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## **Domestic Bureaucratic Politics and Chinese Foreign Policy**

***Hongyi Lai, Su-Jeong Kang*** \*

***Abstract:** One of the outstanding features of China's domestic politics is the prominence of the bureaucracy in the policy-making process. Arguably, bureaucracy is the next major player in the policy-making process in China after the top leaders. In this article, three following aspects of the role of bureaucracy in the Chinese foreign policy-making process are examined—1) the structure of the bureaucracy, especially the main agencies of the bureaucracy involved in foreign policy making, 2) the respective responsibilities of these agencies and their roles in the process, and 3) inter-agency coordination including the resolution of conflict among them. It observes that while the Ministry of Foreign Affairs plays a key role in the process, other ministries and bureaucratic agencies have significant and even growing input in an increasing number of functional areas, such as trade, finance, economy, climate change, soft power and military affairs. In addition, coordination among these agencies has become a key in the policy-making process.*

### **Introduction**

One of the outstanding features of China's domestic politics is the prominence of the bureaucracy in the policy making process. Arguably, bureaucracy is the next major player in the policy making

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process in China after the top leaders. Therefore, a good understanding of bureaucracy and the bureaucratic process is indispensable for our good understanding of China's foreign policy making.

In the recent years, a number of studies have emerged to shed light on the issue. Insights they offer include the change in the bureaucratic process and possible roles of some of the major agencies in the 1990s. Against this backdrop, this article offers an up-to-date analysis of the role of bureaucracy in China's foreign policy in the recent decade. This article will start with an overview of the studies on bureaucracy in foreign policy in general and similar studies on China in particular. Useful insights from these studies will be acknowledged. The next main section of the article will be devoted to the bureaucratic structure of the foreign policy making in China, as well as the resolution of conflict among agencies, especially among ministries and commissions. The bureaucratic structure includes the Politburo and its Standing Committee, major leading small groups related to external affairs, as well as major commissions, ministries and offices that participate in foreign policy making. Their functional roles and arbitration of conflict among them will be revealed. The article will conclude with the key findings and observations.

In observing the role of bureaucracy in the policy making process, three aspects are important. The first is the structure of the bureaucracy, especially the main agencies of the bureaucracy involved in foreign policy making. The second is the respective responsibilities of these agencies and their roles in the process. The third is inter-agency coordination including the resolution of conflict among them. All these three aspects are covered in the article. In this article, the term *foreign policy* is synonymous with external policy and it includes mainland China's policies towards Taiwan and Hong Kong. However, the focus of the article is on China's foreign policy beyond Hong Kong and Taiwan.

## **Literature review**

In the study of foreign policy analysis, various models of decision-making exist to illuminate the factors and processes that can shape government action. The bureaucratic politics model that emerged in the 1960s has served as an important contending perspective of foreign policy decision making. It describes foreign policy decisions as a product of the bargaining process among various government agencies with divergent interests. Graham Allison and Morton Halperin pioneered the conceptualization of the model and developed its framework with specific propositions as a way to explain foreign policy behavior.<sup>1</sup> Numerous scholarly works concerning foreign and security policy have employed the bureaucratic politics approach in their analysis and explanation of the policy-

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<sup>1</sup> Graham T. Allison, 'Conceptual Models and the Cuban Missile Crisis', *American Political Science Review* 63(3), (1969), pp.689-718; Graham T. Allison, *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1971); Graham T. Allison and Morton Halperin, 'Bureaucratic Politics: a paradigm and some policy implications', *World Politics* 24, (1972), pp.40-79.

making process.<sup>2</sup> Proponents of the bureaucratic politics model argue that the government comprises a conglomerate of competitive bureaucratic agencies and individuals in positions. From their perspectives, each bureaucratic agency has its own institutional interests and goals, and seeks greater influence, resource, budget and personnel within the government. Thus, individuals define their preferences with reference to their position in the bureaucratic structure. This model assumes that no preponderant individual or organization exists within the decision-making group. Governmental decisions are made by competition, bargaining and compromise amongst the various participants.

Much progress has been made to extend the applicability of the bureaucratic politics approach, developed from the U.S. foreign policy making system, to other national contexts.<sup>3</sup> However, its applicability to the Chinese context was doubted until the late 1980s. Earlier studies of Chinese politics had tended to focus largely on the top elite level, disregarding ‘the complex structure of the state itself as a significant determinant of the political process and policy outcomes’.<sup>4</sup> In the study of Chinese politics, the ‘Mao-in-command’ approach was predominant in the 1950s and early 1960s. In the late 1960s and 1970s, factional politics model was prevalent, looking at policy disputes and power struggle among factional members within the leadership.<sup>5</sup>

The policy-making process had become less personalized and more institutionalized in the course of the 1980s reform.<sup>6</sup> By the late 1980s, China experts began to extend their study beyond the top political elite and adopt a bureaucratic politics approach.<sup>7</sup> Their studies suggested that, despite the informal dynamics of the regime, Chinese policy-making is not totally controlled by the top leaders, but it is full of competition among various bureaucratic agencies and organizations. However, compared to the studies of China’s domestic policy-making, less attention had been paid to the structure and process of foreign policy-making in China because of the lack of source materials and extreme secretiveness surrounding this process. Through interviews with Chinese senior officials,

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<sup>2</sup> For example, Morton H. Halperin and Arnold Kanter, eds., *Readings in American Foreign Policy: A Bureaucratic Perspective* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1973); David C. Kozak and James M. Keagle, eds., *Bureaucratic Politics and National Security: Theory and Practice* (Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner, 1988); Daniel W. Drezner, ‘Ideas, Bureaucratic Politics, and the Crafting of Foreign Policy’, *American Journal of Political Science* 44(4), (2000), pp.733-49; Kevin P. Marsh, ‘The Intersection of War and Politics: the Iraq war troop surge and bureaucratic politics’, *Armed Forces & Society* 38(3), (2012), pp.413-37.

<sup>3</sup> For instances, see Kim Richard Nossal, ‘Allison Through the (Ottawa) Looking Glass: bureaucratic politics and foreign policy in a parliamentary system’, *Canadian Public Administration* 22, (1979), pp.610–626; Jeffrey Checkel, ‘Structure, Institutions, and Process: Russia’s changing foreign policy’, in *The Making of Foreign Policy in Russia and the New States of Europe*, ed. Adeed Dawisha and Karen Dawisha (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe); Takao Sebata, *Japan’s Defense Policy and Bureaucratic Politics, 1976-2007* (Lanham, MD.: University Press of America, 2010).

<sup>4</sup> The failure to incorporate the bureaucratic political approach in the earlier studies of Chinese policy-making is well summarized by Lieberthal and Oksenberg. See, Kenneth Lieberthal and Michel Oksenberg, *Policy Making in China: Leaders, Structures, and Processes* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1988), pp.3-34.

<sup>5</sup> For instance, Andrew J. Nathan, ‘A Factionalism Model for CCP Politics’, *The China Quarterly* 53, (1973), pp.34-66.

<sup>6</sup> Carol Lee Hamrin and Suisheng Zhao, *Decision-Making in Deng’s China: Perspectives from Insiders* (Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharp, 1995).

<sup>7</sup> Lieberthal and Oksenberg, *Policy Making in China*; Kenneth Lieberthal and David M. Lampton, *Bureaucracy, Politics, and Decision Making in Post-Mao China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992).

Doak Barret made a first important contribution to a description of the relationships between various components involved in the foreign policy-making process.<sup>8</sup> He found that the rapid expansion of China's foreign relations encouraged the involvement of more bureaucracies and experts in the processes of foreign policy making and implementation.

Since the late 1990s, some scholars have shed light on changes in the Chinese foreign policy-making process. According to Lampton, major changes of China's foreign and security policy making since 1978 are characterized by the deepening of professionalization, corporate pluralization, decentralization and globalization.<sup>9</sup> As Shambaugh pointed out, the demise of dominant leaders such as Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping and the emergence of a more collectivized decision-making process allowed national institutions and bureaucracies to take a greater role in foreign policy making than the earlier years.<sup>10</sup> Through a survey of informal and formal mechanisms of central decision making, Ning Lu showed that foreign decision making in the reform era was much less personalized and more consensus-based than the Maoist era.<sup>11</sup> He claims that Chinese foreign policies are often an output of coordination and compromises among the top leadership and various governmental agencies. According to his argument, though the room that the top leadership allows bureaucratic debate is much narrower in foreign policy decision-making than in other areas of less vital concerns, the role of the foreign affairs bureaucracies has become prominent in decisions of secondary importance and of a tactical nature.<sup>12</sup>

It has been noted in recent works on China's foreign policy making that the aforementioned developments have continued and intensified under Hu Jintao's leadership. Lai observed that the external policy making under Hu has become diversified and pluralistic, involving a multitude of players and an increasingly diffuse process.<sup>13</sup> Specifically, in addition to traditional players such as the core leader, the Politburo and its Standing Committee, leading small groups (LSGs) and the Central Military Commission (CMC), other institutions and players such as national ministries and departments, advisors and think tanks have been exerting an increasingly important influence.<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, non-traditional players, such as public opinion, popular nationalism, media, and local

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<sup>8</sup> Doak Barnett, *The Making of Foreign Policy in China: Structure and Process* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1985), pp.2-4.

<sup>9</sup> David M. Lampton, 'China's Foreign and National Security Policy-making Process: is it changing and does it matter?', in *The Making of Chinese Foreign and Security Policy in the Era of Reform, 1978-2000*, ed. David M. Lampton (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press), pp.1-38.

<sup>10</sup> David Shambaugh, 'The Dynamics of Elite Politics during the Jiang Era', *The China Journal* 45, (2001), pp.101-11.

<sup>11</sup> Ning Lu, *The Dynamics of Foreign-Policy Decision-making in China* (Boulder, Colorado.: Westview Press, 1997).

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p.179.

<sup>13</sup> Hongyi Lai, *The Domestic Sources of China's Foreign Policy: Regimes, Leadership, Priorities and Process*. (New York, NY: Routledge, 2010), pp.134-155.

<sup>14</sup> Linda Jakobson and Dean Knox, 'New Foreign Policy Actors in China', *Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) Policy Paper* 26, (2010).

governmental entities, have also found a greater voice in the foreign policy making process in the recent years.<sup>15</sup>

As various bureaucratic agencies compete for power and influence in foreign affairs, communication, coordination and negotiation among them have become essential. In such developments, one of the key changes was the expansion of the role of LSGs as inter-agency coordinating bodies on key policy issues.<sup>16</sup> According to Cabestan, China's global rise and growing involvement in world affairs have led to the increasing complexity of its international interests, which has intensified the need to better coordinate conflicting interests of various party and state organs involved in foreign and security policy.<sup>17</sup> As noted by many observers, though this need has been partly addressed by the growing role and number of specialized LSGs, much remains to be done for effective inter-agency coordination.<sup>18</sup>

The military is and should thus be treated as part of the Chinese bureaucracy, a special part. As You Ji's article will examine the role of the military, this issue will be reviewed only briefly in this article.<sup>19</sup> Some of the recent examinations on a 'more assertive' China highlight the allegedly growing role of the military in the foreign policy process and even regard it as 'the main force behind a range of more assertive and/or confrontational actions taken by the Chinese government in recent years'.<sup>20</sup> However, according to Michael Swaine's recent work, while the military does not dictate defense policies nor wield decisive influence over fundamental aspects of foreign policy, senior military officials generally interact with civilian leaders in a collaborative and consultant manner.<sup>21</sup> He finds that the CMC and relevant LSGs provide regularized institutional channels between the senior military leadership and senior civilian officials with authority over foreign policy. Those entities carry out primarily advisory, coordinating, and consensus-building functions in handling major national policy issues.

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<sup>15</sup> For a recent elaboration on these players, refer to James Reilly, 'The Role of Public Opinion in Chinese Foreign Policy', *Journal of Contemporary China* 23(86), (2014); Jianwei Wang, 'Chinese Media and Foreign Policy', *Journal of Contemporary China* 23(86), (2014); Mingjiang Li, 'Local Liberalism: China's Provincial Approach to Relations with Southeast Asia', *Journal of Contemporary China* 23(86), (2014). For a discussion on the rising role of nationalism in China's foreign policy in the recent years, refer to Suisheng Zhao, "Foreign Policy Implication of Chinese Nationalism Revisited: the Strident Turn," *Journal of Contemporary China* 22 (82), (2013), pp.1-19.

<sup>16</sup> Evan S. Medeiros and M. Taylor Fravel, 'China's New Diplomacy', *Foreign Affairs* 82(6), (2003), pp.22-35.

<sup>17</sup> Jean-Pierre Cabestan, 'China's Foreign-and Security-policy Decision-making Processes under Hu Jintao', *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs* 38(3), (2009), pp.63-97.

<sup>18</sup> Margaret M. Pearson, 'Domestic Institutional Constraints on China's Leadership in East Asian Economic Cooperation Mechanisms', *Journal of Contemporary China* 19(66), (2010), pp.621-33.

<sup>19</sup> You Ji, 'The PLA and Diplomacy: Unraveling Some Myths about Civil-Military Interaction in Chinese Foreign Policy-Making', *Journal of Contemporary China* 23(86), (2014)

<sup>20</sup> Robert S. Ross, 'China's Naval Nationalism: Sources, Prospects, and the U.S. Response', *International Security* 34(2), (2009), pp.46-81.

<sup>21</sup> Michael Swaine, 'China's Assertive Behavior—Part Three: the role of the military in foreign policy', *China Leadership Monitor* 36, (2012).

## **Bureaucratic structure of foreign policy making**

The aforementioned literatures examine the role of bureaucracy in China's foreign policy making. In a way they suggest the relevance of bureaucratic politics in the policy process in China. In particular, they suggest that the following agencies play a larger role than before in the process— the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the LSGs of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Despite their virtues, there are obvious limits. Most of these studies, especially detailed and comprehensive analyses of bureaucratic structure and process, tend to be published a decade ago, and many changes have taken place in the bureaucratic politics in China. Furthermore, there remains the need for a better understanding of bureaucratic operational process, as the existing literature offers scattering insights, not a clear view. Importantly, a good analysis is needed on how inter-agency conflict is resolved. In the following section, we will analyze the bureaucratic structure of China's foreign policy making in the recent decade. Nevertheless, we also gather insights from existing studies and incorporate findings from our recent interviews.

### *Politburo and its Standing Committee*

The Politburo and its Standing Committee are the chief political decision-making bodies in China. The Politburo headed by the Party's general secretary is at the top of the CCP's political structure. The number of seats in the Politburo and its Standing Committee are not formally established in the CCP Constitution, and their size and membership vary with each Party Congress. Since the 18th Party Congress in November 2012, the Politburo has had twenty five members, seven of which were appointed to its Standing Committee.<sup>22</sup> Because the Politburo is too large and diverse to hold regular frequent meetings to approve every major foreign or security-policy decision, the full body is involved in decision-making only 'when considering major policy shifts, dealing with crisis situations or seeking to achieve a higher level of legitimization for a particular policy direction'.<sup>23</sup> However, some analysts maintain that the Politburo appears to participate in a broader scope of decision-making criteria under the increasingly collective leadership.<sup>24</sup> The current official members of the Politburo and their duties are listed in Table 1 and 2.

Currently comprising the Party's top seven officials, the Politburo Standing Committee (PSC) of the CCP Central Committee is China's ultimate decision-making body. It reportedly meets every seven to ten days for efficient decision making on major policy issues while its agenda and

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<sup>22</sup> Alice L. Miller, 'The New Party Politburo Leadership', *China Leadership Monitor* 40, (2013).

<sup>23</sup> Michael F. Martin, 'Understanding China's Political System', *CRS Report for Congress*, (14 April 2010).

<sup>24</sup> Remarks by Jing Huang at the Brookings Institution, 'China's 17th Party Congress: looking ahead to Hu Jintao's 2<sup>nd</sup> term', (30 October 2007).

deliberations are not made public.<sup>25</sup> This body operates through a process of collective decision-making based on informed deliberation and consensus. The PSC gives the final approval to key foreign and security policy decisions based on proposals from the relevant agencies such as LSGs and the CMC.<sup>26</sup> It is also responsible for the supervision and coordination of all major policy decisions. The PSC incorporates the heads of the major hierarchies in the political order. As listed in Table 1, the PSC members' associated posts and policy responsibilities reveal that the seven members preside over all major policy sectors including party apparatus, finance, economy, legislature, administration, propaganda, united front, military and foreign affairs. Each member represents his respective policy sector in PSC deliberations. PSC members also lead the Party's Central Committee LSGs for their policy areas and supervise the implementation of the PSC's decisions among the relevant institutions.

Table 1. Official Members of the Politburo Standing Committee of the 18<sup>th</sup> CCP Central Committee (listed by rank order)

Name	Current Posts	Duties / Policy Work
Xi Jinping	PRC President, CCP General Secretary, Chairmen of CMC	Party apparatus; foreign affairs; military affairs
Li Keqiang	Premier of the State Council	Government administration; Finance and economy
Zhang Dejiang	Chairman of the National People's Congress Standing Committee	Legislative affairs
Yu Zhengsheng	Chairman of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference	United front affairs
Liu Yunshan	Executive Secretary of the CCP Central Committee Secretariat; CCP's Propaganda Chief; Chairman of the CCP Central Guidance Commission for Building Spiritual Civilization	Ideology and propaganda affairs; and media and information censorship
Wang Qishan	Secretary of the CCP Central Commission for Discipline Inspection	Party discipline and anti-corruption
Zhang Gaoli	Executive Vice Premier of the State Council	Finance and economy

Sources: 'List of members of Standing Committee of Political Bureau of 18th CCP Central Committee', *Xinhua*, (15 November 2012), available at: [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/special/18cpcnc/2012-11/15/c\\_131976451.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/special/18cpcnc/2012-11/15/c_131976451.htm) (accessed 6 May 2013); 'Xinhua Insight: China's new helmsmen', *Xinhua* (15 November 2012), available at: [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/special/18cpcnc/2012-11/15/c\\_131977176.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/special/18cpcnc/2012-11/15/c_131977176.htm) (accessed 6 May 2013); China Vitae ([www.chinavitae.com](http://www.chinavitae.com)).

<sup>25</sup> Jakobson and Knox, 'New Foreign Policy Actors in China', p.4.

<sup>26</sup> Alice L. Miller, 'The Politburo Standing Committee under Hu Jintao', *China Leadership Monitor* 35, (2011), pp.2-4.

Table 2. Other members of the Politburo of the 18<sup>th</sup> CCP Central Committee

Name	Current Posts
Li Yuanchao	Vice President; Head of the Hong Kong and Macao Affairs Coordinating Group
Meng Jianzhu	Secretary, CCP Political and Legislative Affairs Committee
Zhao Leji	Secretary, CCP Central Committee Secretariat; Director, CCP Central Committee Organization Department
Liu Qibao	Secretary, CCP Central Committee Secretariat; Director, CCP Central Committee Propaganda Department
Li Jianguo	Vice Chairman, the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress
Li Zhanshu	Secretary, CCP Central Committee Secretariat; Director, CCP General Office
Liu Yandong	Vice Premier (may take charge of agriculture, forestry, and irrigation)
Wang Yang	Vice Premier (may take charge of industry, telecommunications, energy and transport)
Ma Kai	Vice Premier (may take charge of finance and commerce)
Wang Huning	State Councilor (may take charge of science, technology, education, culture, and health)
Guo Jinlong	Secretary, Beijing Municipal Party Committee
Sun Chunlan	Secretary, Tianjin Municipal Party Committee
Han Zheng	Secretary, Shanghai Municipal Party Committee
Sun Zhengcai	Secretary, Chongqing Municipal Party Committee
Hu Chunhua	Secretary, Guangdong Provincial Party Committee
Zhang Chunxian	Secretary, Xinjiang Provincial Party Committee
Xu Qiliang	Vice Chairman of CMC
Fan Changlong	Vice Chairman of CMC

Sources: 'List of Political Bureau members of 18th CCP Central Committee,' *Xinhua*, (15 November 2012), available at: [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/special/18cpcnc/2012-11/15/c\\_131976432.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/special/18cpcnc/2012-11/15/c_131976432.htm) (accessed 6 May 2013); 'Latest division of labor among the members of the Standing Committee of the Politburo and among members of the Politburo', *Dawei News*, (19 November 2012), available at: <http://forum.dwnews.com/threadshow.php?tid=1009302> (accessed 20 November 2012); China Vitae ([www.chinavitae.com](http://www.chinavitae.com)).

The Chinese leadership has undergone transition during late 2012 and early 2013. Two top leaders, namely, President Hu Jintao and Premier Wen Jiabao, handed over their posts to Xi Jinping and Li Keqiang, respectively, at the 12th National People's Congress in March 2013. Importantly, Xi Jinping assumed the chairmanship of the Central Military Commission in November 2012, a post viewed by some as the most powerful in China.<sup>27</sup> He has been seen as behind a number of China's major external moves, including the recent assertive moves by the Chinese air force to approach the air space of the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands over which Japan has de facto control but which China views as its own territory.

<sup>27</sup> 'Xi Jinping named Chairman of CCP Central Military Commission,' *Xinhua*, (15 November 2012).



### *CCP Central Committee's LGSs*

The CCP Central Committee's LSGs are interagency bodies created to facilitate consensus-building and coordinate policy-making among the relevant Party, government, and military agencies.<sup>28</sup> The LSGs deliberate major policy-decisions and submit their proposals to the Politburo or its Standing Committee for approval.<sup>29</sup> They also facilitate cross-agency coordination in implementation of PSC decisions. Although their full memberships, agenda, deliberations are not publicized, the LSGs are reportedly headed by PSC members and consist of high-level officials from the party, the government, and the military.<sup>30</sup> These coordination working groups allow various ministries and departments to focus their efforts and resources on issues or projects that the central leadership feels are important.

The Central (National) Foreign Affairs Leading Small Group (CFALSG) is the key coordinating agency in foreign policy making. This LSG is currently headed by Party General Secretary and President Xi Jinping. The role of this group is to deliberate the critical foreign policy decisions and make recommendations to the PSC for ratification. In addition to the CFALSG, the Central Finance and Economy Leading Small Group also deliberates on decisions affecting foreign policy. In particular, it plays the primary role in leading interagency coordination on matters of foreign trade and economic relations—an increasingly important dimension of China's external relations. Premier Li Keqiang heads this LSG and Executive Vice Premier Zhang Gaoli serves as his deputy. Moreover, two other LSGs can be classified as handling foreign affairs as understood in the West, though they are considered internal affairs in China. One is the Central Taiwan Affair Leading Small Group, headed by the president; the other is the Central Hong Kong and Macao Affairs Coordinating Group, headed by the vice president.

### *Ministries, departments, and agencies of the Government and the Party*

Various ministries, departments and agencies participate in the formation and implementation of foreign policy. Among them, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) remains the most influential institutional player in foreign affairs at the ministerial level or equivalent. It primarily implements foreign policies that have been approved by the PSC.<sup>31</sup> One of its major roles is to issue policy clearance to ministerial-level bureaucracies by translating broad foreign policy guidelines into

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<sup>28</sup> Minxin Pei, 'Inside the Black Box: a guide to policymaking in China', *Macquarie Equities Research*, (17 May 2011). For a discussion of the history of the Party's Central Leading Small Groups and their current role, see Alice L. Miller, 'The CCP Central Committee's Leading Small Groups', *China Leadership Monitor* 26, (2008).

<sup>29</sup> Lai, *The Domestic Sources of China's Foreign Policy*, pp138-143.

<sup>30</sup> Miller, 'The CCP Central Committee's Leading Small Groups'.

<sup>31</sup> 'Main responsibilities of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the PRC', Official website of the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, available at: <http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/wjb/zyzz/t558670.htm> (accessed 6 May 2013).

practical implementation plans.<sup>32</sup> It also supervises a wide range of issues and areas related to foreign affairs, including China's relations with major powers and most other countries of the world (with perhaps the exception of North Korea and Cuba, where the CCP International Department plays a key role). This ministry has seven regional divisions handling regional and bilateral relations and a number of specialist departments for various aspects of foreign affairs: boundary and ocean affairs, international organizations and conferences, international arms control, bilateral and multilateral treaties, consular work, foreign-related protocol and ceremonial affairs, external security affairs, and Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan affairs, etc.<sup>33</sup> In addition, while crucial decisions affecting China's relations with major powers or important countries in the region are made at a much higher level, the MFA enjoys more leeway in determining policies over minor states within the overall foreign policy guidelines.<sup>34</sup> The influence of MFA is buttressed with its considerable resources and broad responsibilities. However, China's expanding international role amid increasingly complex global issues has led the MFA to rely on other agencies for expertise and eventually competing with them for influence.<sup>35</sup>

Since the CCP shifted its top priority to economic growth with the Reform and Opening Up policies of 1978 and eased concerns over potential war against the Cold War superpowers, it has paid greater attention to economic issues in foreign policy. Concerning the economic issues, at least four other government agencies have expanded their roles and powers in foreign affairs: the Ministry of Commerce, the National Development and Reform Commission, the People's Bank of China, and the Ministry of Finance.

The Ministry of Commerce (MOFCOM) is a key player in foreign economic policy, including policies regarding foreign trade and international economic cooperation.<sup>36</sup> It formulates multilateral (including regional and free trade area) and bilateral trade and economic cooperation strategies and policies.<sup>37</sup> This ministry is also responsible for multilateral and bilateral negotiations on trade and economic issues. It coordinates domestic positions in negotiating with foreign parties, signs the relevant treaties and agreements, and monitors their implementation. For example, its predecessor, the Ministry of Foreign Trade and Economic Cooperation (MOFTEC) was the ministry directly responsible for the negotiation of China's accession to the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the WTO entry was one of China's most far-reaching foreign policies since the 1990s. Another main task of the MOFCOM is to promote and regulate foreign direct investment in China. This ministry guides

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<sup>32</sup> Ning Lu, 'The Central Leadership, Supraministry Coordinating Bodies, State Council Ministries, and Party Departments', in *The Making of Chinese Foreign and Security Policy in the Era of Reform*, pp.39-60.

<sup>33</sup> 'Departments', Official website of the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, available at: <http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/wjb/zzjg/> (accessed 6 May 2013).

<sup>34</sup> Jakobson and Knox, 'New Foreign Policy Actors in China', pp.8-10.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Interview with an official well-informed on foreign policy making in China in 2012.

<sup>37</sup> 'Mission', Official website of the Chinese Ministry of Commerce, available at: <http://english.mofcom.gov.cn/column/mission2010.shtml> (accessed 6 May 2013).

foreign investment promotion activities, examines and approves the establishment and changes of foreign-invested enterprises, and supervises their activities. The MOFCOM also regulates the overseas activities and projects carried out by Chinese companies. In addition, this body oversees China's foreign aid and international assistance. In the recent years, China's foreign aid has become one of the foremost tools for the improvement of its relations with African, Latin American and Southeast Asian countries.<sup>38</sup>

The National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC) is a macroeconomic management agency under the State Council. Its main task is to study, formulate and implement strategies and plans for promoting the sustained, rapid and sound development of the national economy.<sup>39</sup> This body oversees large economic projects with an international dimension. They can be projects of foreign investment as well as projects of China's outward investment.<sup>40</sup> It also takes on responsibility for formulating plans to develop the energy sector and securing Chinese access to critical resources, such as oil and natural gas.<sup>41</sup> The NDRC's National Energy Administration manages the country's energy industries, drafting energy plans and policies, negotiating with international energy agencies, and approving foreign energy investments.<sup>42</sup> Furthermore, the NDRC also exercises its authority over China's climate change policy. This body acts as a coordinator of China's climate change activities, and holds the lead position in relevant international negotiations.<sup>43</sup>

The People's Bank of China (PBC), China's central bank, is responsible for managing China's exchange rate and foreign reserve.<sup>44</sup> With the RMB appreciation being one of the consistently sought objectives by the Western countries especially the U.S., the significance of the PBC has thus increased in the recent decade. The Ministry of Finance has a say in other government agencies' international projects financed by the central government because it administers the national budget including revenues and expenditures.<sup>45</sup> It also handles tariff policy which may affect international trade.

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<sup>38</sup> 'China's Foreign Aid', *Xinhua Net*, (21 April 2011), available at: [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english2010/china/2011-04/21/c\\_13839683\\_10.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english2010/china/2011-04/21/c_13839683_10.htm) (accessed 6 May 2013); Sara Lengauer, 'China's Foreign Aid Policy: motive and method', *Culture Mandala: Bulletin of the Centre for East-West Cultural & Economic Studies* 9(2), (2011), pp.35-81; interviews with Chinese who were well-informed about the bureaucracy in foreign policy making in China in 2012.

<sup>39</sup> 'Brief introduction of the NDRC', Official website of the NDRC, available at: <http://en.ndrc.gov.cn/brief/default.htm> (accessed 6 May 2013).

<sup>40</sup> Interview with a business executive with considerable contact with the foreign policy making circles in China in 2012.

<sup>41</sup> Bo Kong, 'China's Energy Decision-Making: Becoming More Like the United States?', *Journal of Contemporary China* 18(62), (2009), pp.789-812.

<sup>42</sup> Erica S. Downs, 'China's "New" Energy Administration', *China Business Review*, (November–December, 2008), pp.42–45.

<sup>43</sup> Ksenia Chmutina, 'China and Climate Change: the role of policy making in climate change mitigation', *CPI Briefing Series* 64, (2010).

<sup>44</sup> 'Major functions', Official website of the People's Bank of China, available at: <http://www.pbc.gov.cn/publish/english/952/index.html> (accessed 6 May 2013).

<sup>45</sup> 'Main functions of the Ministry of Finance of the PRC', Official website of the Chinese Ministry of Finance, available at: <http://www.mof.gov.cn/zhengwuxinxi/benbugaikuang/> (accessed 6 May 2013).

The Ministries of Public Security and State Security have been increasingly involved in addressing international security issues. The ministers of both ministries serve as members of the CFALSG. The Ministry of Public Security, presumably, may take charge of international issues related to public security.<sup>46</sup> The most notable issues include human trafficking, international drug trade and international crimes. It is said to be a key player in China's relations with Myanmar, especially over the border area. The Ministry of State Security takes charge of espionage and counter-espionage, as well as collection and processing of sensitive information related to national security and political matters (such as possible threats to the Party regime).<sup>47</sup>

Two other bodies associated with the CCP Central Committee perform a number of foreign policy roles outside the channels of formal state-to-state diplomatic relations.<sup>48</sup> The Party's International Department, formerly the Department of International Liaison (DIL), manages China's relations with communist countries, chiefly North Korea and Cuba.<sup>49</sup> In recent years, its director, Wang Jiarui, has played a prominent role in leading China's diplomatic contacts with the North Korean government.<sup>50</sup> It also manages the CCP's ties with major political parties around the world.<sup>51</sup> The Party's United Front Work Department (UFWD) handles relations with civic groups or mass organizations outside the Communist Party.<sup>52</sup> This agency operates in Hong Kong, Taiwan, and overseas Chinese communities to glean information of intelligence value and woo influential individuals or civic groups to support the goals of the CCP.<sup>53</sup>

In the recent decade, China's policy makers have given greater attention to the country's soft power and national image. They are conscious of the impact of China's rise on its global image. This renders ministries and departments directly involved in China's soft power initiatives greater importance. Over China's soft power and cultural diplomacy, a number of ministries and departments play an important role.<sup>54</sup> They include the Party's Publicity Department, the Xinhua News Agency,

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<sup>46</sup> Official website of the Chinese Ministry of Public Security, available at: <http://www.mps.gov.cn/n16/index.html> (accessed 6 May 2013).

<sup>47</sup> Peter Mattis, 'Assessing the Foreign Policy Influence of the Ministry of State Security', *China Brief*, 11(1), (2011), pp.5-8.

<sup>48</sup> For more information on the Party's Central Committee's departments, see Alice L. Miller, 'The Central Committee Departments under Hu Jintao', *China Leadership Monitor* 27, (2009).

<sup>49</sup> David Shambaugh, 'China's "Quiet Diplomacy": The international department of the Chinese Communist Party', *China: An International Journal*, 5(1), (2007).

<sup>50</sup> Bonnie S. Glaser and Scott Snyder, 'Wang Jiarui's New Year's Visit to Pyongyang and China's New Approach to North Korea', *China Brief*, 9(4), (2009).

<sup>51</sup> 'Functional features', Official website of the International Department of the CCP Central Committee, available at: <http://www.idcpc.org.cn/english/profile/features.htm> (accessed 6 May 2013).

<sup>52</sup> Kenneth Lieberthal, *Governing China: From Revolution through Reform* (New York, NY: WW Norton & Company, 2004), p.216.

<sup>53</sup> For discussion of CCP United Work activity in Hong Kong and Taiwan, see Cindy Yik-Yi Chu, 'The Long History of United Front Activity in Hong Kong', *Hong Kong Journal*, (July 2011), available at: [http://www.hkjournal.org/archive/2011\\_fall/5.htm](http://www.hkjournal.org/archive/2011_fall/5.htm) (accessed 6 May 2013); John Dotson, 'Retired Taiwan Officer Exchanges Offer Insight into a Modern "United Front"', *China Brief* 11(19), (2011).

<sup>54</sup> Interview with an official well-informed on the foreign policy making in China in 2012.

China Central Television (CCTV), the Ministry of Culture, the Ministry of Education, and the National Office for Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language (*hanban*).

The CCP Central Committee's Publicity Department (DOP), formerly known as the Propaganda Department, is responsible for overseeing domestic media and guiding public opinion through censorship and propaganda.<sup>55</sup> It manages the public presentation of the Party's message in the media and other relevant channels.<sup>56</sup> To promote a positive image of China to the world, the DOP also sets the key policies regarding China's international media. Within the DOP's guidelines, Xinhua News Agency and CCTV have become main players in publicizing and clarifying Chinese policies to the outside world.

The Ministry of Culture plays a key role in the cultural exchanges with other countries and increasingly guides the exports of China's cultural goods (including movies, music, books, and periodicals). Its Bureau for External Cultural Relations is in charge of foreign affairs in cultural work. It administrates overseas cultural work by making policies and regulations on international cultural exchanges, by signing and implementing cultural cooperation agreements with foreign countries on behalf of the state, and by instructing the work of cultural department under Chinese embassies and in Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan.<sup>57</sup>

The Ministry of Education (MOE) supervises the policies regarding Chinese students studying overseas and scholarly exchanges. Hanban, an institution affiliated with the MOE, is in charge of design, supervision and management of the Confucius Institute project, one of the most prominent initiatives for China's cultivation of soft power.<sup>58</sup> The mission of this agency as the Confucian Institute headquarters is to promote Chinese language and culture internationally. It supports Chinese language and cultural programs at educational institutions in other countries and provides relevant teaching resources, personnel and services worldwide.<sup>59</sup>

### *People's Liberation Army*

The military (People's Liberation Army, or PLA) has been a player in China's foreign policy-making process. However, it has lost its seat on the PSC and officially does not have a direct voice in Chinese foreign policy. Despite the distancing of military leaders from civilian decision-making process, the military still holds sway over some external policies, particularly when external affairs involve

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<sup>55</sup> 'Main functions of the CCP Central Committee's Publicity Department', *News of the CCP*, available at: <http://cpc.people.com.cn/GB/64114/75332/5230610.html> (accessed 6 May 2013).

<sup>56</sup> Miller, 'The Central Committee Departments under Hu Jintao'.

<sup>57</sup> 'About the Ministry of Culture', Official website of the Chinese Ministry of Culture, available at: [http://www.ccnt.gov.cn/english/Introduction/200904/t20090428\\_62706.html](http://www.ccnt.gov.cn/english/Introduction/200904/t20090428_62706.html) (accessed 6 May 2013).

<sup>58</sup> Alan H. Yang and Michael Hsiao, 'Confucius Institutes and the Question of China's Soft Power Diplomacy', *China Brief* 12(13), (2012), pp.10-13.

<sup>59</sup> 'Functions of Hanban', Official website of Hanban, available at: [http://english.hanban.org/node\\_7719.htm](http://english.hanban.org/node_7719.htm) (accessed 6 May 2013).

national security and sovereignty issues. In the recent decades, several defense-related foreign policy issues have probably frequently involved the PLA. One is about arms control and non-proliferation. Another is Asian security issues such as security threats from China's neighboring countries and regions including North Korea, Japan, India, Pakistan, Central Asia, and the East and South China Seas. The third is an issue concerning the recent years' territorial disputes over the Spratly Islands in the South China Sea and the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands in the East China Sea.

The military has its own channel of conveying its opinion before a foreign policy is formulated. The top level of the institutional channel for the military is the Central Military Commission (CMC). The CMC is the military's supreme decision-making body overseeing defense policy and military strategy.<sup>60</sup> It remains an important channel for military leaders to transmit their views to supreme civilian leaders in charge of foreign policy-making. Xi Jinping currently presides over the meetings of the entire CMC as chairman while representing the interests of the military on the PSC, albeit unofficially. The commission currently consists of 11 members, most of whom are high-ranking generals.<sup>61</sup> The full membership of the CMC is listed on Table 3. The PLA's four general departments are represented on the CMC as leading organs for military, political, logistics and armament affairs of the entire army: the General Staff Department (responsible for military operations, intelligence and professional education); the General Political Department (responsible for political training and military personnel matters); the General Logistics Department (managing military expenditure, supplies, and transportation); and the General Armaments Department (managing the PLA's weapons and equipment needs and overseeing China's manned space program). In addition, the major forces of the military, including the air force, the missiles forces, the navy and supposedly the infantry, are also represented at the CMC.<sup>62</sup> By making its voice heard by the chairman of the CMC, who is concurrently the president and the general secretary of the CCP, the PLA can express its views in the policy-making process. In addition, the PLA also can have a say in foreign policy decision-making processes through its presence in the Foreign Affairs and Taiwan Affairs LSGs.<sup>63</sup> In addition, it is alleged that PLA officers may directly suggest policies to the civilian leadership via internal, non-public channels.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> On the CMC, see Nan Li, 'The Central Military Commission and Military Policy in China', in *The People's Liberation Army as Organization*, ed. James C. Mulvenon and Andrew N. D. Yang (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2002), pp.45-94.

<sup>61</sup> James Mulvenon, 'The New Central Military Commission', *China Leadership Monitor* 40, (2013).

<sup>62</sup> On the PLA's general departments, see Dennis J. Blasko, *The Chinese Army Today: Tradition and Transformation for the 21st Century*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2012), pp.33-35; 'Organizations of the Central Military Commission (CMC)', *China.org.cn*, (20 May 2003), available at: [http://www.china.org.cn/english/features/state\\_structure/64577.htm](http://www.china.org.cn/english/features/state_structure/64577.htm) (accessed 6 May 2013).

<sup>63</sup> Tai Ming Cheung, 'The Influence of the Gun: China's Central Military Commission and its relationship with the military, Party, and state decision-making systems', in *The Making of Chinese Foreign and Security Policy in the Era of Reform*, pp.61-90.

<sup>64</sup> Jakobson and Knox, 'New Foreign Policy Actors in China', p.14.

Table 3. Membership of the Central Military Commission

	Name	Current Posts
Chairman	Xi Jinping (since November 2012)	PRC President, CCP General Secretary
Vice Chairmen	General Fan Changlong (since November 2012)	Politburo member of CCP Central Committee
	Air Force General Xu Qiliang (since November 2012)	Politburo member of CCP Central Committee
Members	General Chang Wanquan (since October 2007)	Minister of National Defense
	General Fang Fenghui (since November 2012)	Chief of the General Staff Department
	General Zhang Yang (since November 2012)	Director of the General Political Department
	General Zhao Keshi (since November 2012)	Director of the General Logistics Department
	General Zhang Youxia (since November 2012)	Director of the General Armament Department
	Admiral Wu Shengli (since October 2007)	Commander of the PLA Navy
	Air Force General Ma Xiaotian (since November 2012)	Commander of the PLA Air Force
	General Wei Fenghe (since November 2012)	Commander of the Second Artillery Corps

Sources: ‘Central Military Commission’, Official website of the Chinese Ministry of National Defense, available at: <http://www.mod.gov.cn/leader/index.htm> (accessed 6 May 2013); ‘List of Chairman, Vice Chairmen, Members of CCP Central Military Commission’, *Xinhua*, (15 November 2012); China Vitae ([www.chinavitae.com](http://www.chinavitae.com))

### Inter-ministerial coordination

Very often a given foreign affair may involve more than one ministry. In such circumstances coordination of these ministries, reconciliation of their different stances, and even resolution of conflict between them become necessary. The procedures and norms of inter-ministerial coordination thus warrant our attention. Here, analyses will be advanced on the basis of interviews with insiders or insightful observers, as well as observation of empirical behavior of these ministries.

Our analysis will center on the role of the MFA versus that of MOFCOM and relate to the respective roles of the president and the premier. It is worth noting the main areas of division of labor and responsibilities among the major agencies in the policy making process, especially between the MFA and other agencies. The MFA is usually the most frequently involved and significant ministry in foreign affairs. When it involves political matters, regional integration, and multilateral ties, the MFA is in charge. When it involves the Free Trade Agreement, bilateral economic ties, and regional economic integration, the MOFCOM is in charge. For example, while the MFA is responsible for the

East Asian Summit (EAS) and the premier attends it, the MOFCOM is responsible for the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) and the president attends it.<sup>65</sup>

The MFA plays a key role in coordinating the overseas visits of the top leaders, especially the president and the premier. On other hand, the MOFCOM would coordinate the meeting and activities of these top leaders if they are matters concerning economy and trade. For example, when the president meets foreign leaders in a foreign country, the MFA will schedule his meetings. The MFA will also be present at the meeting. However, the MOFCOM will be the key agency responsible for arranging his talks on economic and trade issues.

Meanwhile, representation of relevant ministries is allowed and, should a matter affect more than one ministry, other relevant ministries are consulted. For example, if the president's meeting with an international guest concerns both political and economic matters, both the representatives from the MFA and the MOFCOM will attend the meeting. Take another example, when the head of a large multinational corporation (MNC) in China seeks to make a speech in China, the MOFCOM will directly review the draft and approve it. However, it will also submit the draft to MFA for comments and approval as well. Once both agencies approve it, the draft will be filed at the General Office of the State Council (for the premier).<sup>66</sup> In negotiations with other countries, the lead agency will consult the other agency to see whether the deal is acceptable to that ministry. Together, these ministries will negotiate and make the final decision.

In most cases governmental agencies with similar or overlapping jurisdictions are most likely to clash over a given issue in foreign affairs. In cases of the inter-ministerial conflict, administrative ranks of ministries and governmental bodies can determine the outcome of the conflict. Among the agencies of the State Council, for example, the NDRC is the foremost agency. It is even called the mini-State Council as it assumes the informal role of coordinating commissions, ministries and bureaus on behalf of the premier. In one case, a large MNC submitted a major project to the MOFCOM, and the MOFCOM approved it. However, the NDRC insisted that the project needed its approval as well. Although the approval of the NDRC might seem simple and not substantial, the NDRC insisted on it. At the end, the MNC submitted the project to and received approval from the NDRC before it went ahead with the project. On another occasion, the NDRC and the MOFCOM had a major difference over certain paragraphs on foreign investment in the government's annual report to the legislature (namely, the National People's Congress). The MOFCOM had drafted its own text on the subject, but the NDRC insisted that it had the say over the issue and drafted its own version. Both agencies referred the issue to the premier. In delivering the government's report at the legislature, he

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<sup>65</sup> Interview with a Chinese scholar on foreign affairs of China in a recent year.

<sup>66</sup> Interview with a business executive in China in a recent year.



read the NDRC's draft.<sup>67</sup> It thus appears that a ministry's administrative status and clout may be advantageous for its view to be accepted at the policy making process.

When ministries involved in foreign affairs have different stances over the same issue and fail to resolve the issue themselves, they are expected to seek help at the next higher level. The key coordinator over inter-ministerial foreign affairs is the state councilor or the vice premier in charge of foreign affairs. Under Jiang's administration of 1993-1998, the person was Qian Qichen. He was also the vice premier. During the Hu-Wen administration, the person is Dai Bingguo.

The CFALSG serves also as the key coordinating agency. It provides a forum for senior party, government, and military officials to coordinate various bureaucracies related to foreign affairs. Although this group's full membership is not publicized, it apparently consists of representatives from party leadership organs, the government, and the military. The CFALSG shares personnel with the Central National Security Leading Small Group (CNSLSG) while these LSGs exist formally as two separate bodies.<sup>68</sup> Its members reportedly include the state councilor for foreign affairs; the ministers of foreign affairs, commerce, defense, state security, and public security; the heads of the Party's International Department and Publicity Department; leading officials in charge of external propaganda, overseas Chinese, Taiwan policy, and Hong Kong and Macao affairs; and a deputy chief of the PLA's General Staff Department.<sup>69</sup> The bureaucratic agencies of these members are directly represented in the CFALSG's deliberations. However, since this group meets irregularly, major ministries represented in this LSG shoulder the responsibilities of managing specific issues. Very often, they are even granted to gain de facto decision making and managing powers over these issues.<sup>70</sup>

Both Qian and Dai utilized the CFALSG and its office to coordinate foreign affairs across agencies. It is likely that their successor Yang Jiechi will do the same in the coming years. Qian served as the secretary general of the CFALSG during 1991-1993, so did Dai from 2005 till 2012. In addition, Qian served as the deputy head of the LSG between 1993 and 2003. The Office of Central Foreign Affairs (OCFA) was the main agency to administer daily affairs for the CAFLSG, including coordinating foreign affairs involving ministries and agencies and provinces. Through the OCFA the inter-ministerial coordinator can help iron out the differences in the stances among ministries and agency. The OCFA would make suggestions regarding the current international circumstances, coordinate the meetings of the CFALSG, enforce decisions made by the CFALSG, help coordinate foreign affairs, draft regulations on foreign affairs on behalf of the CCP, review key regulations on

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<sup>67</sup> Interview with a business executive with considerable contact with the foreign policy making circles in China in a recent year.

<sup>68</sup> Miller, 'The CCP Central Committee's Leading Small Groups', pp.9-10.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.; 'List of the current membership of the Central Foreign Affairs Leading Small Group (2010)', available at: <http://www.huayingya.com.cn/html/gonggao/21874.html> (accessed 24 November 2012).

<sup>70</sup> Interview with an official analyst well-informed on the foreign policy making in China in 2012.

foreign affairs formulated by CCP departments, ministries and provinces, and handle the requests for instructions on foreign affairs from these organizations.<sup>71</sup>

Political status of individual senior officials and leaders is a critical factor in inter-ministerial coordination. The administrative and Party status of the leader involved in the process matters a great deal. Qian Qichen served as the minister of foreign affairs as well as the vice premier during 1993-1998. Prior to that, he served as the foreign minister for one decade. Due to his high administrative rank and long experience in foreign affairs, he had significant clout in foreign affairs. Qian's two successors, Li Zhaoxing and Yang Jiechi, in comparison, have relatively far less leverage over foreign affairs.<sup>72</sup>

However, the person with the ultimate power over foreign affairs is the president. Hu Jintao had served in this post since March 2003 and handed over the post to Xi in March 2013. The president is usually the head of the CFALSG, the CNSLSG, the chairman of the CMC that commands the military, as well as the general secretary of the CCP. His command of the military, the ruling party and the top apparatus of the foreign affairs gives him the unparalleled power over foreign affairs.

Hu could also exercise his influence over foreign affairs through his top aides such as Ling Jihua. Dai Bingguo is also Hu's trusted lieutenant over foreign affairs.<sup>73</sup> Dai was said to have developed close ties with Hu when he served as the deputy director of the DIL. At the 15th Party Congress in August 1997 Hu, who took charge of the Party affairs and organization, made Dai the director of DIL and a member of the Central Committee of the CCP. In 2003, he became the acting deputy foreign minister and Party group secretary of the MFA, subtly upstaging the minister of foreign affairs. Dai's far higher status within the Party made him the real leader of the MFA. In 2005, he became the director of the OCFA. In 2008 he was promoted to be the state councilor in charge of foreign affairs.<sup>74</sup>

Xi, who assumed the Presidency in March 2013, has his own opinion on foreign affairs. He may act on his own conviction, instead of simply following that of his staff and advisers. He tends to be more assertive on foreign affairs.<sup>75</sup> These personal traits may be reflected in China's foreign policy and its handling of disputes with neighbors. In the coming years, we will see more clearly how the ongoing leadership transition in China will affect the formulation of China's foreign policy.

In March 2013, Yang Jiechi, the then Minister of Foreign Affairs, assumed the post of State Councilor in charge of foreign affairs. He thus becomes the key coordinator of foreign affairs in China under the leadership of President Xi Jinping. Educated initially in the United Kingdom (at University of Bath and London School of Economics) and having served as the Chinese ambassador

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Interview with a Chinese scholar on foreign affairs of China in a recent year.

<sup>73</sup> Interview with an official analyst well-informed on the foreign policy making in China in 2012.

<sup>74</sup> Dai Bingguo: Hu Jintao's "National Security Adviser", (2 September 2009), available at: [http://www.gotoread.com/mag/11948/sarticle\\_31369.html](http://www.gotoread.com/mag/11948/sarticle_31369.html) (accessed 19 October 2012).

<sup>75</sup> Interview with an official analyst well-informed on the foreign policy making in China in a recent year.

to the United States during 2001-2005, Yang speaks very good English and knows the West especially the U.S. well. Wang Yi, a former Chinese ambassador to Japan during 2004-2007 and afterwards the Director of Taiwan Affairs Office of the State Council, succeeds Yang as the new Minister of Foreign Affairs. These two appointments suggest the Party's trust of professional diplomats and promotion of senior diplomats with good performance records in key posts of foreign affairs, and the continued prominence of the foreign affairs xitong (bureaucratic cluster) in the Chinese foreign policy process. Both Yang and Wang were regarded to have done well in handling the Sino-US relations and mainland-Taiwan relations during their tenures, respectively. In addition, their appointments signify the leadership's attention to China's ties with the US and Japan and the mainland's ties with Taiwan. Yang, a former friend of President George Bush, may bode well for the China-US relations amidst growing bilateral tensions.<sup>76</sup> However, China's foreign policy will be moderated and even affected by structural factors, such as the rise of China in relation to the U.S. and Japan and consequential tension between China, on the one hand, and the other powers in the Asia-Pacific that have been close to the U.S. It will also be affected by the vision and leadership style of President Xi.

### **The case of “nine dragons stirring up the sea”**

The multiplication of bureaucratic players in China's foreign affairs and the issue of inter-agency coordination can be seen from bureaucratic activities regarding China's claims in the South China Sea. Since 2010, China's assertive stance and behavior over the South China Sea (and recently the East China Sea) has attracted global attention. A number of analysts in and outside China have noted the multiplication of bureaucratic players and their competition over jurisdiction over territorial waters. Borrowing the Chinese myth, it is coined 'nine dragons stirring up the sea', referring to the numerous rival parties over an issue. The Chinese analysts tend to blame this bureaucratic rivalry over overlapping jurisdiction in the claimed territorial waters for the ineffectual Chinese safeguard of its territorial waters.<sup>77</sup> In contrast, the international analysts for International Crisis Group attributed the Chinese aggressive defense of its claims over the disputed waters to this bureaucratic overlaps and competition for political credits for performance regarding defense of claims of territorial waters and for resources.<sup>78</sup> The rivaling agencies are believed to include the Bureau of Fisheries Administration (BFA) of the Agricultural Ministry, China Maritime Surveillance (CMS), local governments, PLA Navy, MFA, national energy companies, the China Customs Anti-Smuggling Bureau under the

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<sup>76</sup> See Yawei Liu and Justine Zheng Ren, “An Emerging Consensus on the US Threat--The United States According to PLA Officers,” *Journal of Contemporary China* 23(86), (2014).

<sup>77</sup> ‘Zhongguo haiyang quanyi lunsang zhong de tizhi yinsu—jiulong zhishui’, [‘The institutional factor in China's loss of sea rights: nine dragons stirring up the sea’] *Texue shequ* [BB.Tiexue.net], (20 October 2010), available at: [http://bbs.tiexue.net/post2\\_4558072\\_1.html](http://bbs.tiexue.net/post2_4558072_1.html) (accessed 24 November 2012).

<sup>78</sup> International Crisis Group, “Stirring Up the South China Sea (I)”, *Asia Report No. 223*, (23 April 2012).

General Administration of Customs, the Maritime Safety Administration (MSA) affiliated with the Ministry of Transport, the China Coast Guard (CCG) under the Ministry of Public Security, the National Tourism Administration, and the Ministry of Environmental Protection. For example, CMS, MSA, and BFA each can dispatch armed or unarmed patrol vessels as large as 3,000- 4,550 tons to patrol territorial waters in the South China Sea as an assertion of China's rights to these waters.

Both arguments, however, are dismissed by a senior Chinese official, a senior Chinese scholar and an independent analyst. On 24 April, 2012, Chinese Defense Minister Liang Guanglie, when asked whether the PLA was ready to defend China's territorial claim in the South China Sea, replied that the MFA and agencies regarding maritime affairs were in charge of the issue and believed that the matter would be properly handled. Li Jinming, a professor in the South China Sea Research Institute of Xiamen University, regarded the report by the International Crisis Group as simplistic. He argued that the Chinese bureaucratic actions over the South China Sea largely rested on the decisions by the national leadership.<sup>79</sup> An independent and well-informed analyst of China's military suggested that all the above agencies involved in the Chinese claim over the South China Sea were subject to the command of Paracel Coast Garrison Division (*xisha shui jing qu*) under the South China Fleet of the PLA Navy. These agencies have prepared long in advance numerous contingency plans to cope with various scenarios regarding international tensions in the South China Sea. Their actions cannot be regarded as uncoordinated.<sup>80</sup> Therefore, while the number of agencies involved in the South China Sea (likely other major international issues involving China) has multiplied, there may have also been commensurate efforts to coordinate their activities. However, in the eyes of international observers, these bureaucratic activities seem largely uncoordinated and amount to unhealthy bureaucratic rivalry.

## Conclusion

In this article we have reviewed the studies on bureaucratic politics in foreign policy making in general and that in China in particular. Building on the insights from the literature, we provide an up-to-date analysis of bureaucratic politics in China's foreign policy making. The main national organizations and agencies involved in the process are detailed, their functional responsibilities are discussed, and when information is available, their memberships are also revealed. The coordination among agencies and resolution of inter-agency conflict are also examined.

Other than the roles of top leaders, the bureaucracy is the most important player in the policy making process in China. The role of bureaucracy in foreign policy making depends on its structure, respective responsibilities (or division of labor) among bureaucratic agencies, and internal

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<sup>79</sup> 'Zhong Fei Jiaoli Huangyan Dao banyue, jiushi weijian huanhe' ['No easing off in the China-Philippines confrontation over Huangyan Island for half a month'], 21CNshequ [21CN Zone], available at: [http://mil.21cn.com/zhuanti/gj/nhwq/pl/2012/04/26/11634170\\_9.shtml](http://mil.21cn.com/zhuanti/gj/nhwq/pl/2012/04/26/11634170_9.shtml) (accessed 24 November 2012).

<sup>80</sup> Conversation with a seasoned and informed analyst of the Chinese military, November 2012.

coordination. In China, key bureaucratic agencies include the LSGs, and more importantly, the state councilor in charge of foreign affairs. Ministries and commissions are also important—most notably the MFA, and to a lesser extent, the MOFCOM, the NDRC, and the CCP Central Committee’s International Department. Other ministries and offices also participate in the process. In addition, the military has its own institutional channel to express its views on external affairs.

Quite often a ministry may take the lead over an external issue. Two ministries are prominent in their role in external affairs: the MFA plays a prominent role in non-economic external issues; the MOFCOM takes the lead over external economic issues. Over wide-ranging issue areas, relevant ministries are represented in key meetings and consulted in international negotiations. In the event of a conflict between ministries, a higher-level leader (usually the state councilor, and in some cases, the premier and the president) will arbitrate and resolve it.

Finally, a note on the trend in the foreign policy making process in China may be useful. In the recent decades, the process has become pluralistic, involving a wider range of actors such as governmental institutions, think tanks, as well as public opinion.<sup>81</sup> Unlike Mao and Deng in their eras, the decision making power is no longer concentrated only in the hands of the top leader. The bureaucracy has taken on a larger role and its agencies have their own respective responsibilities.

Compared with the 1990s (period of much focus of key existing literature on China’s foreign policy making), there are some new developments in the 2000s and early 2010s. While the MFA plays a key role in foreign affairs, it has to share the power and, in some cases, hand over the key role to other ministries and bodies in an increasing number of functional areas. This can be attributed to the increasing specialization of foreign affairs and the growing importance of specific foreign affairs such as climate change and soft power.

In terms of external affairs, the MOFCOM has been in charge of foreign trade, foreign direct investment and foreign aid. Now even the MOFCOM assumes new jurisdiction over FTA. Even in the broadly defined economic areas, new players have become more important. They include the NDRC which coordinates macroeconomic policies, as well as the People’s Bank of China. The latter has daily jurisdiction and the best technical expertise over China’s exchange rate, as the value of Chinese Renminbi has become one of the most salient issues in China’s foreign economic affairs in the recent decade. To a lesser extent, the State Intellectual Property Office and China’s judicial systems have assumed greater importance with increasing international attention to China’s enforcement of laws regarding intellectual property rights. In addition, new agencies (either LSGs or ministries) assume a key role in specific foreign affairs such as climate change and border security issues. Arguably, the clusters of ministries whose role in foreign affairs has ascended most noticeably are those related to cultural soft power. They include the CCP Propaganda Department, the Press Office of the State Council, the Ministry of Culture, the Xinhua News Agency, the CCTV, the State

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<sup>81</sup> Lai, *The Domestic Sources of China's Foreign Policy*, pp.134-155.

Administration of Radio, Films and Television, the State Press and Publication General Administration, and the State Sports General Administration. Finally, with the surge of interests within and outside China toward territorial waters, the agencies with jurisdiction over the issues have also gained importance. They include the navy of PLA, the ministries of public security, transport, natural resources, and agriculture, the general administration of customs, and the State Oceanic Administration.

In addition, the inter-ministerial coordinator may have assumed a greater role. Currently the president and to a lesser extent the premier is the coordinator at the highest level. But probably in many cases which are not of utmost importance, the state councilor in charge of foreign affairs and aides for the president and to a lesser extent the premier may play the role of managing and resolving inter-ministerial conflict. It is possible that the top leaders exercise their influence through these daily inter-ministerial coordinators to balance their busy schedules. In this regard, the OCFALSG is the main standing agency assisting with the president to coordinate foreign affairs among ministries and departments.

Lastly, it is worth noting that while the bureaucratic politics model may largely apply to China, there is a key distinction between its application in the western countries and that in China. In the West, bureaucracy is under the close supervision of the legislators, the elected representatives of the voters, and that of the media which has certain leverage in independent inquiry and reports. In contrast, in China the supervision of either the legislature or the media is much weaker. This gives rise to a much greater influence of bureaucracy in foreign affairs in China.