

## China-Russia Relations and the Crimea Crisis: Does China Still Insist on the Non-interference Principle?

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### Abstrak:

Krisis di Crimea menyebabkan dunia mengecam tindakan invasif Rusia. Tiongkok, sebagai mitra strategis Rusia berada pada situasi dilematik karena di sisi lain, Tiongkok memiliki kewenangan di UN Security Council untuk menjaga perdamaian dunia. Pada saat yang bersamaan, Tiongkok juga menjalankan prinsip non-interferensinya untuk menjawab tantangan tersebut. Dalam artikel ini akan dibahas lebih lanjut mengenai bagaimana Tiongkok dapat menyeimbangkan kepentingannya dengan Rusia melalui prinsip non-interferensinya serta kepentingan-kepentingan yang dimiliki Tiongkok terhadap Rusia. Metode yang digunakan dalam penelitian ini adalah metode kualitatif melalui studi dokumen. Teori yang digunakan adalah teori perubahan kebijakan luar negeri David Welch. Temuan dari penelitian ini adalah kepentingan Tiongkok terhadap Rusia, yaitu kerja sama energi, militer, serta pengaruh di Asia Tengah sehingga timbul pragmatisme Tiongkok untuk mendukung Rusia.

**Kata-Kata Kunci:** Tiongkok, Rusia, krisis Crimea, prinsip non-interferensi, perubahan kebijakan luar negeri.

### Abstract:

Krisis di Crimea menyebabkan dunia mengecam tindakan invasif Rusia. Tiongkok, sebagai mitra strategis Rusia berada pada situasi dilematik karena di sisi lain, Tiongkok memiliki kewenangan di UN Security Council untuk menjaga perdamaian dunia. Pada saat yang bersamaan, Tiongkok juga menjalankan prinsip non-interferensinya untuk menjawab tantangan tersebut. Dalam artikel ini akan dibahas lebih lanjut mengenai bagaimana Tiongkok dapat menyeimbangkan kepentingannya dengan Rusia melalui prinsip non-interferensinya serta kepentingan-kepentingan yang dimiliki Tiongkok terhadap Rusia. Metode yang digunakan dalam penelitian ini adalah metode kualitatif melalui studi dokumen. Teori yang digunakan adalah teori perubahan kebijakan luar negeri David Welch. Temuan dari penelitian ini adalah kepentingan Tiongkok terhadap Rusia, yaitu kerja sama energi, militer, serta pengaruh di Asia Tengah sehingga timbul pragmatisme Tiongkok untuk mendukung Rusia.

**Keywords:** China, Russia, Crimean crisis, non-interference principle, foreign policy change.

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## Introduction

The rising power of China as the permanent country member of the UN Security Council has raised the responsibility of Beijing to engage more actively in peacebuilding missions. Many countries have considered China a key actor with its massive influence in many regions. It can be seen from China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) that has made major sub-regions of Asia, including Northeast Asia, Southeast Asia, South Asia, Central Asia, and Oceania, experience a rising level of interaction and are becoming more intertwined in a growing network of interdependence with the China (Shambaugh, 2004). Consequently, China's role in responding to a dispute is frequently taken into account. In this sense, to approach many disputes, one of the principles China often emphasizes is non-interference. Beijing interprets the non-interference principle as an exclusive authority to manage domestic affairs without interfering the external actors (Aidoo & Hess, 2015).

One of the interesting disputes is China's approach to the crisis of Crimea between Russia and Ukraine in 2014. In this case, Russia annexed the Crimean Peninsula after the Ukrainian government conflicted with the pro-Russian militia in eastern Ukraine. The situation potentially became a civil war that attracted international attention (Timofeev, 2015).

This crisis started in November 2013 when Viktor Yanukovych, Ukraine's president, who is strongly supported by Russia, decided to abort a trade deal with the EU and accept financial aid from Moscow. This event immediately caused street protests for three months, leading to the coup of Yanukovych in February 2014 (*Timeline: Political Crisis in Ukraine and Russia's Occupation of Crimea*, 2014). To respond to this unstable condition and protect the Russian people in the Crimea Peninsula, Moscow sent its troops to seize the peninsula, which is internationally recognized as part of Ukraine's territory. Russia's action was categorized as an intervention by the UN, and, as a consequence, it attracted much criticism from many countries, leading to economic sanctions toward Moscow.

In this situation, China attempted to respond to the dispute. Moscow is known for having a good relationship with Beijing since they are important trading partners for each other. Russia has been the top oil supplier for China for years. In 2018, Russia's oil exports to China reached \$37.9 billion (Lons et al.,

2019). However, China encountered a difficult situation. On the one hand, China realizes that Russia's intervention in Crimea has opposed its principle of non-interference and also increases the potential threat for China that Moscow might expand its dominance to the region close to China. On the other hand, the bilateral relationship between China and Ukraine, which has become closer, could be endangered by how China shows its response to this dispute (Swanström, 2014). In addition, putting pressure on Russia as a rejection of the intervention can risk China's interest in Russia.

Western countries decided to impose sanctions on Russia to respond to the crisis. However, this situation might be considered an arena of geostrategic competition between the US, its allies, and Russia to assert their geopolitical influence. China has shown less involvement in the geopolitical confrontation between Russia and the West over Ukraine before the Crimea crisis (Timofeev, 2015). As China expanded its influence with rising power, Beijing was encouraged to respond to the Crimea crisis. One of the advantages China can gain is that, as Russia was imposed a sanction by the US and the EU, Moscow would need Beijing's help to avoid broad international isolation. Hence, the approach of China to Russia may reflect how China stands on the non-interference principle and considers its national interest toward Russia.

Therefore, to what extent did China engage Russia in the Crimea crisis and pursue its interests? To analyze this question, further study of China's response to the Crimea crisis will be brought in this article. The selection of this topic is based on the curiosity of how China possibly bases its approach to Russia on the non-interference principle and pursues its national interest simultaneously. This situation can reflect how normative ideas and national interests can influence a foreign policy in responding to a dispute. The conceptual framework used in this article is motivational psychology and prospect theory, two of the three bodies of David Welch's theory of foreign policy change.

The foreign policy change theory has three bodies: organization theory, cognitive and motivational psychology, and prospect theory. Among them, this article will focus only on cognitive and motivational psychology and prospect theory, which are strongly relevant to the topic of China's approach to Russia regarding the Crimea crisis. The theory of cognitive and motivational psychology will be used to analyze whether China could abandon or, at least, redefine its

principle of non-interference, while prospects theory can be used to explain how China responds to Russia to pursue its interests while keeping its stance on the non-interference principle.

The theory of foreign policy change can be used to analyze how a state utilizes a new strategy to approach another state in responding to an issue. Welch suggests that a severe foreign policy change should not happen frequently, and if states change their actions dramatically, they will do it for a formal reason, which refers to the national interest (Welch, 2005). Based on such understanding, a shift of the state's approach is seen as necessary when it is aimed to pursue a concrete interest.

The cognitive and motivational psychology theory highlights that a state might rethink its strategy to pursue its interest when the policymakers believe the existing strategy is ineffective. In this sense, foreign strategy change requires policymakers to recognize the wrong policy and embrace risk for adopting a new approach. Welch explains: "Foreign policy change will be most likely when policy fails either repeatedly or catastrophically, or when leaders become convinced that it will imminently do so" (Welch, 2005).

This assumption relates to the notion that the non-interference has limited China in pursuing its national interest in other countries. Qiu Lin, a well-known Chinese columnist, said that the non-interference principle had encouraged China to adopt a passive approach that caused the loss of China's gain (Zheng, 2016). Furthermore, this theory will be applied in the section on the significance of the Chinese principle of non-interference.

Regarding the clash of national principles and the needed approach, prospect theory, a behavioral alternative to rational choice theory, can help to explain to what extent a state can adjust its approach. Welch compares rational choice and prospect theory: "While rational choice will tell us how we ought to make decisions, prospect theory describes and accounts for discrepancies between the normative ideal and actor's actual choice behavior" (Welch, 2005). In this sense, the state can adopt a particular approach, although it goes against its normative principle to keep its interest.

Since this article attempts to see the relationship between a normative idea and the state's behavior, prospect theory is arguably the right approach to explaining how China could balance its principle of non-interference to its

interest towards Russia in responding to the Crimea crisis. Furthermore, prospect theory assumes states will assess gains and losses concerning a reference point in responding to a dispute. In this sense, foreign policy change is considered risky because decision-makers cannot ensure precisely the consequences of their decisions, and thus, prospect theory expects states to avoid foreign policy change if there is no significant reason to pursue it (Welch, 2005).

The assumption is based on the calculation of how states consider the gain they will have. Comparing gain and loss, the expectation of foreign policy change is more likely when states perceive themselves to be in the domain of losses (Welch, 2005). With this theory, the consideration of gain and loss will be used in case of what approach China employs to respond to Russia's intervention in Crimea, which is counterproductive to China's principle of non-interference.

Previous research from Kirchberger (2017) highlights the military-industrial triangle of Russia, Ukraine, and China. After Russia's intervention and occupation of Crimea, the military-industrial ties between Russia and Ukraine ended abruptly. On the other hand, China remains excluded from trading with major defense electronics and advanced weapon system manufacturers due to the US/EU arms embargo. Despite progress in developing its defense-industrial base, China still finds itself partially dependent on Russia in critical arms projects. Therefore, China faces pressure to enhance its domestic technological innovation capacity to tackle this issue.

Kalinichenko (2017), on the other hand, looks more at the deteriorating relationship between the EU and Russia due to the Crimean crisis. Both parties were in a "war of sanctions" as Russia also did countersanctions to the EU as a response to the EU's sanctions on Russia. For example, Russia imposed travel bans on more than 50 EU citizens. Tsetov (2016) examines Russia's shifting policies to Southeast Asia as a consequence of the strained relationship between Russia and the West as the Crimean crisis arose. Although Russia's turn to the East may not have substantial changes, it holds significant public relations value for the Russian leadership. Southeast Asia is crucial in this narrative as it showcases Russia's renewed interest in the Asia Pacific with a comprehensive and strategic approach. As most of the literature does not emphasize China's non-interference stance toward Russia's intervention in Crimea, we would specifically scrutinize this issue.

This article will use qualitative research by referring to the Crimea crisis as a case study. Moreover, reports from the government, media publications, books, and academic journals will be the primary data sources. In addition, the timeframe of this article will be limited from 2014-2017. It was when Russia started its intervention in Crimea until the period when Russia controlled the area. This article elaborates on two sub-questions to answer the central question: How did China balance the principle of non-interference and its interest in Russia in responding to the Crimea crisis? The first sub-question is: What is the significance of the principle of non-interference for China? The second question is: What are the interests of China towards Russia? This research aims to see how the Chinese government responds to Russia and pursues its interest in the situation in which Moscow violates the non-interference principle by sending its troops to occupy Ukraine's Crimea.

### **China's Non-interference Principle**

Explaining the stance of non-interference as a fundamental principle of China's foreign policy can help to understand Beijing's behavior in responding to an international issue. To do so, this section will refer to the five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence: sovereignty and territorial integrity, non-interference, mutual non-aggression, equal benefits, and peaceful coexistence. These five principles were declared by Zhou Enlai, the former Premier of China, at the 1955 Afro-Asian Solidarity Conference in Indonesia and became the foundation of Chinese normative ideas (van Eekelen, 2015).

Mentioning explicitly in the five principles, China considers non-interference a critical element of China's foreign policy discourse. In this sense, the principle of non-interference means that a state cannot interfere with another state's internal affairs, which essentially come under national jurisdiction (Zheng, 2016). Based on such understanding, China is known as a country that attempts to oppose the initiative of intervention, which can endanger the national stability of another country. In the 1980s, China had shown little significant role in global intervention and decided to oppose the Soviet Union's Afghanistan War.

Moreover, after establishing diplomatic relations with the United States in 1979, China formally declared its "independent foreign policy for peace" in 1982. The policy firmly reinforced China's stance of "non-interference." The

situation worsened as Western countries imposed a sanction against China in the 1990s regarding the crisis of Tiananmen. Consequently, China continued challenging Western countries' interference in China's internal affairs (Xiao, 2016).

China still perceives that the intervention initiatives can negatively affect its sovereign integrity because of the separatist issues in Tibet, Taiwan, and Xinjiang. In this context, external interference, the reason for defending human rights, is a sensitive issue for Chinese leaders because they believe that the issue of human rights can be used as a justification by Western countries to divide China (Zheng, 2016). For China, the Arab Spring becomes an example of how Western countries use their force to interfere in the Middle East in the name of human rights. To respond to this, Chinese leaders firmly believe that to protect their national security, the non-interference principle is still necessary.

The principle of non-interference has become rhetorical for China in responding to a specific issue. Xiao (2016) explains that the non-interference principle can serve China's interests. According to him, at least, there are three primary purposes for China's adoption of the principle. First, the principle is considered a way to secure China's sovereignty from external threats. This can be a reason for China to resist Western countries from responding to its internal affairs. Second, the stance of non-interference facilitates China to build a close relationship with developing countries. In this sense, many post-colonial states stand on this principle to overcome neo-colonialism. This is reflected in ASEAN countries and South America, which keep the principle of non-interference in managing their international relations. Third, China can utilize the principle of non-interference to avoid being engaged in international disputes that do not accommodate Chinese national interests or even contradict the stance of the non-interference principle.

However, China's principle of non-interference faces some challenges that can limit the government to pursue its national interest. It can be seen in Beijing's hesitancy to play a significant role in supporting Chinese companies in Sudan, which means its investment has not gained the goodwill of local governments. China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) reportedly did not get an equal approach and fair treatment for its investment in the Sudanese oil industry (Zheng, 2016). However, China's quest for international status has

pushed Beijing to engage more in international affairs. It means Beijing should not limit its role and avoid taking the initiative.

This is also relevant to the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) concept that was first proposed by the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty in December 2001. This concept explains two core points regarding human rights protection concerning the intervention initiative. First, states must take the primary responsibility to protect their citizens, and second, the international community can also take the responsibility to intervene in large-scale human rights disasters when the target country cannot fulfill such basic national obligations (Liu & Zhang, 2014).

China shows its support for this concept, although not in all points. In this case, China focuses more on state sovereignty. Liu Zhenmin, China's deputy permanent representative to the UN (2006-2009), explains that a legitimate government has a responsibility to protect its citizens, and the international community can provide assistance or humanitarian intervention only if the government approves and receives help (Liu & Zhang, 2014).

China always emphasizes peaceful negotiation to respond to many international crises, including the Korean War and the crises between Iran and Iraq. However, at the UN, China several times voted to abstain from a resolution that mandates intervention. This action is translated as China might allow several interventions and attempt to redefine its stance on non-interference (*Principles of China's Foreign Policy*, n.d.). In the case of the crisis in Syria, China even showed its support to the Arabian Union's suspension of Syria's membership in it for the cruel suppression by the Syrian government (Liu & Zhang, 2014). Moreover, in 2011, for the first time, China sent its military forces (a warship and four military aircraft) to Libya to evacuate 35,860 citizens and 2,100 foreigners from 12 other countries (Liu & Gammon, 2022).

To what extent did China position itself on the principle of non-interference? The theory of cognitive and motivational psychology highlights that pursuing national interest enables a state to rethink its foreign policy when the existing strategy is ineffective. It reflects that China would not abandon its stance of non-interference. However, China might try to redefine the principle. Chinese leaders attempt to adjust the principle with the needs of a Chinese strategy to pursue its concrete interest. In this sense, China can be pragmatic in



implementing its principle of non-interference. In other words, China puts a degree of flexibility in the principle of non-interference while trying to build its international reputation.

### China's Interests in Russia

The relationship between Russia and China has developed smoothly for decades. The two countries established a Strategic Cooperative Partnership in 1996, which marks their commitment to expanding bilateral cooperation (Guan, 2022). This partnership was aimed at enhancing cooperation in various fields and raising the partnership-oriented toward the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Jingjie, 2013). In addition, China and Russia developed a strategic cooperative partnership by signing the Treaty of Good-Neighborly Friendship and Cooperation in 2001. This treaty obliged the two countries to renounce the use or threat of force against each other and reinforce the stance of national sovereignty in their mutual relations (Guan, 2022).

However, China's rising power, which has surpassed Russia as a focus of attention in the region, has complicated China-Russia relations. It can be seen in the case of China has expanded its economic aid to enhance its influence in Central Asian Countries, which are considered a threat to Russia. According to Stronski and Ng (2018), China's growing dominance in Central Asia's energy, infrastructure, and lending sector and its successful challenge to Russia's influence in the region have political implications that should concern Moscow. Despite being the traditional trading partner, Russia's economic ties with Central Asia have weakened over the past decade, exacerbated by its economic challenges. China's BRI and the Central Asia–China pipelines have positioned it as a powerful player in the region, connecting Central Asia to non-Russian markets. Meanwhile, Russia's security commitments have faced difficulties, raising doubts about its ability to exert influence and respond effectively to regional crises. In this case, Moscow perceives the region as still a part of its traditional influence (Juraev, 2014). China and Russia may have some tensions over certain cases, but it is believed that the two countries try to avoid long-term damage because they are pragmatic with each other.

In relations with Russia, at least, China seeks three interests. First, China considers Russia as one of the essential suppliers of its growing energy needs. It

relates to China's rising industry, which needs more energy to fuel its economic operations. Second, China seeks to expand its role as a great power in Central and North East Asia. This includes economic development and stability assurance in the border area. Third, Chinese policy is aimed at military modernization (Bolt, 2014).

### Energy Supply

The consequence of China's economic modernization is the high demand for energy to fuel its industry and economic activities. China's need for oil net import has increased steadily from 2,200 thousand barrels per day in 2004 to 5,800 thousand barrels per day in 2012 (Stang, 2014). To fulfill this need, China considers Russia a source of energy that can help China become a regional power. Russia was the world's largest oil producer and the second-largest natural gas producer in 2009 (Geng, 2021). In this situation, abundant natural resources give Russia a good bargaining position towards China.

Russian energy export to China increased gradually from 2009-2014. The total value of Russia's energy exports to China peaked in 2014 at US\$27,75 billion (Henderson & Mitrova, 2016). This period has shown stable cooperation, and Russia perceives energy as a tool to show its superiority. In terms of oil, from 2010-2014, the figure for Russian crude oil exports to China has more than doubled to almost 30 million tonnes. It accounted for 13% of Russia's crude oil exports (Klein & Westphal, 2016).

Nevertheless, China-Russia cooperation on energy is not significant compared to Middle Eastern countries. Russia's oil imports in 2010 accounted for just 6% of China's total oil imports. Also, Russia was only China's fifth-largest oil supplier behind Saudi Arabia, followed by Angola, Iran, and Oman (Wu, 2015). Still, from a Chinese perspective, Beijing must diversify its foreign energy sources. In this sense, China attempts to expand its energy to oil, natural gas, coal, and nuclear power.

In addition, China also perceives Russia as a future potential partner for energy. Moscow might surpass the oil exports of Saudi Arabia and Angola to China. It is also based on Russia's "Energy Strategy 2030," which aims to expand sales to Asia. This policy was further implemented in 2014, which targeted that by 2025, oil and gas exports to Asia are to be double (Klein & Westphal, 2016).

China, as the biggest energy consumer in Asia, perceives Russia as a vital actor supporting its energy needs as its economy keeps growing.

### Military Cooperation

The military has been an essential area of Russia-China cooperation through military dialogue, joint exercises, and armament sales. After the Cold War, China started to import primary conventional weapons, components, and technologies from Russia. It is estimated that from 1991-2010, Russia supplied 90% of China's imported major conventional weapons, and this number accounted for nearly 40% of Russian exports (Hsu & Soong, 2014).

The purpose of China in maintaining a military partnership with Russia is to modernize China's military. This includes the joint development of advanced weapons systems. Beijing needs a powerful military to be a regional power and try to achieve a qualitative shift in the military balance in Asia, especially in the Taiwan Strait, in its favor. China perceives Russia as a potential actor in shaping a secure region since the two countries have a common threat perception.

Furthermore, some factors indicate why China chooses Russia while many other countries can support its military modernization. First, China's seeking of a potential supplier is limited by the arms embargo imposed by the European Union and the United States since 1989. In this case, Russia can fulfill China's need for arms. At the same time, Russia also faced financial problems after the collapse of the USSR, and the arms industry had become the source of income for Moscow while rebuilding its economy. This situation has encouraged the two countries to deepen their mutual cooperation and trust.

Second, regarding the threat perception, Russia and China consider the US and its alliances, including NATO, a real threat to regional stability and often limit their efforts in pursuing national interests. Consequently, China sees the importance of Russia increasing its capability in diplomatic and military aspects to overcome the Western countries (Chase et al., 2017). In this sense, internally, China and Russia have the same fear of revolutions to change the regime, which is seen as a part of Western countries' ideas (Klein & Westphal, 2016).

Third, Joint military exercise is one of the most essential elements of China-Russia military ties. The military exercises provided China with valuable

experience operating with the far more experienced Russian military and gave China opportunities to practice in a variety of geographies far from China's borders. These experiences are invaluable to China, which has not engaged in large-scale military conflict in several decades. Besides, Joint exercises provide additional benefits to China as a tool for sending political signals and increasing the military facilities through technical adoption. China and Russia dramatically scaled up the number and type of exercises. The two countries participated in at least 78 joint military exercises between 2003 and 2022 (*How Deep Are China-Russia Military Ties?*, 2022).

### Interest in Central Asia

Central Asia is a growing region that Russia and China focus on for political and economic clout. To approach Central Asia, China and Russia established a joint leadership institution called the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) to pursue common interests and regulate relations in Central Asia (Lanteigne, 2018). The SCO aims to strengthen mutual trust and facilitate border demilitarization between China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, and Tajikistan.

SCO has accommodated the countries to fight common threats, known as the "three evils" of terrorism, separatism, and extremism. Based on such understanding, each country puts national security as a top priority in handling the issue of counterterrorism. In China's case, Beijing is concerned about Uyghur separatists, which have seriously threatened domestic stability. Furthermore, the SCO expanded its ambition as a multinational organization that covers the economy as an area of cooperation in Central Asia (Stent, 2016). However, China's rising power has dominated the SCO agenda in pushing economic integration with trade and infrastructure projects since 2008. This can be seen from how Chinese energy companies have signed several major pipeline and supply agreements with Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, and Uzbekistan. They have moved very quickly to implement the agreements.

China has attracted the local government since Beijing did not give many conditions for the Central Asia Countries to accept the aid. In this sense, China makes no demands for political reform from Central Asian governments (Stronski & Ng, 2018). To pursue its interests in Central Asia, China attempted to

be cautious in approaching Russia as a regional player. In this case, Beijing praised the Russian government while expanding its influence on the ground. This dual style is evident in Beijing's dealings with the SCO. In public, the Chinese attempted to moderate their leading role in the organization and decreased their assertiveness. In reality, Chinese governments utilized the SCO to legitimize regional influence.

### **Did China Become Pragmatic?**

The Crimea crisis between Russia and Ukraine has put China in a difficult situation. On the one hand, China is known as a country that firmly stands for the non-interference principle, which opposes all kinds of state actions that intervene in another country's internal affairs. Russia's intervention in Crimea has gone against China's principle of non-interference. On the other hand, Russia is China's strategic partner that shares a common interest. China needs Russia to counter the Western countries, which are seen as threatening the region. Hence, with this situation, did China use an assertive approach toward Russia regarding the Crime crisis?

This section on how China balances its principle and concrete interest toward Russia fits into the operationalization of prospect theory. Thus, it will examine the theory's assumption that states will assess gains and losses concerning a reference point. In this regard, China might adopt a particular approach, although it goes against its normative principle to keep its interest.

To decide its response to the Crimea crisis, China acts pragmatically by not showing its direct support to Russia and simultaneously avoiding opposing Russia's intervention firmly. Unlike the US and its alliances, which directly supported Ukraine's territorial integrity, criticized Russia and pushed to withdraw its troops from Crimea, China encouraged the involved actors to respect the sovereignty and emphasize a diplomatic means to end the crisis (Kuznetsov, 2016).

It is evident that China tried to become neutral in the UN Security Council meeting on March 3, 2014. The Chinese ambassador highlighted the situation in Crimea and the importance of a peaceful resolution while avoiding focusing on Russia's action (Kuznetsov, 2016). Two weeks later, in the agenda of a vote on the UN Security Council draft resolution, which needed to make the

Crimea referendum illegal, China decided to abstain from voting while Russia vetoed and the other thirteen members of the body supported the proposal (Timofeev, 2015).

It should be underlined that China played a role of active neutrality, not just waiting and avoiding engaging in deciding the best option for the crises. As part of the reconciliation for the Crimea Crisis, the Permanent Representative of China to the United Nations, Liu Jieyi, proposed a three-point plan, namely (1) to establish an international coordinating mechanism consisting of all concerned parties to explore means of a political settlement of the Ukrainian crisis; (2) all parties should refrain from taking any escalatory actions; and (3) international financial institutions should start to explore how to help restore economic and financial stability in Ukraine (Timofeev, 2015).

However, Chinese analysts perceive that Beijing's active engagement can endanger China's position. Wan Cheng Cai, from the Xinhua Centre of World Issues, said there is no direct request to China to be involved, and Beijing is not part of the crisis. Hence, China's participation would not have a significant impact because the other four UN Security members are already participating in the dialogue. Fang Yujun also adds that China looks like Russia's supporter at the end of the crisis (Ait, 2015).

In reality, China tried to balance the situation by considering its principle of non-interference and pursuing its concrete interest in Russia simultaneously. Beijing did not want to show its explicit support towards Russia. Having responsibility as a rising power to engage in world affairs, China just urged a peaceful approach to the Crimea crisis, and there is no criticism toward Russia.

Supporting Ukraine in the Case of Crimea can be translated as an inconsistency in China's move in relation to China's internal affairs, in which Beijing also has problems of separatism in Tibet and Xinjiang. Moreover, the case of Crimea would be seen as similar to the case of Taiwan. Accordingly, China avoids giving public support to any country's action related to the issue of separatism in the territory of another country. At least, China would respond to the issue by remaining silent (Kuznetsov, 2016). In term of China's advantage in Supporting Ukraine, Beijing would have opportunities to ease its relationship with Western countries and be seen as a country that support the non-intervention principle.

In the case of Crimea, China perceived the Western countries as trying to enhance its influence in the region. As Western countries imposed some sanctions on Russia, this situation might complicate the crisis in Crimea. On July 23, 2014, the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs objected by declaring that China had consistently opposed using sanctions in international relations. He said that giving sanctions to Russia would not bring a solution for any party involved. Conversely, it will create a new problem which worsens the situation (Kuznetsov, 2016).

It is also reported that the US has pushed China to support the sanctions against Russia. However, China decided to abandon the initiative. Facing this situation, the Chinese government reasserted its opposition to the Western countries' sanctions policy against Russia, even stating that China will continue supporting a strategic partnership with Russia (Kuznetsov, 2016).

China's position on Russia's side is considered necessary for long-term interest, especially in terms of continuing energy cooperation and overcoming the interest of the US in the Asia Pacific region. The consequence of the crisis of Crimea and the Western countries' sanctions against Russia is that Moscow leans over to China for help. At the end of 2014, Russia and China signed a US\$400 billion deal to build a gas pipeline, the "Power of Siberia." Beijing has a good bargaining position in this cooperation because China gains a low price and ownership of the pipeline infrastructure (Stent, 2016). Before the crisis, a Chinese company, China National Petroleum Corporation, negotiated with Russia's Gazprom for oil cooperation. However, until the financial difficulty came to Russia due to sanctions, the two companies did not reach a deal on price. In other words, China gains the advantage of Russia's need to overcome broad international isolation and economic sanctions against Crimea.

Furthermore, China also sees that after reintegration with Russia, Crimea might be able to broaden Russia-China economic cooperation. Russian government officials repeatedly stated that Crimea should become one of the biggest bases of shipbuilding, including export-oriented ones (Timofeev, 2015). Based on such understanding, the bilateral trade and energy cooperation between the two countries can increase.

However, supporting Russia's move can influence the international community's trust as Beijing is growing its influence as a great power and can

oppose the principle of non-intervention that the Chinese government frequently emphasizes. Moreover, the approval of China on Russia's move can also increase the threat perception of countries that share borders with China, especially those dealing with the South China dispute. Consequently, those countries tried to anticipate the possibility of China repeating what Russia did in the Crimea case.

In terms of overcoming the penetration of Western countries, both Russia and China consider the risk of the color revolution, which is constantly inspired by Western countries. At the defense ministerial meeting, Russia's Sergei Shoigu and Chinese Chang Wanquan agreed on jointly opposing color revolutions. According to them, no country is secure from color revolutions, interpreted as a revolution aimed at changing the regime (Kuznetsov, 2016). In addition, China's concern over the Western countries' interference also relates to the US military deployments to the Asia-Pacific region, in which Beijing considers the US can threaten its territorial claims and freedom of action in the South China Sea and East China Sea (Saalman, 2016).

## Conclusion

China has encountered a dilemma in responding to the Crimea crisis between Russia and Ukraine. Russia is a strategic partner for China regarding geopolitics and energy cooperation. However, Russia's intervention in Crimea, part of Ukraine's territory, has gone against China's principle of non-interference. Accordingly, China attempts to balance its concrete interests toward Russia and simultaneously pay attention to the intervention. How China acts towards Russia might influence the relationship between the two countries.

To approach Russia, China becomes pragmatic. At the beginning of the crisis, China took a cautious approach by responding to the situation in Crimea but simultaneously not giving criticism and opposition toward Russia. China also abstained from the UN resolution vote, and, concerning Russia, Beijing refused to give direct public support to Moscow. However, as Western countries deepened their role and intensified their sanction on Russia, China decided to lean on Russia. Russia is seen as a strategic partner in containing Western influence and fulfilling China's energy needs. In this sense, China attempts to balance the principle of non-interference and its interests toward Russia by changing its approach from cautiousness to pragmatism.



In this sense, China considered Russia a vital actor in overcoming the potential threat and securing its needs. Moreover, China considers Russia as one of the critical suppliers for its growing energy needs in the future. China also attempted to pursue its strategic interest towards Russia by strengthening its influence in Central Asia and increasing the bilateral cooperation on the military aspect. With these interests, Beijing has become reluctant to enforce its non-interference principle towards Russia. Even though non-interference is vital for the foreign policy discourse, China has calculated the consequences of opposing Russia in the Crimea crisis. The significant involvement of the US and its alliances in giving sanctions on Russia is potentially considered a threat since this event could also happen to Beijing.

This Chinese government's behavior, which decided to support Russia, redefining its principle of non-interference, has approved the assumption of prospects theory, highlighting that a state can adopt a particular approach. However, it goes against its normative principle to keep its interest.

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