Whither China’s Non-Interference Principle?

Shitong Qiao

J.S.D. Candidate, Yale Law School

Email: shitong.qiao@yale.edu

The Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, including the non-interference principle, won China the reputation as the champion of the world’s newly independent nations in the mid-1950s. But nowadays the non-interference principle brings China the reputation as a patron of pariah states and is viewed as an excuse for China to resist outside criticism on its human rights situation. Why does the same principle suffer opposite treatments across this time? Is non-interference still a basic principle in rising China’s foreign policy? Is it time to abandon such an unwelcome principle?

I address the above questions by examining the evolution of the non-interference/non-intervention principle in China’s foreign policy and in international law. Criticism of China’s non-interference principle is attributed to both the erosion of the non-intervention principle in international law and China’s rising power and influence. Based on doctrinal and empirical analysis of China’s foreign policy from 2003 to 2012, I found that China had kept non-interference as a basic principle in its foreign policy, both attributed to its understanding of current international law and to non-interference as a pragmatic strategy of defending its national interests at home and abroad. If the Chinese government continues to be a rational actor in the following decade, it will adhere to the non-interference principle.