

CHINA AS A DIPLOMATIC ACTOR: NEUTRALITY OF DISCOURSE, PRAGMATISM OF INTEREST

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To understand how China constructs its foreign policy in the contemporary era, it is useful to look at the intellectual traditions that have shaped Chinese political culture over the centuries. Two of the fundamental figures of this tradition are Confucius and Sun Tzu, whose ideas profoundly influenced the way Chinese society has understood power relations, governance, and strategy.

Confucius (551–479 BC) formulated a conception of social organization based on harmony, moral responsibility, and respect for social hierarchies. In his thinking, the stability of a community depends on the balance between authority and responsibility, and the ruler must exercise power through moral example and by promoting social harmony. This perspective contributed to the development of a political culture in which order, balance, and the avoidance of direct conflict are regarded as essential elements of governance and of relations between states.

In apparent contrast, yet complementary at the strategic level, stands the thought of Sun Tzu, the author of the famous treatise *The Art of War*. Sun Tzu emphasized the importance of strategy, adaptability, and the intelligent use of resources in managing conflicts. One of the central ideas of his work is that the highest form of strategy consists in achieving victory without direct confrontation, by anticipating the opponent's moves and employing indirect means.

Together, these two traditions of thought provide a relevant interpretative framework for understanding the diplomatic behavior of contemporary China. On the one hand, Beijing's official discourse emphasizes cooperation, stability, and respect for state sovereignty—elements that reflect the influence of the Confucian tradition. On the other hand, the pragmatic manner in which China pursues its economic and strategic interests within the international system can also be interpreted in light of the strategic tradition associated with the thought of Sun Tzu.

Thus, the analysis of China's contemporary foreign policy can be understood not only through the prism of recent geopolitical developments, but also within the broader context of an intellectual tradition that combines the harmonization of diplomatic discourse with the strategic pragmatism of action.

The rise of China represents one of the most significant transformations of the international system in recent decades. From a regional power with limited influence during the Cold War, the People's Republic of China has evolved into a global actor capable of shaping the geopolitical, economic, and diplomatic developments of the contemporary world. In this context, Chinese diplomacy seeks to project the image of a responsible major power, oriented toward stability and cooperation, while at the same time avoiding ideological rhetoric or direct interventions in the political structures of other states.

China's foreign policy is characterized by a combination of neutrality of discourse and pragmatism of interest. Beijing consistently promotes the principles of state sovereignty, non-interference in internal affairs, and the peaceful resolution of conflicts, while simultaneously pursuing the consolidation of its own economic and strategic interests. In this sense, Chinese diplomacy is distinguished by a pragmatic approach in which economic cooperation and political stability are regarded as essential elements for the development of international relations.

The doctrinal foundations of Chinese foreign policy can be traced back to the principles formulated in the 1950s, known as the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence: respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, non-aggression, non-interference in the internal affairs of other states, equality among states, and peaceful coexistence. These principles have become the cornerstone of Beijing's diplomatic discourse and continue to be consistently invoked in international relations.

In the contemporary era, these principles are integrated into a broader vision of the international order, in which China supports the idea of a multipolar world characterized by cooperation and balance among major powers. Beijing seeks to present itself as a stable and predictable actor capable of contributing to the maintenance of international equilibrium without resorting to military interventions or ideological pressure on other states.

Discursive neutrality constitutes one of the distinctive features of Chinese diplomacy. In most international conflicts, Beijing avoids radical positioning and prefers to adopt a moderate rhetoric

based on calls for dialogue and negotiation. This strategy enables China to maintain diplomatic relations with diverse and even rival political actors, thereby strengthening its position as a mediator or pragmatic partner.

Beyond this discursive neutrality, Chinese foreign policy is deeply influenced by the logic of national interest. Beijing places great importance on economic security, access to resources and markets, as well as regional stability. In this regard, economic cooperation represents the main instrument of Chinese diplomacy. Initiatives such as the Belt and Road Initiative reflect this strategy through massive investments in infrastructure, energy, and transportation across different regions of the world. Through these projects, China seeks not only to expand trade relations but also to create networks of economic interdependence that strengthen its global influence.

China's positions in major international conflicts over the past decades clearly illustrate this combination of neutrality and pragmatism. During the war in Yugoslavia in 1999, Beijing criticized NATO's military intervention, considering it a violation of Yugoslav sovereignty and international law. The incident involving the bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade further intensified this stance, prompting China to firmly condemn the action and emphasize the importance of respecting international norms.

A similar position was adopted in the case of the Iraq War in 2003. China opposed the military intervention led by the United States, arguing that any such action should be authorized by the United Nations Security Council. Beijing insisted on the necessity of a diplomatic solution and on the respect for the sovereignty of the Iraqi state.

In the Syrian conflict, China maintained the same diplomatic line, supporting the principle of Syrian state sovereignty and rejecting the idea of external military intervention or regime change imposed from outside. Within the United Nations Security Council, Beijing used its veto power several times to block resolutions that could have led to sanctions or international pressure against the government in Damascus.

The situation in Libya in 2011 represented another important moment for Chinese diplomacy. China abstained in the vote that authorized international military intervention, but later criticized the way in which the NATO operation evolved into a regime-change campaign against Muammar

Gaddafi. This episode reinforced Beijing's reluctance toward Western military interventions and policies aimed at changing political regimes.

In the Israeli–Palestinian conflict and the crisis in Gaza, China has adopted a relatively balanced position, calling for a ceasefire and the resumption of political negotiations. Beijing has consistently emphasized the necessity of a solution based on the two-state principle and has attempted to strengthen its diplomatic role in the Middle East.

Regarding its relationship with Iran, China has developed significant economic and energy partnerships while avoiding direct involvement in regional tensions. Beijing generally supports diplomatic solutions and multilateral negotiations, seeking to maintain stability in a region that is essential for global energy security.

Through these positions, China seeks to present itself as a responsible major power that respects state sovereignty and promotes international stability. Unlike other models of foreign policy, Beijing avoids promoting internal political changes in partner states and prefers to develop relationships based on economic cooperation and mutual interests.

Contemporary Chinese diplomacy thus reflects a complex combination of discursive neutrality and strategic pragmatism. While the official discourse emphasizes the principles of sovereignty and peaceful cooperation, Beijing's actions aim at strengthening China's economic and geopolitical influence within the international system.

In a world characterized by profound geopolitical transformations and the emergence of a multipolar system, China seeks to consolidate its position not only as a major economic power but also as a diplomatic actor capable of influencing the evolution of the international order through a combination of pragmatism, stability, and cooperation.

The relationship between China and the European Union represents one of the most complex dimensions of contemporary Chinese diplomacy, clearly reflecting the combination of discursive neutrality and pragmatic interests that characterizes Beijing's foreign policy. For China, the European Union is simultaneously a major economic partner, an important political actor in the international system, and an essential element in the global balance of power. From Beijing's perspective, the development of relations with the European Union serves both China's economic interests and the broader objective of consolidating a multipolar international order.

Diplomatic relations between China and the European Economic Community were established in 1975, and since then cooperation between the two sides has expanded steadily. In recent decades, the European Union has become one of China's most important trading partners, while China, in turn, has emerged as one of the European Union's main economic partners. Bilateral trade has experienced remarkable growth, supported by the relative complementarity of the two economies: Europe possesses advanced technologies and mature markets, while China offers extensive industrial capacity and a vast domestic market.

From a diplomatic perspective, Beijing views the European Union as an important actor in maintaining the global balance. China has consistently supported the idea of a strong and united Europe, considering that a consolidated European Union can contribute to limiting the dominance of a single superpower in the international system. In this regard, Beijing often frames its relationship with Europe in terms of a **comprehensive strategic partnership**, a formula frequently used in official Chinese diplomatic documents.

At the same time, China seeks to develop strong bilateral relations with individual EU member states, paying particular attention to major economies such as Germany, France, and Italy. Economic cooperation includes investments in infrastructure, industry, energy, and technology, and Chinese initiatives such as projects associated with the **Belt and Road Initiative** have also targeted the European space. In Central and Eastern Europe, China has also promoted regional cooperation frameworks aimed at strengthening economic exchanges and investments.

However, the relationship between China and the European Union is not without tensions. Differences in perspective regarding certain aspects of international trade, economic competition, or technological standards have periodically generated frictions between the two sides. The European Union has also at times expressed concerns regarding reciprocal market access and the role of the state in the Chinese economy. In recent years, Brussels has begun to describe China simultaneously as a **partner, economic competitor, and systemic rival**, a formula that reflects the ambivalent nature of the relationship.

Despite these divergences, Beijing continues to promote cooperation with the European Union in pragmatic terms, emphasizing the mutual economic benefits and the need to maintain stability in trade relations. China generally avoids direct political confrontations with European institutions

and prefers to highlight areas of common interest, such as trade exchanges, investments, energy transition, and the fight against climate change.

From the perspective of Chinese diplomacy, the relationship with the European Union illustrates very well Beijing's broader strategy: the development of strong economic partnerships, the maintenance of a moderate diplomatic discourse, and the avoidance of major political conflicts. In this sense, the European Union is perceived by China not only as an important economic partner but also as an essential actor in an international system characterized by interdependence and multipolarity.

Therefore, cooperation between China and the European Union reflects the same pragmatic logic that characterizes China's overall foreign policy: the consolidation of international influence through economic development, diplomatic dialogue, and strategic partnerships, rather than through ideological confrontation or direct political intervention.

After the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union, the two states gradually moved from a relationship marked by ideological rivalry and strategic suspicion to one of political and economic cooperation. Over the past two decades, this rapprochement has been strengthened through the development of partnerships in the energy, military, and diplomatic fields, as both states share an interest in limiting Western influence and promoting a multipolar international order.

On the diplomatic level, China and Russia have developed a comprehensive strategic partnership characterized by coordination within international organizations such as the United Nations and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation. The two states also share a relatively similar vision regarding the principles that should govern international relations, emphasizing respect for state sovereignty, non-interference in internal affairs, and the rejection of external military interventions aimed at changing political regimes.

From an economic perspective, relations between China and Russia have experienced significant development, particularly in the energy sector. Russia represents one of the main suppliers of energy resources to the Chinese economy, and cooperation in the fields of natural gas, oil, and energy infrastructure has become a central element of the bilateral relationship. At the same time,

China provides Russia with access to markets, technologies, and investments, thereby contributing to reducing Moscow's economic dependence on the West.

On the geopolitical level, the rapprochement between the two states is also facilitated by a shared perception regarding the role of the United States in the international system. Both Beijing and Moscow consider that the Western-dominated international order should evolve toward a multipolar model in which major powers coexist within a relatively stable balance.

In this context, the outbreak of the war in Ukraine in February 2022 placed China in a delicate diplomatic position. On the one hand, Beijing maintains important strategic relations with the Russian Federation and avoids directly condemning Moscow's actions. On the other hand, China seeks to avoid a serious deterioration of relations with the European Union and other Western states, which represent essential economic partners for the Chinese economy.

China's official position regarding the conflict in Ukraine reflects this balancing strategy. Beijing has repeatedly emphasized the necessity of ending hostilities and resolving the conflict through diplomatic negotiations. At the same time, China has avoided explicitly condemning Russia and has criticized the expansion of military alliances and the logic of geopolitical confrontation which, according to Chinese diplomacy, contributed to the escalation of tensions in the region.

Within the United Nations, China has abstained from voting on several resolutions condemning Russia, thus maintaining a position of relative diplomatic neutrality. Beijing insists on the respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all states, including Ukraine, while at the same time emphasizing the need to take into account the security concerns of all parties involved.

Economically, relations between China and Russia have intensified following the introduction of Western sanctions against Moscow. Bilateral trade has increased significantly, and China has become one of Russia's main economic partners, contributing to the maintenance of trade and energy flows. At the same time, Beijing has shown a certain degree of caution in order to avoid excessive exposure to potential secondary sanctions from the West.

Thus, China's position regarding the war in Ukraine clearly illustrates the pragmatic nature of its foreign policy. Beijing seeks to maintain its strategic relationship with the Russian Federation while at the same time avoiding a direct confrontation with the West and protecting its global economic interests.

Overall, the relationship between China and the Russian Federation can be characterized as a strategic partnership based on geopolitical convergence and shared economic interests, but not as a formal alliance. In the context of the conflict in Ukraine, Chinese diplomacy seeks to maintain its position as a moderate and pragmatic actor, avoiding direct involvement and promoting the idea of a negotiated solution in accordance with the general principles of its foreign policy.

The Beginnings of Cooperation with Romania

Romania paid particular attention to China even before becoming a kingdom. Prince Carol I addressed a letter to the Emperor of China, Guangxu, on April 8/20, 1880, informing him of the proclamation of Romania's independence, which had become a free and sovereign state. In this letter, he also expressed the desire to establish relations based on goodwill and cordial friendship between Romania and the Qing Empire.

At the beginning of 1881, on January 26, a response acknowledging the mutual recognition of the two states—Romania and China—was received. In his message, the Chinese sovereign expressed “warm wishes for prosperity and well-being to the country and the people of Romania.”

Mao Zedong later reached the conclusion that China's economic development, according to the Five-Year Plans based on assistance from the Soviet Union and the countries of “people's democracy,” would be a slow process and would increasingly make China dependent on Moscow. As a result, a process of developing essential sectors in China—such as agriculture, trade, and industry—was initiated with the aim of concentrating in the hands of the state the resources necessary to engage China in a vigorous program of socio-economic development based primarily on its own capabilities.

In 1954, Dr. Petru Groza paid a visit to China, where he held discussions with Mao Zedong regarding the exchange of national experiences in economic and social development. During this visit, Petru Groza traveled to several major Chinese cities. Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej later visited China in 1956 to participate in the Eighth Congress of the Chinese Communist Party. The discussions were considered productive, and the Romanian leader was seated to the left of Mao Zedong at the reception offered by the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party.

A year later, Chivu Stoica referred to the formulation expressed at the Eighth Congress of the Chinese Communist Party—“the camp of peace, democracy, and socialism”—during the

consultations held in Moscow. During a meeting with Chinese students in Moscow, Mao declared that just as imperialism had a leader, namely American imperialism, socialism also had a leader, namely the Soviet Union.

There are indications that Romanian officials may have been inspired by the example of the 1950s, when Soviet troops and a Soviet naval base stationed on the territory of the People's Republic of China were withdrawn, prompting Romanian leaders to initiate discussions regarding the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Romanian territory.

In 1960, delegations from socialist states arrived in Bucharest to participate in the Third Congress of the Romanian Workers' Party. The event was organized with considerable diplomatic caution in order not to escalate tensions between Beijing and Moscow. Nevertheless, the first visible signs of tension between the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China began to emerge. Gheorghiu-Dej found himself in a delicate situation, as he was pressured to conform to the arrangements proposed by Nikita Khrushchev.

The Informational Letter reached the Romanian delegation at around 10:00 p.m., and the Romanian proposal that the conference proceedings should be chaired on a rotating basis was rejected by Khrushchev. The head of the Chinese Communist Party delegation, Peng Zhen, was irritated by the attitude of the Soviet delegation. Gheorghiu-Dej responded by praising the merits of the Chinese Communist Party and of Chairman Mao Zedong, recalling his conversations with the Chinese leader and recommending that the situation be treated with calm.

Moreover, the Romanian leader referred to the fact that he himself had previously been treated harshly by Soviet leaders such as Molotov, Kaganovich, and even Stalin, who once told him: "I do not trust you." In the end, the Chinese delegation parted from their Romanian counterparts on cordial terms.

Conclusions

The evolution of relations between Romania and China highlights the existence of a mutual interest in developing diplomatic and political ties since the period of the formation of the modern Romanian state. The establishment of official contacts between Romania and the Qing Empire at the end of the nineteenth century demonstrates the early concern of the Romanian state to assert itself on the international stage and to develop relations with the Asian space.

The analysis of China's foreign policy reveals the emergence of a distinct diplomatic model characterized by a combination of discursive neutrality and strategic pragmatism. In its official discourse, Beijing insists on principles such as respect for state sovereignty, non-interference in internal affairs, and the peaceful resolution of conflicts, elements that allow it to present itself on the international stage as a responsible and stable actor. At the same time, beyond this moderate rhetoric, China's diplomatic action is strongly oriented toward protecting and expanding its economic, political, and strategic interests.

The positions adopted by China in various international conflicts and in its relations with the major centers of power in the international system clearly illustrate this approach. Beijing generally avoids direct involvement in military confrontations or the promotion of regime change, preferring instead to support diplomatic solutions and multilateral negotiations. This strategy allows China to maintain relations with diverse and even rival actors, thereby strengthening its role as a pragmatic partner and potential mediator within the international system.

At the same time, the main instruments of Chinese diplomacy remain economic cooperation, investments, and the development of networks of global interdependence. Through initiatives such as the Belt and Road Initiative and through the expansion of economic partnerships with states in different regions of the world, China seeks to consolidate its global influence without resorting to classical instruments of geopolitical domination.

Therefore, China's foreign policy reflects a strategy of gradual assertion within the international system, in which stability, economic development, and diplomatic dialogue are used as instruments for strengthening power. In this sense, China seeks to establish itself not only as a major economic power but also as a diplomatic actor capable of influencing the evolution of the international order through a combination of strategic prudence, pragmatism, and cooperation.