

Non-Intervention As Governmentality: China's Technologies of Power in The Production of Global Order

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ABSTRACT

China's expanding role in global governance has intensified debates over whether its principle of non-intervention limits power or represents a distinctive mode of exercising influence. This study aimed to explain how China's non-intervention operates as a form of governmentality through BRICS, particularly through the concepts of sovereignty, consensus, institutional flexibility, and national responsibility. Using a qualitative approach, the research combined a genealogical perspective with Michel Foucault's governmentality framework. Primary data consisted of BRICS summit declarations, institutional documents, speeches by Chinese leaders, and foreign policy documents published between 2014 and 2024, while secondary data included relevant books and scholarly literature. The findings showed that non-intervention functioned not as the absence of power but as a technology of government that structured the conditions under which states exercised freedom. Through BRICS, China advanced its influence by promoting sovereign equality, consensus-based decision-making, financing without political conditionality, national ownership, and institutional flexibility. These mechanisms encouraged compliance without overt coercion while preserving the formal agency of member states. The study concluded that China governed at a political distance by organizing institutional environments in which sovereignty and freedom became mediums of power, making non-intervention a productive rationality for shaping global order. This interpretation reframed China's rise beyond conventional models of domination.

INTRODUCTION

The principle of non-intervention occupies a central position in China's foreign policy and its engagement with the global order. It is commonly understood as respect for sovereignty, territorial integrity, and the right of each state to determine its own political system and development trajectory without external interference. Such an interpretation positions non-intervention as a normative constraint on the exercise of power. A state is considered to uphold non-intervention when it refrains from interfering in the domestic affairs of other states. However, this understanding does not fully explain why China has increasingly invoked non-intervention as its economic, diplomatic, and institutional influence has expanded beyond its territorial boundaries. The expansion of China's influence demonstrates that limiting intervention does not necessarily result in a reduction of power. Power may continue to operate through mechanisms that do not take the form of commands, direct pressure, or overt coercion.

This transformation has become increasingly significant as China has deepened its relations with countries in the Global South and expanded its participation in multilateral institutions, including BRICS. China does not explicitly promote an international order that requires the standardization of political systems, ideologies, or development models. Instead, its discourse emphasizes equality, mutual respect, consensus, mutual benefit, and the freedom of each state to determine its own policies. This approach distinguishes China's engagement from forms of power exercised through political conditionality and direct institutional intervention. Nevertheless, the absence of overt commands does not mean that these relationships operate beyond the dynamics of power. The choices, interests, and conduct of states can be influenced through the construction of cooperative spaces, financing mechanisms, institutional norms, and definitions of legitimate and rational action.

BRICS provides an important arena for examining this transformation in the operation of power. It was not established as a supranational institution with the authority to compel its member states. Decisions are reached through consultation and consensus, while each state retains its political autonomy. The diverse interests, political systems, and geopolitical orientations of its members are not eliminated but managed within a flexible framework of cooperation. Within this context, non-intervention functions not only as a principle governing interstate relations but also as a mechanism that allows differences to be maintained without preventing collective action. Power operates not by eliminating the freedom of member states but by using that freedom as a condition for governance.

Most studies of China's non-intervention continue to focus on the consistency between principle and practice. These studies generally question whether China genuinely maintains its commitment to non-intervention or is gradually abandoning it as its global interests expand. Another strand of debate views non-intervention as a strategic instrument for protecting economic interests and securing political support from developing countries. Both approaches provide important explanations of transformations in China's foreign policy; however, they tend to conceptualize power as something possessed and exercised by one state over another. Consequently, non-intervention is often assessed merely as adherence to a norm or as a cover for material interests. The possibility of understanding non-intervention as a distinct mode of governing international conduct remains insufficiently explored.

This article offers a different interpretation by conceptualizing non-intervention as a technology of government within Michel Foucault's framework of governmentality. Governmentality enables an understanding of power not merely in terms of prohibition, domination, or coercion, but as a rationality that structures the environment in which actors make choices and regulate their own conduct. Power does not always operate by restricting freedom. Instead, freedom can become the very medium through which government is exercised more effectively, as actors continue to perceive themselves as acting according to their own interests and decisions. States do not necessarily need to be governed directly when their fields of possible action have already been structured through particular norms, forms of knowledge, risk calculations, responsibilities, and institutional mechanisms.

Within this framework, non-intervention is understood not as the absence of action but as the regulation of political distance, boundaries of involvement, and the distribution of responsibility among states. Respect for sovereignty grants each state formal freedom while simultaneously assigning responsibility for managing its own domestic affairs. Consensus

preserves equality among members while defining the boundaries of decisions that can be collectively accepted. Institutional flexibility accommodates differences while encouraging states to align their interests with the continuity of cooperation. Thus, non-intervention operates by shaping the conditions under which states govern themselves without perceiving that they are being subjected to external power.

The central question of this article is how China's non-intervention operates as governmentality through BRICS. This question addresses three interrelated issues: how freedom and sovereignty function as mediums of power; how consensus and institutional flexibility produce compliance without overt commands; and how these practices generate a regime of truth through which non-intervention becomes regarded as a natural, fair, and rational principle. This focus does not aim to demonstrate that China covertly controls every process within BRICS. Rather, the article examines the conditions that enable influence to be exercised without assuming the form of direct domination or political standardization.

The study employed a qualitative method with a genealogical approach. It examined Chinese foreign policy documents, official speeches, BRICS declarations, institutional cooperation mechanisms, and academic literature concerning non-intervention, governmentality, and China's rise. Genealogy was used to trace the transformation of non-intervention from a principle that limits involvement into a productive rationality of global governance. The analysis focused not only on official statements regarding what the principle prohibits but also on the forms of relations, subjectivities, responsibilities, and conduct enabled through its application. BRICS was selected because it represents the convergence of respect for sovereignty, consensus-based decision-making, institutional flexibility, and China's efforts to shape an alternative form of global governance.

The novelty of this article lies in its argument that non-intervention is neither merely a defensive norm nor a cover for China's national interests. Non-intervention constitutes a productive technology of power because it organizes interstate relations, regulates political distance, distributes responsibility, and defines the boundaries of acceptable action without relying on overt commands. Governmentality provides the rationality of power, non-intervention functions as its regulatory technology, BRICS serves as its operational arena, and a regime of truth emerges as its political effect. Through this configuration, the article demonstrates that the expansion of China's influence does not always occur by displacing the freedom of other states but by shaping an environment in which that freedom is exercised in ways that generate order, cooperation, and compliance.

The article's central argument is that, through BRICS, China is developing a mode of governing without appearing to intervene. Influence is constructed through the recognition of states' formal freedom, the management of differences, the formation of consensus, and the internalization of responsibility. This mode of operation transforms non-intervention from a principle of foreign policy into a rationality of global governance that enables power to operate through the sovereignty of other states. This interpretation provides an alternative understanding of China's rise, not merely as a shift in material power but also as a transformation in the techniques through which the international order is governed.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative method combining a genealogical approach with a governmentality framework. The qualitative method was selected because the study aimed not to quantify the extent of China's influence but to explain how non-intervention was produced, operationalized, and normalized as a rationality of power in international relations. The genealogical approach did not seek to identify a single origin or construct a linear historical development of non-intervention. Instead, it examined the historical conditions, institutional practices, and policy discourses that enabled non-intervention to be accepted as a legitimate principle while simultaneously functioning as a technology of government. Foucault conceptualized genealogy as an inquiry into traces, discontinuities, functional transformations, and power struggles through which certain concepts become accepted as true and self-evident within particular contexts (Foucault, 1977).

The object of this study was China's governmentality of non-intervention as operationalized through BRICS. BRICS was examined not as an institution entirely controlled by China but as a multilateral arena in which sovereignty, equality, consensus, institutional flexibility, and cooperation without political conditionality were produced as principles of interstate relations. This focus enabled the study to examine how influence could be exercised without overt commands and without eliminating the formal freedom of member states. The governmentality framework was employed to interpret power through rationalities, technologies, forms of knowledge, and processes of subject formation that shaped how actors governed their own conduct. This approach followed the understanding that governmentality examines not only who governs but also how objects become governable, through what forms of knowledge governance is exercised, which technologies are applied, and how political subjects are constructed (Dean, 2010).

The research drew on primary and secondary data. Primary data consisted of official BRICS summit declarations, BRICS institutional documents, speeches delivered by Chinese leaders at BRICS forums, and Chinese foreign policy documents related to sovereignty, non-intervention, multilateralism, and global governance. The research corpus covered documents published between 2014 and 2024. The year 2014 was selected because the Fortaleza Declaration marked the institutional consolidation of BRICS through the establishment of the New Development Bank, while 2024 represented a significant stage following BRICS membership expansion through the Kazan Declaration. The Johannesburg II Declaration and the Kazan Declaration were treated as key documents because they emphasized mutual respect, sovereign equality, consensus, openness, and opposition to unilateral coercive measures as foundational principles of BRICS cooperation (BRICS, 2023; BRICS, 2024). Secondary data included books and scholarly articles addressing genealogy, governmentality, China's non-intervention policy, BRICS, and transformations in global governance.

Documents were selected purposively based on four criteria. First, they were issued by the Chinese government, a BRICS presidency, or an official BRICS institution. Second, they contained discussions of sovereignty, non-intervention, consensus, equality, national responsibility, institutional flexibility, or cooperation without coercion. Third, they demonstrated mechanisms connecting these principles to decision-making, development financing, management of differences, or collective action. Fourth, they were directly related to China's position and practices within BRICS. These criteria delimited the research corpus

while ensuring that the relationship between policy discourse and the operation of power could be examined consistently.

Data analysis was conducted through four stages. The first stage identified statements defining non-intervention, sovereignty, equality, consensus, and state responsibility. The second stage traced the transformation of non-intervention from a principle limiting interference into a rationality that governed forms of engagement. The third stage examined the technologies of government involved, particularly consensus-based decision-making, institutional flexibility, financing without political conditionality, recognition of national ownership, and the distribution of responsibility among states. The fourth stage interpreted the political effects produced, including compliance without direct commands, governance through formal freedom, and the construction of a regime of truth that positioned non-intervention as a natural, fair, and rational principle. Documents were therefore analyzed not as neutral policy representations but as discursive practices that shaped what could be articulated, understood, and implemented within interstate relations.

The validity of the findings was maintained through source triangulation and cross-document analysis. Statements in Chinese policy documents were compared with collective BRICS declarations, institutional documents, and relevant academic literature. The study also examined tensions between official discourse and institutional practices to avoid interpreting declarations as direct evidence of policy effectiveness. China's dominant position within BRICS was not assumed but analyzed through the relationship between ideas promoted by China and norms collectively institutionalized within the organization. This approach did not aim to demonstrate China's covert control over all BRICS members but rather to explain the conditions through which China expanded its influence by emphasizing sovereignty, formal freedom, and the responsibility of other states.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Non-Intervention as a Calculation of Power

Significantly, governmentality becomes even more powerful when it encounters situations that appear morally "intolerable" yet are politically treated as part of an order that must be managed. It is here that non-intervention reveals its most operational form. When suffering, instability, or violence is understood as a chronic condition for which no immediate solution exists, governmental rationality shifts from the imperative to act towards a strategy of containing its effects. Foreign policy is no longer directed towards transforming reality but towards preventing that reality from spreading and disrupting the system as a whole. Foucault demonstrates that modern government is not oriented towards total salvation but towards managing populations within tolerable thresholds (Foucault 2007).

In practice, this approach transforms how international solidarity is articulated. Solidarity is not eliminated but reduced to forms that do not require structural involvement. Limited humanitarian assistance, technical support, and dialogue facilitation frequently serve as substitutes for political intervention. This substitution enables external actors to preserve their moral claims without disturbing the prevailing balance of power. Didier Fassin demonstrates that humanitarian reason directs political attention towards suffering and compassion but may displace questions of rights, justice, and the structures of inequality that produce such suffering (Fassin 2012). From the perspective of governmentality, this

mechanism enables external actors to maintain political distance while preserving a normative presence.

Non-intervention also derives its appeal from its compatibility with the logic of managing limited resources. When political, military, and economic capacities are understood as resources that must be allocated selectively, restraint appears to be a rational choice. Within this framework, the decision not to become directly involved is rarely interpreted as a failure but as an exercise in priority management. Michael Mann demonstrates that power depends on the organizational capacity to control and coordinate ideological, economic, military, and political resources in pursuit of particular objectives (Mann 1986). From the perspective of governmentality, such limitations of capacity can be articulated as a basis for managing engagement selectively rather than merely as evidence of state weakness.

The operational power of non-intervention is also evident in its capacity to mitigate normative conflict among international actors. Direct intervention frequently generates intense debate concerning legitimacy, legality, and motives. Restraint, by contrast, creates greater room for compromise because it does not compel other actors to adopt unequivocal normative positions. In many cases, practical agreement to limit action can provide common ground that allows divergent interests to coexist. Ian Clark demonstrates that international legitimacy is not produced through perfect correspondence between legality and morality but through political consensus regarding the actions considered acceptable under particular conditions (Clark 2005).

At a deeper level, governmentality operates by cultivating long-term dispositions towards uncertainty. When actors become accustomed to operating in environments that cannot be fully controlled, the capacity for restraint becomes a central competence. Foreign policy is then evaluated by its ability to avoid major errors, not merely by its spectacular successes. Reinhart Koselleck demonstrates that modernity widens the distance between past experience and expectations of the future, making political action increasingly dependent on prognosis amid a future that remains open and cannot be fully anticipated (Koselleck 2004). Under these conditions, non-intervention can be understood as a strategy of restraint intended to reduce the possibility of actions producing far-reaching and uncontrollable consequences.

Governmentality's operational reality therefore demonstrates that non-intervention does not result from an absence of political will but from structured calculation. It operates through the substitution of action, the management of resources, the mitigation of normative conflict, and habituation to uncertainty. These mechanisms reinforce one another, constituting a governmental rationality that renders restraint not only justifiable but also politically attractive. Within this framework, non-intervention appears not as a withdrawal from power but as a means through which power operates most efficiently, namely through forms of regulation that require no direct presence yet continue to produce an enduring order.

Extending this argument, the operation of governmentality can also be understood through the way it structures the relationship between individual action and systemic order. In many situations, decisions to exercise restraint do not arise from explicit agreement among the parties involved but from a shared awareness that particular individual actions may generate undesirable systemic effects. Governmental rationality operates by linking micro-level actions to macro-level consequences, thereby constituting individual prudence as a contribution to collective stability. Foucault emphasizes that modern government does not

govern subjects individually but regulates the conditions under which their actions, in aggregate, produce the desired effects (Foucault 2007).

In foreign policy, this connection between the individual and systemic levels produces a dispersed form of discipline. Actors do not require direct prohibition to exercise restraint because the systemic consequences of particular actions have been normalized as shared knowledge. When escalation is understood as a threat to the broader order, restraint appears as a rational form of responsibility. Nikolas Rose demonstrates that such regulation operates by constituting subjects capable of identifying, calculating, and managing their own risks, rather than primarily through visible forms of external coercion (Rose 1999). Within this framework, non-intervention results from distributed discipline rather than centralized authority.

A further layer reveals that governmentality also structures how success is defined and measured. Success is no longer necessarily identified with the fundamental transformation of existing conditions but with the capacity to prevent deterioration and preserve basic functions. This definition shifts the emphasis from transformation to stabilization. In international practice, stabilization is frequently regarded as an adequate achievement even when injustice or tension persists. Mark Duffield demonstrates that the orientation towards resilience in disaster management and humanitarian practice emphasizes the capacity to endure, adapt, and maintain functionality amid uncertainty rather than structurally transforming the conditions that produce vulnerability (Duffield 2016). From the perspective of governmentality, this orientation enables non-intervention to be positioned as a means of preserving systemic resilience.

This emphasis on stabilization also transforms the relationship between knowledge and decision-making. Knowledge is not always used to open up new possibilities for action but frequently to narrow the range of actions regarded as reasonable. When risk assessments, impact projections, and worst-case scenarios are continually foregrounded, the space for bold decisions becomes increasingly restricted. Foucault demonstrates that the production of modern knowledge frequently functions as a technology of security rather than an instrument of emancipation (Foucault 2008). In foreign policy, such knowledge supports non-intervention by framing the dangers of intervention as risks that must be avoided.

Governmentality also operates by structuring the relationship between centres of decision-making and global public opinion. Public opinion does not always demand action, but it remains highly sensitive to visible failure. When intervention entails the risk of failure that may attract widespread scrutiny, restraint becomes the safer choice in reputational terms. John Mueller demonstrates that American public support for war tends to decline as military casualties increase, particularly when the interests at stake are no longer perceived as commensurate with the human costs incurred (Mueller 2005). Governmentality draws upon this sensitivity by positioning non-intervention as the response most compatible with volatile public expectations.

These mechanisms demonstrate that governmentality produces a mode of regulation through the alignment of interests, knowledge, and expectations. Non-intervention emerges as the point at which these elements converge, since it enables actors to maintain normative consistency, minimize systemic risks, and preserve legitimacy without incurring substantial political costs. This rationality does not eliminate conflict or tension but manages them within

boundaries considered acceptable. Foreign policy thus operates as a continuous governmental practice in which power is exercised through the formation of conditions rather than the direct imposition of will, and non-intervention becomes one of the most stable expressions of this mode of power.

Governmentality therefore enables foreign policy to be understood as a practice of regulation that operates through freedom, normalization, and restraint rather than direct intervention. Power is exercised not by commanding or coercing but by shaping how problems are formulated, risks calculated, and standards of reasonableness established. Within this framework, non-intervention does not represent the absence of action but an expression of governmental rationality grounded in governing at a distance and the internalization of responsibility. This understanding provides a basis for examining how the principle can operate concretely as a governmental technology in foreign policy, an interpretation that will be developed in the following section.

Non-Intervention as a Technology of Government

If governmentality has thus far been understood as a governmental rationality, this section focuses on how that rationality operates technically. Non-intervention is understood here not as an autonomous normative principle but as a technology of government that operates through a set of concrete mechanisms. This technology does not depend on direct instruction or overt coercion; instead, it structures conditions under which the conduct of other actors is directed through restraint, the organization of choices, and the production of stable expectations.

As a technology of government, non-intervention operates first by structuring the field of engagement. It does not eliminate all forms of engagement but regulates their limits. Recognition of the sovereignty and autonomy of others functions as a framework that determines the extent to which external actors may act. In many international practices, this framework is institutionalized through the principles of state consent, national ownership, and local leadership, which position domestic actors as the principal agents responsible for managing their own circumstances (OECD 2023). Non-intervention therefore does not terminate external influence but redirects it towards indirect support and limited facilitation.

This technology also operates through mechanisms of filtering. Not every situation is treated as requiring direct engagement. Risk classification, assessments of urgency, and estimates of potential escalation form filters that determine which responses are considered proportionate. The absence of intervention may consequently appear as the outcome of a technical assessment that has been naturalized as a matter of professional reason. Didier Bigo demonstrates that modern security practices depend on professional knowledge, profiling, surveillance, and risk classification to determine which individuals or situations are treated as threats and assigned security priority (Bigo 2002). From this perspective, non-intervention can be understood as one possible outcome of a classificatory process that places a particular situation outside the priorities of direct engagement.

Non-intervention as a technology of government also employs the distribution of responsibility as a central mechanism. Responsibility for stability and order is transferred to the actors being governed, while external actors retain supervisory and facilitative roles. This distribution creates conditions under which failure or instability does not automatically trigger intervention because it has already been located within a framework of internal

responsibility. UNDP reports demonstrate that approaches grounded in local responsibility have increasingly become central points of reference within various international frameworks, particularly in the fields of development and stabilization (UNDP 2023). In this context, non-intervention functions as an instrument for ensuring that responsibility remains at the local level.

This governmental technology is reinforced by mechanisms of continuous evaluation and monitoring. Evaluation does not necessarily operate through direct correction but by establishing standards of acceptable conduct and performance. Indicators, periodic reports, and peer review constitute a field of assessment that encourages actors to adjust both their conduct and the ways in which they present their performance. Michael Power demonstrates that the expansion of audit regimes compels organizations to structure their procedures and representations of performance in accordance with demands for measurability, documentation, and verification (Power 1997). From the perspective of governmentality, non-intervention derives its operational force from its connection to these evaluative regimes.

At the symbolic level, non-intervention also functions as a technology of legitimation. By refraining from direct involvement, external actors can preserve an image of respect for sovereignty and formal boundaries. This legitimacy is not merely normative but also operational, since it reduces resistance and increases the likelihood that subtler forms of influence will be accepted. Ian Hurd demonstrates that international legitimacy constitutes a source of power in its own right because it shapes how actors understand their interests and accept the authority and decisions of international institutions (Hurd 2007). Non-intervention mobilizes this legitimacy to preserve the effectiveness of government at a distance.

Non-intervention as a technology of government also operates through the regulation of time. Delay, rescheduling, and graduated responses become its principal instruments. Time is not treated as a neutral variable but as an instrument of control. By postponing direct engagement, external actors allow space for internal adjustment while preserving the option to act in the future. Reinhart Koselleck emphasizes that control over tempo constitutes an important dimension of modern power because it determines when action becomes necessary or may be avoided (Koselleck 2004). Within this framework, non-intervention functions as an effective technology for governing tempo.

Extending this argument, non-intervention as a technology of government also operates by framing the policy choices available to other actors. Government is exercised not by prescribing what must be done but by narrowing the range of options regarded as feasible, safe, and responsible. Certain policies consequently become more likely to be adopted not because they are imposed, but because the alternatives appear to entail greater political, economic, or reputational risks. Foucault emphasizes that modern power operates by structuring the field of possible action, thereby directing freedom without directly constraining it (Foucault 2008). Non-intervention employs this mechanism by establishing restraint as the background against which policy calculations are made.

This governmental technology becomes more effective when connected to mechanisms of indirect incentive. Access to cooperation, international recognition, or long-term relational stability frequently depends on perceived compliance with shared norms, including respect for the limits of involvement. Institutional evidence indicates that many international partnerships emphasize alignment of positions and consistency of conduct as implicit

prerequisites for sustained cooperation, even when these are not formulated as formal conditions (World Bank 2024). In this context, non-intervention functions as a signal of normative compliance that facilitates access to symbolic and material resources.

Non-intervention also operates as a technology for filtering conflicts. Not every conflict is treated as an international security issue requiring a collective response. Through agenda-setting, certain conflicts are framed as domestic or regional matters whose resolution is left to the actors concerned. This process is not always articulated explicitly but is reflected in the degree of attention, intensity of diplomacy, and allocation of resources. Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver, and Jaap de Wilde demonstrate that not every politicized issue is successfully securitized. Securitization occurs only when an issue is constructed as an existential threat and accepted as such by an audience, thereby legitimizing extraordinary measures (Buzan et al. 1998). From this perspective, non-intervention may operate by keeping particular conflicts below the threshold of securitization, preventing them from becoming issues that demand direct international involvement.

This technology also reveals how non-intervention can produce structural compliance. Compliance is not always generated through sanctions but may emerge through repeated adjustment to relatively stable expectations. When actors do not anticipate direct external intervention, responsibility for managing risks and preserving order is transferred to them. Such adjustment becomes structural when it shapes long-term policy orientations rather than merely producing tactical responses. Nikolas Rose demonstrates that liberal government operates by directing relatively autonomous subjects to regulate their own conduct through calculation, choice, and individual responsibility (Rose 1999). In the international context, this logic can be extended to explain how non-intervention encourages states to adjust their policies without direct external coercion.

At the operational level, non-intervention also works through the organization of diplomatic language. Language emphasizing dialogue, consultation, and respect for internal processes creates a normative environment in which coercive action appears less compatible with accepted principles of communication. Such language is not merely rhetorical but also shapes expectations regarding conduct considered reasonable and justifiable. Jürgen Habermas demonstrates that political communication acquires normative force when actions and decisions are supported by reasons that can be justified and accepted through processes of collective will formation (Habermas 1996). From a governmentality perspective, the language of non-intervention draws upon this normative force to establish dialogue, consultation, and restraint as legitimate standards of diplomatic conduct.

Furthermore, the technology of non-intervention relies on stabilization through repetition. Each instance in which restraint is adopted as a reasonable response reinforces the norm and reduces the likelihood of deviation in the future. Repetition produces an effect of sedimentation whereby non-intervention is no longer questioned as a policy choice but accepted as an institutional habit. Pierre Bourdieu emphasizes that such habituation produces a *habitus* that directs action without requiring continuous reflection (Bourdieu 1990). Within this framework, non-intervention becomes part of the practical dispositions of international actors.

China's Governmentality of Non-Intervention through BRICS

BRICS provides an important arena for examining how China's principle of non-intervention has evolved from a diplomatic principle into a technology of government within global governance. The organization has no supranational government, binding enforcement mechanism, or single centre of power capable of determining policy for all its members. Decisions are formulated through consultation and consensus, while each state retains its sovereignty, political system, and development priorities. At first glance, these characteristics suggest that BRICS possesses only a limited capacity to govern the conduct of its members. A governmentality perspective, however, reveals that the absence of centralized command does not imply the absence of power. Government can operate through the formation of norms, procedures, policy choices, and spaces of cooperation that induce states to act without perceiving themselves as being governed. BRICS enables power to operate through the formal freedom of its members because order is produced not by eliminating state autonomy but by directing its exercise within a framework of consensus, mutual benefit, and national responsibility.

China's role in this process cannot be understood as direct control over the entire BRICS agenda. BRICS declarations result from collective negotiations, and every decision therefore reflects the interests of Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa, and the new members admitted following the organization's expansion. China's position is more appropriately understood through its capacity to connect its foreign policy principles with a collective language acceptable to other members. Sovereignty, equality, non-intervention, multilateralism, openness, and mutual benefit are not advanced as doctrines formally imposed by China. Rather, these principles are translated into the institutional vocabulary of BRICS that structures how cooperation is understood and conducted. China's power is therefore evident not only in its economic capacity or considerable material influence but also in its ability to shape a normative environment in which other states can pursue their interests through categories and mechanisms aligned with the rationality of Chinese foreign policy.

An early indication of the institutionalization of this rationality can be found in the 2014 Fortaleza Declaration. The document affirmed open, inclusive, and mutually beneficial cooperation while emphasizing the need to reform global economic governance so that developing countries could obtain greater representation. The declaration also marked the establishment of the New Development Bank and the Contingent Reserve Arrangement. The New Development Bank was designed to mobilize resources for infrastructure and sustainable development projects in BRICS countries and other developing economies. The establishment of these two mechanisms transformed BRICS from a consultative forum into an arena possessing the institutional capacity to provide financing options and financial protection. The declaration did not establish a supranational authority above its member states but created instruments that each state could employ in accordance with its own development priorities (BRICS 2014).

The Fortaleza Declaration reveals an intersection between the recognition of sovereignty and the formation of capacities capable of directing conduct. Member states are not required to surrender their authority over development to BRICS. Instead, they are recognized as the owners of their development priorities, while BRICS institutions provide resources through which those priorities can be realized. Sovereignty is not situated outside

governmental mechanisms but made into their operational medium. States remain free to determine their projects, needs, and development strategies, yet this freedom operates within institutionally constituted fields of financing, knowledge, and cooperation. Governmentality operates by creating conditions that enable states to govern themselves through the possibilities for action provided by these institutions.

The establishment of the New Development Bank gave this rationality a more concrete form. Its founding agreement identifies the financing of infrastructure and sustainable development as the Bank's principal purpose. Its initial structure was also based on an equal distribution of subscribed capital among the five founding states. No founding member was granted an individual veto or formal position enabling it to control the entire decision-making process. This arrangement is significant because it institutionalizes equality rather than presenting it merely as normative language. China accepted formal constraints on its dominance despite possessing an economy considerably larger than those of several other members. Such constraints do not mean that Chinese influence disappears. China's willingness to operate within a framework of equality instead helps generate legitimacy, reduce suspicion, and broaden acceptance of an institution whose establishment was strongly promoted by China and whose headquarters are located in Shanghai (New Development Bank 2014).

The choice of institutional equality reveals non-intervention as a calculation of power. China's formal dominance within the Bank could strengthen its decision-making capacity, but it could also intensify resistance from other members and diminish the NDB's credibility as a multilateral development institution. Equality limits China's capacity to govern through direct command but increases the likelihood that other states will accept the institution as their common undertaking. Self-restraint produces a more acceptable form of power because influence does not appear as subordination. Government operates through rules, resources, and forms of cooperation perceived as posing no threat to the autonomy of its members. In this context, non-intervention is not a passive stance but a means of managing distance so that the expansion of influence does not provoke political resistance.

A similar rationality is evident in the New Development Bank's General Strategy for 2022–2026. The document places member countries and clients at the centre of the Bank's operations. The NDB's strategy affirms respect for national sovereignty, member countries' ownership of their development priorities, and the absence of policy conditionality in the Bank's investment decisions. This approach is complemented by the use of country systems for environmental and social standards, governance, and procurement, provided that those systems meet the NDB's operational requirements. The Bank does not begin its interventions by replacing domestic systems with an entirely externally designed set of procedures. Country systems serve as the foundation, after which any gaps are assessed and addressed according to project requirements (New Development Bank 2022).

The principle of national ownership reveals two dimensions of power operating through non-intervention. The first recognizes the right of states to determine their own development objectives and instruments. Borrowing countries are not required to adopt a single political model or standardized package of economic reforms as a condition for obtaining financing. The second distributes responsibility for implementation to the states concerned. National governments must formulate priorities, ensure project feasibility, employ domestic systems,

and assume responsibility for development outcomes. The freedom granted by the institution does not create an unregulated space. It is tied to the expectation that states will govern themselves, calculate risks, and demonstrate their capacity for implementation. Power operates by constituting the state as a subject that is both sovereign and responsible.

The absence of policy conditionality does not mean that the NDB finances every state decision without assessment. The Bank continues to apply project evaluation, risk governance, financial viability criteria, environmental and social standards, and sustainable development objectives. The distinction lies in how these standards are operationalized. Government does not necessarily require states to transform their political systems or macroeconomic policies according to a standardized external model. Instead, states are directed through project criteria, financing procedures, technical knowledge, and risk assessments that operate within the framework of national priorities. Non-intervention is therefore not the opposite of regulation. It relocates regulation from direct political coercion to the technical management of decisions that formally remain under state ownership.

This regulatory pattern was reaffirmed in the 2023 Johannesburg II Declaration. The declaration states that the BRICS spirit is founded on mutual respect and understanding, sovereign equality, solidarity, democracy, openness, inclusiveness, strengthened collaboration, and consensus. It positions sovereign states as the foundation of the international system while rejecting unilateral coercive measures regarded as inconsistent with the principles of the United Nations Charter and detrimental to developing countries. Consensus was also employed in determining the guidelines, standards, criteria, and procedures for expanding BRICS membership (BRICS 2023).

Consensus constitutes an important technology of government because it does not produce compliance through voting procedures that divide participants into winners and losers. Each member retains space to defend its interests but is also expected to adjust its position so that a collective decision can be reached. The freedom to withhold agreement simultaneously creates a responsibility to continue negotiating. States are not governed by a central authority but directed by the need to preserve the organization's continuity and obtain the benefits of cooperation. Compliance emerges through mutual adjustment, the moderation of demands, and acceptance of language that can command common agreement.

The consensus mechanism also helps manage sharp political differences among BRICS members. Its member states possess systems of government, strategic orientations, security relationships, and regional interests that do not always align. India maintains a strategic partnership with the United States and has ongoing border tensions with China. Brazil and South Africa bring domestic political traditions and perspectives on democracy and human rights that do not fully correspond with those of China or Russia. These differences are not resolved through ideological standardization. BRICS sustains cooperation by limiting its agenda to areas in which shared interests can be established and by employing formulations sufficiently flexible to accommodate divergent national positions.

This flexibility can be understood as a technology for governing diversity. The organization does not require its members to relinquish their identities or external relationships before participating in cooperation. Each state remains free to interpret multilateralism, development, security, and the reform of global governance according to its national circumstances. Such interpretive freedom enables BRICS to accommodate states that

are not bound by a single common ideology. At the same time, flexibility establishes boundaries of conduct because states are expected to avoid actions that would directly undermine consensus and the organization's continuity. Government operates not through standardization but through the management of a threshold of difference considered acceptable.

The expansion of BRICS in 2023 demonstrates the productivity of this mechanism. Admission of new members was not conditioned upon acceptance of a particular model of government. The appeal of BRICS lies instead in its recognition of sovereign equality, openness to diverse development paths, and promise to amplify the voice of the Global South in international governance. The expansion process was established through consensus on membership guidelines, criteria, standards, and procedures. States seeking membership were not required to become identical to the original members but to enter an institutional environment governed by a particular vocabulary and set of rules of conduct. Inclusiveness therefore extends the reach of BRICS norms without requiring expansion through direct subordination.

China's interests are evident in the alignment between the collective language of BRICS and ideas recurrent in its foreign policy. China positions non-intervention, equality, the independent choice of development paths, the settlement of disputes through dialogue, and opposition to unilateral coercion as foundations of its relations with developing countries. It also employs BRICS Plus to expand dialogue between BRICS and the countries of the Global South. During China's chairship of BRICS, this mechanism was promoted as a space in which developing countries could strengthen coordination and amplify their voice in global governance. China does not articulate its influence as a right to lead other states but as support for their capacity to determine their own interests and development trajectories (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China 2014; Wang 2024).

This language produces a political position advantageous to China. Opposition to intervention and unilateral coercive measures constrains the legitimacy of external pressure on developing countries while reinforcing China's image as a defender of sovereignty and the plurality of development paths. Other states can accept cooperation with China without having to acknowledge themselves as being under its leadership. Relations are framed as coordination among equal partners, despite the unequal distribution of economic capacity among them. Material asymmetry is not eliminated but managed through language and procedures that prevent it from appearing as an overt political hierarchy. It is here that non-intervention operates as a strategy for governing distance. China can remain closely involved through trade, financing, diplomacy, and institutions while maintaining distance from direct control over the domestic policies of other states.

The governmentality of non-intervention becomes even more apparent in the 2024 Kazan Declaration. Following the expansion of membership, the declaration reaffirmed mutual respect, sovereign equality, solidarity, openness, inclusiveness, consensus, and the strengthening of multilateralism. BRICS did not transform itself into a supranational organization in response to the growing number of members and the increasing diversity of their interests. Instead, expansion was addressed through the reiteration of principles that preserve state autonomy and direct cooperation through consultation. The Kazan Declaration

also rejects unilateral coercive measures and supports the settlement of disputes through dialogue, diplomacy, and peaceful means (BRICS 2024).

This repetition demonstrates that non-intervention is not merely an incidental declaration but has become an institutional grammar. Equality determines the standing of actors, consensus governs the formation of decisions, flexibility manages differences, and national responsibility determines who must carry out development. These four mechanisms enable BRICS to produce coordination without establishing a powerful centre of command. Member states comply with decisions because they participate in their formulation and perceive them as consistent with their own interests. Compliance is not separated from freedom. The freedom to determine one's own position becomes the very mechanism through which states internalize collective decisions as choices of their own.

These findings do not imply that China secretly controls BRICS or that every organizational norm originates entirely from China. The consensus that constitutes BRICS's strength also limits China's capacity to convert its material capabilities into political command. India, Brazil, South Africa, Russia, and the other members retain the capacity to negotiate, restrain, or modify the organization's agenda. The governmentality of non-intervention operates precisely through this limitation. China acquires influence not by eliminating the agency of other members but by operating through mechanisms that recognize and mobilize that agency. Influence becomes more productive when other states can connect the BRICS agenda to their own national interests.

The evidence from 2014 to 2024 therefore reveals three important transformations. First, non-intervention shifted from a principle restraining external interference into a mechanism for organizing cooperation. The establishment of the NDB demonstrates that respect for sovereignty can produce institutions rather than merely prevent action. Second, sovereignty and state freedom became instruments of government by being connected to national ownership, risk calculation, and responsibility for implementation. Third, consensus and flexibility enabled compliance to be produced without overt command. States are directed not by relinquishing their autonomy but through the ways in which that autonomy is exercised within the institutional space of BRICS.

BRICS ultimately demonstrates that the expansion of Chinese influence need not proceed through the construction of a formal hierarchy. China has helped create an environment in which sovereign equality, non-intervention, consensus, and national responsibility are accepted as rational means of governing international relations. This environment grants member states freedom while simultaneously shaping their choices, conduct, and limits of action. Non-intervention is not the absence of government but a means of governing at a distance. China does not need to appear as the power determining every decision because its influence can operate through institutions, norms, financing, and the subjectivity of sovereign states that govern themselves. It is within this configuration that BRICS becomes an operational arena for China's governmentality of non-intervention.

Normalization of Non-Intervention and the Production of a Regime of Truth

The repeated affirmation of sovereignty, equality, consensus, openness, and national responsibility in the 2014 Fortaleza Declaration, the 2023 Johannesburg II Declaration, and the 2024 Kazan Declaration demonstrates that non-intervention has moved beyond its status as a diplomatic principle. Non-intervention no longer merely determines what one state must

not do to another; it constitutes an institutional grammar that governs how international cooperation is imagined, articulated, and conducted. The consistency of this language produces a set of normative boundaries concerning forms of power regarded as acceptable. Influence is considered legitimate when exercised through consultation, development financing, respect for national priorities, and collective decision-making. Conversely, coercion, unilateral political conditionalities, and interference in domestic affairs are positioned as forms of engagement incompatible with sovereign equality. Through this process, BRICS not only coordinates the interests of its members but also produces standards by which global governance is understood as fair and rational (BRICS 2014; BRICS 2023; BRICS 2024).

A regime of truth emerges when a set of ideas is no longer regarded as merely one political option among many but is accepted as a reasonable way of understanding reality. Within BRICS, sovereignty is produced as the primary foundation of international relations, consensus as a fair mode of decision-making, and national ownership as the appropriate means of governing development. These three ideas are continuously reproduced through declarations, institutional mechanisms, and financing practices, thereby acquiring a force that extends beyond normative statements. Non-intervention appears true not because it is imposed as a singular doctrine but because it is connected to values that developing countries can scarcely reject, including independence, equality, political dignity, and the right to determine their own development paths. A regime of truth operates by connecting particular principles to the aspirations of the subjects that accept them.

The position of the state within this rationality is consequently reconstituted. The state is understood not only as the bearer of sovereignty that must be protected from external interference but also as a subject expected to govern itself. The freedom to determine development priorities is accompanied by responsibility for formulating projects, managing risks, utilizing domestic capacities, and accounting for outcomes. The New Development Bank's emphasis on national ownership, the use of country systems, and the absence of policy conditionality demonstrates this relationship between freedom and responsibility. States are given space to determine their choices while simultaneously being directed to develop the governmental capacities necessary to implement those choices. Government does not disappear when political command is withdrawn. It is relocated into feasibility assessments, risk management, project standards, technical knowledge, and national responsibility (New Development Bank 2022).

The formal freedom of states thus becomes a medium of power. Member states are not compelled to accept decisions imposed by a supranational authority but are incorporated into consultative processes that require them to adjust their positions so that consensus can be achieved. Each member retains the right to defend its national interests, yet the continuation of cooperation depends on its capacity to moderate demands, manage differences, and formulate language acceptable to all parties. Compliance does not emerge after freedom has been removed but is produced through the exercise of freedom itself. States comply with collective decisions because they have participated in producing them and can interpret those decisions as part of their national interests. This mechanism ensures that power does not appear as external pressure but as an orientation of conduct accepted and enacted by states in the name of their own choices.

This rationality establishes the conditions under which Chinese influence can be accepted without immediately being interpreted as hegemonic domination. Material asymmetries between China and the other BRICS members remain evident. The size of China's economy, its financing capacity, trade networks, and diplomatic position provide it with a degree of influence not equally possessed by every member. Yet this material influence is not automatically translated into formal hierarchy. The initial equal distribution of capital within the New Development Bank, consensus-based decision-making, and the repeated language of sovereign equality prevent China from appearing as a centre of command. These constraints instead increase acceptance of institutions and norms aligned with Chinese foreign policy because other states are not required to declare their subordination in order to participate in them.

Non-intervention functions as a strategy for governing distance within these relationships. China can deepen economic and institutional ties through trade, development financing, diplomacy, and BRICS without openly assuming control over the domestic authority of partner states. Political distance is maintained through recognition of national choices and diverse development paths. This recognition produces an image of relations among equal partners even when they operate within a structure of unequal capacities. Power becomes productive because it does not require the elimination of other states' agency. China gains space for influence precisely by recognizing, mobilizing, and directing that agency within a framework of cooperation aligned with the principles of its foreign policy.

The rejection of unilateral coercive measures further reinforces this regime of truth. Such language does more than criticize coercive practices in global governance; it establishes a moral distinction between two modes of exercising power. Intervention, unilateral sanctions, and political conditionalities are positioned as practices that undermine sovereignty, whereas dialogue, consensus, and respect for nationally determined development paths are presented as more equitable forms of engagement. This distinction provides China with a discursive advantage. It can position itself as a defender of pluralism and the sovereignty of developing countries, while the influence it exercises through financing, trade, and institutions is less readily equated with direct intervention. Chinese power does not become invisible, but acquires a language that renders it more acceptable.

This regime of truth never operates in absolute terms. The consensus that provides BRICS with legitimacy also enables other members to restrain, modify, or reject China's agenda. India, Brazil, South Africa, Russia, and the new members bring interests and political orientations that do not always coincide with those of China. Institutional flexibility may also produce decisions that are broad, compromise-oriented, and difficult to translate into decisive collective action. Recognizing these limitations is essential to prevent the governmentality of non-intervention from being understood as China's concealed control over the entire organization. The power identified in this study is relational. China influences the normative environment of BRICS while simultaneously having to adjust its interests in response to the agency and resistance of other states.

The normalization of non-intervention ultimately does not produce uniform compliance. Instead, it creates conditions under which certain forms of action become more possible and legitimate than others. States are encouraged to understand themselves as sovereign subjects that are free to choose and responsible for their own national development.

BRICS is understood as a space of coordination that respects differences, while Chinese influence is translated through the language of partnership and mutual benefit. The novelty of this finding lies in demonstrating that power does not always expand by restricting the sovereignty of other states. Power can operate more deeply by recognizing that sovereignty and then organizing how freedom is exercised, responsibility is fulfilled, and political choices are formed. Non-intervention is therefore not a domain outside government but a rationality that enables government to operate through formal freedom and political distance.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrated that China's principle of non-intervention functioned not merely as a norm of respecting state sovereignty but also as a governmental rationality through which influence was exercised by shaping institutional environments rather than imposing direct control. Within BRICS, this rationality was reflected in sovereignty, equality, consensus-based decision-making, institutional flexibility, and national responsibility, as evidenced by the 2014 Fortaleza Declaration, the 2023 Johannesburg II Declaration, and the 2024 Kazan Declaration, as well as the establishment of the New Development Bank, which promotes national ownership and financing without political conditionalities. These mechanisms constructed a regime of truth that framed non-intervention as a legitimate and equitable model of global governance, enabling China's influence to be accepted through institutions, consultation, and partnership while preserving the formal agency of member states. At the same time, consensus-based decision-making limited China's capacity to dominate because all members retained the ability to negotiate, resist, or reshape collective agendas. The study's novelty lies in reconceptualizing non-intervention as a technology of power rather than as the absence of power, demonstrating that China governed at a political distance by organizing the conditions under which sovereign states exercised their freedom. In this way, influence became effective precisely because it did not appear in the form of direct domination.

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