'Professionalization' of Chinese International-Relations Think-Tanks in the 1990s: A Content-Analysis Approach

Stephan Scheuer

Summary

Think-tanks have enjoyed increasing attention among scholars of Chinese foreign policy in recent years. But so far, surprisingly little is known about the way these institutions evolved. Many scholars agree that international-relations think-tanks started to play a more important role in foreign-policy decision-making procedures as their work began to be 'professionalized' in the 1990s. They agree on this in spite of having a framework to systematically measure what 'professionalization' actually means. This paper attempts to go a step further to identify, define and characterize this shift towards professionalization. Using content analysis, articles by think-tanks are compared in three different cases since the beginning of the 1990s. A shift in the method of argumentation employed in the articles is revealed as more recent articles provide a less normative and more theory-based interpretation of international events.

1   Introduction

Scholars analysing foreign policy-making in the People's Republic of China (PRC) have largely concentrated their research on decision-making procedures. According to them, the old paths via which decisions were made on a central level became more open to other actors, especially during the 1990s. Scholars have described a trend towards "increasingly open decision-making" (Zhu & Xue, 2007, p. 47) that has enabled other actors and institutions that had previously been excluded to take part in the process (Cao, 2004; Dickson, 2003; Unger & Dittmer, 2002).

International-relations (IR) research institutes, or think-tanks (known hereafter as 'TTs'), are one type of actor who plays a role here. This is a rather special one, too: while they used to play a minor role in research and were criticized for being too closely attached to the government, they started to enjoy more academic attention in the course of the past decade. Only a few scholars continued to identify them as being part of the bureaucracy (Mohanty, 1998, p. 587); most labelled them as semi-governmental actors that needed detailed analysis (Liao, 2006; Glaser & Saunders, 2002; Li, 2009; Zhao, 2005). They are now seen as providing additional ways to

understand how foreign-policy decisions are being made in the PRC (Zhu, 2010; Jakobson & Knox, 2010; Friedrich, 2000; Shambaugh, 1991). Scholars claim that the way TTs work has changed significantly since the 1990s. 'Professionalization' (Lampton, 2001, p. 10) is the term often used to describe the changes that made these institutes so much more valuable for the study of foreign policy-making in the PRC. So far, however, methodologically reliable studies are still lacking to explain why these bodies should get increasing analytical attention. Zhu Xufeng has tried to give an explanation by using questionnaires to show how far TTs can count as 'influential' on foreign-policy decision-making (Zhu, 2009, p. 333). Like others before him, though, he had problems measuring 'influence' as an empirical category in foreign policy (Quansheng Zhao, 2005, p. 123; Quansheng Zhao, 1992, p. 158; Liao, 2006, p. 63).

This paper takes a different approach. Numerous scholars advocate using TT publications as sources of information (Zhu, 2010; Jakobson & Knox, 2010; Friedrich, 2000; Shambaugh, 1991). But if the work done by TTs did actually change during the 1990s, then their articles could reveal much more than just interpretations of international events. The way the authors write about their topics could also indicate exactly how the work of TTs became more professional. If TTs changed, their publications might have changed as well.

I shall approach this by comparing TT publications at different points in time. If the assumed shifts really impacted TTs and their publications, this should be visible in the argumentation of each article. Comparing different articles will allow us to answer the following question: *Did trends towards 'increasingly open policy-making' in the PRC's foreign policy during the 1990s influence TT publications?* The idea behind this question is to identify the extent to which authors have changed their lines of argumentation, e.g. are the arguments presented in the articles more normative or more theory-based, and how far do the lines of argumentation change in the same journal over time? Using content analysis, this paper will assess whether or not the lines of argumentation pursued in these journals really changed at all during the 1990s.

2   Professionalization of think-tanks

Foreign-policy decision-making in the PRC has traditionally been highly centralized. Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping both dominated the way in which decisions were made (Kim, 1994, p. 24); institutions only had a limited amount of influence. A closed realm of top leaders were the only people besides Mao and Deng who were involved, which was already obvious to analysts at the time (Nathan, 1973, p. 35), but new studies were able to draw an even more detailed picture showing that the number of people involved was even smaller than assumed (Huang, 2000, pp. 411-17).

This structure shifted fundamentally at the beginning of the 1990s. Since then, scholars have described "increasingly open decision-making" (Zhu & Xue, 2007,

p. 47) in foreign policy. The number of participants widened: various central- and local-government agencies were able to take part in and influence the policy process (Shirk, 1993; Lieberthal & Lampton, 1992; Lieberthal, 2004). At the same time, different types of social elites gained increasingly important roles in the policy process (Cao, 2004; Dickson, 2003; Unger & Dittmer, 2002). Lampton used the term 'professionalization' (2001, p. 10) to describe the changes in the Chinese political structure. With the end of Deng Xiaoping's leading role, his successor Jiang was unable to acquire a comparable dominant position. As a result, he further emphasized the institutionalization of decision-making procedures and the broad influence of other actors such as research institutes (Fewsmith, 2008, p. 197). According to Lampton, the professionalization was not limited to the decision-makers themselves, but was also present among the people indirectly participating in decision-making – like the research institutes or TTs (2001, p. 10).

One of the points that indicated the shift was the CCP National Congress in 1997 (Shambaugh, 1998, p. 10; Ouyang, 1998, p. 5). This was the first congress to take place after the death of Deng Xiaoping. His successor, Jiang Zeming, was able to force his party rival, Qiao Shi, to retire and announced plans for the restructuring of state-owned enterprises. As he lacked a powerful position comparable to Deng's, he tried to fill the vacuum of decision-making power by further stressing the power of institutions (Ouyang, 1998, p. 5). Decisions should not lie solely with individuals any longer, he said, but be made by established institutions (Fewsmith, 2008, p. 202). A "more pluralistic and competitive Chinese policy environment" (Glaser & Saunders, 2002, p. 616) was created.

Research institutions themselves were directly affected by the shift. Not only did they become more involved in decision-making processes, but the work itself changed as well. Up to the 1980s, their work was described as having very little analytical depth (Langford et al., 1991, p. 4). And political scientist Michael Yahuda even summarized that international relations was almost non-existent as a discipline in China at the time (Yahuda, 1987, pp. 319-323). The first new trends grew visible in the early 1990s, however. With the vanishing influence of Deng Xiaoping, IR research institutes gradually shifted the scope of their work to reflect a more analytical approach and less Marxist-Leninist ideology (Langford et al., 1991, p. 4). At the same time, it was obvious that they were still very much serving a purpose as organs executing government action. But even back then, certain scholars predicted that their influence and independence would increase: "in the future, they should and can play a more active role" (Luo, 1991, p. 77).

Increasing analytical depth characterized the slowly developing work of IR research institutes. Similar observations were made in the study of IR research institutions that focus on national security, as Mohanty has summarized: they have "been witnessing profound changes during recent years which shows that the changing times have brought about a change in China's strategic thinking as well. The Marxist-Leninist model, soviet pattern of education and heavy ideological leaning all have been slowly paving the way for a more professional outlook that reflects the

pragmatism" (Mohanty, 1998, p. 597). Similar findings also exist in the field of international relations. Universities put more emphasis on the study of international relations and institutes were better equipped. What used to be limited to a small number of elite universities in Beijing and Shanghai became available to many more students around the country (Chan, 1997, pp. 40-64). Many of the staff employed at IR research institutes were trained at Chinese universities, which must have had an influence on how such places worked. In a more detailed study of the development of these IR research institutes, or 'think-tanks' as they were being called by then, Saunders described trends towards a less ideological and more theory-based perception of the United States as well (Saunders, 2000, pp. 41-65).

What does this professionalization actually mean then? In what way does the policy advice given by these TTs differ from what they provided previously? The various descriptions of 'professionalization' (Lampton, 2001, p. 10) seem to encompass all of the characteristics David Lampton claimed for the description of changing foreign-policy decision-making procedures. But if the decision-making shift really did affect Chinese TTs, then it is crucial for us to understand how this exactly happened.

This article will not go into detail regarding the definition of TTs or the historical development of these institutions, as this has already been done by several researchers (Bondiguel & Kellner, 2010, p. 12; Zhu 2009, p. 337; Zhu & Xue 2007, p. 453; Liao 2006, p. 53). However, it is important to categorize the existing IR TTs in China. Various scholars have already tried to identify all the important TTs at the time, with varying degrees of success (cf. Friedrich, 1996, pp. 407-413; Mohanty, 1998, pp. 587-598; Liao, 2006, p. 10). The most comprehensive overview was published in a special issue of *China Quarterly* magazine in 2002. The institutions analysed were separated into two very useful categories: civilian and military. According to an overview by David Shambaugh in that issue, there were 12 institutions labelled as civilian TTs (2002, pp. 579-596). Gill and Mulvenon identified a total of seven major military TTs also working on international relations topics (2002, pp. 618-623). To varying degrees, they were all attached to government institutions, but enjoyed the more relaxed political environment of the third period.

This paper will therefore analyse the effects of the decision-making shift in TTs by looking at their publications. The selection of relevant TTs will be based on the two categories stated above: civilian and military. The way international politics is perceived is represented in the articles that were published. If there really was such a profound shift in the work of these bodies, it ought to be apparent in their articles.

3   Methodology

3.1   Research model

To make the research of this paper as valid and reliable as possible, it is necessary to translate the approach into a research model first of all (King et al., 1994, p. 12). The underlying assumption of TTs being influenced by shifts in policy-making can be summarized in the following way: 'increasingly open policy-making' as an independent variable (IV) is influencing 'TT publications' as a dependent variable (DV). If the shifts in policy-making impacted the way TTs worked, it should also have impacted their publications. In order to prevent the wrong correlations from being measured, 'policy shifts' has been included here as an intervening variable (IntV). When comparing articles published at different times, there is always a danger of showing general shifts in government policies rather than real shifts in how the argumentation in TT publications works. This danger needs to be reflected in the cases that are selected.

The assumptions about a general trend towards professionalization in Chinese IR think-tanks can be transformed into two hypotheses for the purpose of this empirical analysis:

> *Hypothesis 1: Increasingly open policy-making during the 1990s resulted in less normative and more theory-based publications by IR think-tanks.*

What has been described as professionalization by Lampton and others (Lampton, 2001, p. 10) is translated into two applicable categories for the empirical analysis: less normative and more theory-based publications. As already indicated by Glaser and Saunders, real shifts in the work of TTs might be seen in their application of theory (Glaser & Saunders, 2002, p. 616). What is essential here is the rigorous application of theory, which might also produce a critical assessment of Chinese policy. This implies a less normative approach towards politics as traditional TT approaches were described as being normative without having much of a theoretical basis (Mohanty, 1998, p. 597).

> *Hypothesis 2: Intervening variables such as policy shifts impact the influence of increasingly open policy-making on think-tank publications.*

This hypothesis describes the influence of possible intervening variables. In order to ensure that the analysis only measures the influence of increasingly open policy-making, shifts in policies need to be reduced to a minimum, otherwise they might impact the main outcome. If the PRC's policy towards Taiwan changed fundamentally, for example, this would impact the way open policy-making influenced TT publications. Therefore the intervening variable needs to be kept as constant as possible for the selection of cases.

3.2   Methodology: content analysis

In order to assess the shifts and changes in TTs' publications, their argumentation will be taken as the central reference point here. As the hypotheses imply, the research method needs to identify how far the underlying argumentation shifted towards a less normative and more theory-based approach. The method of content analysis was developed to provide a tool with which to analyse communication and is very useful for text analysis (Straus, 1968, p. 5; Krippendorff, 2004, p. 1). It is therefore also the method of choice for the purpose of this paper.

Content analysis is a useful methodological approach as it is designed to analyse and compare texts and other forms of communication. The central problem to be solved using this methodology is data reduction. To be able to analyse available TT publications, the high volume of words needs to be classified into a relatively small number of content categories (Weber, 1996, p. 15). Content analysis is a suitable way of tackling this problem, one in which special emphasis is put on scientific requirements such as inter-subjectivity, reliability and validity. These requirements would be more difficult to meet with other approaches, namely grounded theory (Lamnek, 1995, pp. 207-227; Strauss & Corbin, 1996, p. 7).

This paper will follow the content-analysis approach proposed by Krippendorff and others (Krippendorff, 2004, p. 10; Mayring, 2008, p. 42; Weber, 1996, p. 15). The unit of analysis is TT articles. The analysis of these articles was based on a codebook. The codebook itself contains definitions about which content is assigned to which category. The four main categories used were 'normative statement', 'policy advice', 'applying theory' and 'objective description'.

Before defining which articles should be included in data collation, relevant cases need to be identified in line with the research model. In the context of this paper, a case is understood to be a policy issue in international relations that has been covered in TT publications.

3.3   Case selection

According to the research model, a comparison is necessary between the different times when policy shifts occurred. In the framework chosen, the mid-1990s had been described as a reference point for policy shifts, with the 1997 CCP National Congress being one example (Shambaugh, 1998, p. 10; Ouyang, 1998, p. 5). Policy shifts were an ongoing process, but in order to compare the evolving lines of argumentation, articles were picked from different points in time to provide some further insights. At least one case during the early to mid-1990s was therefore necessary and one from the late 1990s. To increase the explanatory potential and limit the influence of possible interference by other variables, two cases in the late 1990s were selected. Issues that were outside existing standard operating procedures were preferred as they required TTs not just to reproduce what had been done

before, but to adapt existing positions to suit the new developments. This created the potential to reveal levels of normative or theory-based interpretations for the purpose of the paper.

As for the first case, the Taiwan Strait crisis of 1995-1996 provides a good example. Time-wise, it fell within the scope of established political processes. Although increasingly open policy-making did slowly have an influence on foreign affairs from the beginning of the 1990s, it was still only developing slowly during Jiang's power consolidation (Suisheng Zhao, 1999, p. 1). The crisis itself has been described as the product of existing confronting perceptions and policies mainly in the United States and the PRC. As the escalating crisis lasted for almost two years, there was also plenty of time for it to be covered in the articles published by TTs (Scobell, 2007, p. 171). The visit by Taiwanese President Lee Teng-hui to the United States in June 1995 did not necessarily imply a military reaction and therefore left room for interpretation (Scobell, 2007, p. 171). The launch of military exercises by Beijing and the dispatching of two aircraft carriers to the Taiwan Strait by Washington left enough space for TTs to publish their perceptions of the development (Li, 2007, p. 288).

The second case needed to be selected from the late 1990s. NATO's bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade in 1999 was a suitable event. The bombs that hit the embassy killed three people and triggered a fundamental conflict between China and the United States (Suisheng Zhao, 2004, p. 193; Kornberg & Faust, 2005, p. 145). What makes it especially interesting for our purposes is the way the incident developed. After a first very harsh official reaction from Beijing, the diplomatic level of the conflict developed comparatively smoothly (B. Wu, 2006, p. 358). This again provided a space for the publication of TT perceptions. In comparison to the first case, it provides researchers with the possibility of tracing the first effects of the 1997 shift.

The third case chosen was the Taiwanese presidential election held in 2000. The victory of Chen Shui-bian, a prominent supporter of Taiwanese independence, created the need for interpretation in China. Some scholars described his success as a great surprise for Chinese Taiwan watchers (Sheng, 2002, p. 59). Regardless of whether that was the dominant perception or not, the situation created the need for new strategic explanations and choices. Before the election, the Taiwanese President, Lee Teng-hui, had already created some uncertainty in China with his announcement of the two-state theory (Su, 2008, p. 52). In comparison to the first case, this provides an inside look at developments as Taiwan functions as a reference in both cases. The impacts of the shifts should therefore at least be recognizable.

The selection of all three cases is summarized in Table 1. A variance was created for the independent variable (IV), from 'limited' for the first case to 'more open' for both cases during the late 1990s. Policy shift, an intervening variable (IntV), was kept relatively constant. There were policy shifts in the period from 1995 to 2000, but as Lampton described, these mainly concentrated on how decisions were made

in Chinese foreign policy (Lampton, 2001, pp. 1-10). Policy shifts that occurred during this period of time should not be played down, namely the Asian financial crisis of 1997/98, the "*zouchuqu*" of state-owned enterprises in 1999/2000 and the 'charm offensives' towards South-east Asia. But as for the relations to Taiwan and the United States during this period, they remained relatively constant. All the events occurred within a relatively short time. The dependent variable has no value at this point, as this will be the result of the empirical analysis.

Table 1: Three cases

	Year	Policy shift (IntV)	increasingly open policy-making (IV)	TT publications (DV)
Third Taiwan Strait crisis	1995/96	Relatively constant	Limited	?
NATO bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade	1999	Relatively constant	More open	?
Presidential election, Taiwan	2000	Relatively constant	More open	?

4   Empirics

4.1   Data collection and analysis

Making a selection of TTs and their articles is necessary to identify the most relevant journals. The main goal of the selection is to represent the two categories of IR think-tanks, viz. civilian and military. Other scholars have already undertaken the task of identifying the most relevant journals used by civilian IR TTs.

In the case of civilian IR TTs, two institutes and their journals are of particular significance. According to Mohanty, there are two journals that are crucial here: *Contemporary International Relations* (*Xiandai Guoji Guanxi*) and *International Studies* (*Guoji Wenti Yanjiu*) (Mohanty, 1998, p. 593). *Contemporary International Relations* is the monthly magazine published by the China Institute of Contemporary International Relations (CICIR). The CICIR itself is an important institute to refer to (Shambaugh, 2002, p. 581). Since the mid-1980s, it has been subordinated to the Ministry of State Security and since 1999 to the Central Committee. The CICIR is described as a very important TT as the Foreign Affairs Leading Group (FALG) is its principal customer. The journal *Contemporary International Relations* is also described as "influential" (Shambaugh, 2002, p. 582). *International Studies* is a very important journal as well. It is published by the China Institute of International Studies once every two months (Mohanty, 1998, p. 594). Shambaugh even goes as far as to put it on the same level as a major British think-tank: "CIIS has now emerged as the full counterpart to the Royal Institute of International Affairs (Chatham House)" (Shambaugh, 2002, p. 583). For Mohanty, *International Studies* was the most influential journal in the field of Chinese IR near the end of the 1990s (Mohanty, 1998, p. 594). Both journals are therefore good reference points for an analysis of civilian IR TTs.

As for military IR TTs, there are two very important journals that exist as well that can be used for the analysis: *Peace and Development* (*Fazhan yu Heping*) and *International Strategic Studies* (*Guoji Zhanlue Yanjiu*). The first one is published by the Center for Peace and Development Studies under the China Association for International Friendly Contact (Gill & Mulvenon, 2002, p. 619). It is therefore directly connected to the PLA. Some people assume relations exist to the central government ministries as well (Shambaugh, 2002, p. 587). The second journal, *International Strategic Studies*, is published by the China Institute for International Strategic Studies (CIISS), described as the "premier intelligence analysis TT in the Chinese military" (Gill & Mulvenon, 2002, p. 619).

These four journals provide an overview of the dominant discussions in Chinese civilian and military IR TTs. Shambaugh described the four journals as offering "excellent insights into the analysis of contemporary international affairs being carried out in China's civilian and military intelligence communities" (Shambaugh, 2002, p. 587). Altogether, 38 articles could be identified that were associated with the three cases. They were then all coded in accordance with the codebook.

4.2   Chinese civilian IR think-tanks

The analysis of civilian IR TT publications was done in three steps. First, the development of each case and its coverage was described in detail using selected sample articles. Additional information about the development of the events was provided to explain the articles' background. This is a useful way to describe the structure of the publications and explain their different lines of argumentation. The second step was the presentation of aggregated data using the codebook applied to each article. This helped to create an overview and support the comparison done in the first step. The third and last step was to make a summary based on a combination of the findings of the first qualitative and the second quantitative approach.

4.2.1 Qualitative data

The event that triggered the third Taiwan Strait crisis was the visit of the Taiwanese President Lee Teng-hui to Cornell University in the United States on 9 June 1995. US President Bill Clinton had approved granting him a visa for an unofficial visit. As the PRC's officials had already communicated prior to the event, they saw Lee's visit to the States as a strong provocation. Beijing's reaction was quick to follow: in the month following Lee's speech, almost all dialogue with Washington was broken off, China's ambassador was withdrawn and in late June the PLA began the first of several exercises in the Taiwan Strait (Suettinger, 2006, p. 277).

In the first few months of the crisis, the journals did not publish any articles on the issue at all. Even when Chinese officials decided to conduct surface-to-surface missile tests 80 to 90 miles north of Taiwan, no article was published on the issue. This situation continued until December when an article on Sino-American relations was published in *Contemporary International Relations* (Xi, 1995, pp. 6). It stated that the US Congress had provoked the conflict and that Chinese officials were

reacting to the external pressure put on them. The Chinese missile tests themselves were not mentioned by the author; he simply concluded his piece with the prediction that the conflict would continue.

This position was repeated in several articles published in the first months of 1996. The similar pattern included a brief description of the events while blaming the US for causing the conflict. In an article published in January 1996, the author included a brief summary of the various military exercises conducted by the PLA. He explained that diplomatic relations had been resumed by the end of 1995, but that the United States was preventing the conflict from easing: "Meiguo jujue chengnuo cishi buzai fasheng" [transl.: the US refused to promise that such an event would not happen again] (J. Xue, 1996, p. 47). The author also took a very pessimistic stance on future developments. In his opinion, the action taken by the United States made improvements in bilateral relations very difficult: "Zhonmeiguanxi hennan huifu quanmian youhao" [transl.: Sino-US relations can hardly resume comprehensive friendship] (J. Xue, 1996, p. 47).

This kind of position persisted until the conflict officially ended, which was in the winter of 1996. An article was published in *Contemporary International Relations* in October claiming that the settling of the conflict was not credible. The two authors blamed members of the US Congress for "guchui meiguo bangzhu baowei taiwan" [transl.: advocating US help to defend Taiwan" (Zhang & Lü, 1996, p. 14) and identified this as the reason for the conflict. The entire article claimed the US Congress was the source of the problems in Sino-US relations. In the authors eyes, members of Congress criticized and threatened (the PRC) continuously for no good reason ("wuduan zhize he donghe") (Zhang & Lü, 1996, p. 14).

In *International Studies* there were only two articles published between 1995 and 1996 covering the crisis. In general, they followed a similar pattern, but undertook more detailed descriptions that were also broader. At one point, an article published by CASS scholar Wang Jizhong in January 1996 started condemning the US with statements like "zheyi sunhai zhongguo zhuquan he zunyan de cuowujueding" [transl.: this false decision harmed China's sovereignty and honour] (J. Wang, 1996, p. 1), in line with the described pattern. But then the author outlined various contradictions in America's policy towards the PRC. He tried to show where the US policy of 'containment' and the US government's ideas of 'engagement' produced conflicting action in foreign-policy decisions. Overall, the US was still pigeonholed as the source of the conflict, but this article actually showed a distinct difference compared to the ones in *Contemporary International Relations*.

The second case study – the embassy bombing in Belgrade in 1999 – produced an entirely different line of argumentation in the publications. On 7 May 1999, five bombs hit the Chinese Embassy in Belgrade and caused the death of three people and injured twenty more. The following day, the Chinese government issued a statement demanding the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) to take full responsibility for the incident. The US government responded by describing the event as a mistake. Protests broke out at the embassies of NATO countries in many

major cities in China the very same day. The US Embassy in Beijing even suffered some damage (Kornberg & Faust 2005, p. 145).

As the public protests continued, *Contemporary International Relations* was quick to include a page in its May volume condemning the bombing, which was written by the entire editorial staff: "Jianjue zhichi woguo zhengfu yanzheng shengming" [transl.: we firmly support our government's stern statement] (CIR editorial staff, 1999, p. 1). Unlike the 1995-1996 crisis, an immediate response to the event was published by the journals. Many more articles were printed the following month. An article summarizing apologies published by various NATO countries was published in June, by which time a strong shift in the perception of the bombing was already visible in China.

While the protesters and many mainstream news media continued to condemn the US in strong terms (Niu, 2006, p. 358), the articles in *Contemporary International Relations* displayed a much higher level of reflection. In an article he published in August 1999, Yan Xuetong analysed the conflict from the perspective of a changing international environment. With a distinct theoretical focus on neo-realism, he interpreted the events as a symbol of the changing international distribution of capabilities. In his view, the Kosovo war showed that the United States was attempting to consolidate its power in the wake of the Cold War. He described the NATO alliance as only acting through the dominant American position. Yan provided a summary of the shifts in the distribution of international power since the end of the 1980s and included summaries outlining how far these events had influenced China's security environment. He did not describe the Belgrade bombing as a danger or major reason for concern, but rather perceived the event as a historic opportunity to handle a conflict calmly in order to create a favourable international environment for the PRC. It was with this policy advice that he concluded his text (Yan, 1999, pp. 7-10).

Policy advice and the application of political theory were conducted by other writers in the following months. Many articles referred to the changing international distribution of capabilities to give a broader picture of the conflict in Kosovo and the bombing of the embassy. In doing so, they differed distinctly from positions expressed in the media, especially in the period immediately following the conflict. The articles did not openly criticize existing policies, but most of the authors suggested much less aggressive answers to the conflict. Many of these articles reflected underlying principles of the neo-realist school of thought. Even if the authors did not explicitly state the application of a realist approach, the way the international situation was described revealed categories and interpretations fitting those of the realist school.

Three articles were published in *International Studies* that referred explicitly to the Belgrade bombing. Some of them were more detailed than the ones in *Contemporary International Relations*, but their lines of argumentation were very similar. The authors elaborated on the changing distribution of international power and used their descriptions to explain the background of the bombing. It was

stressed that the incident should not be seen as a single event, but needs to be analysed with a view to the general US policy in the area. Although the military intervention was conducted by NATO, the authors referred to the United States as being the most powerful actor in the alliance (Xia, 1999, p. 4).

The third case – the Taiwanese elections in 2000 – did not receive much attention in either of the two journals. The elections did play a role, but again the dominant interpretation did not focus on the actual event, but rather on the broader context of American involvement in the relations between mainland China and Taiwan. Chen Shui-bian's victory following the elections on 18 March 2000 meant the Republic of China in Taiwan had chosen its first president from an opposition party. As Chen had taken a stance on Taiwanese independence during the election campaign as well as focusing on the island's economic development, this might have created some uncertainty among Chinese foreign-policy decision-makers, as certain scholars have claimed (Sheng, 2002, p. 52; Su, 2008, p. 59).

The articles published in *Contemporary International Relations* on the issue did not pay much attention to the election results. Taiwan got high priority, but just as an obstacle to the development of Sino-US relations. While the changing international structure did play an important role in the assessment of the 1999 bombing, some scholars fell back to the lines of argumentation used during the 1995-1996 crisis. America was not labelled an aggressor, but Chu Shulong obviously saw the need to introduce his arguments by making a strong point in favour of Chinese sovereignty: "taiwan wenti shishi guan zhongguo guojia zhuquan, anquan he lingtuwanzheng" [transl.: the Taiwan question concerns the principal questions of Chinese sovereignty, security, and territorial integrity] (Sun, 2003, p. 10). The main body of his argumentation displayed a higher degree of reflection as he referred to the national interest of the United States and its powerful position in the international system. His text and the analyses conducted by the other authors therefore went beyond the normatively written articles in the first case, but seem to lack an implicit theoretical basis in the case of the 1999 bombing.

4.2.2 Aggregated data

Using aggregated data generated from the coding process helps us to obtain an overview of all the articles published. It provides a useful method of obtaining additional results in addition to qualitative analysis, and it gives us the possibility of comparing the results of the three cases in one graph. However, as the length of the articles varied widely, the absolute numbers generated from the codes have limited explanatory capability as the codes don't all stand for the same quantity of text. Sometimes a code stands for a single sentence and sometimes for several – according the topics mentioned.

Figure 1 provides an overview of the coding given to articles published by central-government TTs. In the articles selected for the first case (the third Strait crisis), 'normative statements' were the dominant coding category. Most of these pieces included at least one part coded as 'normative' – for many of them, the majority of codes were assigned for making

normative statements. The code 'objective description' has been used almost equally often. But in contrast, 'applying theory' and 'policy advice' were hardly ever used.

Figure 1: Overview of the coding for civilian TT publications
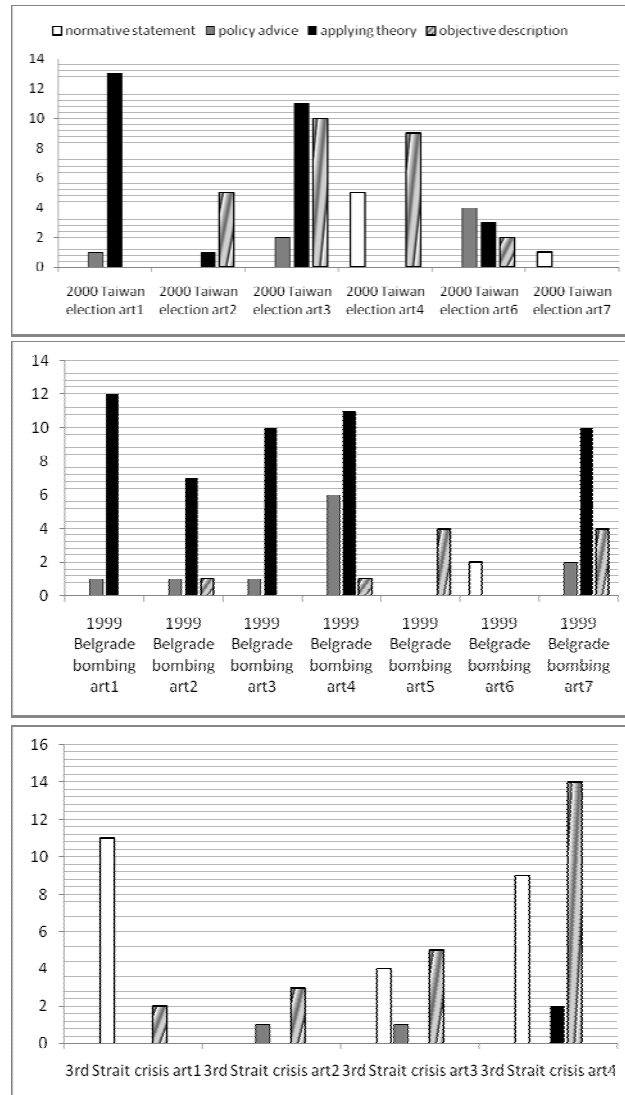
The picture changes completely when we look at the second case, the Belgrade bombing in 1999. The articles on this subject are dominated by 'applying theory' codes and 'policy advice'. Only one article is an exception here – this was published in *Contemporary International Relations* a month after the bombing and was highly

characterized by normative condemnation of America's role in the air strike (CIR editorial staff, 1999, p. 1). The direct aftermath of the incident obviously stirred up strong emotions, as described in the qualitative analysis. But the other articles, published two or more months after the incident, were much more theory-driven and aimed to provide policy advice.

In the third case – the 2000 election in Taiwan – the results are different once again. The articles have a high number of 'applying theory' codes assigned to them, but the 'objective description' code was also frequently used. Policy advice and normative statements are almost equal in number. The articles concerning the Taiwanese election seem to fall between the strongly theory-driven ones on Belgrade (case 2) and the normative ones on Lee Teng-hui's visit to America (case 1). A possible explanation of this might be the issues these articles are written about. Even if the degree of theory application did increase among TT publications and normative statements did play a less important role, the topic still influences the argumentation. Taiwan seemed to be a sensitive issue, even in 2000. The trend towards theory usage was evident on comparing case 1 with case 2, but less pronounced when comparing case 1 to case 3. Writing about the relatively new area of the Kosovo war and expressing reactions to the bombing of the Chinese Embassy were not influenced much by traditional lines of argumentation (i.e. normative statements).

4.3   IR think-tanks associated with the Chinese armed forces

4.3.1 Qualitative data

The coverage of the three cases in military TT journals differed considerably from the civilian ones, but the overall trends were the same. The Taiwan issue was already covered before Lee Teng-hui's visit to Cornell University in June 1999. In an article published in May in *Peace and Development*, the authors blamed Clinton for being the reason for Sino-US relations worsening, taking examples from the PRC's relations with Taiwan. For the author Gao Kao, "zhongmei guanxi bujin yao tingzhi, erqie hui daotui" [transl.: Sino-US relations will not only stagnate, but fall back] (1995, p. 16) because of Clinton's policy as the latter would interfere in Chinese domestic issues. To further underline potential conflicts, he described the modernization of the Chinese armed forces in comparison to America's military expenditure. In his view, this created the necessity to increase military spending in China (Gao, 1995, p. 18).

Other articles followed the same pattern. An article by Zhao Qiqi deserves particular attention here. He was deputy director of the Center for Peace and Development Studies at the time, so it is likely that his viewpoint was influential at the institute. Zhao started his argumentation with the sentence "taiwan shi woguo zuida de dao" [transl.: Taiwan is the biggest island in our country] (Qiqi Zhao, 1995, p. 49). This symbolic sentence at the outset of the article can be seen as setting the tone for the whole piece. What followed was a description of how far China was a victim of US policy under Clinton. In Zhao's eyes, the US administration was abusing Taiwan issue in order to harm the Chinese nation (Qiqi Zhao, 1995, p. 51).

Certain articles in *International Strategic Studies* made historical comparisons to underline their arguments. They were much longer than the ones in *Peace and Development* and had more space to elaborate on historical events. In the first issue in 1996, an article was published on the strategy used by Chinese emperor Kangxi (1654-1722) to conquer Taiwan. A Chinese general had been occupying the island at the time. Kangxi used his armed forces to unite Taiwan with the mainland. To make the relevance of the events to the Taiwan crisis of 1995-1996 even more obvious, the author started his article with the sentence: "Taiwan ziguyilai jiushi zhongguo de lingtu" [transl.: Taiwan has been China's territory since ancient times] (R. Wu, 1996, p. 113). By describing Kangxi's forceful strategy, this kind of article seems to strongly support military solutions for the Taiwan question. Other articles are more explicit and refer to more recent events like the first or second Taiwan Strait crisis. Their arguments are very much like Zhao Qiqi's, blaming the US for being the aggressor (Xin, 1996, p. 19).

In contrast, the 1999 Belgrade bombing was analysed from a completely different angle. Like the civilian TT publications, the articles in *Peace and Development* took a much more theory-based approach to describing the events. Shang Hong, for example, provided an article analysing the Kosovo war as an example of America's new interventionism. He tried to show how far the strategy had shifted and to what extent this might influence China's foreign policy. The bombing of the embassy was not taken as a reason for claiming the US was an aggressor, however. Shang concluded his argumentation with the statement that America's latest interventionism "duici women yinggai yuyi gaodu guanzhu he jingti" [transl.: we need to pay a great deal of attention to this and be prepared for it] (Shang, 1999, p. 2).

In the articles in *International Strategic Studies*, which are mostly very long, the theoretical framework also received much more attention. In an article on Chinese foreign policy in the 21st century, the Kosovo war was taken as an example of future challenges. The US was not seen as the enemy, but rather its shifting strategy was analysed. The author, Wang Yizhou, even used articles by British scholars as sources in his article in order to describe approaches to analysing the shifting international environment. The way Wang tackled the issue was similar to a theoretical neo-realist approach. Categories like 'shifting distribution of capabilities' seemed to play a role, although much of the analysis was actually descriptive (Y. Wang, 1999, p. 21)

International Strategic Studies even published a translated article by Joseph Nye from Harvard University. In the article originally taken from the US journal *Foreign Affairs*, he talked about shifting national interest, with a special focus on the United States and the Kosovo war. In the Chinese version, the title was changed slightly from "Redefining national interest" to "Redefining US national interest" ("Chongxin jieding meiguo guojia liyi") (Nye, 1999, p. 39). Printing such an article in this journal, which traditionally has a military focus, is not a novelty, but was not very

common at the time. It is certainly a completely different approach compared to the coverage of the Taiwan crisis of 1995-1996.

As for the analysis of the Taiwanese presidential election in 2000, the articles maintained a rather more theoretical approach. One study published in *Peace and Development* analysed the influence of the election in Taiwan with reference to domestic politics in the United States. The authorprovided a detailed description of conflicts between Congress and the White House regarding Taiwan. While a small number of statements and politicians were singled out as being hostile towards the PRC during the Taiwan crisis, the articles appearing in 2000 showed a much deeper understanding of the domestic political structure in the United States. Critical statements towards the PRC by members of the US Congress were now interpreted in the light of the political system (Guo, 2000, pp. 38-41). This gave Guo's article a more theory-based argumentation without it making any strong normative statements. In his conclusion, Guo suggested waiting for the outcome of the election as this might still strongly impact the US policy towards Taiwan.

An article in *International Strategic Studies* on the outcome of the Taiwan election also took an approach that closely referred to the political system – Taiwan's in this case. The author described the victory of Chen Shui-bian as an event that did not change Taiwan's policy fundamentally. In his view, Chen's positions regarding independence only enjoyed the support of a minority. He predicted that Taiwan's general policy would not change because of the election result (Xiao, 2000, pp. 115-116).

The more theoretically founded and less normative nature of these articles does not imply any favouring of moderate positions in foreign policy, however. Shi Yinhong discussed the implications of a government white paper about the Taiwan question. While discussing positive and negative aspects of a military solution, he concluded that the white paper increased the possibility of using military force. Without falling back on any normative arguments, he described the higher probability of using the PLA to force Taiwan to unite with the mainland (Shi, 2000, pp. 116-118).

4.3.2 *Aggregated data*
In addition to the detailed descriptions, aggregated coding data provides a useful overview with which to verify the assumptions generated in the previous section. The coding of each article is presented in a combined graph in figure 2.

Figure 2: Overview of the coding outcome for military TT publications Outcomes
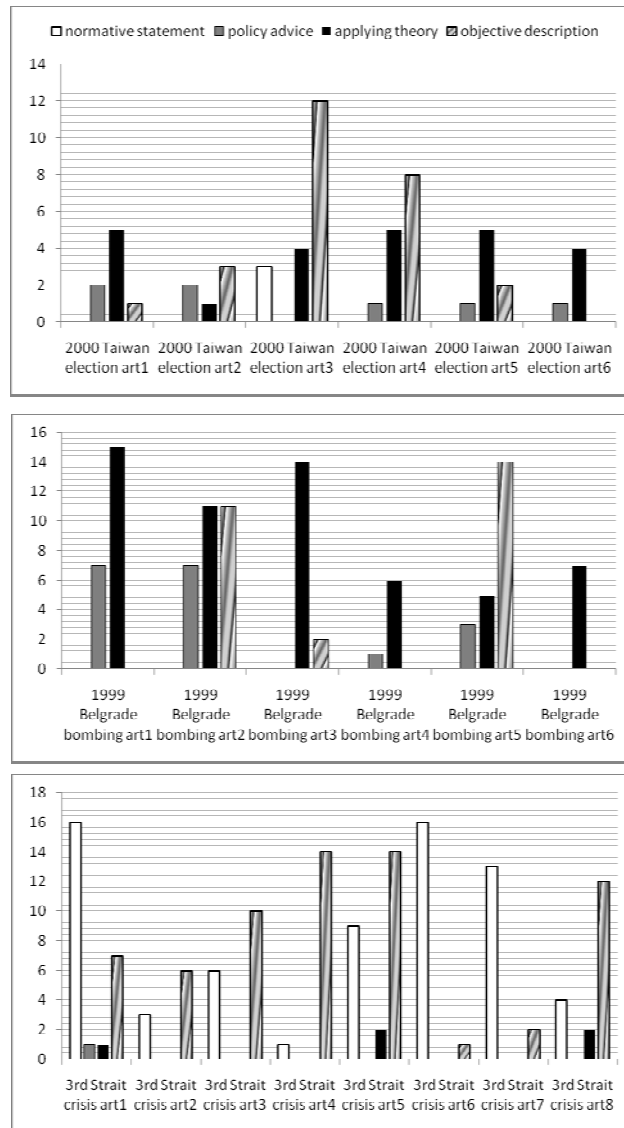
The graph shows a high usage of 'normative statement' and 'objective description' for the first case, the 1995-1996 Taiwan Strait crisis. As already assumed, many authors based their arguments on normative statements; a theoretical framework

seems to have been virtually non-existent for the analyses of the events. Only one of the articles has codes associated with the category of 'policy advice'.

The coding of the coverage of the 1999 Belgrade bombing provides a completely different picture: 'applying theory' is the dominant category here. 'Objective description' remained an important category, but 'policy advice' was also identified many times. This indicated that the authors applied a theoretical framework in formulating their arguments. This is a distinct difference compared to the first case and supports the main hypothesis of this paper.

The third case, the 2000 presidential election in Taiwan, supports the assumed trend towards more theory-based arguments and less normative statements as well. Even if the code 'normative statement' was used in some cases, it only played a minor role compared to the category of 'applying theory'. The code 'objective description' was used the most. Like the civilian TT publications, the third case seems to indicate a less intense trend towards 'professionalization' among the TTs than compared with the second case. It still shows an obvious difference, though.

5   Conclusion

This analysis started from the general assumption that TTs and their publications changed during trends towards 'increasingly open policy-making' in the PRC. The changes in the argumentation were examined by analysing the content of four important TT journals.

The assumed changes seem to be true, judging by the empirical evidence. By translating the unspecific term 'professionalization' into the two categories 'normative statement' and 'applying theory', the articles showed fundamental shifts in the three cases selected. Civil IR think-tank publications started to apply theory slightly more frequently than military ones during the Taiwan Strait crisis (the first case). The two cases selected after Deng's death in 1997 showed different results. Both civilian and military IR TT publications took a much more theory-based approach during the second case, the 1999 Belgrade bombing. This was surprising in as far as the mainstream media and public protests took a much more radical stance at the time (Niu, 2006, p. 358). Even a translated version of Joseph Nye's article on national interest was published, which would probably hardly have been possible before 1997, as the article also critically assessed the developments in Kosovo, including China's role in them. The third case provided a slightly different picture: civilian and military publications used a theoretical framework to a greater extent, but many normative statements were used, especially in the civilian articles. All in all, this outcome supports the hypothesis that was assumed: the articles that were analysed revealed a shift in their lines of argumentation over time; an increasing degree of professionalization characterizes civilian and military TT publications. Think-tank publications did change, as some scholars assumed (Shambaugh, 2002, p. 580; X. Zhu, 2009, p. 333; Liao, 2006, p. 63; Quansheng Zhao, 2005, p. 123).

While the merits of this study should not be played down, it does have limitations that ought to be discussed. As is mostly the case with social-science research, our analysis was only able to show a correlation, but not a causality. The research model attempted to keep the possible intervening variables constant. But unless a tracing procedure is conducted, one cannot be sure if the changes in the publications were really just due to changes in the policy-making procedures. The limited number of articles analysed (38) certainly provides some valuable insights, but the study obviously cannot claim to reflect the overall changes in all of China's TT publications.

But even if we bear these limitations in mind, the paper still reveals some interesting trends. The application of theory in the articles changed significantly since the beginning of the 1990s. Theory itself was limited to a neo-realist interpretation of international events in most cases. Constructivist or neo-liberal approaches played almost no role at all in the publications. This may indicate a certain mindset that Chinese scholars had at the time and give a new angle on explaining how China acted in its foreign policy during this period. The outcome of the paper certainly strengthens the hypothesis that the way Chinese TTs interpret IR issues has changed since the mid-1990s.

As this paper has shown, think-tanks offer an additional way of understanding the Chinese perception of events – one that should be considered in future research on Chinese foreign policy. Focusing on TT publications is only one of many methodological approaches, however. Such a study is limited to making an analysis of TTs from the outside by looking at their published output. The next logical step is to analyse TTs from the inside by conducting research about the actual work done within them. This will take us a step further in understanding how they work and be a task for researchers over the next couple of years.

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