims not only to be a responsible stakeholder, but in a redefined International System, it also wishes to take part in the construction of a new International Order, and in its decision-making process.

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Abstract

The text defends the thesis that China is aware that its process of modernization is still recent and needs more growth, maturation and consolidation to assume the role and responsibilities of a regional or even a global leader. This text pursues an understanding about the Chinese stance in relation to the negotiations for the redefinitions of the International Order and the International System (and, hence, Global Governance) and, secondly, seeks to perceive the reactions of non-developed and developed countries in relation to Chinese strategies.

Keywords: China; Foreign Policy; Global Governance.

Resumo

O artigo defende a tese de que a China está ciente de que seu processo de modernização ainda é recente e precisa de mais crescimento, maturidade e consolidação para assumir o papel e a responsabilidade de um líder regional ou até mesmo global. Este texto desenvolve uma compreensão sobre a postura da China em relação às negociações para as redefinições da Ordem Internacional e do Sistema Internacional (e, portanto, da Governança Global) e, por outro, procura perceber as reações dos países não desenvolvidos e em desenvolvimento em relação às estratégias chinesas.

Palavras-chave: China; Política Externa; Governança Global.