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Universities and Research Institutes as Foreign Policy Actors in China

Universidades e Institutos de Pesquisa como Atores de Política Externa na China

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Abstract: In parallel with the increasing international projection of the People's Republic of China, a broad process of decision-making decentralization and proliferation of foreign policy actors is underway. As a result, the myriad of issues that the country needs to deal with globally have accelerated the professionalization of specialized bureaucracy, as well as demanded expertise in official advice. This article aims to investigate the role of universities and research institutes in this scenario. To this end, the paper initially presents a brief retrospective of contemporary Chinese foreign policy and an overview of recent trends involving decision-making. Then, we seek to discover how the channels of dialogue between the various Chinese think tanks and the leaders responsible for the policy implementation work, guiding the discussion through a historical perspective. We hope, therefore, to contribute to recent studies on the complexification of China's international agency and the coordination challenges that arise from it.

Keywords: China; Foreign Policy; Decision-making Process; Universities; Think Tanks.

Resumo: Em paralelo ao adensamento da projeção internacional da República Popular da China, está em curso um amplo processo de descentralização decisória e proliferação de atores em sua política externa. Em consequência, a miríade de questões com as quais o país precisa lidar no âmbito global tem acelerado a profissionalização da burocracia especializada, bem como demandado *expertise* no aconselhamento oficial. O presente artigo tem o objetivo de investigar o papel das universidades e institutos de pesquisa diante desse cenário. Para tanto, o trabalho apresenta, de início, uma breve retrospectiva da política externa chinesa contemporânea e uma visão geral a respeito das tendências

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recentes envolvendo o processo decisório. Em seguida, buscamos desvendar como funcionam os canais de interlocução entre os diversos *think tanks* chineses e as lideranças responsáveis pela implementação política *de facto*, norteando a discussão através de uma perspectiva histórica. Esperamos, assim, prestar uma contribuição aos estudos hodiernos sobre a complexificação da atuação internacional da China e as dificuldades de coordenação que daí emergem.

Palavras-chave: China; Política Externa; Processo Decisório; Universidades; Think Tanks.

1. Introduction

More than 70 years after the communist revolution of 1949, the foreign policy of the People's Republic of China (PRC) has gone through significant changes since then. For the last few decades, such shifts were caused, at first, both by readjustments on a domestic level, specially the reforms undertaken at the end of the 1970's, as well as due to the structural changes that occurred on the international system, mainly after the end of the Cold War. Nowadays, China's international presence is much more prominent than in previous years, notably regarding its economic influence and active participation in multilateral arrangements.

In that sense, the decision-making process has become increasingly complex and is characterized by, among other factors, the multiplication of actors[3] and the increasing professionalization of the bureaucracy. Therefore, it is possible to see a slight democratization of the Chinese foreign policy process, even if it is still strongly centralized and relatively opaque. It is true that the pinnacle of the decision-making process is still retained at the Politburo Standing Committee (PSC), a very exclusive group of leaders who are responsible for the more delicate strategical decisions. In practice, issues such as relations with other major powers and the reunification with Taiwan remain under the responsibility of such elite.

Even then, the number of players that compete to influence the high leadership has increased considerably. In this context, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) is just one out of many players, which are not necessarily in agreement over what constitutes the Chinese national interest or how to best pursue it in a global arena. At the moment, the foreign policy of the PRC is influenced not only by corporations linked to the Chinese

3 Specifically, in the area of foreign policy, these actors can be understood as institutions and individuals that have the power to make decisions, are formally part of the formulation process or seek to influence outputs (Jakobson & Knox, 2010).

Communist Party (CCP), the government and the armed forces, but also by organizations outside of such spheres.

Experts from universities, research organizations, military academies, executives from state owned companies, bank directors, sub-national administrative authorities and media representatives are some of the leaders that operate on the fringe, outside of traditional official demarcations (Jakobson & Knox, 2010). In this article, our focus is to understand the space that experts occupy, be it through the universities themselves or via think tanks and other institutions dedicated to research. How have these actors been influencing current Chinese foreign policy?

Before we get into this discussion, it would be appropriate to present a brief retrospective of contemporary Chinese foreign policy, which will be covered in the next section. After that, the article will look into recent trends involving the decision-making process of the PRC. Following that, we seek to understand how the channels of dialogue between think tanks (whether they're linked to universities or not) and the leaders which are responsible for the *de facto* policy implementation work, bringing a historical evolution of the topic, as well as some examples. At the end, we draw up some conclusive notes.

2. Chinese Foreign Policy Post-1949: a brief summary

The first moments of China's international performance in the post-revolutionary context were marked by Mao Zedong's determination in assuring the regime's stability – specially focusing on the recovery of the economy, which had been wrecked by recurrent wars – and avoiding any external threat. At that point in time, the high leadership of the CCP saw the possibility of a military conflict with the United States as imminent, either in Taiwan, Indochina, or at the Korean peninsula, as it did indeed happen a few months after the proclamation of the PRC.

Chinese foreign policy during that time, it can be said, was strongly linked to Mao's worldview, who saw North-American imperialism as a great threat which should be eliminated (Mao, 1966; Hunt, 1996). As a matter of fact, a broad content analysis of the speeches of Chinese leaders revealed that Mao's operational beliefs were strongly conflict-oriented (Feng, 2007), mostly because of his historic as a revolutionary partisan and his permanent mistrust regarding the two sides of the bipolar conflict, as exposed on his well-known Three Worlds Theory.

On the other hand, premier Zhou Enlai used to adopt a more diplomatic perspective. Not for nothing he played a vital part on the international insertion of China during the post-war era, having a very important role at the Conference of Bandung (1955) and in the articulation with African countries (Abegunrin & Manyeruke, 2020). As the hostilities of the Cold War slowed down, the leaders responsible for China's foreign policy started reinterpreting the country's position in the world.

The 1970's – which were marked by the replacement of Taipei by Beijing at the United Nations (1971), Mao's death (1976), the rise to power of Deng Xiaoping, and the establishment of formal diplomatic relations with the United States (1979) – were a relevant point of inflection. Since then, with the gradual reforms implemented by Deng, economic development became a greater priority. Direct conflict with the United States or even with the Soviet Union was no longer seen as an inevitable occurrence.

Thus, it was inaugurated a foreign policy strategy based on building friendly and cooperative relations with every and any country, detached from political and ideological guidelines. This behavior, implemented with more energy during the 1980's, had a dual purpose: at the same time that it guaranteed a peaceful international environment for China to integrate itself into the existing international order, it also helped consolidate the power of the CCP "at home" (Wang, 2011).

Through a global performance based on a low profile approach, the PRC reinvented itself under Deng Xiaoping, became an observer of the established norms, an enthusiast of the *status quo,* willing to seize the windows of opportunity. From that behavior emerges the known Dengist aphorism: "*Observe calmly; secure our position; cope with affairs calmly; hide our capacities and bide our time*" (Brown, 2017, p. 19). This less assertive approach to foreign policy remained, with a few adjustments[4], during the presidencies of Jiang Zemin (1993-2003) and Hu Jintao (2003-2013) and was abandoned with Xi Jinping's recent rise to power[5].

In parallel with the succession of new leaders, China's international projection has taken on unimaginable proportions. As the country grew at a double-digit rate annually,

4 Jiang Zemin predicted a time frame of 20 years of strategic opportunities and Hu Jintao's administration highlighted the country's international projection under the label of "peaceful development". As facts unfolded at the beginning of the current century, in particular the 9/11 attacks and the subprime financial crisis, which shifted the global strategy of the United States, this discreet foreign policy was abandoned in China.

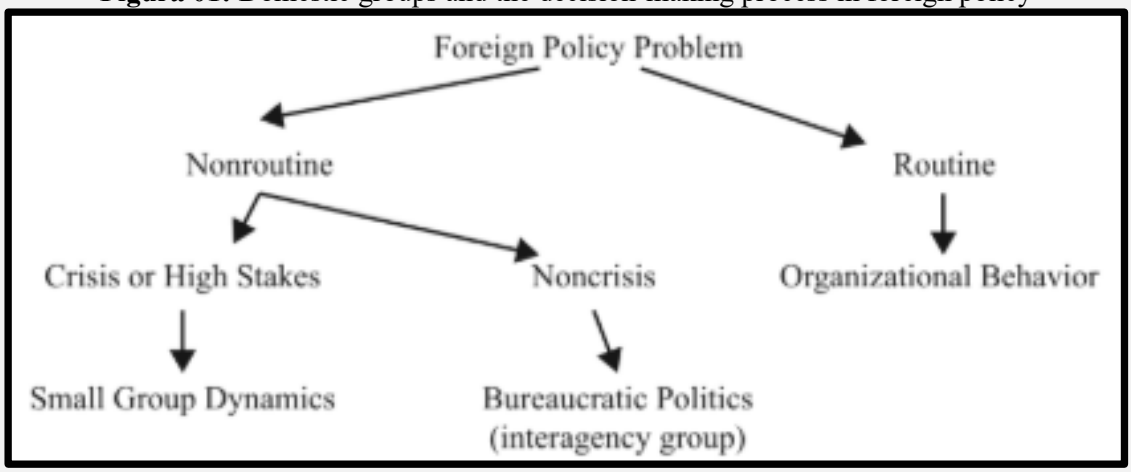
5 It is beyond the scope of the current article to discuss the recent assertiveness of China's foreign policy. For a broad debate on the topic, see: Christensen (2011), Johnston (2013), Chen & Pu (2014), Yan (2014), Zhang (2015), Chang-liao (2016) and Poh & Li (2017).

it was natural that the notion of national interest would expand, as did the number of actors involved in this process. In the 21st century, the great political leaders of the PRC, such as Xi Jinping and current premier Li Keqiang, despite efforts to restore the levels of centralization observed in the past, have to share the stage in regards to the international behavior of the country. As for the present article, it is important to reinforce that its aim is to analyze the role that universities and research institutes play in this context.

3. Decision-making process in the PRC: overview and recent dynamics

Even under very centralized political regimes, as is the case for China, the foreign policy decision-making process is never an exclusively personalist one. That is to say: it does not matter how influential a head of state and/or government is, he will have to reach out to some group dynamic in order to make and implement decisions. Therefore, a good basis for the discussion we aim to develop in this section rests on the fact that the state is not a unitary rational actor (Hudson, 2014).

Figura 01: Domestic groups and the decision-making process in foreign policy



Source: Hudson (2014, p. 73)

In the subdiscipline of Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA), a consensual way to divide foreign policy problems is between routine and non-routine issues. For the former, organizational behavior, through standard operating procedures (SOP), is enough to produce the necessary outputs. On the other hand, non-routine issues are divided between those that involve a crisis situation, when it is necessary to restrict deliberation to a small elite, and the non-crisis ones. The latter tend to be resolved via domestic games played by multiple unitary and corporate actors, which involves bargains, coalitions and manipulating communication channels. The Figure 1 sums up the discussion.

The governance regime implemented by the CCP is composed of three vertical "systems": The Party itself, the government, and the armed forces. Each of these branches has its own subdivisions, which operate according to some major functional sectors (e.g. military issues, administrative issues, propaganda), overseen by a member of the PSC. As we have discussed in the introduction, the PSC is the highest decision-making body in the country. Composed of less than ten members, the committee is the privileged *locus* where political leaders of the country can interact. The PSC is formed from the Party's Central Committee, acting as an executive branch of the committee. The Central Committee and the State Council, alongside the National People's Congress, which is less relevant than the former two, are the central coordinating bodies of the country's domestic political system.

It is important to keep in mind that the Party, government, and armed forces often overlap on the different action fronts of the Chinese State, but there is a certain prevalence of the CCP over the others. At best, the Party controls the use of force – after all, the People's Liberation Army (PLA) is the armed wing of the Party, and not a regular state army – as well as the State's advisory mechanisms (Jakobson & Manuel, 2016). In regards to foreign policy, the highest decision-making body is the Central Foreign Affairs Commission, which is linked to the Party's Central Committee and has been headed, since 2013, by Yang Jiechi, one of the architects behind China's current global performance. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), which is one of the government's bodies, has less power inside this structure.

At the end of the day, it is essential to underline that the great leaders of the country, to a greater or a lesser extent, are still responsible for a significant portion of the decisions made. This is the distinctive continuity trait of the Chinese foreign policy. On the other hand, the role played by experts in counseling the government has increased considerably. In addition to that, the bureaucracy has been going through large professionalization and its role is becoming more complex so that routine decisions or non-crisis situations, especially those that require a high degree of specialized knowledge and experience, might restrain – or even constrain – the interference of the higher political elite.

> The Chinese policy-making process, therefore, presents the analyst with two faces. With regard to major issues of strategy, the setting of broad agendas, and crisis management, the senior elite still has considerable latitude (…) At the same time, in its myriad dealings with the rest of the world on routine issues ranging from arms control to economic

> relations, Beijing increasingly speaks, often with multiple voices, in terms familiar to the rest of the world, and policy changes gradually. In this realm, decisions tend toward global and professional norms, against the ever-present backdrop of realpolitik and considerations of national interest. (Lampton, 2001, p. 2)

Summing up, it is possible to list at least three interconnected trends which have somehow influenced the way in which foreign policy decisions are made in China: (i) the proliferation of organizations, groups, and individuals throughout the decision-making process[6]; (ii) the increase of technical capacities of the bureaucracy and the recurring need to summon experts of a certain field; and (iii) the decentralization of the decision-making process as a whole (Lampton, 2001; Jakobson & Knox, 2010). Understanding the intricacies of these domestic conditions is, therefore, imperative in the investigation of the PRC's foreign policy.

Maybe because they ignore these China's idiosyncrasies, various western analysts – specially Europeans and North-Americans – see a great assertive strategy in how the Asian dragon behaves internationally. To them, China's international performance is a result of rational calculations by its leaders as response to the increasing power and influence that the country has developed (Christensen, 2013). As for the Chinese analysts themselves, they see things differently: China is looking for a great strategy and, on this search, needs to deal with a double challenge of coordinating the different government branches and manage the myriad of different points of view between the elites and the general public (Wang, 2011)[7].

It is within the aforementioned context that academic experts and other research bodies – whether they're linked to the government/Party or not – have been gaining space. Such experts enjoy a relative "symbolic capital" over the decision makers, even if they cannot exert the same level of influence over the public opinion or calculations of a political order. Even then, "they are socially recognized as privileged holders of expertise, which gives them a certain intellectual authority. This position allows them not only to

6 Roughly, the decision-making process includes many stages – recognizing the issue, framing, prioritizing goals, contingency planning, evaluating possible options, etc. – and different levels of analysis. Moreover, a decision will often be reevaluated and tweaked as time passes. It is, in practice, a "constellation of decisions made with reference to a specific situation" (Hudson, 2014, p. 4).

7 Only with respect to maritime affairs, the following bodies, among others, compete for influence: Ministry of Defense; Ministry of Agriculture; Ministry of Land and Resources; Ministry of Transport; Ministry of Ecology and Environment, formerly the Ministry of Environmental Protection; Ministry of Science and Technology; and, above all, the National Development and Reform Commission, which is responsible for the general economic development and particularly for the resources (Jakobson, 2014).

supply governments with information, but also to help construct the cognitive frame through which information is filtered and interpreted" (Morin & Paquin, 2018, p. 196).

In China, the academics ability to influence the decision-making process was practically nonexistent until the 1980's and well into the 1990's. At that point, there were barely any channels of communication with the government and/or the Party. Additionally, these experts were rarely sought by high level government officials for any kind of consultation. As a result of that, few studies produced on an academic environment had political connotations. Testimonies of a few members of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS) reveal that, halfway through the 1990's, a shift occurred in this setting.

> An analyst from the CASS Institute of American Studies recalled his institute first receiving attention from policy makers after the Clinton administration granted a visa to Taiwan President Lee Teng-hui. The State Council informed the leadership that no visa would be granted based on what Vice Premier Qian Qichen believed to be a promise from US Secretary of State Warren Christopher. However, experts from the Institute of American Studies correctly predicted that Lee would be granted a visa. Following that episode, the analyst recounted, the MFA sought advice more frequently from outside specialists. An expert from the CASS Institute of World Economics and Politics dated the beginning of government attention to his institute and the process of government consultation with scholars to the Asian Financial Crisis in 1997. (Glaser, 2013, pp. 102-103)

During the 2000's, right after being named General Secretary of the CCP, Hu Jintao developed a routine of summoning collective study sessions within the scope of the Politburo, when experts from the Party, the government, the PLA or from universities were invited to give lectures on a specific topic of interest (Jakobson & Knox, 2010). It is notable, then, that the conversion of the academy and other research institutes into foreign policy actors is an extremely recent phenomenon, even acknowledging that the reforms at the end of the 1970's have played a central role in this shift. On the following section, we will discuss this subject in detail.

4. The development of think tanks in China

It is extremely important to define the main object of study in this section: the think tanks (*zhiku* 智库 or *sixiangku* 思想库). There is a myriad of different types of think tanks and their institutional links in China: (i) research institutes coordinated by ministries and other government agencies (most of them are divided into departments to better meet specific needs); (ii) academic institutes based in the provinces and other sub-national

administrative units; (iii) research institutes at universities; (iv) research institutes inside the schools of the Communist Party; (v) research institutes within the Armed Forces; and even (vi) research institutes established by non-public foundations, state companies or even financed by other resources (Zhang, 2013). There is, then, a variety of different arrangements, which can be linked to all three of the vertical systems of the PRC, state companies, universities as well as non-public organizations.

The presence of experts in public debate and political counseling, as previously discussed, is a distinctive feature of contemporary Chinese foreign policy. Never before has the cultural, economic and political elite of the country been so engaged and attentive to the think tanks and the expansion of research capacity at universities and other research centers, which are now recognized as guiding tools for the decision-making process. As PRC's foreign affairs expanded, a result of economic growth and the internationalization of national companies, the same happened with the demand for more information about new partners of the country and other global themes (Abb, 2013; Li, 2009; Zhang, 2013). Either way, generally speaking, think tanks are not exactly a novelty in China.

The so called "first generation" of think tanks goes back to the 1950's, 1960's and part of the 1970's. These spaces were constituted, for the most part, using the blueprint of Soviet research institutes, and were strongly linked to specific ministries and their respective institutional missions (Tanner, 2002). Since the PRC was established, it is important to stress, the role of think tanks was highly dependent on preferences and specific characteristics of the main leader. Therefore, despite existing even in the post-revolution context, such arrangements were far from challenging the centralizing forces of the decision-making process in Maoist China.

With the end of Mao's rule and the reforms led by Deng, it became clear that the delay in science and technology constituted a serious barrier to national development. In the Social Sciences, Economics and Foreign Studies research were designated as vital for the reform project, which lead to a rebuilding and systematic expansion of the existing institutional foundation. It was during this period, the end of the 1970's, that the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS) was established, created from the division of Philosophy and Social Sciences of the Chinese Academy of Sciences (CAS), and put under direct control of the State, which designated that it would be considered a unit of ministerial level. To this day, the CASS is the most important research institute in China in the Social Sciences and Humanities field (Abb, 2013).

In the beginning of the 1980's, with the development of the "second generation", many research institutes started gaining more space. The reason behind that was that the main leaders of the Country, specially those more aligned with a reformist orientation, believed that the political reports they were receiving from the traditional departments of the CCP and its ministries were inadequate tools to guide the ongoing economic restructuring. Such leaders, then, started to demand alternatives with a better theoretical and empirical orientation (Tanner, 2002).

At this point, almost all state agencies that dealt with foreign policy tried to build their own expert bodies. Therefore, Deng's administration was characterized by a transition where Soviet style research practices were abolished in favor of Western inspired reforms. Among other events, it should be highlighted: the decentralization of scientific funding; researchers and institutes were allowed more freedom to create their own projects and hire researches; universities were allowed to design their own syllabus' autonomously (Tanner, 2002; Abb, 2013).

The repercussions of the episode on Tiananmen square, in 1989, marked the beginning of what was called "the third generation" of think tanks. The repression threatened the operation of those institutions which were connected to the reform policies. As it pertains to the public security think tanks, what happened in Tiananmen helped redefine the whole research agenda, initially sparking discussions about who was to blame for the demonstrations and the misconduct triggered, forcing analysts to reflect with unprecedented sophistication about the social, economic, and political aspects of the unrest in a socialist society under reform (Tanner, 2002). On the other hand, Tiananmen did not represent such an inflection point at the same intensity for the think tanks of the military, international relations and foreign policy sectors (Tanner, 2002; Abb, 2013).

Under president Jiang Zemin (1993-2003), the think tanks unquestionably consolidated their space and influence within the central government. During the 1990's, Jiang Zemin frequently received counsel from academic institutions in Shanghai, such as Fudan University, the East China University of Political Science and Law, the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences and the Institute of International Studies[8]. Throughout the decade, various young experts with experience in the field of International Relations

8 Before reaching presidency, Jiang Zemin was mayor of Shanghai. According to experts, he is the leader of a coalition within the CCP. For more information: https://edition.cnn.com/2012/10/23/world/asia/china-political-factions-primer/index.html.

moved from Shanghai to Beijing, where they worked alongside the president in areas such as policy planning, propaganda, issues pertaining to Taiwan, and foreign affairs (Li, 2009).

The vast majority of Chinese think tanks studying foreign policy are somehow related to the government[9], from universities and other institutes affiliated to the CCP. The institutional structure of these think tanks is designed to form a critical wing of the government (Abb & Kollner, 2015). All of these groups share one important characteristic: they are strongly linked to the nexus of power between the State and the Party, although in different ways and to varying degrees. Such connection between the government and the CCP is valued by the Chinese think tanks, as such tight connections with the leadership are a criterion for trust and credibility, as opposed to Western think tanks, which value independence (Li, 2009; Abb & Kollner, 2015; Akani, 2019).

Universities and research institutes that act as think tanks in China publish research reports, articles, and books that include both domestic issues and foreign affairs. These analyses frequently come in the form of public policy reports, created according to the demands made by government agencies or as designed by the research institutes themselves. It is not rare that researchers and academics are summoned to be a part of internal discussions among officials and asked to write and comment on the public policy proposals that come out of such discussions. Not only that, but it is common for employees of the CCP, the government, and armed forces to give lectures and participate in seminar discussions and academic workshops (Jakobson & Knox, 2010). The official communication happens through various channels, be it administrative links or personal connections[10] (Zhu, 2019).

A recent study by the University of Pennsylvania shows that China currently has 507 think tanks, behind the United States (1.871) and remarkably close to India (509). On the list of the 100 most important research institutes of the world, the following should be highlighted: *China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations* (CICIR), 18th place on the overall ranking, best ranking of a Chinese institution; *Chinese Academy of Social Sciences* (CASS), 38th place; *China Institute of International Studies* (CIIS), 50th

9 Some examples at a ministerial level are the China's Institute of International Studies (CIIS), under management of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA); China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations (CICIR), under the Ministry of State Security; and the Chinese Academy of International Trade and Economic Cooperation, linked to the Ministry of Commerce.
10 What in China is referred to as guanxi, 关系.

place; *Development Research Center of the State Council* (DRC), 56th place; *Center for China and Globalization* (CCG), 76th place; *Institute of International and Strategic Studies* (IISS), 81th place; and *Shanghai Institutes for International Studies* (SIIS), 96th place (Mcgann, 2019).

In the following section, we briefly present some of these research institutions, as well as three universities that have a key role in policy making in China (Peking, Fudan, and Tsinghua).

4.1. The Chinese Academy of Social Sciences – CASS (中国社会科学院)

The CASS is the main academic organization and a broad research center of the PRC in the fields of Philosophy and Social Sciences, being affiliated to the State Council. It was created in May, 1977, and today it consists of 31 institutes and 45 subordinate research centers, which are accountable for activities covering almost 300 subdisciplines. Nowadays, the CASS has around 4.200 employees, of which over 3.200 are professional researchers.

According to the Chinese government, establishing a broad international exchange program is one of the primordial guidelines for the CASS, a goal which has gained momentum over the last years. The number of researchers that take part in academic exchanges has gone from dozens of people split in ten groups in 1979, to over 4.100 divided into 1.398 groups in 1995. Meanwhile, CASS has built an effective relationship with over 200 research organizations and institutes, institutions of higher education, foundations, and related government departments, in over 80 countries and regions.

The organization, today, has partnerships with institutions from 41 Asian countries, 11 African countries, 36 European countries, 12 Latin-American countries, as well as three regional areas (Taiwan, Hong Kong and Macao; United States and Canada; Australian and New Zealand). In 2019, the Campinas State University (Unicamp), in Brazil, became the first Latin American university to host a CASS owned center, with the intent to reflect about opportunities and challenges that the growth of the Asian country represent for Brazil, as well as to develop new educational, scientific, cultural and commercial partnerships between the two countries (China Hoje, 2019).

4.2. China Institutes of Contemporary International Relation – CICIR (中国现代国际关系研究院)

The China Institutes of Contemporary International Relation (CICIR) is a very well-established complex for research and consultation, extensive and multi-functional, which focuses on strategic studies and international security, created in 1980 from the Ministry of State Security. For years, it has partaken in international academic exchanges. It offers masters and PhD courses and has three academic publications: *Xiandai Guoji Guanxi*, *Contemporary International Relations* and *Guoji Yanjiu Cankao*.

In 2015, the CICIR was designated as a pilot unit for the construction of China's main think tanks. Nowadays, the official organizational blueprint includes 11 sub institutes, two research divisions, eight research centers and various administrative departments. Overall, the team includes 380 people, 150 of which are professors[11].

4.3.China Institute of International Studies – CIIS (中国国际问题研究所)

The CIIS is responsible for researching about international issues to serve the Chinese diplomatic body. It is, in essence, the think tank of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The CIIS was founded on the 25th of November of 1956 and it is responsible for leading research and analysis, mainly about medium and long term issues which are of strategic relevance, particularly those pertaining to the global economy and politics. It also studies and offers recommendations on policies for large events and pressing issues.

The CIIS received its current name in December of 1986. Before, it acted under the label of "Institute of International Relations (IIR)", under China Academy of Science. In 1988, the Chinese Center for International Studies (CCIS), previously a research institution of the State Council, was incorporated to the CIIS.

CIIS' team is composed of almost a hundred researchers and other professionals. Among them are senior diplomats, area studies experts, and featured experts of the main areas of foreign affairs. All the young scholarship holders of the CIIS have advanced university degrees in international relations or other related disciplines. The institute has its own professional library, which houses over 260.000

11 For more information: http://www.cicir.ac.cn/NEW/en-us/index.html.

books. According to the MFA, the collection of international affairs is one of the biggest in the country[12].

4.4. Shangai Institutes for International Studies – SIIS (上海国际问题研究院)

Founded in 1960, the Shanghai Institutes for International Studies, connected to the government, are a broad research organization for studying international politics, economics, security strategies and China's foreign affairs. Among other topics, the think tank dedicates itself to the modernization of China and the economic development and opening of Shanghai.

Overall, the SIIS is composed of 14 subdivisions, including study centers (for example: Center for Asia-Pacific Studies, Center for Russian & Central Asia Studies, Center of European Studies), institutes (Institute for World Economy Studies, Institute of Foreign Policy Studies, etc.) and departments (there are only two: Department of International Exchanges and Department of Research Management). After the efforts of many generations of researchers, the SIIS is now a nationally and internationally renowned, ranking among the best think tanks of the world[13].

4.5. Peking University - Beida (北京大学)

Founded in 1898, the Peking University is one of the most prestigious Chinese universities in the world. In October 2013, the university established the Institute of International and Strategic Studies (IISS) as a think tank, aiming to increase its influence over the main decision makers in China.

Formerly known as the Center of International and Strategic Studies of the Peking University, created in May of 2007, the IISS is affiliated to the School of International Studies. Their Administrative Council is composed of senior researchers and academics outside and within the School of International Studies, and the accountability system of the president is implemented under the leadership of the Council[14].

12 Details at: http://www.ciis.org.cn/english/2019-01/10/content_40639859.html.
13 More information: http://www.siis.org.cn/EnIndex.
14 For more details, see: http://en.iiss.pku.edu.cn/.

Also, under the governance of the Peking University, is the Institute of Poverty Research, an institution dedicated to research on social and economic development related to poverty. It produces analyses and reports for the Central Government[15].

4.6.Fudan University (复旦大学)

Fudan University was founded in 1905, formerly called the Fudan Public School. There are, in total, 18 research institutes incubated at the University, which promote interdisciplinary studies in Regional Development, Ecological Governance, Industrial Economy, Digital and Technological Governance and Innovation, etc. Among these institutes is a broad reaching net which includes the Global Think Tank Center, the Fudan-Latin-America University Consortium (FLAUC) and the BRICS University League.

Another example arose in August, 2013, when the Policy Research Center for the Chinese Economy, a think tank project proposed by the China Center for Economic Studies at Fudan was officially approved by the Educational Commission of Shanghai. It is also important to highlight the role of the Fudan Development Institute (FDDI), a global research organization which focuses on Development Studies. The FDDI, with its multidisciplinary characteristics, is one of the pioneer academic think tanks established after the reform and reopening policies were launched in 1978[16].

4.7. Tsinghua University (清华大学)

Founded in 1911, the Tsinghua University is considered by many as the best university in China, and is responsible for the academic training of well-known names such as Nobel prize winer Tsung-Dao Lee and Yang Zhening, not to mention ex-president Hu Jintao and current president Xi Jinping.

The university established its Technical Innovation Research Center in 2000, as a key research center for the Humanities and the Social Sciences. Considering it is a national level think tank, it focuses on the management of technical innovation, strategy and politics for S&T and high-tech enterprises.

15 Details at: https://onthinktanks.org/think-tank/北京大学贫困地区发展研究院/.
16 See more at: http://fddi.en.fudan.edu.cn/.

In 2009, the Tsinghua University also spurred the creation of the China Data Center (CDC), designed to provide a data platform to assist academic research and teaching in the relevant disciplines. It is expected that the Center will act as a think tank for the government, focusing on in depth research about the main issues of Chinese society. Apart from this, other branches of the University are also notorious on a national level: The Institute of Modern International Relations and the Institute of International Strategies and Development[17].

5. Concluding Remarks

Setting off from a brief contextualization about the Chinese international behavior and current trends revolving around the decision-making process, this article sought to discuss the role played by experts as foreign policy actors. We have seen that the demand for expertise has cemented itself on the organizational chart of the PRC, a natural consequence of the strengthening of the country's global projection. This expansion of the national interest beyond the immediate surroundings of Asia has amplified the country's number of partners and dialogue fronts on a global level.

In this context, the national research institutes, initially designed based on the Soviet model, have started to constitute an important sphere for communication between experts and political leaders. Although some of these institutes are linked to the government or the Party, they have, actually, a very similar role to the universities, which are also fundamental pieces of the contemporary process of creating and implementing Chinese foreign policy.

An increasing number of experts from these spheres have become well known on the public debate as a whole, and particularly in the discipline of International Relations. Names such as Wang Jisi, Yan Xuetong, and Qin Yaqing – directors of, respectively, the School for International Studies of the Peking University; the Institute of Modern International Relations, Tsinghua University; and of the Chinese Foreign Affairs University (CFAU), linked to the MFA – have become part of a select group of experts in the discipline, which for a long time consisted solely of North-Americans and Europeans, save for a few, rare exceptions

17 Details at: https://www.tsinghua.edu.cn/en/index.htm.

The research effort developed here, we highlight as a conclusion, is still rudimentary. China's experience in integrating experts into the decision-making process deserves, in our opinion, more careful attention from the academic and political community in Brazil and other developing nations. Future works that seek to implement more in depth case studies about the role of the Chinese research institutes are, therefore, extremely welcome, especially now, that the *Belt and Road Initiative* presents itself as the apex of the journey of international projection of the PRC. Certainly, Chinese experts from various fields of study have played a significant part for the success of such initiative. It is interesting to follow closely.

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