

# Is China a responsible stakeholder?

AMITAI ETZIONI\*

China has recently been criticized for not being a ‘responsible stakeholder’, not being a good citizen of the international community and not contributing to global public goods. China ‘is refusing to be a responsible stakeholder in the international political system, cultivating, as it has been, good relations with some of the world’s most odious regimes’, according to Robert Kaplan, writing in *The Atlantic*.<sup>1</sup> An editorial in the *Wall Street Journal* asserts that ‘China won’t be a responsible stakeholder’ and acts as a ‘free-rider’.<sup>2</sup> Observing China’s growing assertiveness in foreign policy and purported attempts to undermine the current liberal world order, Elizabeth Economy writes in *Foreign Affairs* that ‘China is transforming the world as it transforms itself. Never mind notions of a responsible stakeholder; China has become a revolutionary power.’<sup>3</sup>

This article explores the application of the concept of stakeholding and what it entails to China’s international conduct. It proceeds by applying sets of criteria to evaluate whether China is acting as a ‘responsible stakeholder’ in the international system. In the process the article raises questions about the criteria that are frequently employed in this context. After a brief outline of developments in western views of China leading up to its being considered a ‘stakeholder’, it first uses a communitarian set of standards of international responsibility that distinguishes between the status of a member of a community and that of a citizen of a state. The article then briefly studies China’s conduct from a less demanding standard: one that considers whether China has fulfilled its duties as a partner in projects in which it has shared or complementary interests with other nations. The third section examines China’s conduct from a third set of criteria that involves conceptions of power, rather than value- or interest-based considerations.

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Kaplan, ‘Don’t panic about China’, *The Atlantic*, 28 Jan. 2010.

<sup>2</sup> John Lee, ‘China won’t be a responsible stakeholder’, *Wall Street Journal*, 1 Feb. 2010.

<sup>3</sup> Elizabeth C. Economy, ‘The game changer: coping with China’s foreign policy revolution’, *Foreign Affairs* 89: 9, Nov.–Dec. 2010, p. 142.

## Within history

The first major break in the American view that China was part of the Soviet-run global communist threat came with the well-known ‘opening to China’ during the Nixon administration. In a 1967 essay in *Foreign Affairs*, Richard Nixon wrote that China should be drawn into the community of nations, because a globally engaged China is likely to act with more ‘civility’ and in a less dogmatic manner.<sup>4</sup> However, many Americans and others in the West continued to see China as an aggressive, expansionist, communist nation until the end of the Cold War. During the Clinton administration, Secretary of Defense William Perry argued that engagement was a strategy for getting China to act like a ‘responsible world power’, and Secretary of State Madeleine Albright called on China to become a ‘constructive participant in the international arena’. The George W. Bush administration’s view of China was less optimistic: Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice declared that China was not a status quo power.<sup>5</sup> However, it was during that administration, in 2005, that Deputy Secretary of State Robert Zoellick called on China to become a ‘responsible stakeholder’ of the international community—a phrase that echoed widely.

The concept ‘stakeholder’ is a highly communitarian one as it holds that while the members of a given community are entitled to various rights, these go hand in hand with responsibilities for the common good.<sup>6</sup> The term ‘stakeholder’ has been used in recent decades mainly in reference to corporatism and societies. Communitarian economists have argued that the corporation should be viewed as belonging not solely to the shareholders, but to all those who have a stake in it and are ‘invested’ in it, including the workers, its creditors and the community in which the plants are located. Tony Blair championed a stakeholder society in the year leading up to his party’s election to government in Britain and during his first years of service, declaring his intention to pursue an economy ‘run for the many, not for the few ... in which opportunity is available to all, advancement is through merit, and from which no group or class is set apart or excluded’.<sup>7</sup>

Zoellick, in his speech urging China to become a ‘responsible stakeholder’ of the international system, listed a very extensive number of changes that China would have to undertake in its domestic policies, indeed in its regime, and in its foreign policy in major areas—from North Korea and Iran to trade—in order to qualify. A critic may argue that basically he asked China to become like the United States and to do its bidding, all in the name of service to the common good of the world. (A similar idea is often expressed in the argument that after the Second World War the US erected a set of ‘liberal’ global rules and institutions that, while tying its own hands to some extent, helped promote world peace, order, human rights and democracy, and that China should now buy into these arrangements.)

<sup>4</sup> Richard Nixon, ‘Asia after Viet Nam’, *Foreign Affairs* 46: 1, Oct. 1967, pp. 111–25.

<sup>5</sup> Alastair Iain Johnston, ‘Is China a status quo power?’, *International Security* 27: 4, Spring 2003, pp. 6–7.

<sup>6</sup> Amitai Etzioni, *The spirit of community: the reinvention of American society* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994).

<sup>7</sup> Tony Blair’s 1996 speech in Singapore, cited in Michael Hopkins, *The planetary bargain: corporate social responsibility matters* (London: Earthscan, 2003), p. 18.

Several other authors have employed the term, seeking to determine whether or not China is becoming a responsible stakeholder on the basis of more universally applicable criteria. The present article joins this examination from the viewpoint of a global community.

In the years during which American policy-makers urged China to become a more 'responsible' or more 'status quo' international power, academics set out to analyse its conduct in similar terms. Robert Ross argued in a 1997 essay in *Foreign Affairs* that China was acting as a 'conservative power' even though it might also be considered 'revisionist' in the sense that it was dissatisfied with aspects of the status quo in Asia, especially with regard to Taiwan and Japan.<sup>8</sup> Alastair Johnston, in a 2003 article in *International Security*, concluded that China was a status quo power and criticized the notion that it was a revisionist power, one currently outside the international community that must be brought in. He held that there did not exist a well-defined global community with well-defined norms. Nonetheless Johnston defined the criteria by which one could identify a status quo power and argued that, despite some problem areas, China did meet them. For example, he pointed out that China's participation in international institutions and organizations had increased dramatically in the post-Mao era. He criticized those who described grandiose Chinese goals of regional hegemony. For example, while some of China's actions with regard to the Spratly Islands raised red flags, 'China is like the Spratlys' other claimants. Indeed none of the claimants has sound legal basis.'<sup>9</sup> In respect of the potential for conflict with the US, Johnston argued that China sought to constrain US behaviour, not to push violently against US power.<sup>10</sup>

Chinese policy-makers themselves have sought over the past couple of decades to show that China intends to act responsibly. President Jiang Zemin stated that 'China needs a long-lasting peaceful international environment for its development', and in 1997 he initiated China's 'New Security Concept', which stresses 'mutual respect' and 'peaceful coexistence'. Since then, Chinese leaders such as Hu Jintao and Wen Jiabao have declared that they are seeking a 'peaceful rise' and that they seek to focus on domestic development, not international expansion. The concept was developed by Chinese scholar Zheng Bijian, who wrote in a *Foreign Affairs* article entitled 'China's "peaceful rise" to great power status', 'for the next few decades the Chinese nation will be preoccupied with securing a more decent life for its people ... China's emergence thus far has been driven by capital, technology, and resources acquired through peaceful means ... China's peaceful rise will further open its economy so that its population can serve as a growing market for the rest of the world ... China's development depends on world peace—a peace that its development will in turn reinforce.'<sup>11</sup> The concept of China as a 'responsible great power' has also been widely discussed by Chinese intellectuals.

<sup>8</sup> Robert Ross, 'Beijing as a conservative power', *Foreign Affairs* 76: 2, March–April 1997, pp. 33–44.

<sup>9</sup> Johnston, 'Is China a status quo power?', p. 28.

<sup>10</sup> Johnston, 'Is China a status quo power?'.

<sup>11</sup> Zheng Bijian, 'China's "peaceful rise" to Great Power status', *Foreign Affairs* 84: 5, September–October 2005, pp. 18–24.

Critics argue that China is merely trying to ‘pull the wool over Western eyes’—that is, to generate the impression that it has peaceful inclinations, while it is in fact preparing to come out as an aggressor once it gains the capabilities to carry out its true intentions.<sup>12</sup>

In the current context one cannot avoid asking by what criteria one is to judge the extent to which a nation is acting responsibly. The article now turns to grapple with this key question from the viewpoints of, in turn, key values, interests and power relations.

## **The term ‘stakeholder’ unpacked and evaluated**

### *Membership and citizenship*

From a communitarian viewpoint the term ‘stakeholder’ is best unpacked, because the assessments that employ it often conflate two distinct notions by blurring the differences between being a member in good standing of a community and being an upstanding citizen of a state. Much more is expected of the former than of the latter. Moreover, contributions to the common good by community members are voluntary, undergirded by informal norms and informal social controls (such as appreciation for those who contribute and criticism of those who fail to do so), while citizens’ duties are set by law and serious violations are punished by financial penalties (or sanctions) and coercive means (e.g. armed interventions). By conflating community membership with citizenship, critics tend to be unduly condemning, and may rush to call for penalties and coercive measures when in fact only stronger moral appeals are justified.

To highlight the distinction between these concepts it is fruitful first to examine how they apply to individuals. An upstanding citizen pays the taxes due, serves as juror when called to and abides by the laws of the land. (I deliberately avoid the term ‘good citizen’ because ‘good’ implies a moral standing, which is appropriate for community membership, but not for citizenship per se.) Such citizens may also keep up with public affairs and vote regularly; however, these activities already shift the assessment from a pure notion of citizenship towards one of community membership. A good community member—aside from being an upstanding citizen—also contributes to the common good by volunteering, making donations, heeding the informal norms of the community and helping to enforce them by exerting informal social controls over those who do not. One reason why citizenship and membership are often conflated is that a given societal entity can be both a state and a community: indeed, this is a widely used definition of a nation.

When these concepts are applied to international affairs, one must take into account that the international community is a rather weak entity. At the same time, although there is no global state of which one can be a loyal citizen, there is a non-trivial and growing body of established international laws and institutions

<sup>12</sup> Erich Follath, ‘China’s soft power is a threat to the West,’ *Der Spiegel*, 28 July 2010, <http://www.spiegel.de/international/world/0,1518,708645,00.html>, accessed 15 Nov. 2010.

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which nations are expected to heed. Hence, in the international realm too, it is important to distinguish between being a 'bad' member (e.g. a nation that makes few or no donations to countries devastated by earthquakes or does not contribute troops to peacekeeping operations) and a nation that acts like a poor citizen (e.g. one that violates widely held international laws or disregards the rulings of international institutions such as the World Trade Organization and the United Nations). Such acts of poor citizenship include engaging in hostile activities (e.g. supporting terrorism or invading other countries without due cause), repudiating the authority of world institutions, and failing to live up to agreed treaties.

The discussion next turns to examine several areas of China's conduct with this dual perspective in mind. The analysis is deliberately limited in two major ways. First, it does not seek to encompass all or even most areas of international conduct, but merely examines a sufficient number to highlight the difference between membership and citizenship, and makes possible a preliminary assessment of China's conduct in both capacities. Second, the discussion focuses almost exclusively on conduct rather than declarations and statements. One can readily find belligerent statements by both Chinese and American military officials, statesmen and observers. Behaviour speaks more clearly, although it too is open to different interpretations.

### *'China is neither a good member nor a good citizen'*

China is reported to have contributed very little to whatever is considered the common good (or 'public goods') of the global community. It was roundly criticized for providing very little help when nations donated relief aid to those struck by the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami and the 2010 earthquake in Haiti. According to *Foreign Policy*, the level of relief aid pledged by China at the UN donors' conference following the earthquake in Haiti was pitifully low. 'More than 50 countries kicked in \$5.3 billion in all, at least a billion dollars over their initial goals. But the world's fastest-growing economy ponied up a miserly \$1.5 million, comparable to the donations made by Gambia and Monaco—hardly top-three economies—and less than the cost of a house in some of the tonier suburbs of Shanghai.'<sup>13</sup> After the 2004 tsunami, China's initial emergency aid amounted to less than US\$3 million. It was raised to about US\$60 million the following week, just outdoing Taiwan, which pledged US\$50 million.<sup>14</sup> This sum, plus its decision to dispatch medical teams, marked China's largest ever relief operation.<sup>15</sup> In comparison, Australia granted the equivalent of US\$810 million in grants and loans to the tsunami-affected countries; Germany, about US\$700 million; Japan, US\$500 million; and the United States, US\$350 million.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Evan A. Feigenbaum, 'Beijing's billions', *Foreign Policy*, 20 May 2010, [http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2010/05/19/beijings\\_billions](http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2010/05/19/beijings_billions), accessed 18 Oct. 2010.

<sup>14</sup> Srikanth Kondapalli, 'Tsunami and China: relief with Chinese characteristics', 17 Jan. 2005, [http://www.niaslinc.dk/gateway\\_to\\_asia/Asia\\_insights/China%20%20Tsunami.doc](http://www.niaslinc.dk/gateway_to_asia/Asia_insights/China%20%20Tsunami.doc), accessed 21 Oct. 2010.

<sup>15</sup> Drew Thompson, 'Tsunami relief reflects China's regional aspirations', *Jamestown Foundation China Brief*, 17 Jan. 2005, [http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no\\_cache=1&tx\\_ttnews\[tt\\_news\]=27394](http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews[tt_news]=27394), accessed 21 Oct. 2010.

<sup>16</sup> Kondapalli, 'Tsunami and China'.

One should note, though, that such donations are expected from good members, but not making them—unlike avoiding paying taxes—does not make a nation into a bad global citizen. The same holds for China's failure to support interventions to stop genocides. China opposed humanitarian intervention in Kosovo, continued to sell arms to Sudan while it was committing genocide and delayed UN Security Council authorization for sending peacekeeping troops to Darfur by insisting no such action be taken without the Sudanese government's consent.<sup>17</sup> In short, China is indeed a rather deficient member.

Turning to examine China as a citizen, it should be noted that, although international law is subject to different and changing interpretations, there is a body of law which is widely recognized and which China itself does not contest but often violates.

China has used force in a number of its border disputes, rather than seeking resolution through mediation, arbitration or some other peaceful and internationally legitimate process. The Chinese attacked India in 1962 over a border dispute, resulting in a war that caused thousands of casualties. China captured the Paracel Islands from Vietnam in 1974; and in 1988 its military forces sank several Vietnamese ships, killing more than 70 sailors, while defending its claim to the Johnson Reef in the disputed Spratly Islands.<sup>18</sup>

In addition, China has used force, albeit on a much smaller scale, to reinforce its claims to rights over large parts of the South China Sea and territories in other of its surrounding waterways. It has seized fishing boats and arrested sailors from other countries in these areas.<sup>19</sup> In the mid-1990s China ignored protests by ASEAN when it occupied Mischief Reef, within the Philippines' economic exclusion zone (EEZ), and built military-like structures there. And in September 2010 a Chinese fishing trawler rammed a Japanese ship patrolling the disputed Senkaku (Diaoyu) Islands.<sup>20</sup>

Moreover, on some occasions China has attempted through harassment to deny passage to US surveillance ships and aircraft in waters and airspace outside the country's territorial limits—in violation of international conventions. In April 2001 a Chinese plane collided with an American one, bringing it down.<sup>21</sup> Similarly, Chinese ships have on occasion manoeuvred dangerously close to American ones. The most noted such incident occurred in March 2009 and involved the US surveillance ship the *Impeccable*. According to defence analysts, there have been numerous other such incidents in the high seas outside China's territorial waters.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Nicola P. Contessi, 'Multilateralism, intervention and norm contestation: China's stance on Darfur in the UN Security Council', *Security Dialogue* 41: 3, June 2010, p. 331.

<sup>18</sup> GlobalSecurity.org, 'South China Sea / Spratly Islands', <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/war/spratly.htm>, accessed 17 Nov. 2010.

<sup>19</sup> John Pomfret, 'Beijing claims "indisputable sovereignty" over South China Sea', *Washington Post*, 31 Jul. 2010.

<sup>20</sup> China is also said to have become more assertive in its claims over the South China Sea, labelling sovereignty over the sea a 'core national interest'. However, such claims are not discussed here because they are only statements and not actions.

<sup>21</sup> On this 'EP-3 incident' see Seymour Hersh, 'The online threat', *The New Yorker*, 1 Nov. 2010.

<sup>22</sup> Examples include the 2006 incident when a Chinese submarine stalked the USS *Kitty Hawk* and surfaced within a torpedo's firing range, and two incidents in 2009 involving the USS *John S. McCain* and *Victorious*.

The Japanese military has reported similar confrontations with China at sea.<sup>23</sup>

Beyond these occasional uses of force, which were spread over decades and limited in scale, serious demonstrations of China's poor global citizenship are revealed by its industrial espionage, violations of intellectual property rights and hostile acts in cyberspace.

The US–China Economic and Security Review Commission (USCC) concluded that the Chinese government 'has been a major beneficiary of technology acquired through industrial espionage'.<sup>24</sup> For example, Google reported one such intrusion in December 2009.<sup>25</sup> Later it was revealed by investigators that this was part of a 'larger computer network exploitation campaign ... with perhaps 33 or more other victim companies',<sup>26</sup> including Adobe Systems.<sup>27</sup> According to the Commission's 2010 report, China is placing requirements on firms operating in China that are designed to force them to expose 'their security measures or even their intellectual property to Chinese competitors' as the price of doing business in China.<sup>28</sup>

Moreover, China's inadequate enforcement of intellectual property rights laws has led to rampant piracy and counterfeiting. Chinese trade in illegal copies of software, films, records, books, pharmaceuticals and a variety of other goods—ranging from luxury items to shampoo—is reported to cost US companies billions of dollars a year.<sup>29</sup> The Motion Picture Association of America estimates that the industry was cheated out of US\$2.7 billion in one year alone.<sup>30</sup>

Hostile acts by China in cyberspace are reported to pose a serious threat to US security. According to the report of the House of Representatives Select Committee on US National Security and Military/Commercial Concerns with the People's Republic of China (the Cox Commission report), China 'has stolen classified information on all of the United States' most advanced thermo-nuclear warheads, and several of the associated reentry vehicles'.<sup>31</sup> In April 2010 a state-owned Chinese telecom firm 're-routed traffic sent to about 15% of the

<sup>23</sup> The Chinese argue that in its interpretation of international law, surveillance and certain other military vessels are considered to be engaged in hostile activities and thus should not be afforded the same rights to free passage as peacetime vessels: see legal brief by Ji Guoxing, 'The legality of the "Impeccable incident"', <http://www.chinasecurity.us/pdfs/jiguoxing.pdf>, accessed 5 Oct. 2010. However, China's viewpoint is not a widely accepted interpretation of the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea or other international agreements: see Glenn Tiffert, 'By provocatively engaging the US Navy, Beijing may be trying to change the international rules', *Yale Global*, 27 Mar. 2009.

<sup>24</sup> Christopher Drew, 'New targets for spies: employers' trade secrets', *International Herald Tribune*, 19 Oct. 2010.

<sup>25</sup> David Drummond, 'A new approach to China', *Googleblog*, 12 Jan. 2010, <http://googleblog.blogspot.com/2010/01/new-approach-to-china.html>, accessed 17 Nov. 2010.

<sup>26</sup> US–China Economic and Security Review Commission (USCC), 2010 Report to Congress, Nov. 2010, [http://www.uscc.gov/annual\\_report/2010/annual\\_report\\_full\\_10.pdf](http://www.uscc.gov/annual_report/2010/annual_report_full_10.pdf), accessed 17 Nov. 2010.

<sup>27</sup> Robert McMillan, 'Google attack part of widespread spying effort', *Computerworld*, 13 Jan. 2010, [http://www.computerworld.com/s/article/9144221/Google\\_attack\\_part\\_of\\_widespread\\_spying\\_effort](http://www.computerworld.com/s/article/9144221/Google_attack_part_of_widespread_spying_effort), accessed 15 Nov. 2010.

<sup>28</sup> USCC, 2010 Report to Congress.

<sup>29</sup> The US Assistant Secretary of Commerce put the estimate at nearly \$24 billion a year in a 2004 statement: 'US lashes out at Chinese piracy', *Asia Times*, 15 Jan. 2005, <http://www.atimes.com/atimes/China/GA15Ad03.html>, accessed 15 Nov. 2010; Henry Blodget, 'How to solve China's piracy problem', *Slate*, 12 Apr. 2005, <http://www.slate.com/id/2116629/>, accessed 17 Nov. 2010.

<sup>30</sup> Frederik Balfour, 'US takes piracy pushback to WTO', *Bloomberg Business Week*, 10 April 2007, [http://www.businessweek.com/globalbiz/content/apr2007/gb20070410\\_466097.htm](http://www.businessweek.com/globalbiz/content/apr2007/gb20070410_466097.htm), accessed 15 Nov. 2010.

<sup>31</sup> US House of Representatives, Select Committee on US National Security and Military/Commercial Concerns with the People's Republic of China, *US national security and military/commercial concerns with the People's Republic of China*, 106th Congress, 1st session, 1999, p. 60.

Internet's destinations, including branches of the US armed services'.<sup>32</sup> In 2007 hackers, suspected of being Chinese agents,<sup>33</sup> stole several terabytes of information—nearly equal to the amount of information in the entire Library of Congress—from, among others, the Departments of State and Defense.<sup>34</sup>

China has targeted other countries as well as the US. Thus, according to the 2010 report of the USCC, 'A China-based computer espionage network targeted primarily Indian diplomatic missions and government entities; Indian national security and defense groups; Indian academics and journalists focused on China; and other political institutions in India, as well as the Office of His Holiness, the Dalai Lama.'<sup>35</sup> A German intelligence officer stated in 2009 that Chinese spying operations are costing the German economy billions of euros a year and warned that China was capable of 'sabotaging' German infrastructure, including its power grids.<sup>36</sup>

Much has been made of China's 2010 claim to 'indisputable sovereignty' over the South China Sea, seeking to treat the body of water as if it were in its entirety part of its EEZ, from which it can extract oil and mineral resources also claimed by its neighbours. This position has been regarded with considerable alarm as a sign of rising Chinese assertiveness, if not aggression,<sup>37</sup> despite the fact that many other nations have made what some consider extraordinary territorial claims about seas or lands, including recently about the Arctic.

Statements aside, the main test of Chinese citizenship in this area is how these disputes go on to be resolved. To the extent that China is making these extravagant claims merely as opening moves in a legal dispute—a far from unprecedented practice among lawyers—the key question is whether China will next turn to direct negotiations with the countries involved, for example Vietnam, Malaysia and the Philippines, or to international mediation or courts, to come to an agreed solution, or whether it will employ force to make these claims stick. (Favouring bilateral over multilateral negotiations is acceptable if the other nation agrees.) If China follows either of the first two courses, it is quite in line with an upstanding citizen role. If it takes the third option, that will be a major piece of evidence that China is far from ready to become a citizen in good standing.

In short, both those who rate China as a rather poor member of the global community and those who see it as a far from upstanding citizen have considerable basis for their judgements—at least as long as one accepts the precept that nations ought be good members of the international community and upstanding global citizens.

<sup>32</sup> Michael R. Crittenden and Shayndi Raice, 'Chinese firm "hijacked" data', *Wall Street Journal*, 18 Nov. 2010, p. A8.

<sup>33</sup> James Lewis, 'To protect the US against cyberwar, best defense is a good offense', *US News and World Report*, 29 Mar. 2010.

<sup>34</sup> 'Cyber war: sabotaging the system', *60 Minutes*, 8 Nov. 2009.

<sup>35</sup> USCC, 2010 Report to Congress.

<sup>36</sup> Kate Connolly, 'Germany accuses China of industrial espionage', *Guardian*, 22 July 2009.

<sup>37</sup> Joshua Kurlantzick, 'A Beijing backlash: China is starting to face consequences for its newly aggressive stance', *Newsweek*, 4 Oct. 2010.



### *Aspirational standards*

The evaluations of China noted so far in this article have been based on the concept of a stakeholder and the normative assumptions packed into it. However, in evaluating China's conduct one should take into account that the standards involved are *aspirational* standards, especially regarding community membership but also regarding citizenship. By 'aspirational standards' we mean expressions of norms and even laws employed by those who argue that nations *ought* to abide by them and that the world would be a better place *if* they were more widely honoured. These aspirational standards are far from mere lip service. The global community, despite being very weak, does recognize and reward those who live by them and chastise and sometimes punish those who do not. It uses approbation and censure, both of which have an effect. Nations do care whether their acts and regimes are considered legitimate and respected by others, and the ways in which a government is viewed by the world affects domestic politics. Thus, the negative reactions of many nations to the 2003 US invasion of Iraq had considerable adverse 'real' consequences. They are an element of what is considered 'soft' or persuasive power. However, one must assume that often various actors will not fully heed the norms and/or will try to circumvent or change them.

At the same time, it should be remembered that even in the most closely knit communities—in, for example, families and villages—members vary in the extent to which they heed norms and contribute to the common good. The same holds for members of a national community and to a far greater degree of the international community, which is in a very preliminary state, its norms still young and in the process of formation. In short, it is productive to have such norms and to promote them; however, before one condemns—let alone seeks to punish—those who do not live up to them, one does well to take into account their aspirational nature. For example, China is properly criticized for doing little to stop genocides. However, while the US and its allies are credited for stopping the ethnic cleansing in Kosovo, they failed to do so in Cambodia, Rwanda, the Congo and Sudan.<sup>38</sup> In a class in which many get a C or a lower grade, including the class leaders, those with a D should not be treated as if they were outliers in a class full of A students: all should be expected to improve their performance.

Some of the same points apply to global governance. There obviously is no global state and hence the concept of global citizenship barely applies. At the same time, although the expectations and demands of nations as citizens are much more circumscribed than those of nations as members, they are more codified and the mechanisms for enforcement are clearer. Considering this context, China might have been encouraged in its various violations of established international laws because they did not elicit a strong response. On most occasions, the nations attacked sought peaceful resolutions or simply yielded. Those whose economies were robbed responded with rather mild complaints and did not reciprocate or

<sup>38</sup> Samantha Power, *A problem from hell* (New York: Basic Books, 2002).

retaliate.<sup>39</sup> These weak responses further dilute the already weak concept of citizenship—and lessen the reasons to criticize China for not being a better global citizen.

### *Contextual factors*

So far this article has assumed that all nations can be expected to abide by the same standards as far as their international roles are concerned. However, it is common to take into account differences in capabilities, such as stage of development and magnitude of assets, in making such judgements. How do these particular adjustments affect the applications of universal normative standards in the evaluation of China, given its recent, current and expected capabilities?

*Relative affluence* Even in well-formed communities, contributions expected from community members are scaled according to their affluence and thus their ability to pay. Among the nations that did make substantial contributions to relief funds for victims of the tsunami and Haiti earthquake are the more affluent countries, such as the US, Germany and Japan. Although China is the world's second largest economy, it does not see itself—and by many measures is not—an affluent nation. Its income per capita is well below that of the main donor nations, a point that is confirmed by the most recent data from the *CIA World Factbook*, which shows that the average per capita GDP in the OECD countries is above US\$33,000, compared to about US\$7,400 in China, and the gap was wider in previous years.<sup>40</sup> At the same time, given China's rapid economic growth, one would expect it to become more generous in the future.

*An improving trend in China* Bates Gill, director of the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, reviewed China's conduct carefully and in detail in many areas, including regional and international security, energy security, economic development and assistance, peacekeeping, trade and economic affairs, and human rights. He concluded in a 2007 memo that, 'Looking back over the past 15 years and looking ahead to the next 10 or 15, the trend is clear that China is becoming a more responsible stakeholder.'<sup>41</sup>

Turning first to membership, China has decided to increase the number of troops

<sup>39</sup> According to an article in *Bloomberg Business Week* ('The runaway trade giant', 24 April 2006, [http://www.businessweek.com/magazine/content/06\\_17/b3981039.htm](http://www.businessweek.com/magazine/content/06_17/b3981039.htm), accessed 15 Nov. 2010), one reason why the US has not been more persistent in using the WTO to halt Chinese piracy is that 'the WTO lacks clear standards on adequate progress towards enforcement' of intellectual property rights. To prove China's inadequate enforcement of anti-piracy laws, the US would need hard data from companies that do business in China. But the problem is that even if these companies are being harmed by intellectual property rights violations, they do not want to be seen as cooperating with the US government. 'Besides risking retaliation against their mainland operations, executives aren't sure a successful WTO ruling will solve anything, given China's weak rule of law.' Moreover, if the suit were to fail—a not unlikely prospect—an even worse scenario could arise: China would probably be emboldened to become even laxer about enforcing its intellectual property rights laws. See also Keith Bradsher, 'Sitting out the China trade battles', *New York Times*, 23 Dec. 2010.

<sup>40</sup> *CIA World Factbook*, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/rankorder/2004rank.html>, accessed 23 March 2011.

<sup>41</sup> Bates Gill, 'China becoming a responsible stakeholder', event resource, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 11 Jun. 2007, [http://carnegieendowment.org/files/Bates\\_paper.pdf](http://carnegieendowment.org/files/Bates_paper.pdf), accessed 20 Oct. 2010. See also Bates Gill, *Rising star: China's new security diplomacy* (Washington DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2007).

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it sends to peacekeeping operations.<sup>42</sup> China has also increasingly participated in counterpiracy operations in Somalia, sending its naval fleets to help in the endeavour,<sup>43</sup> and committing itself to share intelligence and conduct humanitarian rescue operations in coordination with other countries involved in anti-piracy efforts.<sup>44</sup>

In terms of becoming a better global citizen, China is improving with regard to its protection of intellectual property rights. Although piracy and counterfeiting remain widespread in China, the government has taken increased steps to put a halt to the practices since it joined the WTO in 2001.<sup>45</sup> Moreover, senior Chinese officials vowed in December 2010 to tackle the issue more effectively, including through new, stricter laws on internet piracy and crackdowns on landlords who rent space to counterfeiters.<sup>46</sup> Changes in China's conduct are already reflected in its rise in the annual rankings of countries in terms of their level of intellectual property protection as perceived by global business leaders: three years ago China ranked in the bottom half of more than 130 countries—54th percentile—this year it has moved up to the 35th percentile.<sup>47</sup>

Moreover, China is exhibiting a more positive attitude towards international organizations and laws. A review of such transformations by two leading scholars concluded that China accepts international law, actively participates in the UN and represents itself ably in a variety of multilateral institutions—a marked improvement on past decades when it 'rejected what it called the "bourgeois" rules and institutions that dominated the world community' and silenced its international law experts. The review further demonstrates that China is playing 'a responsible role' in multilateral organizations that deal with maritime issues, where it has many disputes with its neighbours, trying to restrict its actions to 'at least its own understanding of international law'. The authors point out that China participated in the drafting of the UN Convention of the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) and ratified it in 1996 (in contrast to the US, which has yet to do so) and has joined regional organizations protecting maritime environments in East Asia.<sup>48</sup>

Moreover, while Beijing is often portrayed as expansionist and aggressive, unwilling to settle its disputes through peaceful means, these scholars point out that China reached a successful agreement with Japan for a joint hydrocarbon project in waterways disputed between the countries, and another with Vietnam over the maritime boundary in the Gulf of Tonkin, whereby the body of water was divided about equally between them.<sup>49</sup> As already indicated, this trend will next be tested in the ways in which China resolves the disputes over its claims to the South China Sea.

<sup>42</sup> Andrew Higgins, 'China showcasing its softer side', *Washington Post*, 2 Dec. 2009.

<sup>43</sup> Maureen Fan, 'China to aid in fighting Somali pirates', *Washington Post*, 18 Dec. 2008.

<sup>44</sup> Anne Barrowclough, 'China sends navy to fight Somali pirates', *The Times*, 26 Dec. 2008.

<sup>45</sup> Balfour, 'US takes piracy pushback to WTO'.

<sup>46</sup> Sewell Chan, 'China agrees to intellectual property protections', *New York Times*, 15 Dec. 2010.

<sup>47</sup> World Economic Forum, *The Global Competitiveness Report 2007–2008* (Geneva, 2008), p. 377 and *The Global Competitiveness Report 2010–2011* (Geneva, 2011), p. 367.

<sup>48</sup> Jerome A. Cohen and Jon M. Van Dyke, 'Finding its sea legs', *South China Morning Post*, 26 Oct. 2010.

<sup>49</sup> Cohen and Van Dyke, 'Finding its sea legs'. See also David Shambaugh, 'Return to the Middle Kingdom? China and Asia in the early twenty-first century', in David Shambaugh, ed., *Power shift* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), p. 24.

Also, China was the first country to buy the bonds newly issued by the International Monetary Fund to help countries worldwide weather the global financial crisis, spending US\$50 billion.<sup>50</sup>

*Different interpretation of norms and duties* China has by and large ceased to claim that human rights are bourgeois, western ideas, and now tends to argue that it is observing them, or that it focuses first on pursuing socioeconomic rights, with the legal and political rights to follow once development is more advanced. Also, one cannot ignore the fact that many other nations violate human rights on the same scale as, or on an even greater scale than, China, and that western nations which are quick to chastise China for violations of human rights are usually willing to turn a blind eye to such violations by other nations, for instance Saudi Arabia.<sup>51</sup>

*Self-perception and sense of identity* Finally, one ought to take into account the way nations perceive themselves, albeit as a mitigating factor rather than one that absolves them from the responsibilities of good members and the duties of upstanding citizens. China views itself as a nation that has for generations been humiliated, exploited and occupied by western powers and Japan,<sup>52</sup> a perception that has much history to draw on. It views many of the demands now laid on it as an attempt to keep it in a weakened status. Gradually, as its economic status improves and it gains in respect, China is moving to liberate itself from these sensibilities. However, they continue to affect its international conduct.

On some occasions and in some contexts China identifies itself with the global South and sees itself as part of the struggle to move towards a less North-tilted distribution of resources and assets. Thus, for instance, its US\$50 billion bond purchase from the IMF was dedicated to a programme that focuses on the developing and emerging market countries of the South.<sup>53</sup> In short, although China does not act as a good member of the international community or as an upstanding citizen, it is necessary to take into account that these judgements are based on: high aspirational standards; contextual factors that mitigate China's conduct; and the fact that China is moving somewhat closer to living up to these standards.

## China as a partner

Strong communities are based on a core of shared values and a web of bonds of affinity among their members.<sup>54</sup> However, a measure of community can also be based on shared or complementary interests. China is often accused of not even living up to this lower, less aspirational, more interest-driven standard. For

<sup>50</sup> 'China to buy \$50 billion of first IMF bonds', *New York Times*, 3 Sept. 2009. On China's economic leadership, see also David M. Lampton, *The three faces of Chinese power* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), p. 111.

<sup>51</sup> Jackson Diehl, 'Obama's National Security Strategy is light on human rights', *Washington Post*, 31 May 2010.

<sup>52</sup> Shaun Narine, 'State, sovereignty, political legitimacy and regional institutionalism in the Asia-Pacific', *Pacific Review* 17: 3, 2004, p. 14; Lau Guan Kim, 'A lie repeated often becomes truth', *China Daily*, 14 April 2004, [http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/english/doc/2004-04/14/content\\_323217.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/english/doc/2004-04/14/content_323217.htm), accessed 3 Dec. 2010.

<sup>53</sup> 'China to buy \$50 billion of first IMF bonds'.

<sup>54</sup> Amitai Etzioni, *The new golden rule: community and morality in a democratic society* (New York: Basic Books, 1996), pp. 13–14.

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instance, Minxin Pei writes that 'China enjoys the practical benefits of the current world order but refuses to share its costs'.<sup>55</sup> Others argue that China will benefit from peace and stability in Afghanistan, purchasing its minerals, while it refuses to contribute to the pacification of that country.<sup>56</sup> However, a closer examination shows that often what the critics see as shared interests are not shared, or at least are not so perceived from China's viewpoint.

From China's perspective, for example, it is in China's interests for the US military to be mired in a war in Afghanistan (and before that in Iraq) and to be further occupied with a proliferating Iran, especially given statements by American military officials that define China's military as a major threat to the US,<sup>57</sup> implying that China is an adversary.

A similar problem arises with regard to nuclear proliferation in Iran. China has no reason to fear that it or its allies (of which there are not many) will be targeted by Iran's nuclear arms. The notion that if Iran acquires nuclear arms, this will lead other nations in the Middle East to do the same, thus destabilizing the region, does not trouble China nearly as much as it troubles the US. At the same time, China is very much concerned about energy sources, and Iran is a significant such source. Nevertheless, China has voted—albeit reluctantly and only after pressure was applied—to support several rounds of sanctions imposed on Iran.

Many view free trade as a clear case of a shared interest: all nations that open their markets are said to benefit. China is often chided for damaging others and itself by limiting access to its markets and by controlling its currency. However, even free trade theory is more complicated than it often is made out to be. The benefits to one and all are easy to demonstrate when full-blown free trade is achieved; the same is not the case, however, when nations merely move from more to less managed trade. Nor are the benefits gained by free trade the same for all participants; and there are considerable transition costs.<sup>58</sup> Also, no nation is currently actually practising free trade, although nations differ greatly in the extent to which and the ways in which they carry out their trade. Finally, China has been moving in the desired direction, allowing the value of its currency to rise slowly and opening up its markets gradually, albeit not nearly at the pace the US favours. Thus even in this area China may earn a C+, moving up from a C-, while quite a few nations have lower standing and the others hardly deserve a B.

<sup>55</sup> Minxin Pei, 'China: the big free rider', *Newsweek*, 22 Jan. 2010; see also Stephanie T. Kleine-Ahlbrandt, 'Beijing, global free rider', *Foreign Policy*, 12 Nov. 2009, [http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2009/11/12/beijing\\_global\\_free\\_rider](http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2009/11/12/beijing_global_free_rider), accessed 18 Oct. 2010.

<sup>56</sup> Robert D. Kaplan, 'Beijing's Afghan gamble', *New York Times*, 6 Oct. 2009; Anne Applebaum, 'Making the world safe for China', *Slate*, 27 Sept. 2010, <http://www.slate.com/id/2268833/>, accessed 18 Oct. 2010.

<sup>57</sup> For instance, Admiral Robert Willard of the US Pacific Command testified that China's military build up is 'aggressive' at the House Armed Services Committee in January 2010; Bill Gertz, 'Harsh words from Chinese military raise threat concerns', *Washington Times*, 5 March 2010. Similarly, Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman Admiral Mike Mullen said in June 2010 that he was 'genuinely concerned' about China's military modernization; Huma Yusuf, 'US concerned about China's military investments', *Christian Science Monitor*, 10 June 2010. And the Department of Defense's 2010 Quadrennial Defense Review said that the lack of transparency in China's military modernization programmes raises 'legitimate questions regarding its long-term intentions': Department of Defense, *Quadrennial Defense Review Report*, Feb. 2010, p. 31.

<sup>58</sup> R. G. Lipsey and Kelvin Lancaster, 'The general theory of second best', *Review of Economic Studies* 24: 1, 1956–57, pp. 11–32.

Climate change is another topic on which China is criticized as not pulling its weight in service of a shared interest. China was blamed by various observers for sabotaging the 2009 UN climate change summit in Copenhagen.<sup>59</sup> At the same time, China set a national target for 15 per cent of its energy needs to come from renewable power sources by 2020.<sup>60</sup> It is also investing hundreds of billions of dollars in the clean energy sector and is providing subsidies to domestic manufacturers of clean energy products.<sup>61</sup>

In short, it is a bit simplistic to measure China by an idealized image of a community in which shared interests are clearly established and each member does its bit. A better assessment recognizes that at least in some key areas interests differ—or overlap to only a rather limited extent—and that China is moving to pay more mind to such interests.

### China as a power: challenging or transformative?

So far China's international conduct has been examined against relatively high aspirational standards: we have asked whether it lives up to that which is expected of a good member of the global community and an upstanding citizen of global governance, or at least a partner who realizes the value of serving shared or complementary interests. However, China's conduct (and that of other nations) is also assessed by very different standards of *realpolitik* that concern the actual and changing power relations among the nations of the world.

Michael Mandelbaum, sees the US as the de facto world government.<sup>62</sup> From this viewpoint, rising new powers are seen as upsetting the global order with their assertive demands, and hence are to be kept in line. In contrast, to the extent that one views the global architecture as moving from a unipolar to a multipolar structure, in which various powers become the focus of one region or another (e.g. France, Germany and the UK as the main drivers of the EU), or several powers share among them the task of remaking a new world order (e.g. the G20 or some other such number), the same policies by new powers seem much more acceptable, indeed transformative. Others, for good reason, prefer to point to 'depolarization'. A quite different frame for assessment involves the G2 concept, referred to by some as a condominium,<sup>63</sup> and by others as Chimerica.<sup>64</sup>

Two particular situations illustrate the importance of these differences in the criteria employed in assessing China. When conflicts have arisen between China's

<sup>59</sup> 'China's thing about numbers: how an emerging superpower dragged its feet, then dictated terms, at a draining diplomatic marathon', *The Economist*, 30 Dec. 2009; Sam Coates, 'China to blame for failure of Copenhagen climate deal, says Ed Miliband', *The Times*, 21 Dec. 2009; Tobias Rapp, Christian Schwägerl and Gerald Traufetter, 'How China and India sabotaged the UN climate summit', *Der Spiegel*, 5 May 2010.

<sup>60</sup> Jonathan Adams, 'China's climate change talks: what's changed since Copenhagen', *Christian Science Monitor*, 5 Oct. 2010.

<sup>61</sup> Economy, 'The game changer', p. 144.

<sup>62</sup> Michael Mandelbaum, *The frugal superpower: America's global leadership in a cash-strapped era* (New York: Public Affairs, 2010), pp. 4–5.

<sup>63</sup> Shambaugh, 'Introduction', in *Power shift*, p. 15; C. Fred Bergsten, 'Two's company', *Foreign Affairs* 88: 5, Sept.–Oct. 2009, pp. 169–70.

<sup>64</sup> Niall Ferguson, 'What "Chimerica" hath wrought', *The American Interest*, Jan.–Feb. 2009, <http://www.the-american-interest.com/article.cfm?piece=533>, accessed 15 Oct. 2010.

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claims to the South China Sea and its islands and counterclaims by other countries in the region, including Vietnam, Malaysia and the Philippines, China has preferred to work out these differences with one nation at a time, while the US has thrown its weight behind the position of the other nations involved to deal with China collectively. If one sees the US as a hegemon this move makes sense, as it reflects the precept that the US needs to contain and 'balance' China as a new upstart, an assertive if not aggressive power, in order to maintain a global order headed by the US. By contrast, if one views the world as increasingly multipolar, especially along regional lines, and does not view this change as threatening, one sees no obvious reason why the US should be involved at all in what might be considered East Asian issues, other than to delight in the commitment of all involved to resolve matters peacefully.

Similarly, if one views the US as the hegemon that needs to contain and balance China, it makes sense that the US would seek to push its armed forces to the border of China if the North Korean regime were to collapse and the two Koreas unite. In contrast, if one views the world as moving towards a multipolar structure, and sees China as a legitimate regional power (albeit not as a regional hegemon), one would favour the US committing itself to keeping its troops at the Demilitarized Zone or even removing them from Korea altogether over time.

### **In conclusion**

China is surely not a responsible stakeholder; but then, few nations are. Urging China to become a better member of the global community and a better global citizen is quite legitimate, as long as one recognizes the aspirational nature of these expectations and takes into account China's history, low income per capita and improving conduct. Moreover, the judgement that China does not even carry its share of the burden when shared interests are involved often does not take into account that these interests are frequently not as genuinely shared as they may seem. Finally, if one views the US as a hegemon, there are good reasons to seek to contain China. These reasons are much less evident if one accepts that the world is becoming more multipolar, and that China is a legitimate regional power.

