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Chinese Wolf Warrior Diplomacy & it's Implications for World Politics

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Abstract

This paper examines the diplomatic development of China, tracing its shift to a confrontational and assertive Wolf Warrior style from a tactful and low-key strategy, and its effects for the Global Order. It is essential to understand the structure of Chinese diplomatic policy for navigating(pondering) the complexity of International Relations With China's increasing influence at international level,. This research uses two case studies to investigate the reasons behind using wolf-warrior diplomacy as a tactic to use Chinese interests. These incidents offer valuable understandings about the various extents of Chinese wolf-warrior diplomacy such as its language, challenge to the established diplomatic customs and use of economic might for geopolitical purposes.

Key Words: Diplomacy, Assertive language, Low-Profile, Wolf-Warrior, Global Politics

Introduction

With the inception of more assertive and Wolf-Warrior style diplomacy, China's approach to international diplomacy has changed significantly. The diplomatic term wolf-warrior was coined after Chinese action film in which Chinese Special Forces fight off foreign enemies. Scholars and policy makers are debating the fundamental reasons behind the embracing of Wolf-Warrior Diplomacy as well as how it affects Chinese soft power image. Digging out the complexity of international relations in the twenty first century requires a thorough grasp of

the motivations underlying China's diplomatic conduct and concern of this firm posture, given the country's continued rise to the prominence in the world affairs. This research is significant as it shed light on the primary drivers behind China's implementation of the Wolf-Warrior diplomacy and its effects on the country's capacity to shape global perceptions and establish positive ties with other nations. Policymakers and scholars who wish to interact with and respond to China's Changing role in international affairs must comprehend the intricacies of China's Wolf-Warrior diplomacy, given the country's increasing influence in the Africa, Asia and Europe along with the strategic rivalry with US.

This paper seeks to examine the development of Chinese wolf-warrior diplomacy through three events during COVID-19, with a particular emphasis on its consequences for China's place at international level. As the outbreak of COVID-19 has caused a global crisis and put China at the centre of attention and criticism, so that's why it offers a crucial framework for examine the underlying reasons and implications of the assertive diplomatic approach. The first part of this paper traces the evolution of Chinese diplomatic approach from tradition low-profile defined by Deng as "Hide your strength, bide your time" to current Wolf-Warrior approach(Godbole, 2015). The "peaceful rise" and "non-interference" are two instances of China's traditional low-profile diplomatic strategy while wolf-warrior diplomacy on the other hand is characterised by the assertive language, conflicts in public and always ready to retaliate against the criticism. This paper provides a closer examination of the complex variables underlying China's diplomatic shift through the use of a qualitative case study. This research looks at particular cases of Wolf-Warrior diplomacy during the COVID-19. The aim of this paper is to add the knowledge into the existing body of knowledge related to the transition in Chinese diplomatic approach. Different scholars have their own viewpoint regarding this transition according to the different theoretical perspectives but this paper is analysing the situation through the lenses of power transitions theory of international relations which suited best to explain this transitional approach.

Power Transitions theory and the Rise of Wolf-Warrior Diplomacy

Power transition theory was first introduced by A.F.K Organski in his book "World Politics" (1950) asserts that when a rising power is about to overtake a currently dominant power, international wars are most likely to break-out. Potential instability characterises this

transitional stage as the rising power crisis the status quo and the dominant power tries to hold onto power. The relative strength of states in the international system, particularly the strongest or the major powers, is the main focus of the theory. Under the context of the power transition theory, China is the prototypical rising power due to its rise as a major player in the world economy during the last several decades. China's goals and objectives on the global scene increased along with its economic, technical and military might.

The rising power status offers a reasonable context for understanding the assertive wolf-warrior diplomacy, as does the impression of surrounding or limiting US-led order. Chinese Wolf Warrior diplomats frequently refute accusations, challenge conventional wisdom, and loudly defend China's viewpoint. The assertiveness may be seen as an indication of China's rising self-assurance in its elevated status and its desire to change some elements of the global system to better serve its interests. Such diplomatic conduct is akin to the dynamics emphasised by power-transition theory, in that it could be seen as a challenge to the existing state of affairs. Furthermore, China's wolf warrior strategy of defying accepted international conventions may be interpreted as a sign of the country's dissatisfaction with the status quo, supporting Organski's theory that China is currently in the process of undermining the position of the dominant power.

Chinese Diplomatic Transition: Low-Profile to Assertive level

Like the power transition theory, China's diplomatic progression from a subdued and pacific approach to an assertive, Wolf-Warrior style is a noteworthy advancement in the field of international relations. It is critical to examine the historical background, shift in China's internal and external settings, and the tactical goals that have influenced its diplomatic behaviour across the ages in order to fully comprehend this transition. The Cold War Ideological clash among the US and USSR had a noteworthy influence on Chinese diplomacy in initial years of the People's Republic of China(PRC) (Chuang, 1996). Through "Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence" and its non-alignment policy, China aimed to preserve its independence and stay out of the superpower competition (Richardson, 2009). A new epoch in China's diplomacy began with the Deng's ascent to rule in late 1970's, following turbulent years of Cultural Revolution. Diplomatic approach of China was inspired by Deng's maxim, "hide your strength, bide your time", which put an emphasis on economic

progress and kept a low profile in international matters. This strategic directive, which emphasizes a modest and vigilant approach to international affairs while concentrating on inland growth, is ascribed to Deng for creating as a part of Chinese foreign policy framework (Godbole, 2015).

Throughout 1990s and early 2000s Chinese diplomacy was distinguished by a focus on cooperative improvement, non-interference in the domestic matters of other nations and peaceful development (Medeiros & Fravel, 2003). The purpose of this strategy was to convince the world that China's expanding military and economic might would not endanger international peace and security. There were three main ideas that shaped the Chinese diplomatic approach abroad in the nonviolent manner. Policy of non-intervention in the internal matters of other states was one of the main tenets of low-profile diplomacy. China's passive diplomacy placed a strong emphasis on the necessity of upholding other countries' territorial integrity and sovereignty as well as pursuing mutually beneficial cooperation in a range of areas, including investment and development assistance along with the commerce. Last but not the least is the peaceful development, based on the belief that China's modernization and economic expansion will not jeopardise world peace and security. In order to encourage the world community of China's good intents, this idea was embodied in the peaceful rise narratives (Danner, 2018). Establishing a stable environment was one of the China's main goals in its low-profile diplomacy as a peaceful international environment was necessary for China to focus on the economic development and its modernization (Richardson, 2009).

The main purpose of Chinese passive diplomacy was not only to secure its economic interests but to maintain its peaceful image at international level along with the geopolitical interest. China through its low-profile diplomacy achieved its already set goals; China not only developed economically but also resolved security and border issues with neighbouring countries and became a part of international institution such as World Trade Organization (WTO). Another example of Chinese low-profile diplomacy is its "good neighbouring" with the other regional actors particularly in Asia and became an active member of regional organizations such as Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and Association of South East Asian Nation (ASEAN), not only to resolve the geostrategic issues but for trade and economic cooperation and for mutual respect and peaceful co-existence. China's low-profile

diplomacy not only helped China to maintain its peaceful image at international level but also to secure its economic and security interests and established good relations with the international actors. Through low-profile diplomacy China became a rising power at the world level and a regional power in Asia but recent moves in China's diplomatic approach raised questions in researcher's and policy makers circle that despite of securing interests what are the major factors which forced China to shift from low-profile to assertive approach?

Factors behind China's Diplomatic Wolf-Warrior Approach

It is difficult to exactly talk about the date or event when China adopted assertive style diplomacy but it is clear China picked this method after Xi took office. Wolf-warrior or assertive style diplomacy is actually the result of Xi's vision "China Dream" or "rejuvenation" of the Chinese nation (Ferdinand, 2016). Xi's vision gave a new direction to the Chinese foreign policy as he gave more importance to the unified and strong Chinese nation (Chang-Liao, 2016). This shift in foreign policy showed that China want to have a more active role at world in large and region in particular, Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) and Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is the best example of China's intentions to shape/influence the world and regional economic structure. The second factor which is playing crucial role behind the adaptation of assertive diplomacy is nationalism. Although nationalism has been a powerful force in China's politics but in recent years many variables have been combined to make it even more noticeable. Chinese people have a tremendous sense of pride in their country due to the country's rapid economic progress and Chinese emergence as an international power (WANG, 2012).

This stance of Chinese government was further solidified by massive propaganda campaigns which highlighted the historical grievances along with the need of national rejuvenation. The rise of nationalism is driving Chinese leaders to take more assertive position for safeguarding the national interests and projecting Chinese strength internationally (Weiss, 2013). Chinese public expect from Chinese government to be robust and resilient towards the international threats. With its harsh and combative style, Wolf-warrior diplomacy is the best to meet Chinese public expectations by demonstrating China's resolve and strength on the global scene. For instance, anti Japanese rallies in 2012 over Diaoyu Island resulted in widespread

public demonstrations in China and consequently it increased tension between two nations. Along with other factors “China Dream” and “rejuvenation” are central to Chinese nationalism (Shi & Liu, 2020)

There are several reasons for diplomats to take such decisive and firm actions, like in order to exhibiting loyalty to their superiors, along with the desire to improve their professional and personal prospects. Certain self serving diplomats may use the media attentions that follow their use of assertive diplomacy as a shortcut to outshine their peers and advance in their careers. Additionally they might have a fear that they will be criticised by the nationalist for being too soft with the externals as it is customary in Chinese politics to take aggressive measures to counter the suspected threat (Xiaolin & Yitong, 2023). Another factor is Chinese diplomats believe that they have endured years of intense pressure, frequent lecturing from the US and other western countries about the virtues and voice of the communist system. Period of national humiliation still exists in their minds, as they have experienced by themselves or have listened from their elders (Martin, 2021).

Last but not the least factor behind Chinese adaptation of wolf-warrior diplomacy is its perception of increasing hostile international environment (Friedberg, 2014) China is worried about the possible containment as a consequence of its rivalry with US and its allies; they perceive the international environment as hostile and the need to safeguard its fundamental interests, these factors are actually driving China for adopting more assertive diplomacy in South and East China Sea (Ross, 2012). For example China’s island building in South China Sea and establishment of Air Defence Identification Zone are the direct result of such perceived threats (Rinehart & Elias, 2015). These elements derived Chinese foreign policy towards more assertiveness and this shift in policy has significant implications for both national and international politics. Now it can be more effectively analyzed the complicated nature of Chinese developing diplomatic behaviour. One way to conceptualize China’s leadership shift is a reaction of perceived international environment. The nation’s perception of more hostile international environment affects not only its leadership but also the notion of nationalism, which is already on the rise. In return, this increased nationalism shaped the decisions of the leaders and diplomatic strategies they adopted.

Leaders are motivated by the nationalism, which they used to take more assertive position at international level. Nationalism is a defensive strategy against perceived external hostility as well as an attempt to mobilise support from inside. A feedback loop is produced when leaders adopt these assertive inclinations and simultaneously increase the perception of external dangers. It is therefore difficult to identify a single factor behind this development in Chinese diplomatic behaviour. A highly interwoven scenario where each aspect continuously influences and influenced by the other is illustrated by the cyclical interaction between changing leadership, growing nationalism, unfriendly international environment etc. All factors together represent Chinese trajectory in the global power hierarchy within the power transition paradigm.

China's behaviour is consistent with the power transition theory, which argues that a rising power is more likely to challenge the status quo, the time it gets closer to the dominant power in terms of capabilities. China's response during COVID-19 and its policies towards Hong Kong and Xinjiang are the best examples of China's shift towards the more assertive diplomacy. Chinese diplomats are now taking more assertive response to international critique on the issues China consider as a matter of their core values, so through wolf-warrior diplomacy they are refusing such claims and promoting their own story.

Geopolitical, Economic and Diplomatic aspects of Diplomacy of China

As China is the growing power at the world stage so every move of China is directly or indirectly affect the international politics, regional order etc. To analyse the future of the world politics or to perceive about the regional order it is necessary to look into the policies adopted by China. It is very crucial to understand that in what direction China adopted wolf-warrior diplomacy and how it has changed its pattern from peaceful to assertive style. This section of the paper highlights the geopolitical, economic and diplomatic aspect of Chinese diplomacy from peaceful to wolf-warrior.

Regarding territorial conflicts and military assertiveness, China's strategy has likewise changed to wolf-warrior diplomacy. Tensions with the US and the neighbouring countries have escalated as a result of the nation's more aggressive pursuit of its territorial claims. Examples of Chinese strong stance in the context of international disputes include

establishment of the Area of Defence Industry Zone (ADIZ) in the East China Sea, its militarization of the South China Sea and border conflicts with immediate neighbour India. China sees the necessity to protect its fundamental interests through adaptation of more assertive diplomacy and employ military actions as a result of its perception of hostile international environment (Fravel, 2008)

The continuous rivalry in the South China Sea is among most notable instances of Chinese territorial claims and military aggression. Relying on its contentious “nine-dash line” demarcation, China asserts sovereignty over the majority of the South China Sea, encompassing the Spratly and Paracel Islands. The neighbouring countries such as Vietnam, Malaysia, Brunei, Philippines opposed Chinese claim over the islands. China has militarized and reclaimed land on a number of disputed South China Sea Islands (Dai & Luqiu, 2022) China’s military aggression and territorial disputes extend beyond sea borders. Tensions in the long-running border conflicts with India, especially in the Himalayas along the line of Actual Control have increased recently. The most noteworthy recent event was the conflict in Galwan Valley in 2020 between the Chinese and Indian troops, which turned into a lethal combat with casualties on both sides. The outcome was a worsening of relations between these two nations as the foreign ministry of China responded to India with Wolf-Warrior mentality and forceful military action (Mattingly & Sundquist, 2022)

The Chinese switch to Wolf-Warrior diplomacy has also been seen through its economic policies. China is the second biggest in the world; it is using the economic clout more and more to persuade nations and forward its foreign policy goals. Assertive economic statecraft of China is a reflection of its desire to become a major world power and its readiness to employ economic pressure to further its geopolitical goals (Harrell, Rosenberg, & Saravalle, 2018) China has achieved considerable economic power on other nations as a result of its large outbound investments, mostly made under Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). With the prospect of withholding or reducing investments, China has utilised this leverage to impose pressure or influence. In 2020, for instance, China withdrew its investments from Norway and halted two-pronged trade negotiation after Norway granted the Nobel Peace Prize to Chinese dissident Liu Xiaobo (Wong, 2021). China has also employed tourism as an economic weapon to put pressure on other nations. The threat of tourism boycott is a

powerful tool for intimidation because Chinese tourists considerably boost the economies of many nations. For instance, China implemented an informal embargo on group tour to South Korea following South Korea's agreement to deploy the US THAAD missile defence system. This resulted in a sharp drop in visitor arrivals and a detrimental effect on the economy of South Korea. Concerns over debt diplomacy have been raised by China's lending policies, particularly with regard to poor nations (Ismail & Aryodiguno, 2022).

The opponents contended that China loans money to the nations with poor economies and governance on purpose, as they know that these nations may find it difficult to pay back the loans. So, as a result China may be able to negotiate a new agreement in the event of their default, possibly obtaining more influence or key assets in this process. The Hambantota port in Sri Lanka and the Doraleh Container Terminal in Djibouti are examples of debt diplomacy issues. It is noteworthy that China's approaches to implementing sanctions have been shaped by its established discourse on sanctions in addition to the limitations it places on its own behaviour (Poh, 2020). There is now more distrust and caution over China's ascent as a result of these activities. Which cast doubt on China's intentions and objectives, along with its dedication to the rules based international system. Additionally, in an effort to lessen their reliance on China and diversify their economic ties, the targeted nations have worked to potentially undermine China's long term influence. China is attempting to establish new economic rules and demonstrate its economic strength, which is why it is using economic statecraft and coercion more frequently. According to the Power Transition Theory contestations over systemic rules intensify when the distance between the rising and dominant power closes.

The conversion to Wolf-Warrior diplomacy is rooted in the development of China's diplomatic language and discourse. The use of hostile and nationalistic language in public pronouncement and dealing with foreign colleagues has become more common among Chinese diplomats. Diplomats of high rank like foreign minister Wang Yi and former spokesperson Hua Chunying have used assertive language to counter criticism and defend China's interests (Dai & Luqiu, 2022). The Chinese shift in diplomatic language is an indication of its increasing self-assurance as a major player on the world stage and its belief that the international community is becoming less supportive of its ascent. As a result,

Chinese diplomats believe they must speak up more when protecting interests of China and refuting the narrative advanced by other nations, particularly the US and allies of it. The emergence of Social Media has greatly influenced China's communication and rhetoric in international relations. Chinese diplomats may now communicate with the worldwide audience, share the narrative of the Chinese government, and have direct conversations with foreign scholars, journalists and diplomats etc (Huang,2022)

China's turn to wolf-warrior diplomacy is reflected in its diplomatic rhetoric and communication strategy, which is marked by change in tone, the assertiveness of prominent spokespersons and diplomats and increasing use of social media as a tool for public diplomacy. Both the larger dynamics of international relations and China's reputation abroad will be greatly impacted by this shift. The country's intention to aggressively influence worldwide narratives can also be seen in China's newly found aggressiveness, similar to a rising power seeking a bigger role in international relations.

COVID-19 and Chinese Wolf-Warrior Approach

COVID-19 put countries crisis management ability on test. China as the epic-centre of the COVID-19 outbreak faced substantial international criticism and scrutiny for not handling properly as initial phase. The confrontational stance of crisis handling by Chinese diplomats put state in hot waters (Martin p. , 2021). The March 2020 Twitter battle between US State Department and Chinese Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Zhao Lijian is a notable illustration of China's Wolf Warrior diplomacy during the COVID-19. The episode provides insightful information about how Chinese diplomatic approach is changing and how social media is influencing modern geopolitics. Zhao Lijian posted a conspiracy theory on March 12, 2020, speculating that the virus may have been delivered to Wuhan by the US Army during the city's hosting of the 2019 Military World Games. Zhao tweeted a link to a video clip of the US Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) director Robert Redfield acknowledging that few influenza cases in the country may have been mislabelled as COVID-19.

After Zhao's tweet swiftly gained popularity, Chinese and US diplomats got into furious argument (Fook, 2020). Following Zhao's tweet the Chinese ambassador to the US, Cui

Tiankai was called by the US State Department to voice the country's strong disapproval of the conspiracy notion. The State Department further underlined how misinformation of this kind might jeopardise global collaboration in the fight against the Pandemic. Zhao's tweet was not removed in spite of US protests, and state run media and other Chinese officials kept spreading the conspiracy theory. This exacerbated the message and strained ties between the US and China even further. The ramifications and examinations of the twitter dispute between Zhao Lijian and the US state department highlight the intricacies of China's COVID-19 pandemic Wolf-Warrior diplomacy.

This episode showed China's willingness to use hostile rhetoric to counter criticism and refute the widely accepted theory on the pandemic's origins. This exchange also serves as an example of how divisive rhetoric can obstruct cross border cooperation in times of crisis. The incident also demonstrated the growing significance of social media in international diplomacy, as Chinese diplomats increasingly used twitter and other platforms to interact with foreign audiences. This increased the reach and impact of their messages, but it also exposed China to increased scrutiny and criticism. The exchange of allegations and conspiracy theories during the diplomatic dispute exacerbated the already difficult ties between the China and the US, hindering intercontinental collaboration in resolving global health crisis. This episode also demonstrated how nationalism and public diplomacy have shaped China's Wolf-Warrior diplomacy, with Chinese diplomats using a combative style to win over local audiences and show their dedication to upholding dignity and honour of China.

The conflict between China and Sweden, which involved Chinese ambassador to Sweden, Gui Congyou is another illustration of China's use of Wolf-Warrior diplomacy. Tensions between China and Sweden increased during the COVID-19 pandemic, mostly because of the disparities in how they handle the viral epidemic. GuiCongyou, China's ambassador to Sweden, attacked the Swedish government and media in a series of harsh remarks, calling their reaction inadequate and charging them with Sino-phobia. With the combative tone, Gui accused the Swedish government and media of propagating anti-Chinese emotions and disseminating false information regarding China's response to the pandemic. He linked Sweden's criticism of China to a light weight boxer challenging a heavyweight fighter to a

bout. Gui charges and aggressive style were met with resistance by the Swedish media and political elite, who defended their rights to free speech and an independent press. As a result tensions between the two nations increased. This incident strained the relations between two countries and highlighted the challenges European nations face in managing relationship with China in the face of divergent values and interests. It also showed how assertive diplomacy can exacerbate tension. In short, the conflict between China and Sweden offers a perspective case study of the difficulties and consequences associated with China's Wolf-Warrior diplomacy.

Conclusion

This study looked at how China's diplomacy changed over time, with a particular emphasis on how it went from being quiet and peaceful to being more outspoken and combative in its wolf warrior style. This shift was mostly caused by shifts in leadership, and increase in nationalism, the sense of danger from the outside world, and a readiness to use economic pressure. The study examined two case studies from the COVID-19 outbreak that exemplified the different factors and outcomes of China's "Wolf-Warrior" diplomacy: the conflict between China and Sweden and Zhao Lijian and the US State Department on Twitted. China's strong rhetoric, readiness to defy established diplomatic conventions, and use of economic for political purposes were all on display in each of these episodes. This diplomatic move has important ramifications for global governance, regional politics and international relations. China's Wolf-Warrior diplomacy has strained ties between nations, shaped public perception and called into question the values of the median independence and press freedom. Furthermore, other nations are re-evaluating their diplomatic approaches and levels of engagement with China as a result of China's strong diplomatic posture. This raises concerns about the possible deterioration of fundamental global governance concepts like multilateralism, accountability and transparency. In addition, the aggressive deeds and language have shaped public perception, which could weaken China's soft power and make it more difficult for it to present a favourable image to the rest of the world. In order to safeguard national interests, other countries may need to modify their strategies, make use of a variety of communication channels and use forceful and persuasive techniques in response to China's Wolf Warrior diplomacy, which challenges established diplomatic practices and

norms. In the end, China's diplomatic strategy will have a significant impact on the dynamics of international politics, the stability of regional powers structures and the operation of the global governance institutions as it continues to exert its position on the international scene. It is crucial to comprehend China's Wolf Warrior diplomacy completely. This understanding is indispensable for diplomats, Academics and policymakers to respond to the shifting global environment.

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