

THE UNITED NATIONS OF CHINA: A VISION OF THE WORLD ORDER

**François Godement, Moritz Rudolf, Marc Julienne,
Marie-Hélène Schwoob & Kata Isenring-Szabó**

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Introduction

François Godement

China's participation in the United Nations system is often viewed through a succession of single lenses: its use of the veto over the last few years (less often than Russia, but more than Western permanent members of the UN Security Council); its financial contribution (now the second largest, but this is a simple consequence of China's GDP); its contribution to peacekeeping operations (at 2,350 blue helmets at the time of writing, it is far less than is often surmised, but with a vast potential increase in participation); its fight against interference on human rights and for prioritising development and dialogue over sanctions and intervention (but China has avoided full-frontal opposition in many cases, now preferring backroom action via its influence on the UN budget).

What the sources deftly mined for this edition of *China Analysis* reveal is that there is sophisticated thinking, and hints of policy debates going on about the UN, its reform process, the various stands taken by other member states, and, to some extent, China's present and future role in the organisation.

The phrase "to some extent" is important, because many of the writings captured in this edition seem to take a disembodied view of China. Vetoes are not discussed, nor is persistent opposition to a permanent Security Council seat for Japan (and less obviously to India's – although one source takes the line that accepting India would bond the country to a neutral foreign policy, therefore closer to China). The role of the secretary-general does not even merit an allusion. And the true extent of China's longstanding fight against human rights action within the UN is hidden under criticism of the "politicisation" of human rights and the mention of Chinese NGOs – in fact, quasi-governmental organisations – showing up in Geneva to enrich collective thinking. How far speech can deviate from actual policy is even more elegantly revealed when one source reclaims the Republic of China's human rights spokesman in 1948, when nothing could have been farther from the politics of the actual winners

of China's civil war.

But the above is only the negative face of China's increasing discursive power (话语权 *huayu quan*) along with some sophisticated analysis and overall proposals. What comes through is how much China values the UN – as an intergovernmental rather than a supranational institution, that is; how much China thinks of the UN as part of a continuum with some of its international efforts (the newly minted Belt and Road Initiative above all) but also with the branding of its own developmental and financing style; how much Chinese experts openly debate the interests and coalitions in the UN General Assembly – and most of all on the intractable reform of the organisation, and even more precisely on UN Security Council membership. And it is also clear that China's increasing contribution to the UN, including in new sectors comes with the global export of China's thinking. Drily, one author notes that a reduced US budget contribution will simply mean less American influence over the organisation. One can apply the reverse judgment to China, of course.

Many of these endeavours still face the test of reality. China claims to defend the UN above all, but the limitations and constraints it puts on the UN's role, as well as its use of coalitions within the G77 group of so-called developing countries, may well be neutering a more effective role for the organisation. Is it with tongue in cheek that one of our sources deplores that member states lack a coherent and mature reform programme?

What this actually says is that China in the UN has gone well past the stage of being the conductor for an orchestra of those who can say no ... Disunity – or lack of interest – among key members of the UN often ensure that China is far less under pressure than in the aftermath of 1989.

One day, a neutralised UN could become a vehicle for China's worldviews; it is clear that China has the analytical capacity to canvass the ranks of UN members, and therefore to coddle or press them in the direction that it seeks. If and when it achieves that goal, the concept of multilateralism, which has very little prominence in our sources even though it figured in Xi Jinping's 2017 UN Geneva speech, will surely

return with force.

China's perspective on reforming the UN system

Moritz Rudolf

As China re-emerges as a global power, it is assuming a prominent role in the United Nations reform process. Chinese scholars and think-tanks have recently been more outspoken in identifying deficiencies in international governance, and have become more detailed in their reform proposals.

The necessity of UN reform

A study by the China Institute of Contemporary International Relations Research Group (CICIR) argues that the UN is facing unprecedented challenges in maintaining its authority.^[1] It argues that the UN system has lost credibility, since globalisation and transnational phenomena constitute a challenge to the principle of sovereignty as anticipated by the UN Charter. Sovereign governments are less able and willing to participate in seeking to fulfil the UN's mission. In addition, the rise of emerging powers does not sit comfortably with the traditional global power structure underlying the UN system. The authors point to deficiencies in the UN safeguarding international peace and security and they express doubts about whether it is able to effectively address global development issues. In addition, they question the ability of the UN to solve global problems in the areas of finance, cybersecurity, counter-terrorism, and epidemic prevention.

The reform process: an overview

The CICIR study notes that over the past 70 years the UN has shown resilience and proved capable of adjusting its “three pillars” – safeguarding peace and security, promoting development, and human rights – to the shifting international environment. According to Chen Xulong of the China Institute of International Studies, the main achievements of the reform process, in recent years, when it comes to security are: establishing the UN Peacebuilding Commission, reforming the UN peacekeeping mechanism, and strengthening the UN anti-terrorism mechanism.^[2]

On development, Chen emphasises the UN Millennium Development Goals, while with regard to human rights, he points to the establishment of the Human Rights Council with its Universal Periodic Review mechanism. In addition, he cites efforts to increase the efficiency of the UN administration, including the establishment of an ethics office, advances in risk management, and improvements in resource management – personnel, capital, and material. However, Chen identifies reform of the UN Security Council (UNSC) as the most difficult task and argues that it has reached a deadlock.

Key obstacles to reform

According to Li Dongyan of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, changes in the international balance of power are the main driving forces behind UN reform, but Li also criticises UN member states for lacking a coherent and mature reform programme.^[3] According to Chen, underlying political power conflicts complicate the reform process. The CICIR study points to fundamental differences regarding the direction of UN reform. While developing states focus on poverty reduction, developed states aim to promote human rights, good governance, and the rule of law. In addition, the study addresses fundamental disagreements among those states around whether to prioritise humanitarian concerns or the national security concerns of sovereign state.

Security Council reform

Mao Ruipeng an associate professor from the Shanghai University of International Business and Economics analyses the intergovernmental negotiation process of UNSC reform. The author divides UNSC reform since 1992 into three stages.^[4] In the first period (1992-1998), reform forces focused mainly on the question of fair representation.^[5] During the second stage (2003-2007), competing groups emerged, including: the G4, consisting of Japan, Germany, India, and Brazil, which all sought a permanent seat of their own; the Uniting for Consensus Group (UfC Group), which

opposes increasing the number of permanent UNSC seats; and the African Union (AU), which backs permanent representation for African countries.^[6] Mao attributes the failure of UNSC reform during this period to the competition between the G4 and the AU, as well as to opposition from the permanent UNSC member states. The third period started in 2009, with the official launch of the intergovernmental negotiations.

Mao points out that the unity of the AU, which the author believes is crucial to the prospects of UNSC reform, deteriorated due to competition among African countries over permanent UNSC representation (during the second stage). Mao argues that the L69 Group (a group of developing countries promoting UNSC reform), which includes co-sponsors of the draft resolution which paved the way for the intergovernmental negotiations (A /61/L.69), is trying to establish itself as a link between the AU, the G4, and the “Alliance of Small Island States”. Mao attributes the role of coordinator to India, given its membership of the G4, its leadership of the L69 Group, and its efforts to act as a mediator among the different groups.

Proposals

Chen advocates the “7-7-7 proposal” as the best means of actually achieving UNSC reform, which was introduced by Kishore Mahbubani, the former Singaporean ambassador to the UN. Under this proposal, seven permanent members would sit on the UNSC: the European Union, the United States, China, India, Russia, Brazil, and Nigeria. Seven “semi-permanent” members would be selected from 28 eligible countries, with each country eligible for election every eight years for a term of four years, and seven “non-permanent” candidates from the remaining countries.

The authors of the CICIR study provide a set of recommendations for UN and global governance reform, including reform to the institutional structure. In addition, they propose more coordination among the permanent UNSC members and between the UN and entities like G7, G20, or BRICS as well as with regional international organisations. The authors say the UN should guide NATO to play an active role in the maintenance of international peace. They argue that in the past NATO has used the

UN as a tool to interfere in internal affairs under the banner of “responsibility to protect”. Moreover, they demand enhancement of the UN’s ability to respond to new challenges of global governance, by reforming the international financial system and climate regime, and strengthening the governance of “global commons” such as the internet.

Zhang Guihong of the UN Research Center at Fudan University argues that UN reform is necessary in order to effectively deal with new threats and challenges.^[7] However, Zhang singles out Donald Trump’s ten-point declaration on UN reform for particular criticism. The ten points include cuts in funding for UN peacekeeping, which Zhang calls a pragmatic policy of short-sightedness lacking strategic vision. He argues that US financial contributions to the UN are not only a burden but also a source of influence. If the US withdraws financially, this should also have an impact on the power distribution within the UN, he argues. Zhang says that Beijing has continuously strengthened its support and financial contributions to the UN, yet few UN agency offices are based in China, and Chinese nationals remain underrepresented.

Recommendations for Beijing

Mao proposes that China adopt a strategy of “low involvement” (低介入策略, Di jieru de celüe) in the UNSC reform process and publicly endorse India to become a permanent UNSC member. He reasons that doing so could help maintain India’s neutrality in foreign policy issues that are relevant to China, including the South China Sea. Since UNSC reform is unlikely to reach a conclusion soon, it will take considerable time until India actually becomes a permanent member. Mao further urges China to avoid intervening in the debates among African countries, but to remain committed as a mediator between developed and developing countries.

The CICIR study calls on China to firmly safeguard the authority of the UN, and to use the existing governance framework as a foundation for continuous adjustment and improvement. China should assume greater international responsibility and provide more conceptual support for the UN, since it has introduced new concepts like the

“community of shared future of mankind” (人类命运共同体, renlei mingyun gongtongti), the “new developmental concept of win-win cooperation” (合作共赢的新发展观, hezuo gong ying de xin fazhan guan), and a “new security concept that goes beyond zero-sum game thinking” (超越零和博弈的新安全观, chaoyue ling he boyi de xin anquan guan).

From passiveness to proactivity: China's evolving role in peacekeeping operations

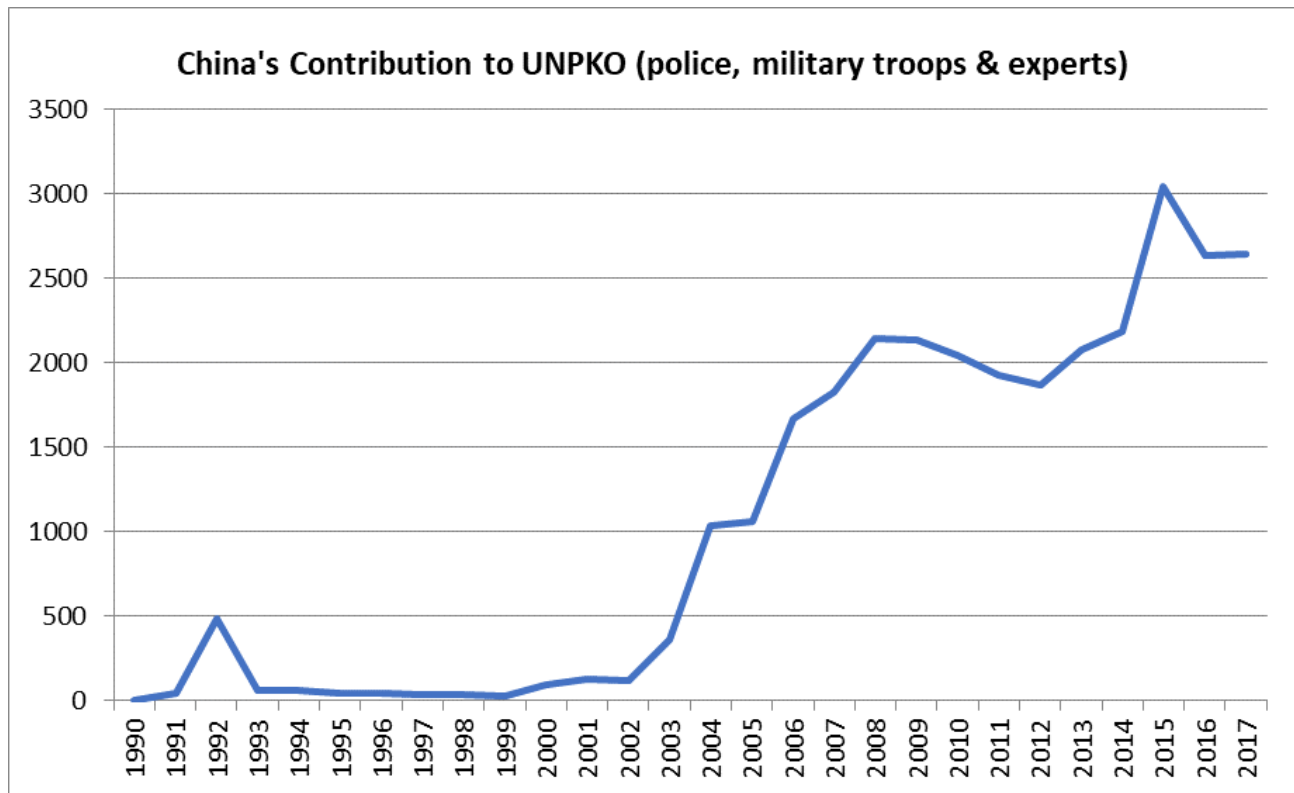
Marc Julienne

The People's Republic of China (PRC) replaced the Republic of China (Taiwan) as one of the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) in 1971. China's involvement in United Nations peacekeeping operations (UNPKOs) did not start before the late 1980s, during Deng Xiaoping's period of reform and opening up. This involvement has since gone through several phases of "gradual adaptation, gradual expansion, and gradual improvement" (逐步适应、逐步扩大、逐步提; zhubu shiying, zhubu kuoda, zhubu tisheng), and has evolved from "passive and simple" participation to "proactive and constructive" (主动和建设型; zhudong he jianshe xing) participation.^[8] Today, China proudly claims to be the largest contributor to UNPKOs among the UNSC permanent members (although out of all UN members it is the 12th largest contributor of troops, police, and military experts). In January 2018, China had 2,634 staff participating in UNPKOs in South Sudan, Lebanon, Mali, Darfur, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Liberia, Western Sahara, Cyprus, and Afghanistan.^[9] China's role in UNPKOs has been transforming rapidly, especially since Xi Jinping came to power in 2012-2013. China is contributing in terms of troops, but it also intends to contribute in terms of norms and concepts, and it therefore tries to influence reform processes in the UN. China's new role in UN peace and security actions, however, is facing challenges.

China's growing contribution to UNPKOs

China's first participation in a UNPKO was in 1990, when it sent five military personnel to the UN Truce Supervision Organization in the Middle East. China's contribution to UNPKOs was then low but stable during the 1990s, and started to increase rapidly in the early 2000s, reaching its peak in 2015 with more than 3,000 Chinese blue helmets worldwide. Under Xi, China's contribution to UNPKOs has

entered a new, more proactive, phase. In 2014, China dispatched 400 contingent troops to Mali, in addition to the 400 engineers, doctors, and security guards sent there the previous year. That same year, the decision to send 700 peacekeeping infantry battalion to South Sudan confirmed a new trend.



Source: aggregated data from <https://peacekeeping.un.org/> (every year in December)

During the 2015 UN Peacekeeping Summit, Xi restated China's commitment to becoming a major actor in international peace and security. He announced that China will: join the UN Peacekeeping Capability Readiness System; set up a standing peacekeeping force of 8,000 troops alongside a standing peacekeeping police force; train 2,000 foreign peacekeepers; carry out 10 de-mining assistance programmes; and provide \$100m in military aid to the African Union.^[10] By December 2016, China had set up a 300-strong standing peacekeeping police force (ie. the equivalent of two Formed Police Units – FPU), which is based in Dongying (Shandong province) and is

composed of troops from the People's Armed Police.^[11]

By September 2017, the standing peacekeeping force had completed the registration of 8,000 troops, including six infantry battalions, three engineers companies, two transport companies, four second grade hospitals, four security companies, three fast reaction companies, two medium-sized multipurpose helicopter units, two transport aircraft units, one UAV unit, and one surface naval ship.^[12] This shows the wide scope of missions that Chinese peacekeepers intend to deal with.

China also stepped up its contribution to the UN Peacekeeping Police, which was set up in 2000 and whose numbers rose considerably in 2013 with the dispatch of its first FPU to the UN Mission in Liberia. Comprising 140 police staff, it constitutes almost the entirety of China's worldwide total of 153 peacekeeping police. It is therefore surprising that the Chinese provisional representative to the UN, Wu Haitao, did not mention this in his statement during the UN Peacekeeping Police Summit in September 2017.^[13] Praising China's active role in peacekeeping police in current UN missions, he only mentioned South Sudan, Cyprus, and Afghanistan (13 staff altogether).

The trend towards increasing Chinese contribution to UNPKOs in conflict areas, such as South Sudan, is also linked to China's interest in protecting the growing numbers of Chinese nationals abroad, argues Li Dongyan, from the China Academy of Social Sciences. She believes that this trend continues, noting that "China refers to both the UK's operation in Sierra Leone, as well as France's operation in Mali". These two operations were launched on the initiative of the two European powers, without a UN mandate, to evacuate foreign citizens (in Sierra Leone) and to support the local army (in Mali). China's particular interest in these two operations further supports the notion that China is likely preparing to send national forces abroad in the future.

"Sovereignty" and "peace and development": China's conceptual contribution

As a rising power and permanent UNSC member with an increasing role in peace and security, China is contributing more and more on the ground. But China is also

seeking to influence the development and reform of the UN and the UNSC, and it is attempting to do this through the promotion of its own concepts.

The concept that China by far emphasises the most is that of sovereignty. Pointing to the UN Charter, China advocates the principles of “sovereignty, equality of sovereignty, non-interference in internal affairs, and peaceful settlement of conflicts”. It constantly promotes its “Three principles of peacekeeping” which it holds should be the “cornerstones of ensuring the sound development of PKOs”: the “neutrality principle” (中立原则 zhongli yuanze); the principle of the “approval by the concerned country” (当事国同意原则 dang shi guo tongyi yuanze); and the principle of “not using force otherwise as under the circumstances of self-defence or duly authorised” (非自卫或履行授权不使用武力原则 fei ziwei huo luxing shouquan bu shiyong wuli yuanze).[14]

The second concept important to China is that of “development promotes peace” (发展促和平 fazhan cu heping). Li explains that the UN approach to peace and security is based on democratic elections and the building of the rule of law, while the Chinese approach of peace-building is based on development: “development is the guarantee of security”.^[15] These two approaches, according to Li, are complementary and the UN should put more emphasis on development, in order to better balance the “three major fields of security, development, and human rights”.

This “Chinese way of thinking” (中国思路 zhongguo silu) reflects China’s expectations of the UN’s reforms. According to Li, “China has always stressed that the reform should help enhance the voice of developing countries in international affairs, and emphasised the need to promote reforms that have yielded positive results in the area of development. As for reform of the UNSC, China advocates giving priority to expanding the representation of developing countries, especially from Africa.”

China’s conceptual contribution in the sphere of peace and security dovetails with Xi’s new concepts of international relations, like: the “new type of international relations with win-win cooperation as the core” (合作共赢为核心的新型国际关系 hezuo gong ying we hexin de xinxing guoji guanxi); the “democratisation and the rule by law in

international relations” (国际关系的民主化、法治化 *guoji guanxi de minzhu hua, fazhi hua*); the “new concept of win-win, increased benefits, and mutual benefits” (双赢、多赢、共赢的新理念 *shuangying, duoying, gongying de xin linian*); and the “new concept of community of interests and destiny” (利益与命运共同体的新概念 *liyi yu mingyun gongtongti de xin gainian*), developed by foreign minister Wang Yi before the UNSC in February 2015.^[16]

The future of China’s role in PKOs

China still faces significant challenges in developing its role in international peace and security. These challenges include its own limited experience and innovation capability in fields like “promoting political settlement, controlling conflict situations, [or] easing humanitarian crisis”.^[17] And there are also external (来自外部 *laizi waibu*) challenges that restrain China’s involvement. Li points out that the “China threat theory” still exists, and that it undermines cooperation on peace and security within the UN. The theory foresees a time when, after becoming a great power, China will impose its “model” (模式 *moshi*) and “path” (道路 *daolu*) on the UN. Li argues that, although there are differences and disputes between Chinese and Western “ways of thinking”, these two kinds of model can co-exist and even complement each other. Thus, China struggles to make the weight of its position felt within the UN, including the UNSC.

Facing these challenges within the UN, China might consider using regional (whether formal organisations or ad hoc regional groupings) and even national PKOs. Sheng Hongsheng, from the Shanghai University of Political Science and Law, argues that China should anticipate and carry out studies on the legal issues regarding regional PKOs, in order to “enhance the legitimacy and legality of future operations”.^[18] Sheng argues that security in China’s periphery is deteriorating, and that the potential of an outbreak of an armed conflict in China’s own region is increasing. In this context, China is likely to “participate or even lead the organisation and implementation of a regional PKO”.^[19] China’s lead on regional PKOs could follow existing examples whereby regional or intergovernmental organisations have taken the lead, such as the

African Union in Sudan, the Commonwealth of Independent States in Moldova and Tajikistan, the NATO and EU in the former Yugoslavia and Afghanistan, as well as state-led PKOs (France's Operation Turquoise in Rwanda).

Sheng then touches upon the controversies regarding the legal basis of regional PKOs. The main controversy is twofold. The first centres on the question of whether regional organisations have the jurisdiction to deal with international peace and security issues. The second controversy emerges around the question of exhausting whether a regional solution is not feasible before the UNSC considers stepping in to solve the dispute. For Sheng, the legality and legitimacy of a regional PKO rest on two conditions: firstly, it must be carried out based on the UN Charter and the basic documents of the regional organisation. Secondly, it must obtain the approval of the country concerned to carry out any political and diplomatic actions (this relates to the sovereignty principle). Sheng notes that Chapter 8 of the UN Charter sets out provisions to encourage "regional arrangements" to settle international disputes.

In sum, Sheng Hongsheng advocates that regional or state-led PKOs should not replace UNPKOs, but if they are used then they must be based on the UN Charter. In this regard he believes them to be fully legal, and so China should prepare for the possibility of PKOs in its neighbourhood in the future.

Finally, with China's increasing interests in unstable foreign countries, PKOs could prove to be a way to both stabilise a country and protect its own interests at the same time, like in South Sudan. Li takes two examples, which, she says, could serve as references for China: UK's operation in Sierra Leone, and France's operation in Mali. These two operations were launched on the initiative of the two European powers, without a UN mandate, to evacuate foreign citizens (in Sierra Leone) and to support the local army (in Mali), as well as to preserve assets in those countries. China's particular interest in these two operations further supports the notion that China is likely preparing to send national PKO abroad in the future.

Chinese views on the global agenda for development

Marie-Hélène Schwoob

Over the past few years, the position of China on the international stage has gradually evolved, following its rise as an economic power, visible in its rapidly increasing trade and investment flows. China's evolving role has also had implications for its place in global governance, through a greater involvement in activities ranging from United Nations peacekeeping operations (China is by far the biggest contributor of personnel, with more than 3,000 troops and police committed) to contributions to development funds (Xi Jinping pledged \$2 billion in support for the development of poor countries at the Sustainable Development Summit in 2015).

Numerous Chinese scholars have started to rethink China's role and consider new strategies that would help the country offer alternative models for international cooperation and governance for development.

Cui Wenxing, a post-doctoral fellow at Fudan University, writes that there have been three main stages of evolution in China's development policy. Firstly, under Mao, when the country's south-south cooperation was essentially based on political considerations (such as providing assistance to socialist countries).^[20] Secondly, after the reform and opening up, when China shifted its focus essentially to economic cooperation with other countries (in all directions), and, finally, the acceleration of the "going out" movement (走出去 zouchuqu) in the 21st century, when south-south cooperation became a way for China to encourage its enterprises to go abroad and to take part in global development.^[21] Cui believes that both the "going out" movement and China's development agenda provided opportunities for Chinese enterprises for more economic cooperation (for instance, via low interest loans provided to Chinese enterprises in developing countries). For Xu Qiyuan, associate research fellow at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, and Sun Jingying, postdoctoral fellow at Beijing University, even if "it is clear that China is still a developing country", its role has evolved from that of recipient country to one of donor country, and China has

become an important partner of international development agencies.[22] China's role in the development of south-south cooperation has been increasing tremendously. The time has come, say these authors, for China to build a "new global partnership for development" (建新型全球发展伙伴关系 *jian xinxing quanqiu fazhan huoban guanxi*), arguing that this new approach should put aside political issues but focus partnerships on pragmatic interests.[23]

Chinese criticism of the UN development agenda

Chinese scholars point to the imperfections of the development framework that the United Nations has promoted since its foundation in 1945. Some Chinese scholars, such as Xu and Sun, recognise that the UN's development framework managed to gradually mobilise the international community, that it has achieved some level of agreement on key concepts relating to development (such as environmental issues, climate change, or sustainable development goals), and that it has contributed to the formulation of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). However, several problems remain in the view of these authors. Among other issues, they note that the MDGs have had mixed results, such as uneven progress geographically, and areas of development lagging behind, such as universal access to primary education, maternal healthcare, and environmental sustainability.

In addition, they believe that the development framework has sometimes focused too much on political issues – for instance, the controversial conditions attached to aid, which relate to governance, transparency, and human rights. In their view these issues should be separated from a country's development goals. In particular, Xu and Sun argue that donor countries often link environmental aspects of sustainable development to political aspects that oppose the principle of "common but differentiated responsibilities", a phrase which is important to developing countries. Developed countries ("traditional aid countries") indeed usually put emphasis on a "universal" principle of environmental responsibility, resulting in environmental sustainability goals being placed at the forefront of priorities.[24] In addition, for Cui, the "shock therapy" of the World Bank has had significant downsides, by forcing

countries to adopt austerity policies and to engage in market liberalisation over short periods of time, instead of progressively changing policies based on long-term research and experimentation.[25]

China's development agenda and the UN

In the view of Xu, Sun, and Cui, China has implemented a successful economic development model and it has performed well in its progress towards the MDGs, all of which (in their view) relate to Deng Xiaoping's development paradigm "crossing the river by feeling the stones" (摸着石头过河 *mozhe shitou guohe*), which provided a smoother alternative to the shock therapy of the World Bank.[26] However, the author/authors believes that there is a role for China to play in redefining a more balanced global partnership for development, that would better reflect the rise of south-south cooperation and the growing role of emerging economies.[27]

Xu, Sun, and Cao Jiahan (assistant research fellow at the Research Institute of Comparative Politics and Public Policy) recognise that the new role that China could play at the global level should take into account organisations which already exist, such as the development agencies of traditional aid countries or the UN agencies in charge of implementing the 2030 Development Agenda. For them, connecting Chinese development initiatives to the agenda of these organisations could indeed help increase trust in these initiatives. The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), in particular, has recently raised some concerns in the international community, in Western countries in particular. For Cao, connecting the BRI agenda to the United Nations' 2030 Development Agenda could be a way to "increase trust and dispel doubts" (增信释疑 *zengxin shiyi*) and to exert greater international influence, as the BRI represents "an attempt by China to explore a new model of international cooperation for development and global governance". [28]

Chinese scholars insist on the similarities that exist between the two agendas. The BRI indeed aims to bring economic development to a number of countries where the gross national product per capita is less than half the world average. They believe this

will create a new impetus in world economic growth and lay the foundations of regional peace and stability. Cui draws a link between the BRI's focus on developing infrastructure and global partnerships, two priorities that are also included in the 2030 Development Agenda.

While China could continue to export its “poverty reduction model with Chinese characteristics” through such initiatives, thus further enhancing the country's soft power, both Cao and Cui, in particular, acknowledge that the country will face challenges if it does so. For the BRI, challenges include security challenges as well as a clash of different views: central Asia is often considered the “backyard” of Russia, which might not look favourably on such initiatives, and the United States is looking at alternative connectivity models, which could compete with BRI. Other challenges might emerge if China takes further part in international development initiatives, such as labour issues and environmental concerns. Cao notes, however, that because “ecological civilisation” was listed as one of the five goals in China's development plan at the 18th National Congress in 2012, Beijing pushed Chinese enterprises to take the safeguard of the environment more seriously. Cui believes non-state actors should be given a more important role in China's development agenda, noting that China, which often relies on government-to-government partnerships in the framework of south-south cooperation, should involve a wider diversity of players, such as civil society or private stakeholders. Cao reinforces the view that non-state actors from civil society organisations and the private sector should play a more active role in China's new type of global partnership for development. So far, mostly government departments such as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Finance, and the Ministry of Commerce have dominated China's development agenda.

In sum, China needs to overcome a range of challenges if it wants to further develop and participate further in global development. In order to overcome such challenges, Beijing will need to develop and strengthen different cooperation platforms. These could range from “platforms with Chinese characteristics” such as the BRI Fund, or platforms connected to the United Nations process, such as the platforms of the WTO, or the G77 promoting south-south cooperation.[\[29\]](#)

China's views on the UNHRC

Kata Isenring-Szabó

As a founding member of the Human Rights Council (UNHRC) in 2006 and party to more than 20 international human rights conventions and protocols, China regards its UNHRC membership as a sign of greater involvement in international affairs. There is no doubt that China's perspective on the subject of human rights differs from the Western perspective and is often contested. This is reflected both in the country's activity at the UN and in Chinese scholars' own writings.

Having been re-elected to the UNHRC for the third time by the UN General Assembly (UNGA), China increasingly uses the intergovernmental body to strengthen its own agenda-setting power as well as that of developing countries. Chinese scholars Liu Huawen and Sun Meng welcome the institutional reforms the UN has introduced over time and the mainstreaming of human rights. However, they are both convinced that the deeply rooted political and ideological differences between UNHRC members will burden the future development of the institution.

Intensifying participation throughout history

“All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights, endowed with reason and conscience, and should be treated in the spirit of brotherhood.”

Universal Declaration of Human Rights

Liu Huawen, secretary-general of the Center for Human Rights Studies at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS), notes that from its earliest days Chinese scholars have been contributing to international human rights legislation. For example, the word “conscience” in the above quote from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights came from Chinese representative Zhang Pengchun, who based his proposal on Confucian values.

China maintained its proactive stance over the years and obtained member status at the Human Rights Commission at the UN Economic and Social Council in 1984. Since then, China has continually delegated human rights experts to the Human Rights Commission.^[30]

China welcomed the establishment of the Human Rights Council in 2006, as it came after a period of time in which its predecessor, the UN Commission on Human Rights, had “lost its credibility” among developing nations, as Liu puts it, “as it only discussed human rights issues in developing countries and never in western European or northern American countries”. Although the resolution which established the UNHRC passed with an overwhelming majority, the fact that the United States and Israel voted against it, and that Venezuela, Iran, and Belarus abstained, was a sign that political differences did not disappear with the creation of the new institution.^[31]

Constructing a “community of common destiny”

Despite existing political and ideological differences between members, China constantly looks for ways to contribute to the reform of the international system of human rights management. By doing so, the country is “breaking the Western monopoly of discourse in human rights issues” and “promotes a more just and fair international human rights system” – so says Ma Zhaoxu, permanent representative of China to the United Nations in Geneva in an interview with the People’s Daily.^[32]

Adopting resolution 35/21 in June 2017 was a milestone on this path: for the first time in the history of the UNHRC the resolution was initiated by China. Moreover, as Ma

Zhaoxu points out, the resolution (named “Contribution of development to the enjoyment of all human rights”), “truly reflects General Secretary Xi Jinping’s policy of *Constructing a community of human destiny* and at the same time, it contributes to the reform of the global governance system.” With the help of resolution 35/21, China put forward a series of initiatives that focus on poverty reduction, reflecting the interests and aspirations of many developing countries, says Ma.^[33]

Welcoming NGOs?

Sun Meng, associate professor at the Institute for Human Rights, China University of Political Science and Law, writes that non-governmental organisations have an important bridging role in countries and territories where the UN cannot supervise due to lack of access. “By coordinating the interests of all parties, NGOs can further the supervisory role of UN human rights mechanisms and thus gradually promote the development of human rights”.^[34]

Liu argues that NGOs have an important role in promoting transparency and democracy in the practice of international organisations and international law. The reality, however, is that the voice of NGOs has become “amplified”, in Liu’s view, mostly due to the development of communications technology, modern transport, and the widespread use of the internet. This has greatly promoted the exposure of human rights issues. Liu welcomes the fact that NGOs actively promote and popularise UN human rights treaties, promote the implementation of human rights conventions, and directly participate in UN human rights work and activities. In his view, the activities of the NGO in the international arena empower the United Nations human rights mechanisms and create a “tremendous boost to the international human rights movement”. The author believes that this development can cover the shortcomings of international human rights law implementation. Nevertheless, he notes that while maintaining a positive attitude towards the rise and participation of non-governmental organisations, China should also be cautious about the complexity of their role.

Liu points out that the activities of NGOs in their home countries and abroad are intertwined and thus pose a jurisdictional problem. The CASS expert argues that, on the one hand, the unprecedented degree of international attention and participation in human rights issues has played a positive role in the development of the UN and its expansion. On the other hand, due to the uneven development of the world, not every stakeholder has the same chance to participate.

“Developed countries have the advantages of capital, language and international exchange capabilities. Their non-governmental organisations are obviously more active than those in developing countries, leading to imbalances in the representation of non-governmental organisations in the United Nations.”^[35]

Liu also criticises NGOs that ignore international law during their actions and confuse domestic and international human rights activism.

Liu also mentions that during the second cycle of the Universal Periodic Review (which started in 2012), there has been a new development in the form of NGOs from China participating.^[36]

According to United Nations regulations, NGOs can organise “side events” during deliberations to introduce and discuss the human rights situation in the countries concerned.

During this time, representatives of Chinese NGOs such as the All-China Women’s Federation, the China Society for Human Rights Studies, and the China International Exchange Association appeared among others at the Palace of Nations in Geneva and organised three side events around the themes of “Promotion of Women’s Rights in China”, “Human Rights in China: An Integrated Approach”, and “China’s Non-Governmental Organisations and Human Rights”. Speakers included NGO employees, Chinese human rights experts, and foreign China-watchers. Liu also attended the side event and witnessed personally how Chinese NGOs briefed the international

community on specific issues and development paths in the field of human rights in China. Considering that the participation of NGOs in the field of human rights in Western countries is self-evident, Liu regards the work of Chinese NGOs as increasingly significant – especially their activities abroad and their cooperation with the UN.^[37]

Constructive criticism

Liu suggests that the UN needs to “consolidate its achievements in the field of human rights”. Even though the current human rights approach of the UN is encouraging, there is the danger of over-politicisation and radicalisation. Despite the fact that the basic legal principles required by the UN Human Rights Council are non-political, non-confrontational and non-selective, ideological disagreements and influence-seeking between member states will continue to exist for a long time to come and will require the UN and its member states to deal with them properly.^[38]

Sun rejoices that the formerly fragmented nature of the UN human rights mechanisms has clearly changed for the better since the end of the 20th century, especially after mainstreaming human rights became imperative in the UN and overall oversight of UN human rights mechanisms was significantly strengthened. At the same time, she also argues that human rights mechanisms are plagued by problems of politicisation, lack of resources, and institutional design flaws.^[39]

Specifically, Sun finds that there is a huge gap between available resources and required functions, meaning there is a lack of both human rights experts and administrators as well as financial resources. She finds the lack of funding especially worrying as it “shows the lack of political will on the part of the member states”. She warns: “if the financial issue cannot be solved effectively, it endangers the survival of the entire UN human rights mechanism”. Moreover, Sun also identifies overlapping functions and the lack of follow-up operations as a problem. The above-mentioned shortcomings have made the UN human rights mechanism, which was already critically resource-hungry, even more overwhelming and have imposed a heavy

workload on the member states.[\[40\]](#)

Sun recalls that the UN has successfully coped with similar problems in the past by integrating its human rights mechanisms with other UN agencies and external agencies as well as non-governmental organisations, “mainstreaming human rights, and strengthening international human rights supervision through multilateral cooperation. Indeed, measures like this enable the UN to “create a sound international image of human rights.”[\[41\]](#)

About China Analysis

The Chinese have long been obsessed with strategic culture, power balances and geopolitical shifts. Academic institutions, think-tanks, journals and web-based debates are growing in number and quality, giving China's foreign policy breadth and depth.

China Analysis introduces European audiences to these debates inside China's expert and think-tank world and helps the European policy community understand how China's leadership thinks about domestic and foreign policy issues.

While freedom of expression and information remain restricted in China's media, these published sources and debates provide an important way of understanding emerging trends within China. Each issue of China Analysis focuses on a specific theme and draws mainly on Chinese mainland sources. However, it also monitors content in Chinese-language publications from Hong Kong and Taiwan, which occasionally include news and analysis that is not published in the mainland and reflects the diversity of Chinese thinking.

About the authors

François Godement is director of the Asia & China programme and a senior policy fellow at the European Council on Foreign Relations. He is also a non-resident senior associate of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace in Washington, DC, and an outside consultant for the Policy Planning Staff of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs. He can be reached at francois.godement@ecfr.eu.

Marc Julienne is a PhD candidate at INALCO, as well as a research fellow with the Foundation for Strategic Research (FRS) in Paris. His research focuses on China's security and defence policy, especially on counter-terrorism strategies. He can be reached at m.julienne@frstrategie.org.

Moritz Rudolf is founder of Eurasia Bridges and is currently pursuing his PhD in international law. His dissertation focuses on how China shapes the international legal order. He can be reached at moritz.rudolf@eurasia-bridges.com.

Kata Isenring-Szabó is a China-observer with a special interest in political and business cooperation between China and Europe. She currently holds two researcher positions. At the Center for Comparative and International Studies of ETH Zurich, she analyses Hungarian parliamentary debates within the ‘Constructing Europe’s borders: Membership Discourses and European Integration’ project, which is funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation. Kata holds another research position, at the Swiss Chinese Case Study Center, University of Zurich, where she is currently working on a Swiss-Chinese business case study collection. She can be reached at kata.szabo@eup.gess.ethz.ch.

Marie-Helene Schwoob is an agronomist and political scientist (PhD) and research fellow at the Institute for Sustainable Development and International Relations (Iddri). Her main research areas focus on the transformation of agriculture and food systems in the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals – systems which she has investigated in various developed and developing countries. She is involved in projects conducted in partnership with research centres such as Wageningen University and under the aegis of UN-SDSN and the European Commission. Marie-Hélène was previously responsible for implementing the Energy-Environment programme at the Asia Centre think-tank, before joining Iddri in 2011 to contribute to research on agriculture and food, in parallel with a doctorate at CERI (Sciences Po Paris) on Chinese agricultural modernisation (thesis defended in 2015). In addition to her research activities, Marie-Hélène also teaches at Sciences Po Paris, Paris Dauphine University, and Paris Sud University, and is a member of the Demeter editorial board. She can be reached at marie.schwoob@sciencespo.fr.

Angela Stanzel is editor of China Analysis and a senior policy fellow on the Asia and China Programme at the European Council on Foreign Relations. Before joining ECFR, she worked for the BMW Foundation and the International Affairs Office of the Koerber Foundation in Berlin. Prior to that, Angela worked in Brussels for the German Marshall Fund of the United States (Asia Programme) and in Beijing at the German

Embassy (cultural section). Her research work focuses on the foreign and security policy of east Asia and south Asia. You can reach her at angela.stanzel@ecfr.eu.

Footnotes

[1] Wang Wenfeng (ed.), “The Future of the UN Reform and Global Governance” (联合国改革与全球治理的未来), http://www.cicir.ac.cn/chinese/Article_6822.html. Wang Wenfeng is a senior researcher at the China Institute of Contemporary International Relations. He is also the editor of “Contemporary International Relations”. Authors of the study include: Wang Honggang, the director of the Institute of World Politics; researcher Sun Ru; associate professor Fu Yu; assistant researcher Yao Kun; and researcher Fang Hua.

[2] Chen Xulong, “A Way Forward for the UN Reform” (联合国改革的出路), http://www.ciis.org.cn/chinese/2015-10/28/content_8331768.htm. Chen Xulong is director of the International Institute for Strategic Studies, at the China Institute of International Studies (CIIS).

[3] Li Dongyan, “Development stages of pushing for UN Reform” (时代发展推动联合国改革), Chinese Journal of Social Science No 810, 18 September 2015, available at http://www.cass.cn/xueshuchengguo/guojijianjiuxuebu/201509/t20150918_2372478.html. Li is a global governance research fellow at the Institute of World Economics and Politics of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences.

[4] Mao Ruipeng, “Debate and Group Reorganisation – Security Council Reform at the Intergovernmental Negotiation Stage” (争论焦点和集团重组政府间谈判阶段的安理会改革), International Outlook, 2017, Issue 1, available at <http://www.sis.org.cn/UploadFiles/file/20170324/201701006%20毛瑞鹏.pdf>. Mao is an associate professor at the School of Law at the Shanghai University of International Business and Economics.

[5] In September 1992, India and 35 other states suggested putting UNSC reform on the agenda of the UN General Assembly (UNGA) and joined Japan and Germany in submitting a draft resolution calling for the consideration of this issue in there (adopted on 11 December 1992, [A/RES/47/62](#)). This led to the establishment of a working group in 1993 (3 December 1993, [A/RES/48/26](#)). In 1997, the “[Razali Reform Paper](#)” proposed the expansion of the UNSC by nine to 24 seats (five permanent, including two for developed and three for developing countries and four non-permanent members with two-year terms). Together with Italy, developing countries objected strongly and on 23 November 1998 they put forward a resolution which succeeded in stalling the debate ([A/RES/53/30](#)).

[6] The G4 formally submitted a draft framework resolution on the reform of the UNSC on 6 July 2005 ([A/59/L.64](#)) and proposed an expansion of the UN Security Council to include six new permanent (with limited veto power) and four non-permanent members. In opposition to this, the UfC Group, including countries like Italy, South Korea, and Pakistan, jointly submitted a draft resolution on to the UNGA calling for an addition of 10 non-permanent members on two-year terms ([A/59/L.68](#)). The African Union (AU) agreed to the “[Ezulwini Consensus](#)” as a further competing proposal, calling for: two permanent seats for African states selected by the AU with full veto power. None of the proposals was able to gain the necessary support in the UNGA.

[7] Zhang Guihong, “Where is the path to UN reform?” (联合国改革，路在何方？), Global Times, 20 September 2017, available at <http://opinion.huanqiu.com/hqpl/2017-09/11264228.html>. Zhang Guihong is the director of the UN Research Center of Fudan University.

[8] Li Dongyan, “UN and the Maintenance of International Peace and Security” (联合国与国际和平与安全的维护), World Economics and Politics, April 2015, (hereafter, Li, “UN and the Maintenance of International Peace and Security”).

[9] UN Peacekeeping, “Contributors to UN Peacekeeping Operations by Country and Post”, 31 January 2018.

[10] “China is Here for Peace, Remarks by H.E. Xi Jinping President of the People’s Republic of China At the United Nations Peacekeeping Summit”, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the PRC, 28 September 2015, available at http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjdt_665385/zyjh_665391/t1305410.shtml.

[11] “Ministry of Public Security Peacekeeping Standing Police Force set up” (公安部常备维和警队挂牌成立), Ministry of Public Security, 23 December 2016.

[12] “Chinese troops 8,000-strong UN Peacekeeping Standing Force registration” (中国军队完成大规模联合国维和待命部队注册), Ministry of National Defence of the PRC, 28 September 2017.

[13] “China’s representative elaborated China’s position on the issue of the UN Peacekeeping Police” (中国代表阐述中国关于联合国维和警察问题立场), *Xinhua*, 6 November 2017 (hereafter, “China’s representative elaborated China’s position on the issue of the UN Peacekeeping Police”).

[14] “China’s representative elaborated China’s position on the issue of the UN Peacekeeping Police”.

[15] “Statement by Ambassador Li Baodong to the Security Council Public Debate on the Issue of Security and Development” (李保东大使在安全与发展的关联问题安理会公开辩论会上的发言), Permanent Mission of the PRC to the UN, 11 February 2011.

[16] “Wang Yi chairs the Security Council public debate on the maintenance of international peace and security” (王毅主持安理会维护国际和平与安全公开辩论会), Permanent Mission of the PRC to the UN, 23 February 2015.

[17] Li, “UN and the Maintenance of International Peace and Security”.

[18] Sheng Hongsheng, “Study on the Legal issues of China’s participation to Regional Peacekeeping Operations” (中国参与区域维和行动的法律问题研究), *Jiangxi Social Sciences*, October 2017, (hereafter, Sheng, “Study on the Legal issues of China’s participation to Regional Peacekeeping Operations”).

[19] Sheng, “Study on the Legal issues of China’s participation to Regional Peacekeeping Operations”.

[20] “South-south cooperation” is the term generally applied by Chinese scholars to cooperation with “non-Western” countries.

[21] Cui Wenjian, “The 2030 Agenda for Development and China’s south-south cooperation” (年可持续发展议程与中国的南南合作), SIIS, Edition No. 1, 2016.

[22] Xi Qiayuan and Sun Jingying, “The evolution of the UN’s Agenda for Development and China’s participation” (联合国发展议程演进与中国的参与), CASS, Edition No. 4, February 2015.

[23] Cao Jiahua, “The “One Belt One Road” Initiative and the 2030 Agenda for Development: linking the two agendas (一带一路倡议与年可持续发展议程的对接), SIIS, 13 March 2016, available at <http://www.siis.org.cn/Research/Info/651>.

[24] Xi Qiayuan and Sun Jingying, “The evolution of the UN’s Agenda for Development and China’s participation” (联合国发展议程演进与中国的参与), CASS, Edition No. 4, February 2015.

[25] Cui Wenjian, "The 2030 Agenda for Development and China's south-south cooperation" (年可持续发展议程与中国的南南合作), SIIS, Edition No. 1, 2016.

[26] Cui Wenjian, "The 2030 Agenda for Development and China's south-south cooperation" (年可持续发展议程与中国的南南合作), SIIS, Edition No. 1, 2016.

[27] Cao Jiahua, "The 'One Belt One Road' Initiative and the 2030 Agenda for Development: linking the two agendas (一带一路倡议与年可持续发展议程的对接), SIIS, 13 March 2016, available at <http://www.sis.org.cn/Research/Info/651>.

[28] Cao Jiahua, "The 'One Belt One Road' Initiative and the 2030 Agenda for Development: linking the two agendas (一带一路倡议与年可持续发展议程的对接), SIIS, 13 March 2016, available at <http://www.sis.org.cn/Research/Info/651>.

[29] Cao Jiahua, "The 'One Belt One Road' Initiative and the 2030 Agenda for Development: linking the two agendas (一带一路倡议与年可持续发展议程的对接), SIIS, 13 March 2016, available at <http://www.sis.org.cn/Research/Info/651>.

[30] Liu Huawen (2015), "The international protection of the UN and human rights" (联合国与人权的国际保护世界经济与政治) (4), 23-42, (hereafter, Liu "The international protection of the UN and human rights").

[31] Liu, "The international protection of the UN and human rights".

[32] Li Yongqun (2017), "Providing a Chinese programme for global human rights governance" (为全球人权治理提供中国方案), Renmin Ribao, 24 June 2017 http://paper.people.com.cn/rmrb/html/2017-06/24/nw.D110000renmr_20170624_2-11.htm, (hereafter, Yongqun, "Providing a Chinese programme for global human rights governance").

[33] Yongqun, "Providing a Chinese programme for global human rights governance".

[34] Sun Meng (2017), "Views on the integration of UN human rights mechanisms" (论联合国人权机制的整合). In: World Economy and Politics (世界经济与政治) (7), 118-132, (hereafter, Sun, "Views on the integration of UN human rights mechanisms").

[35] Liu, "The international protection of the UN and human rights".

[36] During the Universal Periodic Review, human rights records of all UN member states are reviewed under the auspices of the Human Rights Council. This unique process aims to improve the human rights situation in all countries and address human rights violations if needed.

[37] Liu, "The international protection of the UN and human rights".

[38] Liu, "The international protection of the UN and human rights".

[39] Sun, "Views on the integration of UN human rights mechanisms".

[40] Sun, "Views on the integration of UN human rights mechanisms".

[41] Sun, "Views on the integration of UN human rights mechanisms".

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