



The Changing Role of Leaders in Chinese Foreign Policy Making Process

Çin Dış Politika Yapım Sürecinde Liderlerin Değişen Rolü

Zekeriyya Akdağ^a

^aDr., Öğr. Üyes, İnönü Üniversitesi İktisadi ve İdari Bilimler Fakültesi, Siyaset Bilimi ve Uluslararası İlişkiler Bölümü, ORCID: 0000-0002-0866-603X (Sorumlu Yazar/Corresponding Author)

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ABSTRACT

China has experienced a long period of rapid economic development. As a result, China has become one of the world's most important economic actors. The transformations China has experienced have made the foreign policy-making process quite complex. In the Chinese political system, leaders have always played a critical role in foreign policy making. However, the role of the leader has become more important since Xi Jinping came to power. This article mainly examines how Chinese leaders, and Xi Jinping in particular, play a role in foreign policy making. This study basically seeks to answer the question to what extent Chinese leaders have power and influence in foreign policy making. China's current economic and political structure does not allow leaders to come to power who would cause major upheavals in the overall direction of the country. This study basically argues that no matter how powerful they try to be, Chinese leaders have limited power and influence in foreign policy making. This study is based on constructivism's analysis of the agent-structure problem.

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Makale Türü

Araştırma Makalesi

Anahtar Kelimeler

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ÖZ

Çin uzun süren hızlı bir ekonomik kalkınma deneyimi yaşadı. Bu süreç sonunda Çin dünyanın en önemli ekonomik aktörlerinden biri haline geldi. Çin'in yaşadığı dönüşümler dış politika yapım sürecini oldukça karmaşık bir hale getirmiştir. Çin siyasal sisteminde liderler her zaman dış politika yapım sürecinde kritik bir role sahip olmuşlardır. Ancak liderin rolü, Xi Jinping'in iktidara gelmesiyle birlikte daha fazla önem kazandı. Bu makale esas olarak Çinli liderlerin, özellikle de Xi Jinping'in dış politika yapımında nasıl bir rol oynadığını incelemektedir. Bu çalışma temelde dış politika yapımında Çinli liderlerin ne ölçüde bir gücü ve etkisi olduğu sorusuna cevap aramaktadır. Çin'in günümüzde sahip olduğu ekonomik ve politik yapısı, ülkenin genel gidişatında büyük çalkantılara yol açacak liderlerin iktidara gelmesine izin vermemektedir. Bu çalışma temelde, ne kadar güçlü olmaya çalışırlarsa çalışsınlar, Çinli liderlerin dış politika yapımında sınırlı bir güce ve etkiye sahip olduklarını iddia etmektedir. Bu çalışma, aktör-yapı probleminde dair sosyal inşacı analizi temel almaktadır.

1. Introduction

The Communist Party of China (CPC) and its top leaders hold a tremendous degree of influence over China's foreign policy. Five generations of leaders are recognized as influential in the political system of the People's Republic of China. These are Mao Zedong, Deng Xiaoping, Jiang Zemin, Hu Jintao and Xi Jinping. Although there have been other leaders who briefly served as official heads of state, their influence has been very limited. Mao, Deng and Xi are seen as the most influential leaders, while Jiang and Hu have generally continued Deng's line.

Although leaders are important in all political systems, their significance is greater in totalitarian and authoritarian regimes. In democratic countries, political leaders face constraints from elections, term limits, and public opinion. However, in the PRC's one-party system, leaders are

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mostly immune to oversight from bureaucracy, opposition groups, and public opinion. They have more opportunities to realize their desires and ideals.

There is a large literature examining the role of Chinese leaders in foreign policy making. Suisheng Zhao is one of the most important authors to analyze the role of Chinese leaders in foreign policy making. Zhao categorizes Chinese leaders into two categories: transformational and transactional leaders (2023: 5). Mao Zedong, Deng Xiaoping, and Xi Jinping are labeled transformational leaders, while Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao are labeled transactional leaders (Zhao, 2023: 5-6). Jing Sun classify Chinese leaders into three categories: architects, managers, and disruptors (2021, 37). Sun identify Mao, Deng and in some respect Xi as architect, Jiang and Hu as manager (2021).

Hu Angang argues that the CCP's and China's governance system is based on collective presidency (2014). Since the founding PRC, Chinese collective presidency has evolved over an extended length of time including a great deal of making and correcting mistakes (Hu, 2014: 15). According to Hu, the Chinese collective presidency is far better than the American presidential system (2014, 37).

The most literature on Chinese leaders' role in foreign-policy-making has focused on leaders' personality and leadership style (Hongyi, 2010; Blackwill and Campbell, 2016; Pekcan, 2019; Sutter, 2021). Most studies examining the role of leaders ignore the influence and power of internal structures. This study examines the role of leaders in foreign policy making in the context of the historical transformation of foreign policy decision-making.

This study mainly seeks to answer the question of what kind of role Chinese leaders play in foreign policy making. To what extent does China's domestic political and economic structure constrain its leaders? This article focuses on the highest levels of Chinese foreign policy decision makers and institutions. It provides a historical overview while also highlighting how the role of leaders evolves in foreign policy decision-making process. Studies examining the role of leaders in Chinese foreign policy have largely focused on the centralizing role of Xi Jinping. This article rather emphasizes the internal structures that constrain President Xi.

This study consists of six parts: The first part of this article presents a theoretical framework. Secondly, it briefly analyzes the Chinese foreign policy decision-making structure. Thirdly, it examines the role of leaders in the decision-making processes during the Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping eras. The transformations brought about by the collective leadership approach in Chinese foreign policy are examined. The changes in foreign policy decision-making processes under Xi Jinping and the impact of them on Chinese foreign policy are discussed. Xi's role in foreign policymaking is analyzed in comparison with that of his predecessors. Finally, the structural and other constraints, domestic rather than external, that Xi faces in foreign policy are discussed. The analyses in this article are mainly based on the constructivist theory's approach to the agent-structure problem.

2. The Agent-Structure Problem According to Social Constructivism

A country's foreign policy is a product of a multitude of national and international actors and structures (Carlsnaes, 2016: 113). There exist numerous domestic and international actors who have a significant role in foreign policy decision-making. Additionally, there are numerous domestic-international structures that have a decisive impact on these actors in various ways (Carlsnaes, 2016: 114).

Policy outcomes are shaped by interactions between parts of a system. Actors interact when they take each other into account when making choices. The outcome for each actor depends on the choices made by the others (Wendt, 2003: 148). Constructivists, who argue that agents are

socially constructed, focus on the causal and constitutive effects on identities and interests (Wendt, 2003: 166).

Agency and structure are mutually constitutive and codetermined (Wendt, 2003: 184). Actors are confronted by structure as an objective social phenomenon that both facilitates and restricts their actions in systematic ways (Wendt, 2003: 184). On the other hand, structure evolves only because of agents and their actions (Wendt, 2003: 185). Neither the agent alone nor the structure alone is effective in the formation of policy outcomes. Although the primacy of one over the other becomes evident from time to time, policies are ultimately shaped as a result of the interaction between agency and structure.

According to Alexander Wendt (1987), social structures and agents are interdependent or mutually implicating entities (338). Wendt's refer to seeing agents and structures as having equal ontological status as the structurationist approach (Wendt, 1987: 339). Rather than reducing agency and structure to one or the other, this approach uses each to explain some important features of the other (Wendt, 1987: 339).

Constructivism considers agents and structures as relational entities that are mutually constituted and co-determined (Wendt, 1987: 350). According to constructivists, social structures are real and have a significant role in explanation. They seek to reconcile agents and structures by combining them in a "*dialectical synthesis*" (Wendt, 1987: 356). The interaction between agents and structures is a dynamic process that leads to their continuous evolution (Hill, 2003: 28). Foreign policy is determined by the reciprocal interaction of social structures and agents (Carlsnaes, 1992: 250).

The effects of structures cannot be reduced to agents (Wendt, 2003: 139). According to Wendt, the structure of a social system includes three elements: the material structure, the structure of interests and ideational structure. Although these elements are interrelated, they are distinct and play different roles (Wendt, 2003: 139). Structures not only constrain actors but also provide them with opportunities (Carlsnaes, 1992: 262). They are crucial in creating an appropriate framework for the political decisions and actions of actors.

A social agent's embedded social structural environment shapes and, hence, explains the range of conceivable actions that the agent can do (Wendt, 1987: 366). There are structures at every level, and it is a mistake in foreign policy to think that "structure" simply pertains to the outside world. The social, bureaucratic, and political structures that influence how foreign policy is decided upon are crucial (Hill, 2003: 26). This study focuses on internal rather than external structures that constrain Chinese leader.

3. Chinese Foreign Policy Decision-Making Structure

In the Chinese political system, the Communist Party of China (CPC) monopolizes decision-making power. Above all the bureaucracy involved in foreign policy and administration, the CPC has direct and ultimate control. Obtaining and analyzing data, enforcing policies, and making suggestions to the CPC leaders are the main functions of bureaucracy (Zhao, 2023: 16).

Despite the existence of a wide range of political actors with different views and interests in China, the Party is highly determinant in the formulation and implementation of foreign policy. The Party functions has been and continue to be supreme over the state in every respect. The Chinese Foreign Minister's meager authority and subservient status to the Party duties is a clear example of how the Party functions still prevail over the State functions (Swanström, 2022: 28). The Ministry of Foreign Affairs is not the most important body in shaping foreign policy in China's political system. Therefore, the Chinese Foreign Ministers do not have the political prestige that their counterparts in other countries have (Swanström, 2022: 17).

China's authoritarian political system gives the CPC's leaders enormous power in policymaking, including foreign policy. The highest body responsible for formulating policy is the CPC Central Committee. However, they only get together once a year. Therefore, the Politburo and the Politburo Standing Committee (PSC), which make decisions in the name of the Central Committee, are the most effective bodies in policy making (Zhao, 2020: 86).

The PSC, the highest decision-making body in the Chinese political system, is composed of top leaders. Its members hold the most important leadership positions such as president, prime minister, and council chairmans (Xiao, 2013: 56). The PSC is the final decision-making body on major foreign policy issues. It deals with urgent international events and crises (Jakobson and Manuel, 2016: 103). Regarding the formulation of Chinese foreign policy, the Foreign Affairs Leading Small Group (FALSG) is the most crucial structure. It acts as a liaison between the major bureaucracies and the senior leadership in the foreign policy formation process (Duggan, 2020: 49-50).

The paramount leader often serves as the CPC general secretary, has the power to call Politburo meetings, and actively participates in foreign policy making. Therefore, China's foreign policy is shaped by the vision, decision-making style, character, and preferences of its top leader (Zhao, 2020: 86). CPC leaders always play a very important role in determining Chinese foreign policy, formulating national security strategy and handling international crises (Zhao, 2020: 85).

While China's central government has considerable power, the Chinese party-state is not a unified entity (Politi, 2022: 89). Leaders, bureaucrats, local governments, public opinion and research institutes can be listed as the key actors in China's FPDM. China's foreign policy is designed to support the Party's survival and the political-economic system (Lai, 2022: 32).

Over time, the formulation of China's foreign policy became more pluralistic (Yu and Ridout, 2021: 4). As to the 1982 constitution of China, individuals occupying these crucial leadership roles were appointed to five-year terms, with a maximum of two terms. The collective leadership was designed to avoid excessive concentration of political power in one or two individuals. It has made China's domestic and foreign policies at least as predictable as those of democratic countries. This system makes it possible for China to implement long-term strategies that enable it to achieve rapid economic growth for a very long time (Xiao, 2013: 57).

Deng Xiaoping initiated collective leadership, pioneering China's institutionalization of political decision-making. With the understanding of collective leadership, many different actors influenced the formation and especially the implementation process of foreign policy decisions. China's FPDM and implementation process had a very complex structure (Swanström, 2022: 24).

Collective leadership based on seeking consensus requires a negotiation process. The negotiation process gives vested interest groups the opportunity to influence the senior leader's views (Yu and Ridout, 2021: 4). Decision-making processes and political outcomes on non-critical foreign policy issues are based on struggles for power and resources between actors with different interests (Politi, 2022: 89). The increasing number of actors involved in China's foreign affairs has led to a fragmented foreign policy decision-making process. The multi-actor and fragmented structure slowed down foreign policy decision-making (Jakobson and Manuel, 2016: 101).

Deng Xiaoping strategy of compromise and sharing of power between the Party and the State Council continued to shape foreign policy for a long time. Xi Jinping initiated a move away from this system based on collective leadership (Swanström, 2022: 22). Although Xi has tried to replace the collective leadership with his personal authority, he could not completely eliminate the multi-actor and multi-structured decision-making process.

Contrary to popular belief, China is far from being a unitary player in international relations. While China has an authoritarian political structure, the country's foreign policy formulation and

implementation is a highly complex process rather than a single well-organized entity. Foreign policy is shaped through a process of competition and negotiation between central government agencies, provincial-level governments and large state-owned enterprises (SOEs) (Yu and Ridout, 2021: 18).

Each subnational actor has the ability to influence some of the critical foreign policy choices. Even in spite of the Party's growing control over a multitude of enterprises and organizations. China's rise to prominence in the world arena means that making foreign policy decisions now require more time as well as expertise than it did in the past (Yu and Ridout, 2021: 18-19).

A fundamental change in China's foreign policy direction requires a fundamental shift in the country's national development strategy and in the politics and ideology of the CCP (Keith, 2018: 258). The collective leadership system, on the one hand, ensures a collective leadership renewal; on the other hand, system stability and increased predictability. This system prevents turmoil and unrest and guarantees party continuity and a long period of stability (Hu, 2014: 71). The Chinese political system does not allow leaders to come to power who would cause major upheavals in the overall direction of the country.

4. Leader-Driven Foreign Policy Under Mao

As the PRC's founder, Mao Zedong was a charismatic and revolutionary figure. He usually made decisions by himself and also sought to quell any dissent or criticism. Paying little attention to institutional and other constraints, Mao made personal, top-down decisions based on his own views (Zhao, 2020: 86-87).

Under Mao, foreign policy formation was subject to strong central control (Politi, 2022: 92). Foreign policy was shaped by a core group of leaders within the CPC, with Mao as the key decision-maker. Mao was the final decision-maker on critical issues such as China's international position and security. On issues where Mao's knowledge was limited, key members within the CPC, in addition to Mao, were decisive in the formulation and implementation of foreign policy (Duggan, 2020: 48).

China's decision to enter the Korean War was a good example of how influential Mao was in decision-making. Despite serious opposition from the CPC leadership, Mao's determination was decisive in sending Chinese troops into the Korean War in 1950 (Zhao, 2020: 87). The Sino-Indian border war of 1962, the Taiwan Strait crises in 1954-1955, the Sino-Soviet border conflict in 1969 and the rapprochement with the United States in 1971, it was Mao Zedong who was decisive in decision-making on critical foreign policy issues (Hu, 2019: 5).

Struggling for leadership of the world communist movement, Mao put China in the precarious position of opposing both superpowers in the 1960s. In 1966, by initiating the Cultural Revolution, he plunged China into national instability and essentially isolated the country from the world (Zhao, 2020: 87).

Remained in power for a lifetime, Mao did not hesitate to take decisions alone when necessary. Although he did not directly intervene in day-to-day decisions, he personally determined important foreign policy decisions (Zhao, 2023: 7).

Since the establishment of the PRC, all major foreign policy and national security decisions were made by one man, Mao (Hu, 2019: 12). Mao was undoubtedly one of the most influential leaders in shaping the long-term goals of Chinese foreign policy. He was also the architect of China's sharply divergent foreign policies. The country's swing from one extreme to the other can be seen as one of the most important indicators of Mao's personal power.

Mao, especially during the period between 1958-1976, centralized too much personal power, and built an individual leadership (Hu, 2014: 27). During this period, Mao did not allow any person or institution to remain in opposition to him. He managed to minimize any opposition to him. He had great charisma as a revolutionary leader who unified China to a great extent by carrying out the Chinese Revolution. In the context of the agent-structure debate, it can be said that the Leader was more dominant in this period.

5. Decentralization of Foreign Policy Decision Making Process and Building Collective Leadership: Deng Xiaoping

Deng Xiaoping had played important roles in the revolutionary process and led the army. He had extensive experience ruling large areas of China at various times. He also had long-term management experience in various high positions in Beijing (Vogel, 2021: 693). When Deng came to power in 1978, China was a poor country that had to deal with many problems. Deng implemented major reforms that would reshape the socio-economic structure of the country. He laid the foundations for policies that would enable China to achieve tremendous economic development in the following period (Vogel, 2021: 693).

Although Deng was the most important leader making strategic and essential decisions, but he did not hold senior government positions. Although he controlled the army as chairman of the Central Military Commission (CMC), he never held positions such as the Party general secretary/chairman. Although Deng made major decisions personally and top-down, he initiated a process of decentralization to transfer power to the bureaucracy. Reforming the decision-making processes, he aimed to develop a collective leadership with a group of top leaders making joint decisions (Zhao, 2020: 88). He respected constraints and sought to achieve his goals gradually. Even though he was not in the top positions of the party or the government, he brought people he trusted to important positions and became their mentor. Deng's reputation was built on his extensive experience, network, and personal prominence (Zhao, 2023: 9).

Under Deng, principles and contents of Chinese foreign policy underwent a number of significant shifts (Liu, 2003: 101). Unlike Mao, Deng Xiaoping saw peace and development as two critical inclinations trends in the world. Deng made reforming and modernizing the economy a top priority (Zhao, 2020: 87). With Deng, creating a peaceful international environment for socioeconomic development became the main objective of Chinese foreign policy. In this context, China attached great importance to “*do not seek enemies*” in its foreign relations (Liu, 2003: 101)

During the Deng era, China's foreign policy was primarily focused on advancing the country's modernization objectives (Liu, 2003: 105). Modernization became China's most fundamental goal. Achieving and maintaining a peaceful international environment necessary for economic development became the main foreign policy goal. China opened its economy to the outside world to benefit from the experience of developed countries. It pursued a “*low-profile foreign policy*” to avoid the polarizing influence of the Cold War and to avoid creating enemies (Zhao, 2023: 9).

The reform and opening-up process initiated by Deng expanded China's foreign policy agenda and brought an increasing number of new players into the foreign policy process (Zhao, 2020: 88). Deng moved away from a foreign policy decision-making mechanism in which the personal authority of the leader was decisive and towards an institutionalized process. During this period, critical foreign policy decisions were still made by a core cadre of leaders. However, with the strengthening of collective and institutionalized decision-making processes, the involvement of the party was reduced and the effectiveness of the state bureaucracy was increased. During the Deng era, a balance was struck between the party and the state bureaucracy in the formulation of foreign policy. The party had a role in policy formulation, while the bureaucracy handled day-to-day relations with the outside world. Mao's personal rule was replaced by a complex web of government and party

organizations, research institutes, and other entities that came together to form the primary decision-making structure in the foreign policy formation (Duggan, 2020: 50-51).

With the reform process, the cult of the one man disappeared. A collective decision-making process was established in the foreign policy structure. A system based on professionalism and a degree of pluralism was built (Hu, 2019: 12). With collective leadership, many power centers emerged to coordinate and negotiate in the decision-making process. Foreign policy was therefore the result of competition between focal centers with very different interests (Hu, 2019: 12).

With Deng, the foreign policy-making process changed from a highly centralized structure shaped by a limited number of actors to a more decentralized system involving a large number of actors (Duggan, 2020: 47). With the reforms initiated by Deng, the foreign policy-making process became professionalized. The Chinese foreign policy-making process has evolved into a complex intersectoral network involving a large number of organizations. Given this complex network, it is unlikely that a single person or group can effectively control the foreign policy making process. Chinese foreign policy is shaped by the process of competition and compromise between various actors in this complex network (Duggan, 2020: 94).

Deng Xiaoping played an enormous role in the transformation of China's domestic and foreign policy. The change Deng brought about in Chinese foreign policy was revolutionary. The role played by the leaders who came after Deng has been evolutionary rather than revolutionary (Xiao, 2013: 57).

Having experienced what Mao's over-centralized power could lead to, Deng built a collective leadership in which important decisions were made by majority consensus. With Deng, a system emerged in which leader and internal structure mutually influenced each other.

6. Consolidation and Optimization of Collective Leadership: Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao

Although Deng Xiaoping tried to replace the one-man decision-making model of the Mao era with with collective leadership, he continued to make important decisions alone. A true collective leadership in decision-making put into practice only after Deng's retirement in the early 1990s. Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao, Deng's successors, lacked his level of personal power. Often as high-ranking Office holders, they played the role of first among equals. As a good practitioner of collective leadership Jiang made sure that important issues were discussed among all members. He was careful to ensure that decisions on critical issues were taken by consensus or at least by majority vote among all participants in official meetings (Zhao, 2020: 88).

Jiang was far behind Mao and Deng in terms of personal authority and experience. Lacking a strong personal agenda, Jiang tried to build a consensus among other prominent leaders and institutions, and took an independent stance (Duggan, 2020: 51). Under Jiang and his successor Hu Jintao, decision-making was dominated by technocrats. The dominance of professionals in decision-making processes, institutional pluralism and the decentralization of power became the main characteristics of the new era (Duggan, 2020: 51).

The leaders' role in Chinese foreign policy had become one of balancing the interests of different actors (Duggan, 2020: 62). Although critical foreign policy decisions were taken by the Politburo Standing Committee (PSC) within the framework of collective leadership, leaders played a key role. During the Jiang and Hu periods, when collective leadership was exercised, leaders had the final authority in making strategic and national security decisions. Because the understanding of the principle of collective leadership allowed leaders to initiate, veto or approve foreign policy decisions. The collective leadership was limited to bringing national security issues to the PSC for collective decision-making. The leader was mostly in charge of everyday and routine tasks (Zhao, 2020: 88-89).

With collective leadership, leaders were less likely to exercise direct control over issues other than critical foreign policy issues. Rather, leaders tried to steer and coordinate the various actors, often towards defined goals (Politi, 2022: 89). Foreign policy decision-making has evolved from a top-down structure to a process shaped by complementary or competitive interactions between diverse actors. In parallel with China's economic transformation, power and authority have been horizontally distributed among various agencies (Politi, 2022: 90).

Collective leadership has enabled people from inside and outside the Party with experience in foreign affairs to deal with China's increasing global engagement. The involvement of professionals with more knowledge and skills has further strengthened China's governance capacity (Duggan, 2020: 52). Professionalization, pluralization of actors, and decentralization shifted the balance of power in foreign policy making process. They strengthened the state bureaucracy's position and institutionalized foreign policy decision-making (Duggan, 2020: 61-62). The institutionalization of decision-making prevented arbitrariness and individualism in foreign policy decisions. It also made China's international behavior more predictable (Zhao, 2023: 11).

The involvement of more actors in the decision-making process has also increased the importance of public opinion in China's foreign policy making. Chinese leaders are forced to take into account public sentiment on some critical issues, such as Taiwan. The Chinese public's reaction to certain specific issues has become one of the most important constraints for the Chinese government (Duggan, 2020: 56).

Jiang and Hu were practical leaders who followed the foreign policy directions set by Deng. Focusing on China's economic development within the framework set by Deng, Jiang and Hu made efforts for a long time to create a stable and peaceful external environment, which is of great importance in China's modernization. Thanks to these leaders who sought to integrate China into the broader international economy, China's international behavior became more pragmatic and predictable (Zhao, 2020: 89).

Although China was in favor of a multipolar international system in the post-Cold War period, it was trying to adapt to the US dominance in the system. Following Deng's low-profile foreign policy strategy, Jiang avoided confrontation with the United States. He proposed the principles of "enhancing confidence, reducing troubles, expanding cooperation and avoiding confrontation" to put China-US relations on track. These principles reflected China's desire to coexist with the United States, the sole hegemonic power (Zhao, 2020: 89).

In the 2000s, the main goals of Chinese leaders were to advance the country's modernization and achieve national reunification. Defending international peace and promoting common development were also key objectives (Liu, 2003: 104). Aware that the peaceful external environment had created great opportunities for China to continue its economic development, Hu continued to maintain the status quo and focus on internal stability (Zhao, 2020: 89). Continuing Deng's low-profile foreign policy, Hu made it one of his main priorities to prevent the concerns created by China's rapid rise in the international community. China put forward the principle of "peaceful rise" to ensure that its rise would not create a situation to the detriment of other countries. When the Hu administration realized that the term "*rise*" implied that China would become a superpower in some countries, it began to use the expression "*peaceful development*" instead of "*peaceful rise*."

The meteoric rise of the Chinese economy has led to a major transformation in the socio-economic structure of the country. China's economic and social structure has become increasingly complex. This process has begun to be reflected in political decision-making. Think tanks, public opinion, different interest circles began to influence China's foreign policy decisions. This led to a more complex foreign policy decision-making process. Foreign policy decision-making became multi-actor and multi-structured. Foreign policy decisions were largely based on consensus among these multiple actors and structures.

7. Recentralization Foreign Policy Decision Making Process: Xi Jinping

Xi Jinping came from a family that held high-level positions. He worked in rural areas during the Cultural Revolution. Although he had extensive experience in different regions, he had not worked in Beijing (Vogel, 2021: 693). Xi Jinping, who was 59 years old when he assumed power in 2013, had no prior professional experience in Beijing (Vogel, 2021: 694). Unfamiliar with the bureaucracy operating in Beijing, Xi has asserted his personal authority.

Soon after taking over, Xi consolidated his power base, making himself the 'core' of the leadership team. He has changed China's political structure from one based on collective and technocratic leadership to one that is more authoritarian and focused on his personal authority (Hu, 2019: 11). He has amassed an unparalleled level of power and influence, nearly matching those of Deng Xiaoping and Mao Zedong, the great leaders (Hu, 2019: 15).

Through his campaign against corruption, Xi has eliminated many of his political rivals and succeeded in placing his own loyal supporters in key positions. Thus, the collective leadership approach that started to be implemented with Deng was replaced by personal leadership (Cuesta, 2021: 5). In the Chinese political system, Xi's growing power in decision-making is also due to the fact that he has placed people with whom he personally has good relations in critical positions (Swanström, 2022: 18).

In 2018, with the removal of the presidential term limit in the Chinese Constitution, Xi is now in a position to remain in office indefinitely and in many ways continue to personally shape both domestic and foreign policy (Lanteigne, 2020: 2). At the 20th Party Congress in 2022, President Xi was reappointed for a third term as General Secretary of the Communist Party of China (CPC). Xi's third term means more than an extension of his term in power. As an indicator of Xi's political power, the third term implies that China's domestic and foreign policy will be changed and implemented according to his political ambition and perception of current conditions (Gyu, 2022: 1).

Under Xi, decision-making power began to concentrate and centralize around the leader (Hu, 2019: 12). Xi has implemented institutional reforms to restructure Chinese foreign policy and the national security apparatus, improving top-down planning, coordination and control (Hu, 2019: 13). President Xi has essentially taken on direct or indirect supervision over many crucial tasks, notwithstanding the significance of numerous other state organizations (Swanström, 2022: 25). With the consolidation of power and centralization efforts, Xi has assumed a dominant status and unquestionable control over foreign policymaking. Xi's political dominance has been further consolidated by his chairmanship of key foreign policy-making bodies (Lai, 2022: 50).

Xi has tried to centralize decision-making authority while involving more actors and institutions in the decision-making process (Wang, 2017: 38). Decision-making power has become more centralized, while participation has become more decentralized. Even though more institutions and think tanks are involved in the FPDM, the select few under the leadership of Xi are ultimately in charge of making all the major decisions (Wang, 2017: 35).

Established in 2013, the National Security Commission (NSC) is one of the most crucial organizations since security and foreign policy are intertwined in the Chinese system. Its mandate is to analyze all matters of foreign policy from a security perspective. This gives it the ability to have an impact on a wide range of issues. The importance of the NSC for foreign policy stems not only from its mandate but also from the seniority of its members. It is led by Xi and includes premier as vice-chair in addition to 10 other members of the Politburo (Swanström, 2022: 17).

The Xi administration has changed the decision-making process to include more people in the formulation of foreign policy while keeping ultimate authority (Wang, 2017: 42). Xi has created

new institutions to exert greater influence and expand his sphere of control over the foreign policy-making process. The Central Foreign Affairs Commission (CFAC), created in 2018, is an example of this. CFAC was established to consolidate the leadership of the CPC and President Xi personally (Swanström, 2022: 19). The CFAC is the most influential agency for decision-making on critical issues and determining responses to international events (Xu, 2022: 67).

Xi's increased personal influence meant that the power of the state bureaucracy declined. This led to Xi's personal visions becoming more decisive in foreign policy. Such a change, which directly increased the leader's influence in foreign policy making, is considered as a return to the Mao-era leadership (Duggan, 2020: 63).

The Xi administration's innovations have increased the leader's influence and reduced the foreign ministry's decision-making power (Wang, 2017: 40-41). The Foreign Ministry's role has diminished and is now mostly limited to representing the country abroad, negotiating treaties, and carrying out the Party's policies (Swanström, 2022: 19).

The move away from "*collective leadership*" in foreign policy decision-making eliminates the possibility to check Xi's power and soften his decisions (Jakobson and Manuel, 2016: 108). Xi's efforts to assert his personal power have weakened China's institutional ability to manage foreign policy formation. In the post-Xi era, it will become increasingly difficult to manage the competition of different interests and interest groups in the decision-making process (Zhao, 2023: 17).

The centralization of China's foreign policy decision-making based on leadership has created space for a decision-making process based on personality rather than knowledge and experience (Berkofsky and Sciorati, 2022: 120). The pandemic showed how President Xi's model of monopolising power has slowed down decision-making in the country's political system and led to a paralysis of governance at the local level (Panda and Ding, 2021: 4).

Xi Jinping has not only amassed more power than his predecessors, but also has a strong interest in foreign policy issues. Seeking to centralise power in his hands, Xi is the sole coordinator of Chinese foreign and security policy (Jakobson and Manuel, 2016: 108). With President Xi taking a close interest in foreign policy issues, the importance and power of foreign policy has increased (Swanström, 2022: 13).

China's expanding influence and power have been used by Xi to pursue a more assertive foreign policy. Xi has sought to transform Chinese foreign policy from the low-profile diplomacy to proactive great power diplomacy (Zhao, 2020: 90). The Xi administration has adopted more assertive policies on issues seen as China's core areas of interest (Swanström, 2022: 13).

Xi's foreign policy has been quite harsh on issues considered "*core issues*" for China, such as territorial integrity, national sovereignty and non-interference in internal affairs. When it comes to these issues, the Xi administration has not hesitated to clash with Western power. China responds very harshly to criticism on issues such as human rights violations, Hong Kong and Taiwan. The erosion in China's international reputation with the Covid-19 pandemic has brought "*wolf warrior*" diplomats to the fore (Magri, 2022: 8).

In recent years, Chinese diplomats have adopted a rather harsh and sometimes aggressive tone when responding to foreign criticism. The harsh rhetoric and attitudes of Chinese diplomats have been called wolf warrior diplomacy (Lai, 2022: 46). China's assertive moves and rhetoric in the East and South China Seas are considered as another manifestation of its wolf-warrior diplomacy (Lai, 2022: 46). Wolf warrior diplomacy is another indication of an effort to move away from the low-profile diplomacy practiced since Deng to assertive diplomacy (Lai, 2022: 46).

Demonstrating strong leadership, Xi has redefined the mission and vision of Chinese diplomacy while restructuring the institutional structure of China's foreign policy decision-making (Hu, 2019: 3). The Xi administration has increasingly adopted policies to showcase China's growing

power. Adopting an increasingly active foreign policy, China's foreign relations have become more globalized. More assertively defending China's national interests, the new administration has put forward new proposals and initiatives on global governance (Hu, 2019: 3).

Xi, unwilling to passively adapt to the current Western-centered order, aims to create an international order that is more suitable for his country's benefits (Magri, 2022: 7). China is trying to maintain its influence in the region by further deepening regional cooperation with the countries in its surroundings and offering alternatives to US-led initiatives. Similarly, Beijing is trying to establish a balance between European Union and the US through various trade and cultural agreements (Magri, 2022: 8).

Under Xi's leadership, the activism of Chinese diplomacy and foreign policy has increased, the scope of contacts has expanded and new goals have been set (Hu, 2019: 9). Xi has tried to set clearer goals for the country and China's visions for the global order. With "*China Dream*", he set goals such as a modernized country by the 2030s and a modernized great power by 2050 (Hu, 2019: 8-9). Xi has endeavored to put forward China's vision of future world as a rapidly rising great power. In this context, he put forward the vision of "*community of shared future for humanity*". It also proposed a "*new type of international relations*". In addition to abstract proposals, he launched the "Belt and Road Initiative" to establish a global economic network centered in China.

7.1. Structural and Other Constraints Limiting Xi Governance

President Xi's centralization and unification efforts have made him the most important actor in foreign policy formulation. Decision-making is concentrated in the hands of a single leader to an extent not seen since Mao. The power of actors other than the leader in the foreign policy-making process has decreased significantly. This is not to argue that China formulates its foreign policy in a monolithic manner below Xi. Numerous actors continue to influence the foreign policy making and implementation process (Swanström, 2022: 15).

The Party and government institutions are central to foreign policy decision-making. Having power and a certain degree of control over different actors further consolidates the Party's role in decision-making processes. Nevertheless, decision-making and implementation processes are often finalized as a result of compromise negotiations between a wide range of diverse actors. The degree of consensus or coordination with other actors is particularly important in terms of influencing foreign policy outcomes (Politi, 2022: 107). Despite President Xi's efforts to increase Party control, China's foreign policy decision-making process remains complex (Yu and Ridout, 2021: 19).

China's ever-increasing global interaction has made the formation and decision-making process of the country's foreign policy more complex. The number of agents and structures inside and outside the country who have an interest and influence on China's foreign policy decision-making has steadily increased since the Mao era. Unlike during the Mao and Deng eras, a much larger number of actors and structures interact to shape Chinese foreign policy decisions today (Duggan, 2020: 48). The Xi administration faces greater challenges than its predecessors to realize its foreign policy goals.

Maintaining good diplomatic relations with actors in China's immediate surroundings and with global actors remains a central element of the country's foreign policy. At the same time, economic goals still continue to shape Chinese foreign policy. In fact, one of the most important challenges facing China is to pursue a more active foreign policy while maintaining strong economic relations with the West (Magri, 2022: 8).

The CPC maintains its dominance over the state in matters of foreign policy even after Xi's reforms, but the Party's control over foreign policy actors remains limited. When it comes to foreign policy, the current effort to centralize power is not as effective as expected (Magri, 2022: 9). There

are some notable exceptions to the party's tendency toward centralization and power consolidation. Some policy implementation falls within the scope of specialized institutions, the military, state-owned enterprises, and local governments (Swanström, 2022: 19). Interest groups also continue to influence the complex and pluralistic policy decision-making process. Instead of negotiating directly with the government, interest groups have an impact on foreign policy through implementation (Xu, 2022: 67).

China's economic rise allowed the country to integrate its economy into the global economy and develop its position in the international arena (Berkofsky and Sciorati, 2022: 115). The process of internationalization allowed domestic agencies to influence foreign relations by acquiring an international presence or function (Politi, 2022: 92). Today, China's private sector has become the main driver of the country's economic growth. They contribute around 60% of GDP and account for 70% of the country's innovation. They also provide 90% of new jobs (Politi, 2022: 99). Economic development is still vital for regime survival at home and for a successful foreign policy abroad. Actors with different interests therefore continue to influence decision-making processes.

With the acceleration of China's economic development, many new actors have been involved in the foreign policy making and implementation process. Chief among these are private entrepreneurs and an increasingly interested and vocal public (Swanström, 2022: 14). The centralization of decision-making under President Xi Jinping has increased the influence of a small group of senior officials in foreign policy making. Nevertheless, the actors involved in foreign policy making are increasingly diverse. In particular, more actors have the capacity to influence the foreign policy implementation process (Xu, 2022: 53). Centralization of decision-making does not mean that foreign policy strategies do not undergo a robust and comprehensive planning process. Centralization does not entail ignoring the interests of institutions that have open channels to raise concerns and make suggestions (Xu, 2022: 61)

Xi's efforts to gain control over foreign policy decision-making have not been entirely successful. Reforms since the Deng era have created a complex and multi-layered decision-making process capable of handling China's growing global engagement. This system, created by long-term reforms, is the most important structure limiting Xi's personal power. Attempts to increase Xi's personal role in foreign policymaking have added new and additional layers to the foreign policymaking process, further complicating the decision-making process (Duggan, 2020: 63-64).

With the increasing integration of the country's economy into the global economy, China's interests have become increasingly internationalized. China's interest and involvement in international affairs has steadily increased. The Party lacks the expertise and capacity to effectively address all issues, leaving room for the intervention of other institutions and actors. The importance of other actors is especially crucial in the process of implementing foreign policy decisions (Swanström, 2022: 16). With a certain degree of economic autonomy, local actors continue to influence China's foreign policy agenda, from border disputes to BRI (Yu and Ridout, 2021: 19). Especially, SOEs have become key actors in strategic projects such as BRI (Politi, 2022: 91). Numerous private companies and state-owned enterprises play crucial roles in the implementation phase of the initiative.

The BRI would promote economic integration on a global scale, especially in East Asia and Southeast Asia. It would create new economic connections through transportation, energy, communications and the flow of goods and services. Thus, the Initiative would strengthen China's ties with other countries and provide a major platform to project its economic influence (Lai, 2022: 45). It is seen as China's most ambitious international strategy since 1978. The number of countries and international organizations with which China has concluded various agreements within the framework of the BRI has exceeded 100. China's trade with these countries has reached 5 trillion dollars (Lai, 2022: 45).

The realization of the BRI reflects how different interest groups influence foreign policy implementation (Xu, 2022: 66). BRI has strengthened the international role of local governments and firms. By transforming local actors into influential international actors, BRI has increased and complicated the interaction between domestic and foreign policy (Yu and Ridout, 2021: 18).

Xi's control over foreign policy is preponderant rather than absolute. There are occasions when Xi takes into account the views of other senior leaders (Lai, 2022: 48). Despite Xi's dominant personality and widespread influence, critically important decisions are still made through collective deliberation. Events critical to China's economic growth, issues that could affect the survival of the regime, events that could affect the CPC's ability to govern, and strategies that could affect the balance between the great power and thus the international system are still seen as requiring a process of collective deliberation (Lai, 2022: 49).

Foreign policy decisions that have the potential to affect China's political regime and economic development are well discussed at the highest levels of the Chinese leadership and are made in a broader framework. While Xi's influence is evident in important decisions, he may not be the only voice. China's attitude towards Russia's invasion of Ukraine is important in showing the limits of Xi's influence in China's foreign policy making (Lai, 2022: 50-51).

President Xi initially favored a firm stance on Russia's side. However, moderate PSC officials were worried about the dire political and economic consequences of China's strong support for a Russian attack. Following the start of the war, China abstained from denouncing Russia and voiced its opposition to NATO expansion. However, China called for a ceasefire, de-escalation, and a diplomatic settlement to the conflict (Lai, 2022: 49).

The activism or revisionism that has become the defining feature of Chinese foreign policy during the Xi administration focused mainly on changes in the internal workings of the country's FPDM rather than the overall status quo. In fact, China has shown on many issues that it prioritizes the stability of the world order in order to expand its network of worldwide partnerships (Berkofsky and Sciorati, 2022: 116). In many crisis, China's position is that Beijing sees regional stability as its main goal. This position can be seen as a continuation of China's traditional emphasis on stability in global affairs (Berkofsky and Sciorati, 2022: 116).

The Xi administration is aware that relations based on trust building with other countries are the main basis of China's power in foreign relations (Berkofsky and Sciorati, 2022: 117-118). Xi's foreign policy is seen as more assertive, but it's not aggressive. President Xi, like his predecessors, has placed extensive emphasis on peace and development, and has never mentioned the use of force as a first option (Keith, 2018: 249).

Under Xi, China has faced a much more challenging international environment than under the previous leaders. China faces increasingly serious challenges at home and abroad, regionally and globally. The international environment facing the Xi administration has become more challenging with the prospects of rising tensions with neighbors (Hu, 2019: 9).

Compared to his predecessors Jiang and Hu, Xi appears to be a more transformational leader. Xi believes that China should take more responsibility in global affairs. Xi is acting more boldly in foreign policy matters and is willing to take more risks to achieve his goals (Hu, 2019: 8).

Ezra Vogel (2021), who has done very important studies on Deng Xiaoping's leadership, characterizes Deng as a macromanager and Xi as a micromanager (694). Playing the role of macromanager, Deng could give great responsibilities to his subordinates and leave the details to them. Xi has become a micromanager, creating and leading small groups to manage various issues. He did control things more directly. He can be compared to Mao in his attempt to manage things

more directly (Vogel, 2021: 694). However, this does not mean that Xi is the most influential leader since Mao.

According to Vogel (2021) Deng had more control over government affairs than Xi, thanks to his masterful knowledge from his extensive experience and the relationship of mutual trust with the people he worked with (694). When the leaders' power is evaluated in terms of their influence on the course of China's development, it is clear that Deng was much more successful in directing China's development. When Deng came to power in 1978, the economy was not in good shape. The impact of the turmoil created by the Cultural Revolution was still ongoing. Social and economic turmoil was felt deeply. Deng made radical changes that were essential for China's development (Vogel, 2021: 695). Deng had greater influence in shaping overall policies. Deng was able to bring about major changes and transformations because he had a large experienced bureaucracy ready to implement his macro policies. He was able to design and implement changes that not only dramatically altered the historical development of the country, but also had a major impact on shaping China's future (Vogel, 2021: 696).

Compared to previous leaders, Xi Jinping leads a more powerful country, allowing him to take a stronger stance in relations with other countries. He also has more direct personal control over daily policies. He is also doing more to shape policies in local areas (Vogel, 2021: 696). There was a balance between the most prominent leaders and other frontline leaders in Chinese political system. Xi, who has maintained his power without sharing it with any other prominent leader or rival, has become one of the most untouchable leaders after Mao. By assuming leadership in all important positions, big and small, Xi is well on his way to building his own personal cult (Zhao, 2023: 14).

Since taking office, Xi has taken many steps to increase his personal power in political decision-making. Xi, who believes that collective leadership makes decision-making difficult and prevents China from being effective in the international arena, has instead sought to build an effective system that would increase his personal power. While Xi's attempts have been successful to a certain extent, they have been limited. While collective leadership has eroded to some extent, it remains the sole decision-making mechanism on critical issues. As one of the world's largest economies and one of the largest commercial actors, China's political decision-making process is very complex. China's complex political system does not allow a single person to dominate decision-making. Although Xi has more power and influence in decision-making than his predecessors, the decisions that will shape the future of the party and the country are made by collective leadership. In the context of the agent-structure debate, although the leader's influence has increased under Xi, the internal structure seems to limit Xi to some extent. China's foreign policy-making process is still multi-actor and multi-structured.

8. Conclusion

As one of the most important leaders of the revolution, Mao had a strong charisma as the founder of the PRC. He personally made significant foreign policy decisions, even if he did not actively participate in daily choices. He did not allow the existence of any person or organization that could oppose him. He is one of the most important leaders who shaped China's long-term foreign policy goals. The Mao era was a period of leader dominance. It has been a period of constant reshaping of the internal structure by the leader to minimize any opposition to him.

As the most charismatic and experienced leader of the post-Mao era, Deng carried out very important reforms that have reshaped the country's economy and foreign policy. Deng's authority stemmed from his personal characteristics, connections, and experiences. With Deng, economic development has become the top priority of domestic and foreign policy. Deng eliminated the cult of the individual in decision-making. Having experienced that Mao's overly-centralized power led to disasters, Deng built a collective leadership that required consensus among senior leaders. Deng

built a multi-actor and multi-structured decision-making mechanism in which leader and internal structure mutually influence each other.

The Chinese economy has made a huge economic leap forward and has achieved a great integration with the world economy. With internationalization of Chinese economy, many new actors and structures have become involved in the foreign policy-making process. As many new and complex foreign policy issues requiring expertise emerged, the role of advisors, bureaucrats and experts increased. Foreign policy decisions were no longer determined by a vertical hierarchy but by horizontal coordination of different interests.

After Xi Jinping took office, he sought to concentrate power in his hands. By launching a massive anti-corruption campaign, Xi has seized the opportunity to eliminate his rivals. Pushing aside the concept of collective leadership that Deng tried to build, Xi tried to rebuild the image of a strong leader. At the National People's Congress in 2018, he was successful in amending the Constitution to remove the presidential term restriction.

China's increasing economic power is the physical basis for the country to adopt an assertive and confident foreign policy. At the same time, however, China's need to sustain economic development necessitates a soft foreign policy. It requires China to conduct its foreign relations on a peaceful basis that prioritizes compromise. On the one hand, the country's economic strength has paved the way for Xi to adopt a more assertive foreign policy approach, while on the other hand, the vital need to sustain economic development is the most important factor limiting his assertiveness.

Despite Xi's consolidation of power in decision-making process, China's stance on vital foreign affairs issues is decided together with senior leaders. A collective deliberation process may still be required for the most critical foreign policies, particularly those that impact the party-state's future. It was only through such a collective discussion that China's attitude towards Russia's invasion of Ukraine could be determined.

The development and execution of China's foreign policy involves a wide range of institutions and stakeholders. Influential players compete fiercely for policies favorable to their interests. The BRI is a good example of vested interest groups in the Chinese political system competing to influence foreign policy decisions and implementation. Despite Xi has concentrated authority inside the CPC, various actors with different interests still retain varying degrees of autonomy and capacity to influence the formulation and implementation of foreign policy.

Xi is attempting to reshape China's foreign policy and is setting out global visions that will redefine the country's international position. However, in doing so, he is trying to emphasize his personal power. In the post-Xi era, it is vital to build an institutional structure to sustain his principles and visions. Deng made the greatest contribution to shaping Chinese foreign policy in the long term, building an institutionalized decision-making mechanism, even though he was the ultimate decision-maker on critical issues. Deng's strength was based on the existence of an institutional structure that shared his ideals and sustained them after him. The same cannot be said for Xi Jinping. Although Xi has tried to redesign China's diplomacy, he has not been able to build an institutional structure that shares his ideals. His continued emphasis on personal power is one of the most important factors limiting Xi's influence on the future of the country and its foreign policy.

Instead of sharing his power with other leaders or institutions, Xi seeks to increase his personal authority. By centralizing decision-making, Xi has become the most powerful leader since Mao. This does not mean that Xi is the most influential leader in foreign policy making. Although Xi has tried to concentrate more power in his hand, he could not completely eliminate the multi-actor and multi-structured decision-making process. In the long run, Mao and Deng have been

much more decisive in shaping Chinese foreign policy than Xi. In fact, it can be said that Deng was the most decisive leader in the formation of today's China.

Despite Xi's attempts to centralize power, China's multi-actor, multi-structured decision-making mechanism continues to exist. China's complex socio-economic structure and complex political structure no longer allow for a single leader to dominate. Therefore, those who see Xi as the new Mao, based on some of his centralization initiatives, ignore the changes and transformation that China experienced since 1978. Although Xi has more power and influence than his predecessors, vital decisions affecting the country's economic development and future continue to be made through the mechanism of collective leadership. While the leader's influence and power have increased to some extent, policy decision-making remains a mechanism in which the leader and the internal structure mutually influence and shape each other.

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