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New Powers for Global Change?

Some Approaches to Boosting China's Pivotal Role in Tackling Global Challenges

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“天下犹未平” (“The world has not yet been perfectly reduced to order”¹) - Mencius (《孟子·滕文公上》)

“有所作为” (“Attempt to contribute to the world”) - Deng Xiaoping (邓小平)

Introduction

Since the end of the Cold War, as the country has entered into the international system in major and extensive ways, China has tried to play its part in the global political economy. The issue of China's role in global governance is a hot potato in the world.

Confucius (孔子) states that the ultimate pursuit of an exemplary person (for example the statesman or the intellectual) is to bring a state of perfect order (stable peace and lasting prosperity) to the world (平天下). Many Chinese have remembered this saying as the motto of their life from generation to generation. Today's China has coined and promoted a very new idea of foreign policy, probably based on the Confucian wisdom: “to contribute harmony to the world” (和谐世界).² By contributing more stability and harmony, China is trying to become a fully fledged responsible state actor in the world.

The West, particularly the US and the EU, in recent years increasingly confronted with new global challenges, has been pressuring China to undertake more “international responsibilities” as a newly admitted “stakeholder”³ or a recognized emerging “partner” in the international system.

Today's China wishes to play a role in global governance. But a big question remains: How will China play this role? As a contributing essay to the FES project *New Powers for Global Change?*, this paper would like to answer this question by suggesting seven approaches to increase China's role in global governance. Perhaps a useful way of thinking about China's role in global governance is a “levels plus issues” analysis. I call this structure designed to discuss China's approach to global governance issues a “level-issue lens.” I

will examine how to strengthen China's role at the national, regional and global levels and discuss China's role in the pressing, rather difficult questions of sustainable development, climate change, peace, world order etc..

1 Promote global governance by deepening and achieving China's domestic reform.

National governance is a base of global governance. Any effective role in global governance that China has successfully played comes from its good governance at home. To develop good governance, China began to reform its domestic system almost three decades ago, in 1978. However, until today, despite great achievements and progress, the reform is still regarded not as finished but as “unfinished business.”

China is facing a number of tremendous challenges on the domestic front. Among these, the main pressing ones are:

- environmental sustainability,
- balanced development,
- income equality,
- public health,
- social stability,
- containment of corruption,

The domestic rather than the international concerns always occupy China's main political and economic agendas. Beijing is attempting to deal with these challenges by seeking some fundamental policy shifts, for example:

- An more efficient mode of economic growth: China's “rapid growth” has been accompanied by high cost and heavy pollution. For example, the Chinese economy is colossally inefficient in energy use.
- A relatively “harmonious society”: This is a new political term for social stability. The outcomes of economic growth in the past years have failed to be distributed fairly in China. China is faced with increasing social unrest due to widening gaps such as between rich and poor or between prosperous coast - marginalized inlands. Chinese leaders also want to have poor people (unemployed and under-paid workers and weak peasants) benefit from booming economic growth.
- Low environmental pollution: China's “putting economic growth first” has already led to severe environmental degradation. China continues to pay a heavy price for the serious pollution brought about by the world's

¹ The translation was made by James Legge. See, *The Works of Mencius*, New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1970, p. 250.

² Officially, in China, the “hexie shijie” was translated into English as “a harmonious world.”

³ America hopes that “China must act as a responsible stakeholder.” The EU is more positive towards China. Brussels regards China more as a “closer partner.”

top producer and consumer of coal. China is the second-largest emitter of greenhouse gases after the United States. Reportedly, it is expected to surpass the United States as the world's number one in the next decade. That is why China has to find "scientific development" solutions for its environmental crisis.

- Clean and transparent government: Political reform is really the hard part of China's reform agenda, but only political reform, perhaps democracy with Chinese characteristics, can guarantee China's achievements in economic reform. The current proliferation of corruption tells us that there is no time to delay China's democracy-oriented political reform.

Increasingly, China's problems and China's ways of handling these problems have affected the whole earth. These problems can easily spill over into the world. In short, China's domestic governance, good or bad, will be a determining factor in global governance, or un-governance. Of course, its success, as anticipated, will prove greatly conducive to global governance.

2 Strengthen China's capacity for global governance.

What is China's capacity to contribute to global governance?

China's intention to be a key player in global governance is not universally known. One of the reasons is that China has "not taken the lead in international affairs," or always "kept a low profile," since the end of the Cold War. In keeping with this strategy, China's role in global governance has been relatively limited. Except for this, there are other reasons for China's limited role in global governance:

(1) Economic growth has been treated as a matter of overriding importance and the only solution to most problems in China. Based on this logic, China, especially at the local levels, had paid little attention to the challenges and problems the quick economic transformation brought, especially environmental degradation, which was seriously neglected. In the past years, as the current Chinese leaders have stressed, economic growth has not been quite "scientific." Growth had taken place at the expense of social cohesion and had also brought along huge human and environmental costs. China has massively sacrificed its land, water and other natural resources in exchange for its economic growth.

(2) Being "the largest developing country" in many sectors, China actually lacks resources to deal with global challenges. Take the issue of climate change for instance. China's climate agency is very much willing to cooperate with the international community in coping with global warming. But as a developing country its capacity to do so is still lower than anticipated. China has repeatedly claimed that it "lacks the money and technology to significantly alter its reliance on highly pollutant coal."⁴

(3) In China, after many years of "proletarian internationalism" (rhetorically "export of world revolution") in the Mao Zedong era, Deng Xiaoping put right China's development approach by transforming the top national agenda from class struggle to economic (re)construction. Some pragmatic ideologies, like "national interest," quickly replaced an empty internationalism and came to dominate Chinese foreign policy in order to create good external conditions for China's moves towards reform and modernization. This is to some extent reasonable, but a number of people have emphasized only national interest, which may sometimes not produce results that are truly identical with China's interest.

The environmental situation in China is deteriorating, and this has severely affected the country's development sustainability. Many cool minds in China have begun to reconsider the approaches of China's "modernization move," even in the name of China's national interest. For example, a study conducted and released at the Chinese Academy of Sciences (CAS) criticizes the fact that China's "ecological protection" has failed to make progress. So it suggests that China needs to set up a Ministry for the Environment in order to boost the construction of China as an ecologically sustainable developing country.⁵ "China is dangerously near a crisis. The country's enormous environmental debt will have to be paid one way or another.", Mr. Pan Yue, deputy head of China's State Environmental Protection Administration, has repeatedly and responsibly warned.

"Lack of money and technology" should not continuously be China's good excuse not to act immediately in addressing problems. The country

⁴ Shi Jiangtao, "Converting to clean energy 'too costly'", *South China Morning Post* (Hong Kong), 7 February, 2007.

⁵ *China Modernization Report 2007*, Center for Modernization Research, Chinese Academy of Sciences, Beijing, 29 January, 2007.

needs to realize the dangers of global challenges. No matter whether or not the industrialized countries bear "an unshirkable responsibility,"⁶ China must rise to meet challenges. If efforts are not seriously pursued to meet these challenges, China's modernization cause will fail in the end. "China has become one of the worst victims of weather-related disasters, with economic losses amounting to up to 300 billion yuan a year, about 2 per cent to 5 per cent of the country's gross domestic product."⁷ "As the world's most populous country and one of the biggest producers of the pollutant gases blamed for climate change, China has perhaps the most to lose from droughts, higher temperatures and more extreme weather conditions."⁸

To increase China's capacity in dealing with global problems, the West can do many things, such as provide more technology transfer/assistances to China.

3 China should continue to play a special role in regional governance.

Regional governance is an indispensable part of global governance. China's participation in regional processes is an indication of its integration into the international system. China has at least contributed to Asia's delayed regional integration.

Regionalization and regionalism have given China a historic opportunity to transform its relations with Asia. Since the financial crisis almost ten years ago, China has realized the importance of regional integration as a means to stabilize China's immediate surrounding environment, to develop China's economy and to deal with transnational problems. China is becoming an active participant, firm supporter, and even an initiator of regional integration in East Asia and other parts of Asia.

The country now has membership in all embryonic forms of regional cooperation in Asia. In Asia's "OSCE" - the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) - China, as a dialogue member, has helped address new notions of security, build mutual

confidence among different powers and nurture security cooperation. China has responded positively to new transnational challenges or non-traditional threats in ASEAN plus processes. It was a major organizer of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). In the two inter-regional bodies: Asia and Europe Meeting (ASEM) and Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), China has of course been a highly important member.

China's decision to participate in regional processes has already helped ease anxieties other players had due to China's rise to a great power status (for instance, "China threat" or "China would challenge the existing regional or international order"). For other countries, various regional arrangements may guarantee that China will never re-emerge as the hegemon in Asia.

By the way, perhaps we should mention China's role in the process of European integration. In the past three decades China has been developing its good relations with the EU - a rising international actor. China-EU relations have entered into a new stage of "strategic partnership" in many areas. China's impact on the EU has begun to increase. The EU and its member states have felt the impact of China's rise. As a result, China's rise has actually stimulated the EU to further integration.

4 Being a promoter for global development.

Development is a major objective and means of global governance. But there are many ways towards development.

In poverty relief, control of diseases, provision of primary education, gender equality and human development, China has achieved a lot as a leading developing country. In terms of these indicators of the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), China should be regarded as a successful development model. In other words, China's development can be a good example for other developing countries. It has made a great contribution to global development.

China's official words for promoting global development are: "common development" and "pursuit of win-win partnership" based on growing inter-dependence and complementarities among countries and economies. For example, as "China affects everyday life in Southeast Asia,"⁹ China and the ASEAN have been ad-

⁶ China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokeswoman Jiang Yu responded on climate change and China's responsibility in Beijing, 6 February, 2007.

⁷ Shi Jiangtao, "Converting to clean energy 'too costly'", *South China Morning Post* (Hong Kong), 7 February, 2007.

⁸ Editorial, "Chance for China to take lead in pollution fight", *South China Morning Post* (Hong Kong), 7 February, 2007.

⁹ Ong Keng Yong (Secretary General of ASEAN), "Securing a win-win partnership for ASEAN and

dress the spirit of "win-win partnership." The principle of equality and the spirit of "South-South" cooperation to "uphold the legitimate rights and interests of developing countries" have been maintained.

There is now a hot debate in the West on China's role in Africa: whether or not China has promoted the development of Africa as a continent (including good governance and human rights). Leading Western opinions are mixed with concerns and criticisms on China's role in Africa such as:

- "Chinese aid to Africa may do more harm than good." "China's failure to match the conditions placed on aid by other countries - including evidence of good governance, respect for human rights and spending directed to alleviate poverty - could set back progress toward democratic administrations."¹⁰
- China's growing investments in the development of Africa in fact amount to a "new wave of colonialism."

The popular comparison in the West of China role today' and Europe's role yesterday in Africa is not reasonable, right and proper. The Sino-African relationship is based on good political cooperation, the spirit of "South-South" solidarity, mutual benefits and respect. Not only has China secured its supplies of natural resources but Africa particularly has benefited more from China's participation in Africa's development. Since the 1950s, China has also greatly assisted African social and human development, providing much needed health and medical assistance to Africa for prevention and treatment of global diseases. Africa is an independent continent with sovereign states. Its colonial history was over. There is no legitimacy in being a new colonial power in today's world. Such comments are not only groundless but a serious humiliation to African countries and peoples. Moreover, they completely neglect China's and Africa's common history. "For more than 100 years of China's modern history, the Chinese people were subjected to colonial aggression and oppression by foreign powers and went through suffering and agony

China", Keynote address at the ASEAN-China Forum 2004 "Developing ASEAN-China Relations: Realities and Prospects," Singapore, 23 June 2004.

¹⁰ Chris McGreal, "Chinese aid to Africa may do more harm than good, warns Benn", Special Report on China, *The Guardian*, 8 February 2007.

similar to that the majority of African countries endured."¹¹

China's role in Africa also embodies the fact that its experiences and lessons of development in the past years are valuable to Africa.¹² China does not want to export its "model" to Africa, but African countries can learn some lessons (including from China's failures) in economic development from China. There are lots of leaders and institutions in Africa that have expressed such an interest in the Chinese model.

On the question of good governance, as China's stakes in Africa increase, good governance in Africa will be also definitely in China's interest. But "China has never imposed its will or unequal practices on other countries and will never do so in the future."¹³ Even though it is necessary to promote good governance in Africa, China may continue not to take the Western ways. In the future, the West, Africa and China will find common interests in good governance.

Except for the Chinese-African partnership for closer "South-South" development cooperation, the other key progress for global development that China has explored is its relations with ASEAN based on principle of "free trade."

The development of China-ASEAN relations has been quite fast. China gave its financial and policy support during the financial crisis in 1997-98. The China-ASEAN Free Trade Agreement (ACFTA) in 2001 laid the first foundation of Sino-ASEAN relations in which two sides will create a free market of 1.8 billion people and aggregate gross domestic product (GDP) of US\$2 trillion by 2010. China's participation in regional security is evidently manifested in its relations with the ARF, established in 1994. It was accepted as a full member of the ARF in 1996. In November 2002, China and ASEAN signed the *Declaration on the Conduct of the Parties in the South China Sea* (DOC), which showed all parties' common desire to maintain stability and work for cooperation in this region. China was the first ASEAN dialogue partner to sign the Treaty of Amity and Coop-

¹¹ Hu Jintao, "Enhance China-Africa Unity and Promote the Harmonious World Building," Speech at the University of Pretoria, South Africa, 7 February 2007.

¹² Paul Wolfowitz (President of the World Bank), "China has valuable lessons for sub-Saharan Africa," *Financial Times*, 30 October 2006.

¹³ Hu Jintao, "Enhance China-Africa Unity and Cooperation To Build a Harmonious World", Speech at University of Pretoria, Pretoria, South Africa, 7 February 2007.

eration in Southeast Asia (TAC), a key ASEAN security protocol.

China and the developing world have long shared many traditional values such as "sovereignty" and equality as well as "non-intervention." But the world situation has changed. Both the African Union and ASEAN have made some important changes in their constitutional or approved common documents. For example, "The African Union's constitution explicitly codifies the possibility and terms of direct intervention in the affairs of member states as mandated by the Peace and Security Council, should it find that there are gross violations of human rights and other humanitarian reasons. The New Economic Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), whose peer review mechanism is structured around an independent review of an African country's adherence to good governance criteria, represents another step towards building in new norms."¹⁴ Similarly, the framing ASEAN Charter also let new values and norms into the old frameworks. China must pay attention to these changes.

5 Being a major force for global peacekeeping and peace-building.

In recent years China has regarded itself as not only a key force for development but also as a major force for global peace. China is exploring how to use its force for peace. Its attitude towards UN peacekeeping has changed: China no longer questions such UN interventions, and it contributes its part to the operations.¹⁵ "Since 1990, China has sent 5,915 military personnel to participate in 16 UN peacekeeping operations," and "Since 2000, China has sent 893 peacekeeping police officers to seven mission areas. At present, China has 1,487 military peacekeeping personnel serving in nine UN mission areas and the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations."¹⁶ "China is the largest UN peacekeeping force contributor of the five permanent members of the UN Security Council."¹⁷ "China is now the 14th-largest contributor of U.N. peace-

keepers."¹⁸ China's support of international peacekeeping operations should be interpreted as a shift in China's foreign policy.

China is so actively involved in UN peacekeeping operations in Africa, particularly in Congo (Kinshasa), Liberia and Sudan. But in Africa, the case of Sudan's western Darfur region crisis is becoming one of the most contentious issues China has to face. China has urged the Sudanese government to act on the crisis. In the West, at least in the last three years, the Sudanese government has been accused of multiple human rights abuses in Darfur. And China also has been questioned about its role in the crisis: not using its deep economic relations with Khartoum (Sudan is China's third-largest trading partner in Africa) to influence Sudan to take greater and quicker measures to resolve the conflict in Darfur.

The Darfur case shows that in today's global political economy China is clearly in a dilemma over how to tackle humanitarian crises like that in Darfur. As its stakes in conflict-stricken or internationally isolated countries in Africa have been increasing and China's growing power is conflicting with American and even European interests, China has to face the challenge of how to safeguard or stabilize its interests at the global level. This may require China to rethink its principles of foreign policy (mainly "non-intervention") to adapt it to new realities. In fact, China can indeed take advantage of its relational power (i.e. to influence others through its relations with them) to find balanced settlements in crises. Such settlements are also conducive to China's long term interest. One good development is that China has begun to take more flexible attitudes towards issues of sovereignty and non-intervention. For example, China has firmly supported the establishment and operations of the UN Peacebuilding Commission. It decided to pledge 3 million US\$ to the UN Peacebuilding Fund. These positional adjustments will help China broaden its role in global governance.

6 More memberships in global institutions

China's path to a re-emerging global power has been based on its interests, acceptance, participation, and compliance in international institu-

¹⁴ Chris Alden, "China-Africa relations: The end of the beginning," in Peter Draper and Garth le Pere (eds.), *Enter the Dragon: Towards a Free Trade Agreement between China and the Southern African Customs Union*, South African Institute of International Affairs, 2005, pp. 147-148.

¹⁵ Pang Zhongying, "China's changing attitude to UN peacekeeping," *International Peacekeeping*, Vol.12, No.1, Spring 2005.

¹⁶ See *China's National Defense in 2006*.

¹⁷ See *Xinhua News Agency*, Beijing, 2 August 2006.

¹⁸ Colum Lynch, "China filling void left by West in U.N. peacekeeping," *The Washington Post*, November 24, 2006; Annual Review of Global Peace Operations 2007, p. 147, Center on the International Cooperation, NYU, 2007.

tions. The Chinese membership in the global institutions does matter for its global governance role.

The Group of Seven (G7), which has played a pivotal role in the management of the global economy, expanded to include Russia - the G8 - in the post-Cold War era. There is a real possibility that the G8 could be further expanded in the future.

After the demise of Soviet Union, NATO has transformed itself politically and militarily, adopting new goals. The number of its member states and associated states has been increasing. In a word, NATO is quickly going global. In the new century, China has felt the impact of an expanded NATO on its security both regionally and globally.

The UN Security Council has been accused of inefficiency and under-representation in the West (including Japan). Some think that existing non-UN organizations like the G8 and NATO could play a larger role than the UN. Some think about creation of new global institutions such as a "concert of democracies" to replace the UN.¹⁹

From the operational perspective, China is not familiar with these Western-dominated or would-be-Western-dominated global institutions. China lacks coordination and cooperation with them. In 2002 China began to explore a working or even a rhetorically closer relationship with NATO.²⁰ Gradually many contacts and mutual interests have emerged between China and NATO.

Along with China's rise economically and politically, many major voices calling for China's inclusion in the G8 or for the West to absorb China into a rule-based global system in order to transform China as a "stakeholder" in it have been heard in the West. Since 2003, China, with other major developing countries such as India, has three times attended G8 outreach summit meetings.

China has begun to study the possible impact of new groupings like "concert of democracies" on its global role. Therefore, if China itself would like to play a larger role in global governance or if

the West would like to pressure China to undertake more "international responsibilities," it is important to see that China needs to have relations with above-mentioned non-UN and non-Asian institutions. The UN system, the international economic institutions (IMF, WB and WTO) and regional institutions in Asia are not enough for China's role in global governance.

Actually, in recent years China has already forged other important links to some international organizations; for example, the Organization of American States (OAS) accepted China as a permanent observer in 2004, which is a reflection of both China and Latin America's mutual interests.

7 Being both a maintainer and a reformer of the global order

As a maintainer:

Is "the impending demise of the postwar system"²¹ a fact, as a distinguished diplomat-scholar from Singapore declares? No, because China will have become a "new" custodian or maintainer of the "old" international system - the UN system or global multilateral order.

China's support for the UN-based world order is not only because it has occupied a powerful place in it (veto power holder in the UN Security Council) but also because China believes that principles of equality, state sovereignty and others, which are enshrined in the UN Charter, matter for the independence and autonomy of China and other developing countries.

As a reformer:

Regardless of the fact that many Chinese have repeatedly and diplomatically reassured the world that a rising China would not challenge the Western-dominated world order, the rise of China has been perceived in other parts of the world, particularly in the West, as a major challenge to the current world order.

In my analysis, China has been a reformer (read: a driver of positive change) within the international system and order, not a challenger of the overall system and order. For example:

- China has committed to advancing the UN reform to strengthen its unity and authority and to enhance its efficiency and capacity to respond to global challenges.

¹⁹ See *Forging a World Under Liberty and Law: U.S. National Security in the 21st Century*, Final Paper of the Princeton Project on National Security, September 27, 2006.

²⁰ Zhang Zuqian, "Beijing calling," *NATO Review*, No.3, Autumn 2003. Also see, Bates Gill and Matthew Oresman, "China and NATO: A romance worth entering," *International Herald Tribune*, November 22, 2002.

²¹ Kishore Mahbubani, "The Impending Demise of the Postwar System," *Survival*, Vol. 47, 2005.

- China is promoting or leading the various processes of Asian regional community building in order to be able to better react to globalization.
- In dealing with American unilateralism, together with others, China has persistently supported multilateralism in the post-Cold War era.
- In the Western-dominated global institutions, especially the IMF, WB and WTO, China and other developing countries speak their voices loudly or collectively. They seek to build a new international political and economic order.

As both a maintainer and a reformer, China is very good for the world. The majority of the world still needs an authoritative, efficient and representative United Nations. The UN system should be strengthened rather than replaced or abandoned.

The developed countries and multinational companies are still dominant in the global economy. The developing countries, including China, still lack the power to set up international agendas and standards. Their developments are still dependent ones. Being a reformer, China is not revolutionizing but only rationalizing the existing global order.

In short, while maintaining the world order, China is seeking to reform it.

Concluding remarks

In this article, I do not intend to promote any wishful thinking about China's role in global governance. Instead, I try to assess China's engagements, their progress, as well as problems and prospects in global governance, some of the most difficult questions on China's foreign policy agenda.

China has been reforming, opening up and transforming since 1978. It has greatly contrib-

uted to the settlement of global issues (particularly, poverty relief, human development, regional security and global peace), and in the meantime it also inevitably bears a major share of global problems (particularly environmental and climate change). For China, one of major arenas of global governance is China's domestic governance. At the regional level in Asia, what China has managed to transform in its relations, bilateral and regional, has laid foundations for Asian regional integration/governance. At the global level, China's global endeavors are good for meeting global challenges. At least, the developing world can look to China as a model or draw some lessons from China.

As a new player in global governance, China urgently needs to strengthen its capacities in various areas. This is not just an obligatory international contribution but in China's long term interest. China's interests, public and private, have been globalizing, and its practices, such as peacekeeping participation, have gone first before its norms and values. After these, sooner or later, in the pursuit of "a harmonious world," China will actively or passively redefine its understanding of "sovereignty," "non-intervention," "peace," "good governance," and "sustainable development" as well. Especially, massive global challenges are emerging constantly that severely threaten the existence and development of mankind and demand great efforts on the part of a rising and responsible China.

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