

Chinese Civilian Foreign Policy Research Institutes: Evolving Roles and Increasing Influence*

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ABSTRACT A more pragmatic Chinese foreign policy and a more bureaucratic policy-making process have increased the opportunities for China's civilian research institutes to affect foreign policy. Beijing's growing involvement in the international community has created increased demand for research and analysis to aid Chinese leaders in making informed decisions. A more pluralistic and competitive policy environment has given analysts at think tanks more influence, but has also created new competition from analysts and authors working outside the traditional research institute system. This article examines the evolving role of Chinese civilian foreign policy research institutes, their relationships to policy makers, and the pathways through which they provide input into Chinese foreign policy formulation. It provides an overview of the key civilian research institutes, identifies important trends affecting them, and examines the roles and functions they play. The article concludes with an assessment of sources of policy influence within the Chinese foreign policy process.

"It used to be easy to be a Chinese diplomat. You just memorized the two phrases that defined the current policy and repeated them over and over. It's much harder now. You have to know about everything."

Former Chinese Diplomat

The advent of Deng Xiaoping's reform and opening up policy in the late 1970s marked the beginning of a gradual transformation of China's regional and global role from a passive ideological observer to that of an active, more pragmatic, participant. Beijing's increased involvement in the international community created demand for in-depth research and analysis to aid Chinese leaders in making informed foreign policy and national security decisions. China's participation in a growing variety of international organizations and institutions also produced the need for specialized expertise in esoteric fields such as arms control, international trade, climate change and intellectual property.¹ A complex network of national security research institutions was already in place to respond to the new requirements of a more international role. A few of these institutes traced their origins to Yan'an in the late 1930s, others were created in the 1950s and 1960s and temporarily shut down during the Cultural Revolution, and some had been established in the post-Mao era.

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1. See Elizabeth Economy and Michel Oksenberg (eds.), *China Joins the World: Progress and Prospects* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations Press, 1999).

Prior to the late 1970s the role of these research institutes had been limited as a result of the ideological, personalistic and top-down pattern of decision-making characteristic of the Maoist era.² The shift to greater pragmatism, increased reliance on the bureaucracy, and policy-making by consensus that followed Beijing's decision to open up to the outside world set the stage for a radical increase in the role and influence of Chinese foreign policy research institutes.

Chinese international relations think tanks were originally established along Soviet lines. Every research institute had a government sponsor and was situated within a formal bureaucratic system (*xitong*). Taskings flowed down the system, and research products went up in response. Information was tightly controlled, reports were vetted for conformance with the dominant political line, and dissenting views were rarely published. There was relatively little interaction between analysts in different research institutes. Analysis produced by Chinese international relations think tanks in the pre-reform period tended to be couched within a Marxist framework and to support official policy pronouncements. One former Chinese foreign ministry official noted that much of the research produced by international relations think tanks was irrelevant and had little impact on policy.³

Over the past two decades, however, research institutes have played an increasingly important role in providing information, analysis and advice to Chinese government and Party leaders. The nature and functions of the research institute system changed substantially during this period as broader political, social and economic trends under way in China influenced its evolution. These pervasive domestic changes in China have created new opportunities for analysts at research institutes to provide input into the Chinese policy making process. The number of players involved in Chinese foreign policy making has expanded, creating demand for information and analysis to support differing policy interests. Chinese leaders and working level officials are more open to external input than in the past. As a consequence of the changed internal and external environment, a larger and more diverse set of Chinese actors now operates in a competitive and pluralistic milieu to analyse international affairs and influence foreign policy.⁴ Civilian research institutes not only compete with each other and with their military counterparts, but also with an increasingly commercialized press and publishing industry.

This article seeks to aid the understanding of the evolving role of Chinese foreign policy think tanks, their relationships to policy makers, and the pathways through which they provide input into Chinese foreign

2. Michael Swaine, *The Role of the Chinese Military in National Security Policymaking*, revised ed. (Santa Monica: The RAND Corporation, 1998), p. 58.

3. Lu Ning, *The Dynamics of Foreign-Policy Decisionmaking in China*, 2nd ed. (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2000), p. 34.

4. David M. Lampton (ed.), *The Making of Chinese Foreign and Security Policy in the Era of Reform* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001).

policy formulation.⁵ It begins with an overview of the key civilian foreign policy research institutes. Next, it identifies some of the important trends under way in the community of Chinese civilian foreign policy research institutions, and examines the roles and functions of these institutes. Finally, the article identifies pathways used by analysts in Chinese think tanks to influence foreign policy decision-making, and assesses the sources of policy influence.⁶

China's Key Foreign Policy Research Institutes: A Brief Survey

Although the civilian component of China's foreign policy research institutes is vast, only a small number of these institutes regularly contribute analyses and policy recommendations to leaders and policy makers.⁷ The China Institute of International Studies (*Zhongguo guoji wenti yanjiusuo*) (CIIS) is the research arm of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA). CIIS experts write reports and provide briefings to MFA officials. It conducts the most policy relevant research of all civilian Chinese foreign policy research institutes, but its influence rarely extends beyond the MFA. The Foreign Affairs College (*Waijiao xueyuan*) also has a small research unit, the Institute for International Studies, that conducts research and holds conferences in support of the MFA. The largest and most well-endowed research institute remains the China Institute of Contemporary International Relations (*Zhongguo xiandai guoji guanxi yanjiusuo*) (CICIR). CICIR is the central government's main civilian intelligence organ and is institutionally under the Ministry of State Security. It has several direct channels to all the members of the Standing Committee of the Politburo. The Institute of Taiwan Studies (*Taiwan yanjiusuo*), formerly a division of CICIR, now reports directly to the State Council's Taiwan Affairs Office as well as to individual Chinese leaders. It is the only governmental institute in Beijing that focuses exclusively on Taiwan affairs.

Among the dozens of research institutes under the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS), the Institute of World Politics and Economics and the eight area studies institutes (United States, Europe, Japan, Asia-Pacific, Russia/Central Asia, West and South Asia, Latin America, and Middle East and Africa) conduct international affairs research. CASS institutes lack the institutional channels to the top leadership that CICIR enjoys and instead rely primarily on personal connections (*guanxi*) to transmit papers to senior policy makers. However in the past few years some CASS institutes have obtained permission to submit papers to the

5. For a pioneering work examining the Chinese policy process, see Michel Oksenberg, "Communications within the Chinese bureaucracy," *The China Quarterly*, No. 57 (January 1974), pp. 1-39.

6. This article is based on the authors' interaction with hundreds of Chinese think tank analysts, government officials and scholars. Glaser's contacts with Chinese foreign policy research institutes began in 1983 and Saunders' interactions date back to 1995.

7. David Shambaugh, "China's national security research bureaucracy," *The China Quarterly*, No. 110 (June 1987), pp. 276-304.

Central Committee's Foreign Affairs Office, which continues to play a role in co-ordinating research for the Foreign Affairs Leading Group chaired by Jiang Zemin. Some CASS units are also tasked directly by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The Central Party School, which in recent years has sought to build up expertise on select foreign affairs issues, has direct ties to senior leaders through the Party apparatus. The Shanghai Institute of International Studies (*Shanghai guoji wenti yanjiusuo*) is small relative to its Beijing counterpart and is administered by the Shanghai municipal government, but it has high-quality researchers and maintains close ties to President Jiang Zemin and Premier Zhu Rongji as well as to Wang Daohan, Jiang's mentor and head of the Association for Relations Across the Taiwan Strait (ARATS). Fudan University's Centre of American Studies conducts research on issues related to the United States and also has ties to policy makers in Beijing. The institutes under the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences (SASS) do not play a significant policy role, although a few individuals in the SASS institutes are well-connected. The Shanghai Taiwan Affairs Institute also has close ties to Wang Daohan.

Trends in China's Civilian Foreign Policy Research Institute Community

Over the past two decades, the number of Chinese research institutes has grown and their role in the Chinese policy-making process has become more important. Several significant trends are reshaping the composition of these research institutes and the way they operate within the Chinese foreign policy making system.

Development of horizontal linkages. China's system is still "stove-piped" into vertical hierarchies or systems and research products are transferred upward, not downward. Nevertheless horizontal relationships and mechanisms have flourished in the past decade. Seminars and conferences often bring together experts from various research institutes to discuss a particular subject or an important international event. Such meetings frequently precede or follow international visits by senior Chinese leaders and discuss specific agenda items as well as the broader bilateral and global context of the visit. A brief report on these discussions that includes policy recommendations is sometimes forwarded to the leadership via a leader's personal secretary or through the Central Committee's Office of Foreign Affairs. Most conferences are not reported in the Chinese press, unless they are organized by Chinese propaganda organs. One such meeting was co-sponsored by *Liberation Daily* and the China International Relations Association following Premier Zhu Rongji's failed effort to reach an agreement with President Clinton on the terms of China's entry into the World Trade Organization during an April 1999 visit to the United States.⁸

8. "Premier Zhu's visit to US has strategic meaning," *Jiefang ribao*, 13 April 1999. The article noted that the 13 April seminar included "experts and scholars from different institutions located in Shanghai" who "exchanged their views on the background, meaning and other issues related to PRC Premier Zhu Rongji's visit to the US."

The accidental bombing of the Chinese embassy in April 1999 was followed by numerous seminars that assembled Chinese researchers to discuss the significance of the bombing for Sino-American relations, American foreign policy, the future of war and peace, and the overall international situation.⁹ Similar conferences have been held on cross-strait relations and US policy towards Taiwan, especially after important developments such as President Lee Teng-hui's declaration in July 1999 that relations between Beijing and Taiwan were "special state-to-state relations" and the election of Chen Shui-bian in March 2000. Theatre Missile Defence, National Missile Defence, US-Japan relations, Sino-Japanese relations, Korean peninsula security and Russian foreign policy are among the topics of seminars held in recent years. Papers based on such seminars and conferences are almost always written by experts from the host institute and submitted up that institute's policy chain; they are not shared with the participants from other institutes.¹⁰ Joint projects by two or more research institutes are rare except when a foreign institution co-ordinates joint research.

Horizontal mechanisms are developing that bring together experts with overlapping interests from both military and civilian research institutions. Several associations concerned with international relations and area studies have been created, especially since 1979. There is a national Association of American Studies as well as a Shanghai American Studies Association. Associations also exist for Japanese studies and for the study of international relations. One example of a horizontal mechanism is the Cross-Strait Relations Research Centre established in September 2000. The centre's work reportedly includes "organizing the writing of research reports, commissioning research projects and accepting the commissioning of research projects, holding various types of academic seminars, unfolding academic exchanges, and editing and publishing collections of relevant research papers."¹¹ Wang Daohan is the centre's honorary director and senior adviser, and Tang Shubei serves as its director. Its staff includes 61 part-time contract researchers who are full-time researchers at units conducting research on Taiwan affairs under the Central Committee as well as at state organs, military departments, social science research institutions and universities. Their research areas cover politics, economy, law, military affairs, history, sociology, journalism, foreign relations and international relations.¹² Another example of a horizontal mechanism that brings together experts with overlapping interests is the China Arms Control and Disarmament Association (CACDA), which was founded in August 2001. According to Xinhua, the CACDA aims "to push forward the international arms control and disarmament process, to carry out

9. The *Hong Kong Standard* reported that leading experts from the military and civilian branches of government held a roundtable conference to discuss responses following the Belgrade bombing. Fong Tak-ho, "Debate on US, Taiwan hits media," *Hong Kong Standard*, 4 November 1999.

10. Author interview with an analyst from CICIR, September 2000.

11. Chen Binhua, "Cross-Straits ties research center established in Beijing," Xinhua, 6 September 2000 in FBIS, 6 September 2000.

12. Xinhua reports in both Chinese and English, 21 August 2001 in FBIS, 21 August 2001.

research projects concerning arms control, disarmament and international security, to promote exchanges between domestic and foreign institutions and individual experts in this regard and to hold seminars on arms control." Li Daoyu, a former Chinese ambassador to the United States, is the CACDA president and CIIS is the working site for the CACDA secretariat.

Intensified competition for analysis and advice. In the past decade, there has been a proliferation of research institutes, societies and associations that provide analysis and policy recommendations to Chinese leaders. Because internal reports are usually sent upward and not shared, most experts rarely have an opportunity to read the reports written by analysts at other institutes. Nevertheless, it is clear that many more organizations and individuals are vying for influence with policy makers than in the past. Some of these institutes are secret and have little or no contact with foreigners. For example, the Institute of World Information under the State Council is a "closed" research institute set up in the mid-1990s. It is said to be smaller than CICIR, but engages in similar types of analyses. Competition has also increased as a consequence of the *ad hoc* formation of small groups of experts with direct access to senior leaders. In 1998, for example, Jiang Zemin convened a group of former ambassadors to provide him with advice on foreign affairs.

Competition among civilian and military research institutes has increased the volume of reports written for Chinese leaders, but has not always translated into higher quality analysis. For example, the first report to reach China's top political leaders after the May 1999 bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade apparently came from the PLA's Academy of Military Sciences (*Junshi kexueyuan*) (AMS), which reported that the United States had deliberately attacked the Chinese embassy. AMS analysts believe that getting their report in first shaped the leadership's initial impressions and influenced the resulting policy response. Experts from other Chinese research institutes privately acknowledged that a deliberate American decision to bomb the Chinese embassy was not in American interests and made no sense, but were unwilling to challenge the official conclusion that the bombing was deliberate. The embassy bombing and subsequent crises such as the April 2001 collision of a Chinese fighter with an American EP-3 surveillance plane have stimulated interest in China in establishing a mechanism similar to the US National Security Council that could play a co-ordinating role in filtering information in an international crisis.

Better educated, better informed. Chinese researchers in foreign policy institutes are on the whole more highly-educated than they were a decade or so ago. Most institute researchers have advanced degrees and a growing number have PhDs, many from Western universities. Many institute experts are skilled in foreign languages. The internet has provided increased access to information, which to some extent has eroded the advantages previously held by resource-rich institutes such as CICIR.

Chinese researchers have also benefited from frequent contact with foreigners and opportunities to travel and study abroad. For the most part, younger scholars who have been exposed to Western analytical approaches have replaced the older generation that analysed the world in a Marxist-Leninist framework. These younger experts tend to be more open-minded and many aspire to make important academic contributions in their fields. Many Chinese institute researchers write articles for publication in Chinese and Western journals. Some have published thought-provoking books, including critiques of Chinese foreign policy.¹³ As in the past, senior institute experts often have close associations with universities and many are part-time professors.

Greater difficulty recruiting and retaining experts. Foreign policy research units are finding it difficult to recruit new analysts and keep those they have already trained. Foreign policy think tanks no longer hold the allure they once did. University graduates have many attractive career options in China today. Other jobs now offer opportunities to travel or study abroad and to have frequent contact with foreigners. Salaries at research institutes are on a par with other Chinese government jobs, but are not competitive with salaries offered in the burgeoning private sector. In recent years it has become far easier to transfer from one work unit (*danwei*) to another, as housing reforms have made it possible for Chinese analysts to change jobs without losing their residences. Government efforts to improve the quality of research and teaching at major universities such as Beijing and Qinghua University have also created new positions for top experts that pay substantially more than jobs at traditional research institutes and provide greater opportunity for independent thinking. A number of prominent analysts have taken advantage of these opportunities to leave think tank jobs or to transfer from one research institute to another. To cite some recent examples, Yan Xuetong and Chu Shulong have moved from CICIR to Qinghua University; Su Ge has jumped from the position of Associate Dean of the Foreign Affairs College to the post of Deputy Director of CIIS; and Ding Kuisong left his position as Chief of CICIR's America division to become Executive Director of the China Reform Forum.

Increased contact with foreigners. Twenty years ago Chinese institute analysts had virtually no contact with foreigners. CICIR first opened up to the outside world in 1980. Today it hosts delegations from foreign countries on a weekly basis. Analysts from Chinese think tanks frequently travel abroad to participate in international conferences. Contact with foreigners has provided a new source of information to Chinese institute analysts and has, in some cases, fundamentally altered individuals' perspectives on international relations. In addition, association with foreigners has served as an opportunity for Beijing to influence views

13. One widely-read example is Yan Xuetong, *Zhongguo guojia liyi fenxi (An Analysis of China's National Interests)* (Tianjin: Tianjin renmin chubanshe, 1996).

held by foreign scholars and officials about Chinese domestic and foreign policies.

Expanded topics of research. Chinese research institutes analyse a wide range of regional and global issues. Many institutes produce annual reports that survey global trends and developments in specific regions. During the reform era, the research agenda of these institutes has broadened to encompass issues such as north–south economic relations, globalization, terrorism, and regional economic and security co-operation. Institutes with global responsibilities were traditionally divided along regional lines with research sections for North America, the Soviet Union/Russia and Eastern Europe, South and South-East Asia, the Middle East and so on. Institutes with a country or regional focus were primarily organized into divisions that studied external and internal policies, with the latter divided into, for example, domestic politics, social issues, culture and literature. In recent years, however, many Chinese institutes have been reorganized to allow for study of transnational issues. CICIR now has a division of world economics and a division of arms control studies which includes a sub-group that analyses drug trafficking and international crime. Just months prior to the 11 September terrorist attacks, CICIR established a new Centre for Counter-Terrorism Studies. The CASS Institute of American Studies also recently created a centre for arms control research.

Increasing role of university professors and institutes. In the past few years, full-time university professors have been participating more frequently in policy discussions that bring together experts from different research units. Some professors at major universities in Beijing, Shanghai and Xiamen are being tasked to provide analysis to policy makers. The MFA sometimes commissions papers from professors whom they judge to have greater expertise in a subject area than researchers at CIIS, its own research arm. One foreign ministry official noted that his department had a few trusted professors who could be asked to conduct policy research to supplement work done within the ministry. His department preferred to approach university experts for specific research rather than task generalists at the research institutes affiliated with the foreign ministry. Many Chinese analysts expect the role of university professors and university research institutes to continue to grow in the coming years. At present, however, university input to the policy-making process remains infrequent and sporadic.

Key Roles and Functions of Foreign Policy Research Institutes

In the past decade or so, the functions performed by Chinese civilian foreign policy research institutes have evolved. The five main roles played by these institutes today are outlined below.

Provide information, analysis and advice to the leadership. The primary function of the major civilian foreign policy research institutes is to provide reports to senior policy makers and leaders. Institutes or individual specialists are commissioned to write studies and provide recommendations on policy matters. Some give oral briefings to leaders on specific issues. Scholars increasingly take the initiative to propose conducting research on subject areas they judge to be important for Chinese policy makers. Some institutes are routinely tasked to support the foreign activities of the Chinese leadership. For example, CICIR is assigned to provide preparatory and background information for the foreign travel of all the Politburo Standing Committee members. In addition to supplying biographical information on foreign leaders, CICIR provides policy analyses and recommendations. It is the only institute known to provide a daily foreign intelligence brief to the Chinese leadership. It is usually one to two pages in length and contains an analysis of the single most important global event of the day.

Conduct academic research. There is great variation from one institute to another in the amount of time devoted to individual academic research. All civilian foreign policy research institutes engage in academic investigation and writing and strive to hire promising young academics, preferably with PhDs. As noted above, senior institute researchers often maintain affiliations with Chinese universities and are part-time professors. Many younger generation Chinese institute analysts aspire to raise the academic standards of their institutions in the future to reach the quality of their counterparts in the West and other Asian countries.

Provide domestic education. Chinese institute analysts play an important domestic education function. Institute researchers are often invited to give lectures to universities, government work-units and even factory managers throughout China. Topics of lectures include the general international situation, Sino-American relations, Taiwan and cross-strait relations, American foreign policy, Japan, and Asia-Pacific security. One Chinese analyst related that he made an average of three or four trips per month to various Chinese provinces to deliver lectures.¹⁴ Another means of informing the domestic population about developments in international affairs is through newspaper articles and television interviews. These activities usually earn institute analysts extra money and prestige, and thus have become quite popular.

Gather information from foreigners. Interactions with foreigners have become an important source of information for Chinese institutes. Delegation visits by Chinese institute analysts to India in the aftermath of India's nuclear tests were instrumental in providing Chinese policy

14. Author interview with a researcher from China's National Defence University, May 2000.

makers with insights into New Delhi's intentions and threat perceptions.¹⁵ Dialogues between Chinese institute researchers and their North Korean counterparts have served as an important link between Pyongyang and Beijing in periods of downturn in their official bilateral relationship. After Lee Teng-hui announced his "state-to-state" theory, Chinese analysts and officials tested the United States' commitment to Taiwan's defence by querying Americans about possible US reactions to various scenarios of Chinese use of force against Taiwan. Analysts often write reports following visits to the United States to inform Chinese policy makers about their discussions with American officials and think tank experts. The credibility of these reports is enhanced by interviews with senior American policy makers and prominent scholars. Participants in US–China–Taiwan dialogues claim that their reports and policy recommendations were read by Vice-Premier Qian Qichen and have had an impact on critical cross-strait policy decisions.¹⁶

Influence foreign views of China. Interactions with foreigners also provide opportunities for Chinese analysts to influence foreign perspectives on Beijing's policies and to express their objections to other countries' policies, especially those of the United States. Bilateral and international conferences allow Chinese institute researchers to air their concerns about American international behaviour and gain sympathy and support for Beijing's positions. Chinese worries about the strengthening of the US–Japan alliance and the Defence Guidelines have been frequent topics of Chinese presentations at trilateral conferences on US–Japan–China relations. The bilateral US–China Track II conferences on arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation hosted annually since 1998 by the Monterey Institute of International Studies and CIIS have provided a quasi-official forum which Chinese analysts have used to vent their criticism of American policies on theatre and national missile defence and complain about American arms sales to Taiwan.¹⁷

The past few years are replete with examples of efforts by Chinese institute researchers to communicate specific messages to the United States and other governments through contacts with foreign scholars. Prior to the revision of the US–Japan Defence Guidelines, Chinese analysts sought to persuade visiting Japanese and Americans to exclude Taiwan from the Guidelines' area of coverage. In 1999 and 2000 Chinese institute experts warned against the sale of Aegis destroyers to Taiwan. Following the issuance of the Taiwan White Paper in February 2000, the Chinese government worried about American overreaction and Chinese research institute analysts explained to their foreign interlocutors that the threat to resort to force against the island if reunification was postponed indefinitely was merely a reiteration of existing Chinese policy.

15. Author interview with Chinese foreign ministry official, January 1999.

16. Author interviews with Chinese institute experts, May and November 2000.

17. For summaries of the conference discussions, see <http://cns.miis.edu/cns/projects/eanp/research/research.htm>.

Pathways to Policy Influence

The channels a particular analyst or research institute can employ to reach senior leaders and policy makers affect their potential policy influence. Six pathways to policy influence are presented below, in rough order of importance. Influential analysts and research institutes can regularly use the pathways at the top of the list to get their views to policy makers, while other analysts are forced to use unreliable methods such as publication of academic articles. In recent years, the greater willingness of policy makers to solicit advice from experts and the increased openness of the Chinese media have broadened the pathways available to analysts.

Internal reports. Internal (*neibu*) reports are the principal product of Chinese research institutes and the most regular means through which foreign policy analysis reaches senior leaders and policy makers. Internal reports can incorporate classified information and present policy recommendations, and are forwarded to policy makers through official channels.

Small group (xiao zu) policy meetings. Analysts are sometimes invited to attend policy meetings and offer their assessments (either through formal briefings or informal comments). Summary reports of lower-level policy meetings are sometimes forwarded to policy makers or senior leaders and may provide the basis for policy decisions.

Informal consultations with policy makers. Policy makers occasionally solicit opinions and advice on policy issues from research institute analysts. This pathway usually requires either a reputation based on previous written reports or a personal relationship with a policy maker. Analysts with personal connections to a policy maker – or to a policy maker's *mishu* (secretary) – can use these ties to increase their policy influence.

Internal conferences. Chinese think tanks sometimes hold internal conferences that bring together experts on a particular subject to exchange views. The conference reports are then forwarded up the policy chain and sometimes circulate within the policy community.

Appearances in Chinese or Western media. Television appearances or newspaper articles allow an analyst's views to reach senior policy makers directly. Xinhua's daily compilation of foreign news, *Cankao ziliao* (*Reference Material*), regularly includes translations of foreign articles about China. Quotations in an article by an important foreign journalist can place an analyst's words directly on the desks of senior policy makers and analysts the next day.

Academic articles and books. Chinese analysts often publish articles and books on policy-relevant topics. Open (*gongkai*) publications differ from internal reports in that classified information and detailed policy recommendations are usually omitted or deleted before publication. Articles are also vetted for political content, which makes some analysts reluctant to publish their real views in open journals.

Sources of Policy Influence

Policy influence requires both a pathway to reach policy makers and reasons for policy makers to pay attention to an analyst's views. An understanding of potential sources of influence is therefore useful in interpreting the significance of the statements or writings of a particular analyst. Some sources of influence also affect the pathways an analyst can use to reach policy makers. Four types of influence are important: positional influence based on where an analyst works in the bureaucracy; expertise influence based on the analyst's expert knowledge; personal influence based on the analyst's personal connections with policy makers; and experiential influence based on the analyst's career history and personal experience. A brief description of each type of influence coupled with anecdotal examples illustrates each category. Although the categories overlap somewhat, they are still useful analytically.

Positional influence. Some think tanks possess influence because of their institutional position within the Chinese government. (Unlike the United States, almost all Chinese think tanks are government-funded.) Positional influence can be based either on an organizational relationship with particular policy-making bodies or on access to classified information through institutional channels. Classified information is strictly controlled within the Chinese system. CICIR is unique among civilian research institutes in having a special documents room where researchers with a "need to know" can access Party, government and even many PLA documents. CICIR and CIIS analysts regularly read diplomatic cables, presidential letters, reports on summit meetings and other classified materials that university professors and analysts at other civilian think tanks do not.

In the US intelligence system, analysts from the CIA or DIA carry more weight in inter-agency meetings because of their agency's reputation and institutional position in the intelligence community. Some Chinese research institutes have similar weight within the Chinese policy-making process. For example, CICIR plays an analytical role roughly equivalent to the CIA's Directorate of Intelligence. Its size (roughly 300 researchers), access to classified intelligence, reputation and location under the Ministry of State Security mean that CICIR's analytical reports regularly reach the desks of policy makers. Regulations stipulate which research units can use certain channels to submit papers to the leadership. Only specified institutes have the right to send papers to the secretaries of senior leaders, to the Central Committee General Office, and to the

Central Committee Foreign Affairs Office. CICIR is permitted to use all of these access channels. Although reports written by CICIR analysts regularly reach policy makers, their influence depends on the importance and relevance of the topic and whether staff members flag a report for a policy maker's attention. The annual reports produced by many Chinese research institutes each December also illustrate positional influence. The reports are intended to be a definitive assessment of key issues, bilateral relationships and the international situation, but the weight accorded to each report depends on which institute produces them.

A different kind of positional influence flows from being located within the same *xitong* as a policy-making organization. For example, the CIIS and the Institute for International Studies, a smaller analytical unit at the Foreign Affairs College, have an organizational relationship within the foreign ministry system that gives them a degree of access and policy influence. Both are sometimes directly tasked by the foreign ministry to produce reports on particular subjects, which are presumably read by the policy makers who request them. Belonging to the foreign ministry *xitong* also creates the possibility of more direct policy influence. CIIS sometimes sends staff members to serve as diplomats in Chinese embassies overseas. The opportunity to serve in a relatively senior position in the foreign ministry gives these CIIS analysts a direct policy role, along with the opportunity to make personal contacts within the foreign ministry that may yield future influence.

Because positional influence stems from a research institute's formal position within the government, it tends to endure despite fluctuations in personnel. Regular channels to policy makers, access to classified information and institutional relationships make research institutes such as CICIR and CIIS more influential than think tanks that lack these assets. Divisions heads at CICIR and CIIS have opportunities to influence policy regardless of their qualifications. Positional influence can sometimes be negative. Although the CASS Institute of American Studies (*Meiguo yanjiusuo*) houses many of China's best America watchers, on strategic issues it arguably has negative positional influence. Many Chinese regard the Institute's analysts as "eagle huggers" who are too soft on the United States, limiting their influence in policy debates.

Expertise influence. Another kind of influence is based upon expert knowledge, either in a particular region or in a technical subject. Sometimes this expertise is concentrated in particular research institutes (such as the CASS Institute of American Studies. Foreign ministry officials asked senior analysts from the Institute of American Studies for their personal recommendations on whether Premier Zhu Rongji should visit the United States in November 1999 to try to negotiate a final agreement on China's entry into the World Trade Organization. Some think tanks have sponsored conferences in order to boost their reputation within the analytical and policy community. The Institute of American Studies hosted a conference in 2000 in order to help its new arms control programme establish its reputation within China and increase its policy

influence.¹⁸ In other cases expertise belongs to particular individuals, regardless of their location within the hierarchy of research institutes. Li Bin, one of China's top arms control analysts, illustrates how technical expertise can generate policy influence. Originally trained in nuclear physics, Li worked at the Institute for Applied Physics and Computational Mathematics (IAPCM) as the Director of the Arms Control Research Division until 1999. Li is trusted within the Chinese arms control policy community for his technical knowledge and judgement about arms control policy issues. Although he left IAPCM to found his own research institute and subsequently moved to Qinghua University, Li is still consulted regularly by arms control policy makers. Professors Liu Huaqiu and Pan Jusheng of the China Defence Science and Technology Information Centre (*Zhongguo guofang keji xinxi zhongxin*) are other Chinese arms control experts who are influential as a result of their experience and technical expertise.

Personal connections are still important within the Chinese system, but Chinese analysts increasingly build their reputations on merit. A good example of how expertise can yield policy influence is Su Ge, formerly an Associate Dean at the Foreign Affairs College and now a Deputy Director at CIIS. Su earned a doctorate from the University of Utah and wrote an influential book about Sino-US relations. He was selected as the leader of a study group on the American Congress established by Jiang Zemin in 1995, a position that gave him access to China's senior policy makers. Although originally selected based on his knowledge of the United States, the political connections gained from directing the study group have given Su's recent research and policy recommendations on Taiwan increased weight. Su Ge's reputation and personal relationships with senior policy makers suggest that his research will continue to be influential, regardless of his institutional affiliation. In fact, one reason for Su's transfer is the hope that he will reinvigorate CIIS research on the United States and Taiwan and increase its policy influence.

The previous examples have focused on expertise influence exerted within official policy channels. A more open Chinese broadcast media and an increasingly commercialized publishing industry have provided new opportunities for analysts to express their opinions through newspapers, books and television appearances outside the research institute system. Yan Xuetong of Qinghua University is the most prominent example of a Chinese foreign policy pundit. Yan, a former CICIR analyst, is an outspoken commentator on foreign policy and security issues who is regularly quoted in Western and Chinese media. Zhang Zhaozhong, who has published a series of popular books addressing military and security topics, plays a similar role on military issues.¹⁹ Although Zhang

18. See Fan Jishe, "Summary of symposium on the present situation of arms control," *Meiguo yanjiu*, December 2000, pp. 153–55 (translated in "PRC experts convene at arms control symposium, discuss TMD, NMD," FBIS, 22 January 2001).

19. Zhang Zhaozhong, *Zhanzheng li women you duo yuan?* (*How Far is War From Us?*) (Beijing: PLA Press, 1995); *Xia yige mubiao shi shei?* (*Who is the Next Enemy?*) (China Youth Press, 1999); and *Wangluo zhanzheng* (*Net War*) (Beijing: PLA Arts and Literature Press,

is a PLA senior colonel and National Defence University lecturer, his books are not highly regarded by other military experts. Nevertheless, his ability to reach a popular audience via books and television appearances allows him to influence the security debate.

Commercial media outlets tend to reward controversial and nationalistic views that can attract attention and boost sales. Chinese newspapers favour writings critical of the United States because they are popular with the increasingly nationalistic public. Some articles are reprinted in other Chinese newspapers or on web-sites and may become the subject of discussion in Chinese chat rooms. For example, Zhou Jianming, director of the Institute of Asia-Pacific Studies under the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences, penned a controversial article rebuking the Chinese leadership for not being sufficiently tough on the United States after the mid-air collision of a Chinese fighter and an American EP-3 surveillance plane in April 2001. The article was first published in *Huanqiu shibao* (*Global Times*) and was subsequently posted on the internet sites of *Guangzhou ribao* (*Guangzhou Daily*) and *Renmin ribao* (*People's Daily*).²⁰ The accidental bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade in 1999 produced an unprecedented policy debate in key Chinese newspapers, including many contributions by Chinese think tank analysts. The international affairs column in *Huanqiu shibao* carried a lively debate among researchers about the bombing incident as well as the international situation and Chinese foreign policy. The column was widely read and probably had an important influence on public opinion and perhaps on official thinking as well.²¹

Although most academic books and articles are unlikely to reach policy makers, they can sometimes push the boundaries of policy debate, as when Shi Yinhong, a professor at People's University, proposed that China should take the lead in establishing a collective security system in East Asia, even if such a security system would require Beijing to restrict the use of force against Taiwan.²² Shi's article prompted debate and scholarly discussion on a previously taboo subject. Scholarly articles in major journals have the potential to exert indirect influence and help analysts build their reputation. Serious books can sometimes influence policy makers, especially if they are read and praised by a senior leader. Jiang Zemin enjoys reading policy-relevant books, and reportedly

footnote continued

2000). Citations from Evan S. Medeiros, "Undressing the dragon: researching the PLA through open source exploitation," paper presented at the CAPS-RAND conference on "New reforms in the PLA," Washington, DC, 21–24 June 2001.

20. *Huanqiu shibao*, 11 May 2001, "Cherishing illusions about China-US relations will bring harm to both the country and the people," *Guangzhou ribao* (internet), 14 May 2001 in FBIS, 16 May 2001; and "China's state security strategy considered from perspective of US strategic trend," *Renmin ribao* (internet), 17 May 2001 in FBIS, 17 May 2001.

21. The column was entitled "China's countermeasures and choices" (*Zhongguo duice yu xuanze*). See David Finkelstein, *China Reconsiders Its National Security: "The Great Peace and Development Debate of 1999,"* The CNA Corporation, December 2000, n. 2.

22. Shi Yinhong, "Security dilemma and the inevitability for a regional security system in East Asia," *Zhanlue yu guanli* (*Strategy and Management*), No. 4 (2000), pp. 86–92.

acclaimed a book on the history of US policy towards Taiwan written by senior America specialist Su Ge.²³

Personal influence. Personal relationships with policy makers are arguably the most important source of policy influence in the Chinese system and also the hardest to document. The classic example of influence based on a personal relationship is Wang Daohan's relationship with Chinese President Jiang Zemin. Wang was Jiang Zemin's first patron and played an important role in assisting his rise to power.²⁴ For many years, Wang's personal relationship with China's top leader gave his nominally independent organization (ARATS) significant influence on China's Taiwan policy. To some degree, Wang's personal relationship with Jiang probably spilled over to others within ARATS (and by extension to others in Shanghai-based think tanks). A report forwarded to Beijing with Wang Daohan's endorsement carried more weight with policy makers than a report without such an endorsement. Another example is Yang Jiemian, Deputy Director of the Shanghai Institute of International Studies. Yang's brother is Yang Jiechi, formerly the Vice-Foreign Minister in charge of North American, Oceania and Latin American affairs and now China's ambassador to the United States. This personal relationship gives Yang Jiemian direct access to both American and Chinese policy makers, which can also be used strategically to increase the overall influence of his institute. Former Institute of American Studies researcher Hua Di's use of personal connections to advocate a stronger Sino-US strategic relationship in the early 1980s is another example.²⁵

Other kinds of personal relationships can also yield policy influence. The increasing emphasis on educational qualifications (including graduate degrees) for China's future political and military leaders provides new opportunities for personal relations between analysts and policy makers (or between teachers and students) to develop. Attendance at the same schools creates a classmate relationship (*xiaoyou guanxi*) that can connect think tank analysts with policy makers. Think tank analysts often try to maintain these ties as their classmates advance to more senior policy positions over time. Lynn White and Li Cheng have also noted that military officers increasingly have personal relationships based on attendance in the same classes at military schools (*tongban* relationships).²⁶ The student-teacher relationship (*shi-sheng guanxi*) is particularly strong in Chinese culture, and provides some analysts based at universities with

23. Su Ge, *Meiguo dui Hua zhengce yu Taiwan wenti (American China Policy and the Taiwan Issue)* (Beijing: Shijie zhishi chubanshe, 1998).

24. For details on Wang Daohan's relationship with Jiang, see Bruce Gilley, *Tiger on the Brink: Jiang Zemin and China's New Elite* (Berkeley: University of California, 1998).

25. See Lu Ning, *The Dynamics of Foreign-Policy Decisionmaking in China*, pp. 139-143. Hua Di was subsequently arrested during a visit to China for his writings on Chinese missile exports. As of this writing, he remains in jail.

26. See Lynn T. White III and Li Cheng, "The army in the succession to Deng Xiaoping: familiar fealties and technocratic trends," *Asian Survey*, Vol. 33, No. 8 (August 1993), pp. 757-786.

direct access to policy makers who were their former students. As educational credentials become increasingly important within the Chinese system, the policy influence of professors at elite universities is likely to increase (indirectly based on what they teach and directly based on personal ties with former students). Fudan University's role in training Chinese arms control experts is another example. Professors Shen Dingli and Zhu Mingquan now have a number of colleagues and former students working in the arms control field, which potentially gives them policy influence.

Geographic ties can be a source of personal relationships that create policy influence. The political influence of the "Shanghai mafia" (including Jiang Zemin and Zhu Rongji and their closest advisors) is well-documented. But the advancement of senior Shanghai political leaders and policy advisors has also created a path for Shanghai-based think tanks to have national policy influence. Jiang Zemin spent a week in Shanghai meeting local experts on the United States prior to his 1997 summit meeting with President Clinton. Another example is the transfer of former Fudan University professor Zhou Mingwei from a position as Director of the Shanghai Foreign Affairs Office to a vice-ministerial position as deputy director of the State Council's Taiwan Affairs Office. Analysts at Fudan University and Shanghai think tanks expected Zhou's promotion to give them greater access to policy makers in Beijing and increase their ability to influence China's Taiwan policy.²⁷ Of course, military analysts also expect that the appointment of General Wang Zaixi as the other deputy director of the Taiwan Affairs Office will give them more access and policy influence.²⁸

Experiential influence. Study abroad, living abroad, or contacts and information gained from foreign travel can also be a source of potential policy influence. As the Chinese foreign policy system becomes more professionalized, university degrees, foreign travel or study, and personal connections with foreign experts are becoming increasingly important credentials. Think tank analysts who study abroad as visiting fellows or who travel abroad for conferences or training programmes informally convey their conclusions to officials or write reports summarizing their experiences for the senior leaders at their think tanks. Some of these reports receive wider circulation among a policy audience. Travel or study abroad often gives Chinese analysts new perspectives on the countries they visit and the policy issues they analyse, giving their reports more credibility. This is especially true if analysts are able to gain access to senior US policy makers or prominent scholars. Regardless of whether the information gained from interviews is useful (or even accurate), the

27. Since Shanghai-based analysts tend to be more liberal-minded than their Beijing-based counterparts, increased Shanghai policy influence could have a significant impact on Chinese policy towards Taiwan.

28. See Kuang Tung-chou, "PLA takes charge of Taiwan Affairs Department to prepare for military action against Taiwan," in Hong Kong *Singtao jihpao* (*Xingdao ribao*), 20 October 2000, in FBIS, 20 October 2000.

ability to cite authoritative foreign sources adds credibility to the analytical product.

Those Chinese analysts who began their careers in the foreign ministry before switching to positions at research institutes have a different kind of experiential influence. Their diplomatic experience gives their reports more credibility, while their personal connections can ensure that their advice and written reports reach policy makers. There are numerous examples of this phenomenon, notably at CIIS. The fact that many PRC America-watchers have lived or studied in the United States increases the credibility of their analysis of US policy (though it can also cause these analysts to be mistrusted).

Assessing Influence

Despite the sweeping changes affecting the foreign policy research institute system, positional influence remains important. Access to classified information, direct reporting channels to policy makers, and organizational ties to leaders and policy makers give think tanks such as CICIR and CIIS regular opportunities to influence policy. At the same time, the Chinese foreign policy system is much more open than in the past. Analysts with policy expertise, national reputations or personal connections with policy makers can exercise policy influence even when working outside traditionally influential research institutes. China's more pluralistic and competitive policy environment means that senior leaders and policy makers now receive information and analysis from a range of actors. Some policy makers actively solicit analysis that addresses current policy issues or supports their views. As a result, analysts at Chinese research institutes have more opportunity to influence foreign policy than ever before.

Examining the pathways Chinese analysts can use to reach policy makers and how they rate in terms of the four sources of policy influence discussed above can help evaluate the significance of an individual analyst's writings and assess their relative importance. Some analysts have only indirect pathways and rely on a single source of influence. Others have multiple direct pathways and have several potential sources of policy influence. These analysts are more likely to be able to reach policy makers with their opinions, and to have policy makers pay attention. The information requirements for a proper assessment of potential influence can be high. At the most basic level, it is necessary to know which think tanks are affiliated with which policy organizations.²⁹ More specific biographical or organizational information is also needed to place articles into context and to determine which analysts are influential and which are not. Scholars need to know about personal links between analysts and key policy makers (which might include similar educational experiences, home towns or home provinces, work experiences, or institutional ties). Gathering this kind of information can be labour intensive,

29. See David Shambaugh's article in this issue of *The China Quarterly*.

but some parts (educational background, career histories) are relatively easy to acquire. Much of this information is now available on the internet as Chinese universities and think tanks increasingly use web-sites to disseminate their research and seek funding opportunities.³⁰ Interviews can also be useful in learning details of a particular analyst's background and connections with policy makers.

Interactions with analysts in Chinese research institutes can be a useful source of information, but need to be treated with caution. The settings in which Chinese analysts interact with scholars often structure the types of exchanges that are possible and should be considered in evaluating their comments. In general, more formal or higher-level settings (especially when Chinese government officials are present) are more likely to produce efforts to send particular policy messages and are useful for determining the nuances of Chinese policy. Informal or private meetings often give a better sense of what Chinese analysts are really thinking. They are also useful for learning about current policy debates and getting a sense of the range of Chinese views on different issues. In public settings, analysts usually base their comments on their understanding of China's official policies or official statements, but may feel free to offer their own understandings or interpretations. Willingness to deviate from official positions frequently depends on the sensitivity of the issue and whether more senior Chinese officials or experts are present. In these cases, junior analysts will stick more closely to the Party line and express agreement with the views of the seniors rather than offering their own opinions. This sometimes reflects concerns about how dissenting views will be interpreted. Such sensitivity to the setting reflects both a cultural tendency to defer to authority in public settings and a sense of Party discipline that can sometimes be relaxed in private settings.

This article has focused on pathways and sources of influence, but it is important to remember that the context of a policy decision often affects an analyst's potential influence. A key forthcoming bilateral or multilateral meeting can make policy makers more receptive to input from think tank analysts. For example, America specialists used the period before Jiang Zemin's 1997 summit meeting with President Clinton to articulate the potential basis for a constructive strategic partnership with the United States. The desire for a successful summit made Chinese leaders more receptive to these arguments. Conversely, periods of leadership conflict or crisis situations can make analysts reluctant to put controversial analysis forward in a nationalistic policy environment. Many America specialists were cautious in their writings following the embassy bombing to avoid accusations of being too soft on the United States. However, analysts who favoured a tougher line viewed the period following the bombing as an opportunity to push for a firmer Chinese policy. Attention to these contextual factors is important in evaluating the content of

30. For a review of internet sources, see M. Taylor Fravel, "Online and on China: research sources in the information age," *The China Quarterly*, No. 163 (September 2000), pp. 821-842.

writings by Chinese analysts and assessing the potential influence of a particular article.

Conclusion

China's deepening involvement with the outside world in the reform era has increased the need for specialized analysis to guide the formulation of Chinese foreign and national security policy. As Chinese senior leaders and officials grapple with a range of complicated foreign policy issues, they have become more willing to turn to research institutes and universities for assistance. Analysts at research institutes routinely provide information, advice and analysis that helps China's senior leaders and policy makers interpret an increasingly complex external world. A more pragmatic Chinese foreign policy and a more bureaucratic policy-making process have increased the opportunities for research institutes to affect foreign policy. The emergence of a more pluralistic and competitive Chinese policy environment has increased the potential influence of analysts at Chinese international relations think-tanks, but has also created new competition from analysts and authors working outside the traditional research institute system. Understanding the sources of policy influence and the pathways through which influence is exercised is important to help identify which analysts and think tanks are most influential and where their influence is felt within the Chinese system. Some research institutes such as CICIR and CIIS continue to exercise influence through traditional pathways, while analysts at universities and less well-connected think tanks must rely on personal connections and other means to reach policy makers. Study of the evolution of the Chinese foreign policy and national security decision-making process must include an evaluation of the changing role played by Chinese research institutes and analysts. This special section of *The China Quarterly* provides a starting point, but more work remains to be done. Students of Chinese foreign policy should continue to document and classify examples of policy influence in order to improve our understanding of how analysts at research institutes affect Chinese foreign policy.