



SID

Society for International Development

SID-NL Lecture Series 2010-2011

“Global Values in a Changing World”

Synergy of State and Society in a Globalized World

Seventh lecture:

Universal norms and China’s complexity in addressing ‘global’ security challenges

Speaker: **Shi Yinhong**, Renmin University of China

Moderator: Tom Zwart, University of Utrecht

On Monday the 18th of April 2011, Shi Yinhong delivered the seventh lecture in the 2010-2011 SID-NL Lecture Series, ‘Global Values in a Changing World’. Shi Yinhong is Professor of International Relations at the Renmin University of China.

Summary

China’s Progress and Complexity in Addressing “Global” Challenges

Professor Shi began his lecture by giving some remarks on China’s complexity in general. In comparison with the recent past, China is now engaged in a much broader and deeper international cooperation. China deals with global security challenges with increasing responsiveness and even takes the initiative to assume greater international responsibility. However, there is a remarkable complexity and sophistication embedded in China’s attitude, positions and policies in the area of global challenges and corresponding multilateral cooperation.



According to Professor Shi this complexity is caused by a number of factors. Firstly, despite the “overwhelming concern” with China’s foreign policies and postures, various grave economic and social bottle-necks within China require the Chinese government to give priority to these domestic problems. Secondly, China’s capability, while rapidly increasing, is almost always insufficient in comparison to China’s wide ranging and ever expanding international responsibilities. Moreover, the multiplicity of China’s foreign policy interests means that China is often facing dilemmas and conflicting policy positions. Chinese thinking is profoundly different from that of most Western countries. China’s more particularistic perspective and her more prudent and conservative political and strategic cultures, make China more reticent to engage with the West.

Global Security Challenges

Shi then turned from a general description of China's complexity in the area of global challenges to a more detailed explanation of China's way of addressing global security challenges. He divided the global security challenges into three: first, nuclear proliferation, second, transnational terrorism and third, the severe man-made humanitarian disasters including genocide and ethnic cleansing.

Nuclear proliferation

Shi argued that China has made important contributions to the cause of international non-proliferation, mainly in the difficult nuclear problem of North Korea but also substantially in the case of Iran. China's arduous and effective efforts in the past six years aimed at the peaceful denuclearization of North Korea demonstrate a considerable increase in her security role and political influence. In particular, China's relationship with the United States has benefited from these efforts, cultivating an image of China as a responsible international actor.



North Korea case study

According to Shi, "particularistic" interests rather than the "universalistic" cause of denuclearization has taken precedence in the case of North Korea. Beijing is determined to avoid serious alienation from North Korea, having built up a significant bilateral trade and investment relationship with North Korea. A major development in this regard, was Premier Wen Jiabao's visit to Pyongyang in early October 2009 which resulted in a substantial increase in Chinese economic aid to North Korea. Shi argued that these efforts show that China seems to be "emancipated" from its persistent policy dilemmas produced by its competing interests. China had diffused the danger of a severe internal crisis in North Korea, with all its potential for regional destabilisation, while not pursuing an active

programme of denuclearization and reform in North Korea. It shows that China had done more than required by her vital interests.

Transnational terrorism

In fighting against terrorist forces, China has mainly focused upon those that have directly targeted China herself and her citizens. China has however consistently demonstrated her firm opposition to terrorism and joined in international anti-terrorist cooperation. In formulating an anti-terrorist strategy, China has insisted on several principles which contain both universalistic and particularistic elements. These principles include:

- All forms of terrorism must be opposed, and the international community should take legislative, administrative, judicial and other necessary measures to resolutely combat it
- Any form of terrorism is hazardous to the international community and no country, party, or individual group should take double standards based on political or other selfish intentions while dealing with terrorism

- The measures, means, and methods adopted in combating terrorism should not aggravate national rivalry, religious hatred, conflict between civilizations, and estrangement between people
- Countries should employ various means to combat terrorism rather than solely relying on military force.

Severe man-made humanitarian disasters including genocide and ethnic cleansing

Shi explained that because of the complexity China perceived, she never joined corresponding multinational interventions, with the exception of the genocide in Rwanda. For example, China condemned NATO's Kosovo War and opposed proposed UN sanctions against Sudan about Darfur. In the future, the most challenging question China will face could be whether the decades-long tradition of self-imposed restriction on her own military involvement in the world reinforced by her doctrine of non-interference should be revised according to the requirements of some cases.

Professor Shi concluded his lecture by reflecting on China's complexity in addressing these global security challenges. China does accept international cooperation and is more and more open for cooperation with Western countries. In this sense, there has been some progress. However, China remains tied to her particularistic interests driven by its own unique philosophy and way of thinking. China's complexity therefore looks set to continue for some time.



The lecture was followed by a discussion in which audience members were invited to provide comments and ask questions. An interesting point was raised by one of the audience members about an important group in China: the students. Shi was asked to explain what view the Chinese government has on students who have studied abroad and then come back to China with different Western views and ideas. Professor Shi responded by saying that the government's official policy is to attract students and professors to come back to China, where they enjoy a considerable degree of freedom given that for students and professors there is generally no information restriction. Maybe, Shi said, this is because of China's trust of intellectuals or it could be that the Chinese government thinks that the intellectual class is weak and cannot cause major upheavals within the country. The chairman Tom Zwart added to Shi's answer by mentioning an interesting outcome of a human rights research project undertaken in cooperation with the Chinese university of Shandong. It showed that Chinese people that have been abroad, value Chinese values even more than people from China who have never been abroad. The latter group is much more open to western values. In that sense, students that have studied abroad would not form a "threat" to the Chinese government.

Another recurring theme was the process of value harmonization (e.g. Asian vs. western values). Shi was asked how he saw these norms as emanating from the values of different parts of the world to solve problems in today's world. Professor Shi answered by saying that according to China there are too many universal norms. Norms must be sufficiently generalized to be truly universal. If norms are too concrete, different nations will have considerable hesitations. Norms have to leave space for accommodating different understandings and laws.

Someone else raised the question of China's peaceful rise in the world, and whether this peaceful rise will continue into the 21st century or that we will see a more offensive China emerge.



Professor Shi emphasized how beneficial a peaceful rise is for China. In part, because the Chinese armed forces have not fought a single battle in the past thirty years,

therefore China *has* to rise peacefully. The Chinese government will not abandon a principle that is so beneficial for China. Of course, Shi had to say, one cannot know if China will indeed be peaceful forever.

The final words were given to Mr. Zwart to give a short summary of the discussion. Zwart emphasized the need to reconcile on the one hand the Chinese particularistic approach (i.e. "*Chinanness*") and on the other hand the more universalistic Western norms. As an example, Zwart named the cooperation of the Dutch School of Human Rights Research with Chinese universities. Together they are trying to combine the Western view on human rights with the Chinese view by using the so-called receptor approach. Particular human rights social networks in China such as the family are being studied. There is need for a real dialogue between the European Union and China, wherein everybody should fully engage, whether we agree with each other or not.



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