China and the global order: signalling threat or friendship?

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The multilateral order cannot hold if the power and influence embedded in international institutions is significantly misaligned with the real distribution of power.[1]

While the United States may not have ceded global power to China just yet,[2] there can be little doubt that China's international interests and influence are not only growing, but have already had a significant impact on the global order. There also seems to be a consensus that ongoing power shifts towards China and the East were accelerated by what has been called a 'global' financial crisis, but which has been seen in China as a crisis of a specific form of 'western' liberal capitalism.[3] And there is a strong feeling—not just in China—that this growing influence of China (and other developing states) has not yet resulted in a concomitant shift in the balance of power within major institutions of global governance, whether in terms of formal voting shares or in softer, more informal ways of setting agendas and persuading others to follow.[4]

It seems fairly clear that China wants to change its role in global politics, and that the emphasis on keeping a low international profile that informed Chinese policy from the 1980s onwards is giving way to a more activist inclination. What is less clear is how this should be expressed and to what ends and outcomes. Those sceptical of China's motivations and long-term objectives point to the failure of the Copenhagen climate conference in 2009 as an example of Chinese distributive strategies preventing the emergence of an effective new governance regime.[5] The development of a 'pattern of aggressively asserting its sovereignty claims in the

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1 Gregory Chin and Ramesh Thakur, 'Will China change the rules of global order?', *Washington Quarterly* 33: 4, 2010, p. 119.

2 Michael Beckley, 'China's century? Why America's edge will endure', *International Security* 36: 3, 2011–12, pp. 41–78.

3 Wu Xinbo, 'Understanding the geopolitical implications of the global financial crisis', *Washington Quarterly* 33: 4, 2010, pp. 155–63.

4 Wang Xiaodong, 'China's status and influence in the multilateral trade system', Indiana University Research Center for Chinese Politics and Business working paper no. 7, 2011.

5 See e.g. John Lee, 'How China stiffed the world in Copenhagen', *Foreign Policy*, 21 Dec. 2009, http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2009/12/21/how_china_stiffed_the_world_in_copenhagen, accessed 2 April 2013. To be fair, most analyses did not point to Chinese interests alone as the key reason for failure.

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South China Sea'[6] has also been seen as a signal that the Chinese are not prepared to make any concessions to others when it comes to the defence of what they consider to be their 'core interests'.[7] The idea that China will inevitably rise to 'rule the world' and shape it to reflect Chinese ideas and interests has gathered a number of followers.[8]

There remain myriad different views within China about what its future global role should and/or could be.[9] While there are some who think that China should keep a low profile, the dominant approach seems to be that the time is right for a more active assertion of Chinese interests and ideas. But Chinese officials (and many scholars) are quick to point out that active assertion does not equate to the pursuit of unbending hegemonic pretensions and continue to assert that 'China will never seek hegemony or expansionism', that 'China's development will never be a challenge or a threat to any other country or the world at large' and that pragmatic cooperation to find 'win–win' solutions is the order of the day.[10]

As we shall see, a number of studies of China's international behaviour have pointed to the way in which the country has tended to conform to existing ways of doing things when it joins international organizations, rather than trying to challenge and change existing *modi operandi*. As Schweller and Pu put it, available evidence suggests that 'China seeks a gradual modification of Pax Americana, not a direct challenge to it'.[11] Or, to put it another way, while China might be dissatisfied with the (global) status quo, it will articulate this dissatisfaction and push for change in a responsible manner that does not destabilize the global system. There also seems to be a reluctance to accept leadership roles that might entail costs that impact on domestic development agendas.

In pursuing an agenda for (responsible) change, China's leaders have constructed a range of relationships with different types and groups of states. These range from very loose common positions with others to more formalized sets of alliances and institutionalized collaborations. The choice of partners, the way the alliances are structured, and the way China frames its demands and agendas within them are partly defined by each specific issue at hand. But they are also partly determined by China's different roles and identities in global politics.

Wei and Fu argue that China holds four simultaneous identities,[12] and that this results in a mix of integrative and distributive strategies depending on the

[6] Carlyle Thayer, 'Chinese assertiveness in the South China Sea and Southeast Asian responses', *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs* 30: 2, 2011, p. 78.

[7] Michael Swaine, 'China's assertive behavior, part one: on "core interests"', *China Leadership Monitor*, no. 34, 2010.

[8] Perhaps best epitomized by Martin Jacques, *When China rules the world: the end of the western world and the birth of a new global order* (New York: Penguin, 2009).

[9] David Shambaugh, 'Coping with a conflicted China', *Washington Quarterly* 34: 1, 2010, pp. 7–27.

[10] This example is taken from Xi Jinping's first comments to foreign experts on China's foreign policy objectives after assuming the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party. See 'Xi Jinping holds discussion meeting with foreign experts', Foreign Ministry of the People's Republic of China, http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/zxxx/t996718.htm, accessed 2 April 2013.

[11] Randall Schweller and Xiaoyu Pu, 'After unipolarity: China's visions of international order in an era of U.S. decline', *International Security* 36: 1, 2011, p. 53.

[12] Wei Zonglei and Fu Yu, 'China's search for an innovative foreign strategy', *Contemporary International Relations* 21: 2, May–June 2011, http://www.cicir.ac.cn/english/ArticleView.aspx?nid=2297, accessed 4 April 2013.

audience and the specific issue being addressed. First, it is a developing country. Like other developing states, it has significant residual socio-economic problems to deal with; and, like other developing states, it has been subject to colonization and oppression by western Great Powers. This identity is manifest in alliances such as the Forum on China–Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) where, in keeping with a long-held identity as leader of the Third World, China is prepared to take a leadership role. Second, it is also an emerging power. In this role, it looks for what we might call 'alliances of the dissatisfied' with other distributive-minded states, for example the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, China, India, South Africa) and perhaps also the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), that can push together for global reform. These first two identities result in alliances that fall part-way between issue-based and bloc-type relationships. Perhaps they are best thought of as 'negative bloc-type coalitions', being built on shared perceptions of being marginalized and under-represented in the current global order, and shared objectives of changing the distribution of global power. But this does not necessarily equate to a shared understanding of how power should be distributed on all issue areas in any new reformed global order.

Third, China's position on the UN Security Council (and more recently as a member of the G20) puts it into direct institutional contact with the established powers as one of a small number of other states that wield, and share, both global power and global responsibility. This incorporates the power and responsibility not just to deal with key global issues, but also to decide on (or veto) the norms and principles on which decision-making is based. Finally, while the concept of a G2 has been resisted in China, the fact that others see China as a quasi-superpower (second only in the global hierarchy to the United States) creates expectations of Chinese behaviour that are not placed on others.

To this list we can perhaps add a fifth role: for, in terms of both aspirations and influence, China is perhaps most clearly (and most often) identified as a regional power.

Conceptualizing China's place in the international order

Even the most cursory glance at debates on the global order reveals the variety of opinions and views on what the world looks like from China. Quite simply (and as noted in the pages of this journal some years ago), there is considerable diversity of opinion in China over not just the nature of the world order,[13] but also over what China's role could and/or should be as constellations of power and influence are transformed.[14] For example, within what we might call Chinese elite-level politics we have seen a number of different opinions expressed, and actions undertaken, over key foreign policy issues like Chinese policy in the South China

[13] Rosemary Foot, 'Chinese strategies in a US-hegemonic global order: accommodating and hedging', *International Affairs* 82: 1, Jan. 2006, pp. 77–94.

[14] Cheng Li, 'Introduction: a champion for Chinese optimism and exceptionalism', in Hu Angang, *China in 2020: a new type of superpower* (Washington DC: Brookings, 2011), p. xx.

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Sea.[15] This diversity is reflected by the range of commentaries from 'authoritative' (from various ministries and officials) and 'quasi-authoritative' (from officially controlled outlets such as the *People's Daily*) sources that are freely available.[16] And that is before we add the growing number of other news sources,[17] and the views of individual citizens as expressed on discussion boards and other online media.[18]

Multiple motivations: different demands

Moreover, the range of actors involved in China's international activities has broadened considerably in recent years.[19] Commercial drivers of external relations have resulted in a key role in some relationships for financial ministries and agencies and the major policy banks,[20] while local governments also pursue their own interests.[21] While China's large state-owned enterprises might play a role in the pursuit of national economic objectives, there is considerable evidence to show that once they are operating overseas, their actions are often dictated by their own commercial objectives.[22] Indeed, for Downs, it is often a case not so much of these companies acting as agents of a national grand plan as of companies mobilizing diplomatic resources to help them meet their commercial objectives.[23] Add to this the actions of small, often independent, Chinese enterprises operating overseas, which one official argued were simply uncontrollable,[24] and the problem of identifying action on the ground as representative of a coherent national grand plan becomes even more evident.

So if at times there seem to be conflicting signals and demands coming from China, we should not be too surprised: different people have different understandings and objectives. And there is also a fundamental uncertainty in China that helps explain the apparent hesitancy in developing a clear Chinese 'grand strategy' to take advantage of the opportunities that the global crisis has brought

[15] International Crisis Group, *Stirring up the South China Sea (I)*, Asia report no. 223, 23 April 2012, http://www.crisisgroup.org/~/media/Files/asia/north-east-asia/223-stirring-up-the-south-china-sea-i.pdf, accessed 2 April 2013.

[16] David Swaine, 'Chinese leadership and elite responses to the U.S. Pacific pivot', *China Leadership Monitor*, no. 38, 2012, p. 1.

[17] Although constraints remain on what can be said, the media do not simply repeat a single line and different papers take different editorial lines. See Qing Liu and Barrett McCormick, 'The media and the public sphere in contemporary China', *Boundary 2* 38: 1, 2011, pp. 101–34.

[18] Shaun Breslin and Simon Shen, *Online Chinese nationalism*, Chatham House Programme Paper, Sept. 2010, http://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/public/Research/Asia/0910breslin_shen.pdf, accessed 1 Oct. 2012.

[19] For a comprehensive review of the different agencies involved in foreign policy-making, and who influences the policy-makers, see Linda Jakobson and Dean Knox, 'New foreign policy actors in China', SIPRI Policy Paper no. 26 (Stockholm, 2010).

[20] Daniel Rosen and Thilo Hanemann, 'China's changing outbound foreign direct investment profile: drivers and policy implications', Petersen Institute for International Economics Policy Brief PB09–14 (Washington DC, 2009).

[21] Chen Zhimin and Jian Junbo, 'Chinese provinces as foreign policy actors in Africa', South African Institute of International Affairs Occasional Paper no. 22 (Johannesburg, Jan. 2009).

[22] Deborah Bräutigam, *The dragon's gift: the real story of China in Africa* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

[23] Erica Downs, 'The fact and fiction of Sino-African energy relations', *China Security* 3: 3, 2007, pp. 42–68.

[24] Author's interviews in Beijing, June 2012.

for China to exploit shifts in the global balance of power.[25] The key debate in China is whether (and how) it should abandon its previous principle of *taoguang yanghui* and take a more active global role.[26] Literally meaning 'hide brightness, nourish obscurity', *taoguang yanghui* was part of a 24-character phrase which originated with Deng Xiaoping in the early 1990s—a period when China faced possible international isolation in light of the 1989 Tiananmen Square incident[27]—and has become shorthand for the idea that China should try to keep a low profile in global affairs. As Shirk notes, it has sometimes been interpreted as an attempt to deceive the global community over China's long-term ambitions.[28] But in Chinese discourse it is seen as a logical stance, given the lack of power to impose Chinese interests and the over-riding focus on domestic development.

Balancing the balancers: becoming a responsible Great Power

Taoguang yanghui was also informed by the desire to allay fears in the global community about the consequences of China's rise—not to *deceive*, but to *explain* China's pacific nature and intentions.[29] This desire emerged from a concern that China's interests were being either deliberately misrepresented or genuinely misconceived by existing (great) powers, and that those who were hostile to China were looking for any opportunity to build a 'China threat thesis' (*zhongguo weixie lun*).[30] So, in this relatively early stage of China's global engagement in the 1990s, Chinese negotiation strategies were not really built on either a bandwagoning or a balancing strategy—rather, they were designed to *prevent* the emergence of balancing alliances with the aim of preventing China's rise.

Medeiros and Fravel argue that under Deng, the character of China's self-perceptions and international strategy changed from isolation and a 'victim mentality' to engagement and increasingly a 'Great Power' mentality. But this shift was offset by a reluctance to accept 'most of the attendant obligations and responsibilities' that come with being a Great Power.[31] Johnston argues that this changed in the late 1990s as China's leaders began to recognize that rhetoric and perceptions mattered: if they talked like a revisionist/distributive power, others would treat them as one.[32] If China was to become a Great Power, China's leaders

[25] Hu Jian, 'Cong "taoguang yanghui" dao "jiji zuowei": zhongguo waijiao siwei, zhanlue yu celue de zhuanbian chu lun' [From 'Taoguang yanghui' to 'active conduct': the transformation of China's diplomatic thinking, strategy and tactics], *Lilun dao kan*, theoretical guide no. 4, 2012, pp. 107–109.

[26] Hu Jian, 'Cong "taoguang yanghui" dao "jiji zuowei": zhongguo waijiao siwei, zhanlue yu celue de zhuanbian chu lun' [From 'Taoguang yanghui' to 'active conduct': the transformation of China's diplomatic thinking, strategy and tactics], *Lilun dao kan*, theoretical guide no. 4, 2012, pp. 107–109.

[27] Its exact etymology is a little unclear, and although it is referred to as a 24-character slogan, the full version can be translated as 'calmly observe, secure your position, deal with things calmly, hide brightness and nourish obscurity, protect our advantages, never seek leadership, attain some achievements'.

[28] Susan Shirk, *China: fragile superpower* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 105.

[29] Chen Dingding and Wang Jianwei, 'Lying low no more? China's new thinking on the tao guang yang hui strategy', *China: An International Journal* 9: 2, 2011, pp. 195–216.

[30] Wang Yunxiang, 'Zhongguo weixi lun xi' [Analysing the China threat theory], *Guoji Guancha*, no. 3, 1996, pp. 35–40. For a detailed analysis of how visions of China are constructed, and Chinese responses to them, see Pan Chengxin, *Power in global politics: western representations of China's rise* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 2012).

[31] Evan S. Medeiros and M. Taylor Fravel, 'China's new diplomacy', *Foreign Affairs* 82: 6, 2003, p. 24.

[32] Alistair Ian Johnston, *Social states: China in international institutions, 1980–2000* (Princeton, NJ, and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2008).

had to think how this would be received in other states, and how this perception of China would in turn result in policies towards it that might have concrete consequences for the attainment of its developmental goals. Chinese strategy was built, then, on a very firm understanding that how Chinese demands and objectives were framed would be a crucial determinant of whether those goals could be attained.

Attempts to emphasize integrative objectives and Chinese responsibility were originally developed and disseminated as the 'peaceful rise of China' (*heping jueqi*) concept. As this raised the spectre of a sudden transition to superpower status,[33] 'rise' was gradually replaced by the more neutral 'development'—originally to peace and development (*heping yu fazhan*), but by the time an official white paper gave it the status of a quasi-official ideology in 2011, simply 'peaceful development' (*heping fazhan*).[34]

Self-interest, responsibility and alliance-building

This shift in policy was also influenced by changing conceptions of the efficacy of seeking and promoting international collaboration and cooperation. To this end, a number of crises helped move the focus of security (and thus the solutions to insecurity) away from a sole concentration on the threat of interstate war to incorporate other broadly defined 'human insecurity' challenges[35] that simply couldn't be dealt with by unilateral Chinese action.[36] For example, the Asian financial crisis of the late 1990s is widely credited with drawing attention to economic security, and the events of 9/11 contributed to the articulation of a 'new security concept' (*xin anquan guan*) built on the idea that 'terrorism, transnational crimes, environmental degradation, drug trafficking and other non-traditional security threats are becoming more and more pronounced'.[37] The need to find common solutions to the transnational spread of SARS in 2003, and later bird flu in 2006,[38] served only to increase the focus on new challenges that were best met by multilateral cooperation, partnership and dialogue.[39] And, as we shall see, the global financial crisis is often seen as marking a key turning point in the transition towards a multipolar world.

Most clearly, these crises reaffirmed the importance of establishing collaborative regional cooperation mechanisms with China's neighbours: 'the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, ASEAN Regional Forum, AsiaInfo meeting, the Asia–Pacific Security Council, the Northeast Asia Cooperation Dialogue and other multilateral

[33] *Jueqi* in Chinese means more than just 'rise', implying a sudden or abrupt change. See Bonnie S. Glaser and Evan S. Medeiros, 'The changing ecology of foreign policy-making in China: the ascension and demise of the theory of "peaceful rise"', *China Quarterly*, no. 190, 2007, pp. 291–301.

[34] Wang Yizhou, 'Zhongguo yu feichuantong anquan' [China and non-traditional security], *Guoji jingji pinglun*, no. 6, 2004, pp. 32–5.

[35] Hu Angang, 'Zhongguo mianlin de zui da tiaozhan shi "renlei bu anquan"' [China's main challenges are 'human insecurity'], *Lingdao juece xinxi*, no. 1, 2000, p. 16.

[36] Lu Zhongwei, *Feichuantong anquan lun* [On non-traditional security] (Beijing: Shishi, 2003).

[37] State Council, *White paper on China's national defence in 2002* (Beijing: Information Office of the State Council, 2002).

[38] Liu Zhijun, 'On bird flu and beyond: a human security perspective', *Global Asia* 1: 1, 2006, p. 86.

[39] Wang Yizhou, 'Zhongguo yu feichuantong anquan' [China and non-traditional security], *Guoji jingji pinglun*, no. 6, 2004, pp. 32–5.

security dialogue and cooperation processes'.[40] In addition to being important in its own right (in helping to solve common problems), regional cooperation is also used to show that China's preferred national self-image as 'a responsible Great Power' is more than just a rhetorical tool.[41] Here, China seems to be actively embracing existing global norms and collaboration mechanisms. But at the same time, this approach is seen by others as a means of shaping a distinctive Asia–Pacific security identity that sets the region apart from the 'West'.[42] Perhaps we can suggest that framing objectives in an integrative manner at the regional level was part of a strategy of emphasizing difference and dissatisfaction at the global level. And the question of whether the preferred path should be to prioritize and emphasize global conformity and responsibility, or instead to articulate difference and perhaps dissatisfaction, continues to be at the heart of Chinese debates over what the country's global role should be in the future. What an investigation of these debates reveals is that external uncertainty over China's long-term position emerges partly from a similar uncertainty and a lack of shared objectives and strategies within China itself. Here we return to debates on the wisdom of maintaining a low profile. At the risk of oversimplification, we can perhaps identify four impulses that suggest caution, and five that instead point towards a stronger, more proactive global role.

Reluctant China?

In terms of caution, the first consideration takes us back to the idea that foreigners who already see China as a danger to the global order are looking for excuses to reinvigorate a 'China threat' argument.[43] So actively articulating a policy preference might actually be counterproductive if it raises concerns in others about what China wants,[44] and China needs to ensure that balancing coalitions don't form to block it.

Second, there has been a reluctance to take part in processes that might make China look as if it is turning its back on its fellow developing states and instead becoming part of a club of Great Powers. Add this to the third factor, that China does not want to participate as a junior/inferior partner (particularly in institutions established not just by but also for the West), and we have an explanation for China's reluctance, prior to the financial crisis, to participate in the G8 process as a formal member.[45] This entails not so much promoting an alternative

[40] Fu Yong, 'Shi lun lengzhan hou de feixhuantong anquan wenti' [An examination of post-Cold War non-traditional security issues], *Shehui kexue*, no. 10, 2003, p. 40.

[41] Yu Xiaofeng, 'Cong weitai duikang dao youtai gongcun: guangyi anquanguan yu feichuantong anquan zhanlue de jiazhi dingwei' [From dangerous confrontation towards superior coexistence: the broad security concept and the non-traditional security strategy value orientation], *Shijie jingji yu zhengzhi*, no. 2, 2004, p. 13.

[42] Wang Yizhou, 'Zhongguo yu feichuantong anquan' [China and non-traditional security], *Guoji jingji pinglun*, no. 6, 2004, pp. 32–5.

[43] Shi Yinghong, Zhang Qingmin and Liu Jian, 'Ruhe huiying "zhongguo weixie lun"' [How to respond to the 'China threat theory'], *Renmin Luntan*, no. 14, 2011, p. 52.

[44] Zhu, 'Guanyu dangqian shijie zhanlue geju de jidian sikao'.

[45] Ren Xiao, 'A reform-minded status quo power? China, the G20, and changes in the international monetary system', Indiana University Research Center for Chinese Politics and Business working paper no. 25, April

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distributive agenda as not being seen to be becoming part of the mainstream status quo.

Finally, there is concern that being identified as an active Great Power also brings with it expectations of global responsibilities and even global leadership on some issues—expectations that China is either not able or not prepared (or both) to fulfil. Liu Liping points to the difference between being a big economy and a rich one. Because people have focused on China's growth and success, they have expectations of what a country with a large economy should do in the global order—expectations that China cannot meet, being a relatively poor developing state with very low per capita income and around 150 million people still living in what by the UN's definition is absolute poverty.[46]

Some see in these expectations a deliberate attempt to get China to take an increased burden in solving global problems that are not of its making. From this perspective, the idea of a G2 was promoted by the United States as a means of flattering China into doing more in terms of placing global responsibility above domestic responsibility.[47] In addition, the West is seen as trying to place the blame for the global crisis on global imbalances, and then seeking the source of those imbalances in countries like China (rather than accepting that fundamental problems in their own financial systems were the root cause).[48] But whether these are accidental and misguided or deliberate and strategic suggestions, the response is that 'China could not assume those responsibilities against its core national interests, its deep-rooted principles, and beyond its capacities'.[49] Thus, as David Shambaugh argues, 'instead of stepping up and taking on a range of global responsibilities, China remains internally oriented, self preoccupied, pursuing a largely narrow self-interested foreign policy'.[50]

Confident China?

Despite these reasons for caution, there are strong converse arguments that China should take a more active international role. The first concerns the need to respond to the expectations of the general public—expectations that show a renewed air of national confidence:

The Chinese people have become more confident and proud of their nation through such events as the success of the Beijing Olympic Games, the World Expo and the Asian Games,

2012, p. 5, http://www.indiana.edu/~rccpb/pdf/Ren%20RCCPB%2025%20G20%20Apr%202012.pdf, accessed 3 Nov. 2012.

[46] Liu Liping, 'China can hardly rule the world', *Contemporary International Relations* 21: 1, 2011, pp. 4–10. Yue takes this a step further and argues that China is still so backward and the economy so dependent on unsustainable dynamics that it will *not* rise: Jianyong Yue, 'Peaceful rise of China: myth or reality?', *International Politics* 45: 4, 2008, pp. 439–56.

[47] Li Mingjiang, 'Rising from within: China's search for a multilateral world and its implications for Sino-US relations', Rajaratnam School of International Studies working paper no. 225 (Singapore, 2011), p. 21.

[48] Wei and Fu, 'China's search for an innovative foreign strategy'.

[49] Chen Zhimin, 'International responsibility and China's foreign policy', in Masafumi Iida, ed., *China's shift: global strategy of the rising power* (Tokyo: National Institute for Defense Studies, 2009), p. 26.

[50] David Shambaugh, 'Beijing: a global leader with "China first" policy', *Yale Policy Online*, 29 June 2010, http://yaleglobal.yale.edu/content/beijing-global-leader-china-first-policy, accessed 2 April 2013.

the 'Shenzhou VI' space mission and the fact that China's economy weathered the global financial crisis. The Chinese people now expect the country to have a higher profile within the international community.[51]

Second—and strongly related to the first point—there is a stronger confidence in the assertion of a sphere of policy in which external actors have no right to get involved, perhaps even one on which they have no right to comment. For Shi Yinhong, this means that 'the "peaceful rise" advocated by China will not and should not change. But it should not be the equivalent of mindless concession. China should never give in while defending its core interests. Only when it comes to non-core interests should it make some compromise in order to ease the pressure on other big powers.'[52] According to the white paper on China's peaceful development, these core interests can be defined as including 'state sovereignty, national security, territorial integrity and national reunification, China's political system established by the Constitution and overall social stability, and the basic safeguards for ensuring sustainable economic and social development'.[53]

Thus, for example, external criticism of China's exchange rate and currency policies is illegitimate as these matters are defined as elements of a strategy to safeguard sustainable development. So too is criticism of any part of the political process. When it comes to what is meant by 'territorial integrity', things are a little less clear. That Tibet, Xinjiang and Taiwan are inalienable parts of China is well established. More recently, it seems that the South China Sea is also included: 'China has always made itself loud and clear that it has indisputable sovereignty over the sea's islands and surrounding waters, which is part of China's core interests. That is based on unambiguous and undeniable historical facts.'[54] It is in words and actions designed to affirm these claims that we have seen perhaps the clearest examples of the assertion of Chinese interests in the years since the financial crisis with the development of a form of 'triumphalism' in Chinese policy.[55]

Third, there is a move towards what Zhao calls 'diplomatic activism' to meet national objectives.[56] China being now a major global economic actor, and domestic development being heavily influenced by (if not dependent on) what happens elsewhere, it simply makes no sense to stand on the sidelines and let other powers remain the main arbiters of global affairs. It is notable, for example, that China had significant economic interests in both Sudan and Libya, and there are indications that these interests had a significant impact on the official Chinese position towards resolving the two crises (notably, Chinese economic interests in Syria are much less extensive).[57] Furthermore, taking a back seat does not allow China to

[51] Niu Xinchun, 'Eight myths about Sino-U.S. relations', *Contemporary International Relations* 21: 4, 2011, pp. 1–2.
[52] Shi Yinhong, 'How to boost China's peaceful rise', *China Daily*, 18 May 2010.
[53] State Council, *White paper on China's peaceful development*.
[54] 'China–Philippines cooperation depends on proper settlement of maritime disputes', 31 Aug. 2011, http://news.xinhuanet.com/english2010/indepth/2011-08/31/c_131086932.htm, accessed 9 April 2013.
[55] Shi Yinhong, '"Triumphalism" and decision making in China's Asia policy', *Economic and Political Studies* 1: 1, 2013, pp. 107–119.
[56] Suisheng Zhao, 'Chinese foreign policy under Hu Jintao: the struggle between low-profile policy and diplomatic activism', *The Hague Journal of Diplomacy* 5: 4, 2010, pp. 357–78.
[57] Author's interviews in Beijing, June 2012.

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influence the way in which global norms and institutions develop and evolve. Far better, then, for the country to 'maximize its national interests through participating in "the chess game" on the international stage'.[58]

Fourth, there is a feeling among some in China that the country simply needs to take on global roles commensurate with its position and power. As a Great Power, you cannot simply do nothing and turn your back on global governance or dealing with international crises. Indeed, in a range of cases from the North Korean nuclear 'crisis' to piracy in and off Somalia, China already has become an active global citizen. Crucially, though, this activity should not simply entail emulating the way that western powers have got involved with the domestic politics of other countries, but on the contrary should involve finding new and 'creative' ways of mediating global problems.[59]

Finally, there is a feeling in some quarters that the time is right to try to change the way in which the global order is organized and governed in order to better reflect Chinese interests (and power): 'A search is on for a stable and effective structure of the international system that fits reality.'[60] This in part entails establishing or participating in new forms of multilateral organizations with like-minded dissatisfied states. But it also entails what Elizabeth Economy refers to as a '"go out" strategy designed to remake global norms and institutions'.[61] This strategy is built on an understanding of the changing nature of authority in the global order, and the way in which alliances can be built to ensure the emergence of a preferred multipolar structure.

Perceptions of international order—from unipolarity to what?

There is a strong perception in China that a process of power transition is under way that creates an opportunity for China (and other developing countries) to have a greater say in the way the world is governed. Official Chinese speeches and many academic works typically refer to the shift towards a multipolar world being 'inevitable' (*biran*) or 'irreversible' (*bukeni*)—though, as we shall see, this is sometimes contradicted by an acknowledgement of a need to promote multipolarity actively rather than just let it naturally occur. Typically, we see three main reasons put forward for why this move is taking place.

First, an increasing dissatisfaction with US hegemony in the global order has resulted in attempts to establish independent positions; not just in 'non-western'

[58] Gao Mingxuan and Wang Junping, 'Issues of concern to China regarding the International Criminal Court', paper prepared for the Symposium on the International Criminal Court, Beijing, Feb. 2007, p. 13, http://www.icclr.law.ubc.ca/Site%20Map/ICC/IssueofConcern.pdf, accessed 2 April 2013.

[59] Wang Yizhou, *Chuangzaoxing jieru: zhongguo waijiao xin quxiang* [Creative involvement: a new direction in China's diplomacy] (Beijing: Beijing University Press, 2011). *Jieru* is usually translated as 'intervention', but Wang chose 'involvement' for the official English title of the book to make the point that the idea is not identical with traditional western intervention.

[60] Cui Liru, 'Peaceful rise: China's modernisation trajectory', *International Spectator: Italian Journal of International Affairs* 47: 2, 2012, p. 17.

[61] Elizabeth Economy, 'Game changer: coping with China's foreign policy revolution', *Foreign Affairs* 89: 6, 2010, p. 142.

states like China but also in Europe.[62] In particular, the war in Iraq is seen as having a detrimental impact on the soft ideational appeal of America and generating resentment at its self-perceived role of global policeman.[63] Second, when multipolarity is mentioned, globalization usually is too.[64] A globalized world can roughly be understood as one where national borders are increasingly porous, state sovereignty has been undermined, and 'the boundaries between international and domestic politics are increasingly blurred'.[65] As money, commodities and even diseases can move between countries with relative speed and ease, it is simply not possible to deal with issues that affect a country—any country—through unilateral action alone.[66] Globalization has also resulted in rapid economic growth in a number of developing states, resulting in a shift in global economic power—not least as they increasingly seek to cooperate with each other rather than just building hub-and-spoke relations with developed countries.[67]

Add these two factors together and we come to the third: the idea that the decline in support for the United States and the rise of the developing world was accelerated by the global financial crisis. This episode has not only discredited the liberal economic model and the appeal of the 'American' way,[68] but also accelerated South–South economic interaction,[69] and has allowed companies from developing countries to establish themselves as important global economic actors.[70] Some commentators have even been confident enough to argue that the financial crisis marked the end of the era of US hegemony and the beginning of the move into a 'post-American age'.[71] Even if the United States remains the world's dominant power, Wang Jisi argues that the speed of the power transition took China's leaders somewhat by surprise, and they are still in a process of defining the best position and approach for China in the 'new' world order.[72]

[62] See e.g. Wang Miao and Yan Jianying, 'Qian xi meiguo danji baquan zhanlue de guoji zhiyue yinsu' [A study of the international constraints on the unipolar hegemony of the United States], *Sheke zongheng* 25: 11, 2010, pp. 36–9.

[63] Chen Yue, 'Yilake zhanzheng dui lengzhanhou meiguo baquan diweiyingxiang fenxi' [Analysis of the impact of the war in Iraq on America's post-Cold War hegemony], *Fazhi yu shehui*, no. 2, 2008, pp. 290–91.

[64] For a representative example, see Cui Liru, 'Quanqiuhua shidai duojihua shijie' [The globalisation era and the multipolar world], *Dangdai guoji guanxi*, 30th anniversary commemorative issue, 2010, pp. 1–5.

[65] Wang Yizhou, 'Guoji guanxi lingyu de ruogan yanjiu dongtai ji wenti' [A number of research trends and questions in international relations research], *Xueshujie* 86: 1, 2001, p. 257.

[66] Zhao Nianyu, 'Shijian he riyi tu xian de feichuantong anquan weixie' [The 9/11 incident and the increasing appearance of non-traditional security threats], *Guoji guancha*, no. 1, 2004, p. 37.

[67] Sun Jianshe, 'Guoji duobian hezuo fazhanzhong de zhongguo waijiao' [International multilateral cooperation and Chinese diplomacy towards developing countries], *Dangdai Shijie yu Shehuizhuyi*, no. 4, 2011, pp. 114–18.

[68] Kang Shaobang, 'Jinrong weiji yu shijie duojihua' [The financial crisis and world multipolarity], *Zhonggong zhongyangxiao xuebao* 14: 1, 2010, pp. 107–112.

[69] Liu Jianfei, 'Shijie jingji geju biandong jiqi dui zhongguo de yingxiang' [Changes in the world economic pattern and its impact on China], *Liliun shiye*, no. 2, 2011, pp. 28–32.

[70] Jin Fang, 'Lun shijie jingji duoji geju de xingcheng jiqi tezheng' [On the form and characteristics of the world multipolar structure], *Shijie jingji yanjiu*, no. 10, 2011, pp. 9–15.

[71] See Chen Yugang, 'Jinrong weiji, meiguo shuailuo yu guoji guanxi geju bianpinghua' [Financial crisis, American decline and the levelling out of the international relations structure], *Shijie jingji yu zhengzhi*, no. 5, 2009, pp. 28–34; Yuan Peng, 'China's strategic choices', *Contemporary International Relations* 20: 1, 2010, pp. 17–32.

[72] Wang Jisi, 'China's search for a grand strategy: a rising great power finds its way', *Foreign Affairs* 90: 3, 2011, pp. 68–79.

Premature obituaries?

As Shambaugh cautions, 'Chinese (and other) analysts would be well advised not to confuse wishful thinking with hard-headed analysis'.[73] In contrast to this 'declinist' literature, some Chinese scholars echo Shambaugh's caution and note that US decline is not the same as the end of US power, and that the transition to a new world order will be a long-term process.[74] Others are less sure that the transition from a US-led global order is inevitable at all. On one level, the United States is seen as doing whatever it can to defend its hegemonic position; those taking this view point to the importance of maintaining a strong commitment to the promotion of checks and balances and of a multipolar alternative.[75] Lin Limin argues that, even after the crisis, there is plenty of evidence that the United States has been willing to try to push China on domestic issues such as currency policy and the status of Tibet, and 'has also intensified efforts to place influence pawns around China'.[76] On another level, others question whether China has the capacity and the support in the global community to push forward a multipolar agenda.[77]

What this suggests, then, is that the transition from unipolarity is actually far from inevitable. There remains a strong feeling in China that the established powers, and in particular the United States, are not well disposed to accommodating a rising China's interests and objectives. If change is to occur, then it requires the active promotion of multipolar alternatives through skilful diplomacy, alliance-building and maybe even Chinese leadership.

Negotiating a multipolar future: beyond blocs in South–South relations

Despite the understanding (or perhaps hope) that the unity of the 'West' is being undermined, the main way in which this agenda of promoting multipolarity has been articulated is through building South–South alliances. Although there is evidence that points to the global crisis accelerating China's interest in forging stronger ties with other developing states[78]—not least to reduce dependence on economic relations with the developed West[79]—a more important turning point was the decision to 'go global' to meet the need for resources and other commercial interests.[80] The Foreign Ministry issued formal 'position' papers on 'South–

[73] David Shambaugh, 'Thinking about China's future', *International Spectator: Italian Journal of International Affairs* 47: 2, 2012, p. 22.

[74] Jiang Shuxian, 'Guoji jinrong weiji he shijie duojihua qushi shenru fazhan' [The deepening development of a multipolar world and the international financial crisis], China Center for Contemporary World Studies research paper, 2011, http://www.cccws.org.cn/NewsInfo.aspx?NId=627, accessed 2 April 2013.

[75] Wang Jisi, 'China's search for a grand strategy: a rising great power finds its way', *Foreign Affairs* 90: 3, 2011, pp. 68–79.

[76] Lin Limin, 'World geopolitics and China's choices', *Contemporary International Relations* 20: 3, 2010, pp. 1–22.

[77] Wang Jisi, 'China's search for a grand strategy: a rising great power finds its way', *Foreign Affairs* 90: 3, 2011, pp. 68–79.

[78] See Chin and Thakur, 'Will China change the rules of global order?'.

[79] Lu Xiaodong and He Changzhou, 'Zhongguo yu fazhanzhong guojia maoyi jiegou de jingzheng he hu bu—jiyu nannan hezuo de shijiao' [Competition and complementarities in China's trade with developing countries: a South–South cooperation perspective], *Guoji jingmao tansuo*, no. 6, 2010, pp. 16–23.

[80] Zhao Yongli, *China's South–South cooperation development strategy* (Beijing: Ministry of Foreign Trade and Economic Co-operation, 2007).

South Cooperation' in 2003 and 2006,[81] and this principle has been a firm part of official foreign policy discourse ever since—most notably when Chinese officials meet with representatives of other developing states. Here we see China's leaders clearly trying to establish common motivations with other developing countries as they frame their calls for change to the existing structures of global governance.

Defining what exactly constitutes 'the South' is not necessarily straightforward. Clearly, absolute levels of socio-economic development matter; on this level, China emphasizes per capita income rather than the size of a national economy, to ensure that China itself remains part of the South. Perhaps the clearest sign of China's attempts to align itself with other developing states in as high-profile a way as possible came with the creation of FOCAC in 2000.[82] But building relations with other developing countries is not just about establishing shared positions within the global order. The search for resources and the pursuit of straightforward commercial objectives also play very important roles. If the West is going to try to depict China simply as a neo-colonial power in an attempt to build anti-Chinese balancing coalitions, then China has to respond.[83] This entails establishing the idea that China will not behave like previous Great Powers in their dealings with the South, but will instead behave like a fraternal developing state and seek to establish 'win–win' partnerships as a 'new model of development'.[84] This can be seen as an attempt both to balance the prospective balancers and also to encourage developing states to hitch themselves to China's developmental bandwagon. And of course, the fact that China has become a major source of conditional free development finance and aid for other developing states does no harm.

But there is more to identifying potential (southern) allies than just economics. There are also rather fuzzy ideational/ideological/political criteria.[85] In this context, the opposite of the South is not the North, but the West. The West is developed, democratic, influenced by the European tradition of philosophy and state-building, and underpinned by a preference for (free) markets and individual (human) rights as the basis of society. Thus conceived, it clearly includes North America, Europe, Australia and New Zealand, and usually Japan. But this is not simply a dichotomy between democratic and authoritarian states; rather, it depends on how closely countries ally themselves with the West (often, in effect, just the United States) on specific issues. Thus, although Brazil, South Africa, India and

[81] *Zhongguo dui nannan hezuo de lichang* [China's policy on South–South Cooperation] (Beijing: Foreign Ministry of the PRC, 2003); *Nannan hezuo* [South–South cooperation] (Beijing: Foreign Ministry of the PRC, 2006).

[82] Ji Lei, 'Cong zhongfei hezuo luntan wenjian kan zhongguo nannanhezuo linian de fazhan' [Looking at the development concept of South–South cooperation since the Forum on China–Africa Cooperation Declaration], *Shijie jingji yu zhengzhi luntan*, no. 3, 2010, pp. 97–105; Ian Taylor, *The Forum on China–Africa Cooperation* (London: Routledge, 2011).

[83] Zhang Hongming, 'Zhongfei hezuo: shi "xinzhiminzhuyi" haishi pingdeng huli' [China–Africa cooperation: neocolonialism or mutual benefit?], *Xuexi yuekan*, no. 23, 2006, pp. 297–309.

[84] Han Yan, 'Fazhan huli gong ying de zhongfei nongye hezuo' [Common mutually beneficial development and China–Africa agricultural cooperation], *Guoji jingji hezuo*, no. 5, 2011, p. 35.

[85] A unique complicating factor for China is that the non-recognition of Taiwan remains a bottom line in China's international relations—which means that the 20 countries that do recognize Taiwan (21 including the Vatican) have no formal diplomatic relations with China. That said, China did send disaster relief and aid workers to Haiti after the 2010 earthquake, and has invited some African and Caribbean countries that recognize Taiwan to participate in economic forums.

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Turkey are all democracies, they do not always side with the West on key international issues, but sometimes side with China on major issues rather than allying with the US and western powers. In this respect, that they are developing countries becomes more important than their political orientation.[86]

Like many other countries, China gives a high profile in foreign policy to relations with neighbours. It is in (and with) neighbouring regions that China has been most content to take leadership in the promotion of cooperative multilateral institutional forums designed to meet its interests and to prevent others from imposing their own preferred regional orders.

Form follows function: blocs versus issues

However, it is notable that China has a number of different relationships with neighbours rather than a single overarching and all-encompassing regional agenda. Shared economic challenges have resulted in institutional engagement with ASEAN, both on its own and also in partnership with Japan and South Korea through the ASEAN Plus Three process. Also, while this is not part of a South–South agenda, we have seen moves towards potentially closer financial collaboration between China, Japan and South Korea as well—notably, at a time when security relations between all three have been rather tense as a result of rival territorial claims. Although China has signed security treaties with ASEAN, security concerns are also a source of tension between China and these 'partners' as well, and some form of conflict with one or more South-East Asian states is quite possible. In the security realm, most notably in relation to non-traditional security (and particularly energy), it is Central Asia and the former Soviet Union that form the focal point for formal regional collaboration.

Official communiqués from SCO summits suggest a potential 'spillover' into other forms of (economic) cooperation. SCO summits have been used as forums for articulating a shared dissatisfaction with the nature of the international order and/or the security objectives and actions of major western powers.[87] But for the time being the SCO remains a long way short of a comprehensive and holistic regional organization, and the differences between Chinese stances towards ASEAN and the SCO are indicative of the issue-based and pragmatic nature of China's international interactions. This is not a world of old-fashioned Cold War polarity where groups of countries come together and stay together in blocs that, almost by definition, reject all that alternative blocs stand for and promote. Rather, it is a world of numerous overlapping, often issue-specific and quite probably fluid alliances and groupings.

Similarly, participation in the BRICS process is seen as being an important part of the process of pushing for change in the global distribution of power—particularly in the major international financial institutions. Again, this might

[86] Yu Zhengliang, 'Global power structure shifted and transitional multi-polarity emerged', Shanghai Institute for International Studies working paper, 2010, http://www.siis.org.cn/en/zhuanti_view_en.aspx?id=10036, accessed 2 April 2013.

[87] These documents are publicly available at http://www.sectsco.org, accessed 2 April 2013.

spill over into other forms of mutually beneficial interaction—for example, in financial cooperation and development financing. But the main motivation behind Chinese participation in the BRICS process is to express joint dissatisfaction that the (ongoing) global power shift has not been accompanied by sufficient changes in the formal balance of authority in the major institutions of global governance. And once more, this alliance of the dissatisfied holds despite considerable differences of opinion among the members over other issues, including an at times rather tense security relationship between China and India. And, just as China seeks a multilayered institutional network of alliances with different states, so too do the other BRICS countries.

Crucially, while the BRICS states might agree on what they don't like and what they are dissatisfied with, there doesn't seem to be a shared vision of what a radically *different* world order might look like. Rather, the agenda seems to focus primarily on the redistribution of power within the existing order. We might suggest that an attempt to articulate a clear alternative by any member could split the BRICS. It's also unlikely that a country like India would be content with moving towards a Sinocentric international order.

Challenging the international order? Power, values and norms

While the need for global governance reform has been clearly articulated in China,[88] the existing international order has actually served the country quite well, and its leaders have done much to ensure that they have become a firmly established part of it. A range of studies have outlined how China has largely integrated itself into the global order by joining existing institutions, and adapting to existing dominant norms and practices.[89] This has entailed not just changing international behaviour to adjust to pre-existing *modi operandi*, but also changing some domestic structures to ensure that they allow for China to operate as an effective and legitimate global actor.[90] A strong argument can also be made that China has been one of the main national beneficiaries of the spread of a post-Fordist form of neo-liberal globalization that is typically associated with western and capitalist power and interests. And this is not just a 'passive' acceptance of existing norms and processes—China was not dragged into WTO membership against its will (or the will of some of its leaders, at least). And, as previously noted in this journal, it is somewhat ironic that one of the ways in which China has been said to be trying to dominate the East Asian region at the expense of others is through the promotion of a free trade agreement with ASEAN.[91]

[88] Yu Hairong, 'Quanqiu zhili gaige poti' [On global governance reform], *Xin shijie zhoukan*, no. 26, 2011, pp. 30–31.
[89] Examples include Johnston, *Social states*; Robert Lawrence, 'China and the multilateral trading system', NBER Working Paper no. 12759 (Washington DC: National Bureau of Economic Research, 2006); Ann Kent, *Beyond compliance: China, international organizations, and global security* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006); and Miwa Hirono and Marc Lanteigne, eds, *China's evolving approach to peacekeeping* (London: Routledge, 2012).
[90] Johnston, *Social states*.
[91] See Shaun Breslin, 'Understanding China's regional rise: interpretations, identities and implications', *International Affairs* 85: 4, July 2009, p. 831.

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Attempts are under way to establish a new discourse that articulates a clear Chinese vision of a new world order through the continuing search for a Chinese version of modernity. Some scholars are trying to 'indigenize' thinking about international relations by 'drawing on Chinese concepts and thought' either to create new theories or to modify existing theoretical bases of thinking about world order.[92] Others are searching for a set of Chinese norms and values that might be the source of a new universal world order led by China—'a new hegemony that reproduces China's hierarchical empire for the twenty-first century'.[93] In different ways, Zhao Tingyang and Yan Xuetong look to Chinese history to find a moral basis for a future Chinese hegemony built on the attraction of a virtuous humane authority rather than the materialistic and forced acceptance of the current American hegemonic system.[94] But even here it is far from clear what the nature of this 'morality entails other than saying that it does not involve military coercion or economic enticement'.[95]

These innovations might provide interesting and coherent blueprints for global governance reforms in the future that could have revisionist implications. But for the present there does not seem to be any great appetite in China (except perhaps on the political margins) either to push for revolutionary change in the global order or to take the leadership role that the search for fundamental reform would require.[96] Nor can we identify what Buzan called 'a fully articulated discourse that tells both the Chinese people and the rest of the world what kind of international society China would like to see and be part of'.[97]

So China does not appear to have unappeasable revisionist ambitions. But, using Buzan's typology, nor is China a 'status quo' power, as there is clearly articulated dissatisfaction in the country with both the overall structure of the global order and China's role and power status within it.[98] The (official) aim is to reform the system, not overthrow it, and to reform it responsibly from within;[99] to make it fairer and more in tune with the interests of developing states in general, and also to reflect the power shifts that have occurred in recent years. China's role, then, is not just to be critical of the international system for the sake of being critical, but to come up with concrete solutions to current problems.[100]

[92] Feng Zhang, 'The Tsinghua approach and the inception of Chinese theories of international relations', *Chinese Journal of International Politics* 5: 1, 2012, pp. 73–102.

[93] William Callahan, 'Chinese visions of world order: post-hegemonic or a new hegemony?', *International Studies Review* 10: 4, 2008, p. 750.

[94] Daniel Bell and Sun Zhe, eds, *Yan Xuetong, ancient Chinese thought, modern Chinese power* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011). See also William Callahan, 'Sino-speak: Chinese exceptionalism and the politics of history', *Journal of Asian Studies* 71: 1, 2012, pp. 35–55.

[95] Linsay Cunningham-Cross and William Callahan, 'Ancient Chinese power, modern Chinese thought', *Chinese Journal of International Politics* 4: 4, 2011, p. 365.

[96] Evan S. Medeiros, 'Is Beijing ready for global leadership?', *Current History* 108: 719, 2009, pp. 250–56.

[97] Barry Buzan, 'China in international society: is "peaceful rise" possible?', *Chinese Journal of International Politics* 3: 1, 2010, p. 29.

[98] Buzan, 'China in international society', pp. 5–36. Buzan sees China as half-way between an orthodox revisionist and a reformist revisionist state. The former is generally happy with the system but not its role within it. The latter accepts some of the institutions but not all of them (and also wants to change its status).

[99] Author's interviews in Beijing, June 2012.

[100] Pang Zhongying, 'Zhongguo zai guoji tizhizhong de diwei yu zuoyong' [The status and motive of China in the international system], *Dangdai guoji guanxi*, no. 4, 2006, pp. 7–22.

There seem to be three rather basic and somewhat limited reformist goals. The first was articulated by Hu Jintao at the G20 meeting in 2008, where he announced that China stands for 'reform of international financial institutions. Efforts should be made to reform the mechanisms for the formation of their decision-making bodies, increase the representation and say of developing countries.'[101] While the G20 itself is part of the global financial architecture, it is seen by China more as an interim platform for itself and other developing country members (and for China as a representative of other developing countries that are not members) to push for more fundamental reform at the IMF, the World Bank and the WTO.[102] Quota reforms in 2010 were seen as a good start, but not representing fundamental change to the inbuilt bias towards the West and the developed world; in China's view, there is still a lot to be done before the institutions of global governance become truly representative and democratic.[103]

The second goal is to empower the United Nations as the only legitimate decision-making body when it comes to finding global solutions to either transnational problems or cases of domestic state failure.[104] No state should have the power to make decisions that affect others on its own, or through organizations like NATO, without the higher approval of the UN. While China accepts that heed should be paid to regional organizations, and was prepared to sanction initial UN action in Libya because regional organizations (the Arab League and the African Union) called for it,[105] the final decision must rest with the Security Council. Of course, there is something of an irony here, as Chinese power and influence on the Security Council stem from the basic fact that it is the antithesis of the democratic global institution that China claims to favour.[106] Although Chinese officials often repeat their support for Security Council reform, the reform they call for does not seem to be of the kind that would dilute Chinese privilege, or promote the power of those that are sometimes seen as China's strategic competitors.

The third goal, closely related to the second, is to promote and defend the norm of state sovereignty. Building on the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence associated with Zhou Enlai, sovereignty is often considered to be the bottom line in Chinese foreign policy, or a red line that Chinese policy-makers will not cross. Respect for sovereignty includes allowing each country to develop its own political and economic systems and norms independently rather than having them imposed by external powers and actors. Here there is resonance with the idea mentioned above of China as a very different type of Great Power from the

[101] Hu Jintao, 'Tide over difficulties through concerted efforts', speech at G20 summit, Washington DC, 15 Nov. 2008, http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/zxxx/t524323.htm, accessed 2 April 2013.
[102] Li, 'Rising from within', pp. 14–15.
[103] Lu Zhuanying, 'Hou jinrong weiji shiqi zhongguo canyu guoji jinrong tixi gaige de mubiao he lujing: yi zhongguo canyu IMF gaige wei li' [China's objectives and means of participating in international financial system reform after the financial crisis: the case of IMF reform], *Dongnan yazhou zongheng*, no. 8, 2011, pp. 87–91.
[104] Lai-Ha Chan, Pak K. Lee and Gerald Chan, 'Rethinking global governance: a China model in the making?', *Contemporary Politics* 14: 1, 2008, pp. 3–19.
[105] 'UN Security Council no-fly zone vote explained', *People's Daily Online*, 18 March 2011, http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/90001/90777/90856/7324632.html, accessed 2 April 2013.
[106] Foot, 'Chinese strategies in a US-hegemonic global order'.

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established western powers: an actor that does not impose political conditionalities on aid or other economic relations with any country.

Despite appearing to represent a clear alternative to the approach of the established powers, the absolute defence of sovereignty is much clearer in Chinese rhetoric than in reality. Indeed, it seems that regime change (*zhengquan gengdie*) rather than sovereignty (*zhuquan*) is the real bottom line. Or, to put it another way, China is increasingly prepared to accept that there are grounds for infringing the sovereignty of other states or bending understandings of what sovereignty covers. For example, China not only abstained from UN Resolution 1973, which established a no-fly zone over Libya, but actually voted in favour of Resolution 1970, which referred 'the outrageous violence perpetrated by Muammar Qadafi on the Libyan people' to the International Criminal Court. This was the first time that China had voted in favour of a resolution referring an issue to a court of which it is not a member (and one, indeed, of which it has been critical in the past for over-riding not just state sovereignty but the authority of global bodies, including the UN).[107] China also supported sanctions on the Ivory Coast, and effectively supported calls for the Yemeni President to stand down.[108]

Yet in February 2012, China did exercise its veto (along with Russia) in the Security Council to block a draft resolution calling for an end to violence in Syria and the implementation of an Arab League peace plan. The difference in position may be explained in part by the different nature of the two conflicts. Interviewees in Beijing typically repeated the concern that events in Syria could easily spin out of control and spill over into wider regional conflict that could bring in other states—in the worst-case scenario, Iran and Israel. This was a crisis that was simply too dangerous to be dealt with through military escalation. The second is the nature of Chinese economic interests, and the relative lack of them in Syria compared to Libya and Sudan. This allowed decisions on Syria to be made on 'purely political' grounds of principle, rather than on those of vested interests.[109]

But the third and apparently most important reason for the discrepancy lies in the consequences of what happened in Libya. Chinese decision-makers might have been prepared to vote for what was essentially an infringement of Libyan sovereignty. They might also have been aware that this could lead to the overthrow of Gaddafi. But they were not voting for direct foreign intervention to bring about that regime change. In the eyes of many Chinese—including China's active online community—China had played its part as a responsible global power and responded to the wishes of the Arab League. But the West (and in particular France and Britain) had then abused China's position in going further than the resolution actually mandated. This was not a case of China making demands that were subsequently not met by the established powers which ostracized China, but China feeling ostracized even though it had moved a long way to meet the demands of

[107] The official foreign ministry position can be found in 'China and the International Criminal Court', 2003, http://www.mfa.gov.cn/eng/wjb/zzjg/tyfls/tyfl/2626/2627/t15473.htm, accessed 13 Nov. 2012.
[108] For full details on how China has voted on human rights issues, see Sonya Sceats with Shaun Breslin, *China and the international human rights system* (London: Chatham House, 2012).
[109] Author's interviews in Beijing, June 2012.

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others. So even though there was some support for abstaining once again over the Syria vote, it was a position that the top Chinese leadership (and again, many ordinary Chinese) were not prepared to countenance. China's response to Libya might not have entailed an actual retaliation; but it is evident from its exercise of veto power in the Syrian case that it has certainly become less keen to see the established global powers get their own way.

Conclusions

In 2001, Shi Yinhong noted the lack of a clear, coherent and unified Chinese approach to international relations and the world order. Looking to the future, he argued that 'the essential disposition of China in world politics of the 21st Century should be a combination of being on guard and struggle on the one hand and accommodation and conformance on the other. Moreover, the latter disposition of accommodation and conformance shall be in general more than the former.'[110] That statement might be over a decade old now, but in terms of identifying both current debates within China and also likely trends for the future, it still sounds just about right.

If there is a normative position underpinning China's official approach to reform of global governance, it is perhaps that there should be no normative basis. For the time being at least, China is less interested in promoting a clearly articulated grand strategy and a new set of universal values than it is in finding pragmatic solutions: primarily solutions to problems that it itself faces, but also at times solutions to problems facing others.[111] Even the supposed bottom line of sovereignty is not quite as absolute as official rhetoric might make it sound—partly because of the recognition that 'globalization' has eroded the ability of all states to do what they want on their own, and partly through an increased commitment to being an active global citizen.

The Chinese state frames itself (and its objectives) in different ways to different audiences/partners. To the established western powers, it is a responsible partner in international politics and a responsible stakeholder within the existing system.[112] To be sure, it is seeking reforms to democratize this system and increase its (and other developing countries') power. It has also developed an important role as a key veto player, as any reform of global economic governance 'would not be realistic without China's participation'.[113] But it will exercise this power responsibly in ways that do not cause instability. To other emerging powers, it is a key partner in the search for such change. To developing countries it is also a key partner, representing and promoting their collective interests on a global scale, and acting as a new form of 'Great Power' that will not repeat the sins of previous

[110] See Chin and Thakur, 'Will China change the rules of global order?'; Li, 'Rising from within'.
[111] See Chin and Thakur, 'Will China change the rules of global order?'; Li, 'Rising from within'.
[112] A term used by Robert Zoellick to describe China's place in the global order. See Robert Zoellick, 'Whither China: from membership to responsibility?', remarks to National Committee on US–China Relations, New York, 21 Sept. 2005, http://www.cfr.org/publication/8916/whither_china.html, accessed 2 April 2013.
[113] Ren, 'A reform-minded status quo power?', p. 27.

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emerging and Great Powers. And perhaps it is here that we see China's biggest impact on the international order. China's eschewal of political and/or liberalizing conditionalities to accompany economic relations might not have sounded the death knell of global liberalism just yet. But it does create alternatives for its partners and a political space within which they can manoeuvre. The growth of Chinese aid is also making traditional donors rethink their strategies, prompting them among other things to look for ways of dealing with China as a partner in third countries.[114]

To date, then, the international order has adapted to China's emergence as a global power with far less fanfare and far fewer problems than some envisaged. At the same time, China has also adapted itself to the international order and managed to simultaneously maintain four of the different identities outlined in the introduction with relative ease. However, as David Kang points out, when he argues that China is not a revisionist power, others reply with the word 'yet': that is, once it has the power to change the world to one of its making, it will.[115] The first stage of global participation is to learn the rules of the game—a task that has largely been completed; the next step is to work out how to influence change in those areas where China is dissatisfied.[116] From this perspective, it is the fifth identity of China as a regional power, combined with the emergence of a more confident China during and after the global crisis, that continues to provide uncertainty over what the country's long-term impact and motivations actually are. To this end, the way in which China and its neighbours negotiate their way through a number of tensions in East and South-East Asia will play a very big role in establishing perceptions of the consequences of China's rise way beyond the boundaries of the region.

[114] Erik Lundsgaarde, 'The future of European development aid', *Futures* 44: 7, 2011, pp. 704–10; Soyeun Kim and Simon Lightfoot, 'Does "DAC-ability" really matter? The emergence of non-DAC donors: introduction to policy arena', *Journal of International Development* 23: 5, 2011, pp. 711–21.
[115] David Kang, 'Getting Asia wrong: the need for new analytical frameworks', *International Security* 27: 4, 2003, pp. 57–85.
[116] Ren, 'A reform-minded status quo power?'.