

The Rise of China and Its Growing Role in International Organizations

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In recent years China's rise has inspired megabytes of discussions and debates. Needless to say, China's rise has influenced the international structure dramatically. However at the same time, there is another phenomenon paralleling the rise of China. In other words, China has been playing a more and more important role in all kinds of international organizations in fields ranging from economics to security to culture, the environment, and so on. In a sense, China's growing role in all kinds of international organizations is part of the story of China's rise. The Chinese government has attached more and more importance to international organizations than ever before. On November 8th, 2010, an article entitled "China Defines Its New Role in International Organizations" appeared in the authoritative state-owned newspaper *People's Daily* (*Renmin Ribao*), which could be recognized as China's full consciousness of the importance of international organizations and its public declaration of a comprehensive engagement with international organizations².

International organizations have been playing more and more important roles in international society. According to the latest statistics from the Union of International Organizations, there are now 63,993 international organizations, in all forms and disciplines³. The depth and breadth a country engages itself in international organizations reveal whether its diplomacy is mature or not. That's primarily why China, as a

rising power with increasing stakes in international society, is attaching more and more importance to its deepening and expanding engagement with various international organizations.

However, China did not take an active stance towards international organizations for quite a long time after the war. Since the reform and open-up policy in the late 1970s, China has gradually changed its attitude and policy towards international organizations. The past decades witnessed a transformation of four stages in China's attitude toward international organizations. First, firmly opposing international organizations; second, holding reserved caution about international organizations; third, joining international organizations actively; fourth, taking the leadership in many international organizations and initiating new forums and organizations. The incentives behind this changing policy toward international organizations lie in several aspects. First of all, globalization has made China closely associated with other countries as interdependence accelerates; second, China has benefited from engaging in international organizations and it could not continue to grow unless it keeps on being involved in international organizations; third, China's rise has generated requests for leadership and participation from other countries, and therefore China must bear international responsibility. Currently the biggest agenda item that China is faced with concerning its role in international organizations is, how to correctly function in a leadership

position in international society and push forward the multi-polarization of the international system and enhance the effectiveness of the resolution of diverse international issues such as non-proliferation, poverty, global warming and so on.

I. From Resistance to Embrace: the Evolving Process

Just as a leading Chinese scholar pointed out, China's relationship with international organizations has experienced a process from denial to admitting, from playing common roles to striving for important positions, from highlighting domestic necessities to more concern about international image. The transformation reflects the changes in the perspectives from which Chinese leaders view the outside world, as well as China's necessities with regard to international organizations⁴.

In general, the process of China's engagement with international organizations can be divided into four stages. The first stage was from 1949 to 1971. China resisted participation in international organizations and had very limited connections with very few international organizations in this period. This was a time when China was outside the UN system, and ideologically impacted by the confrontational and antagonistic Cold War mentality. The basic situation China faced was isolation from international society, which limited its participation in and shaped its attitude towards international organizations. The view that Chinese leaders held about international organizations at this stage was rather negative and even hateful. China did not participate in the international organizations, basically because China did not trust the guidelines of any international organization. The speeches delivered by Premier

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Zhou Enlai and other leaders then showed that China was conservative and prudent about the UN and other international organizations. In China's view, these international organizations were controlled by western powers while third world countries had little leverage. Thus it reflected the inequality of international political reality⁵. Under such circumstances, China had very limited choices. The first was to link with the international organizations in the socialism camp. The second was to develop relationships with international organizations in developing country blocs. Some direct examples were the Geneva Conference in 1954 at which Premier Zhou Enlai famously put forward the Five Principles of Peaceful Co-existence (*Heping Gongchu Wuxiang Yuzhanze*), and the Asian-African Conference or Bandung Conference in 1955 which convened most of the Third World countries, as well as China's intimate relationships with the Group of 77 and Non-aligned Movement. Meanwhile, China also had never given up its effort to resume its legitimate seat in the UN.

The second stage was from 1971 to 1978. In this period China gradually came to take some steps in its participation in international organizations. Actually in the 1970s even after China had regained its seat in the UN, it did not choose to engage in diplomacy with many international organizations as some predicted and anticipated, instead it still held a passive stance. This could be explained from two aspects. One was that in the 1970s the UN was still the competing arena for the US and the Soviet Union under the framework of the Cold War. The other more profound reason lay in China's domestic factor. China's diplomatic conceptions and foreign policies had been influenced by the Cultural Revolution and the ultra-leftist ideology. China thought of the UN as

the tool of the capitalist controlled by the US and the Soviet Union. Therefore China only took the UN as a formal forum in the period, with little expectation for it to maintain world peace. Though China did not take active steps in participating in the UN and some other major international organizations, its attitude had changed a lot compared to the first stage. Therefore, it tried to establish connections with some social and cultural organizations. For example, China joined a series of organizations in non-political areas within the UN system, such as UNDP and UNESCO, and also resumed and developed its relationship with the International Olympic Committee, International Standards Organization, and so on.

The third stage was from 1978 to 1989. From 1978, China confirmed its reform and open-up policy, and strengthened its interaction and communication with the outside world, which in turn led to a boom in its participation in international organizations. In this period, China not only developed its relationship with international political organizations, but also began to establish relationships with organizations in wide-ranging areas like economic, trade, finance, culture and scientific technology, and so on⁶. Particularly after entering the 1980s, Deng Xiaoping advocated that China should both struggle and cooperate in foreign affairs including within the international organizations, aiming at establishing a new international order based on the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence. Therefore when Deng was in power, the number of international organizations China participated in and the breadth and depth of its participation were unprecedented comparing to Mao's era. The essence of Deng's strategy on international organizations was to obtain a stable and peaceful international envi-

ronment for domestic economical development by acknowledging the existing international institutions⁷. The most evident was the significantly expanded participation in economic and financial organizations. This was largely due to the central strategy of concentrating on economic development as the major national goal, which was confirmed by the Third Plenary Session of the 11th Central Committee (*Shiyijie Sanzhong Quanhui*). The direct reason was the foreign investment and capital for booming economic development. Deng Xiaoping, the general strategist and architect of China's reform and open-up policy, pointed out that China must first fulfill its economic modernization, which means the Chinese economy must shift from the Stalinist model to an independent one relying more on export. Therefore participation in major international organizations became indispensable⁸. In 1980, China regained its membership in the most influential international economic and financial organizations such as the IMF, the World Bank, and also formally joined the ADB (Asian Development Bank) in 1986. Through these major organizations, China obtained large volumes of funds and aids to construct the infrastructures nationwide which were fundamentally important for the preliminary stage of economic development. Apart from economic organizations, China also began to show its interest in organizations concerning peace keeping, disarmament and arms control. Before the 1980s, China used to resist UN peace keeping operations, since China held the view that an intervention by a UN controlled by hegemonic powers could never be justice. With the rapprochement in the late 1980s, and the alleviation of the confrontation between the US and the Soviet Union, China began to build its confidence in UN peace keeping. For example, in 1984, China proposed its seven

principles for UN peace keeping operations. In 1988 China formally became a member of the UN Peace Keeping Special Committee.

The fourth stage was the post-Cold War era, from 1990 until now. During this period, China not only has comprehensively expanded and deepened its engagement in a diversity of international organizations, but also has tried to play a more and more active and leading role in many organizations. At the initial stage, because of the 1989 Tiananmen Incident, China was once strictly sanctioned and isolated by the Western countries. Therefore, to break through the predicament, China tried hard to promote and strengthen multilateral diplomacy in international organizations, and gradually formed a strategy of highlighting both bilateral and multilateral diplomacy. From the middle of 1990s, as China's economic and military power began to grow at high rates, the "China threat" claim also rapidly gained momentum in some Western and neighboring countries. To avoid being perceived as a threat and deliver a more transparent and accountable image, China made efforts to show its responsibility by contributing to the activities in many international organizations. Needless to say, in this period, the depth and breadth of China's participation in international organization has dramatically increased. Nowadays almost in all the major international organizations covering all the areas, politics, economics, security, military, environment, climate, culture, etc, China's voice can be heard. In 2003, the number of influential international governmental organizations (IGOs) that China joined was 41, accounting for 91.11% of that of the US. In 1996, this number was only 70%⁹. This marked a remarkable growth in China's participation.

Most importantly, there are some milestones

ICCS Journal of Modern Chinese Studies Vol.4 (1) 2011 of China's unprecedented expansion of engagement in international organizations, and the dramatic change in its attitude towards international organizations. For example, after long years of pursuit, China was finally awarded membership in the WTO in 2001. Even though entering the WTO meant not all opportunities but also tremendous challenges, particularly for China's agriculture which was by no means competitive internationally, this was among the most encouraging events in the year. In the same year, China convened some Asian countries and established the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, and the annual Boao Forum based in Hainan Province in China was also initiated. These two events manifested that China had become so active as to take the leadership of establishing and initiate new international organizations or forums. One thing which is also worth noting is that in the same year, China successfully won the bid for the 2008 Olympic Games. Owing to these enormous strides that China has made in its engagement with international organizations, some people thus even argued that the year 2001 marked the watershed when China began to really connect with the world. What's more, as the new century unfolds, when China's economic development has no sign of slowing down, its influence in international organization and its position in international society have been also experiencing another tide. That is part of the reason why some people claim that the 21st century would be China's century; at least the first ten years saw the unprecedented ascent of China's international position.

II. Comprehensive Engagement and the Incentives

ICCS Journal of Modern Chinese Studies Vol.4 (1) 2011 introduction on international organizations vividly reflected this rising power's strategic vision on multilateral diplomacy and comprehensive engagement with international organizations. This book says, "As a great power in the world, China has gradually become an important force in the international society, therefore we must intimately cooperate and coordinate with the United Nations and other international organizations, and play an active role in these organizations. Only by doing so, China can do more contribution to the international society."¹⁰ It is publicly recognized that in recent years China's influence has been increasing tremendously. A direct manifestation is the growing number of senior officials in some leading international organizations. Below is a general review of Chinese nationals appointed top-ranked positions in some of the most influential international organizations in recent years¹¹.

As mentioned above, China was initially not active in participating in international organizations. Its expanding and deepening engagement in international organizations is a gradually evolving historical process. The basic characteristic of China's current participation in international organizations can be summarized as a comprehensive engagement with all kinds of international organizations in wide-ranging areas. After doubt, hesitation, reappraisal, reflection, and reconsideration, China has completely abandoned its old-style of thinking about international organizations. Instead, it has set up a new national strategy of engaging international organizations, making enormous efforts to join in addressing common global agendas through international organizations, attaching significant importance to multilateral diplomacy in international organizations. A textbook for college students offering a general

Name	Position	Assuming Year
Margaret Chan Fung Fu-chun	Director-General of WHO	2007
Sha Zukang	Under-Secretary-General of UN	2007
Lin Yifu	Chief Economist and Senior Vice President of World Bank	2008
Zhu Min	Special Advisor to the Managing Director of IMF	2010
Zhang Yuejiao	Justice of Dispute Settlement Body of WTO	2008
He Changchui	Deputy Director-General of UN FAO	2009
Wang Binying	Vice Director-General of WIPO	2010

As a result, China gains more and more interest from international organizations, as well as contributes more and more to international organizations. Certainly more and more responsibility has been expected from China. In such a context, China has promptly adjusted its policy and

become more devoted to give rather than to gain. Centered on the UN and other leading international governmental organizations, China has proactively increased its international contribution in recent years. One thing worth noting is that China has significantly and actively expanded its

commitments to UN operations. For example, China has raised its share of membership fees from 0.7% at the end of the 20th century to 2.053% in 2005, 2.677% in 2009, and a further promotion to 3.189% in 2010. Meanwhile, its peacekeeping fees share also increased from 3.147% in 2009 to 3.939% in 2010. In addition, China is now dispatching the largest number of peacekeeping personnel among the Security Council members. In 2010, China continued to promise to provide more aid to other developing countries for the Millennium Development Goal of UN, including constructing schools, dispatching medical personnel, developing clean energy and ecological programs, reducing debts for the least developed countries, and so forth¹².

The underpinning incentives for China's fiercely changed attitude towards international organizations and its expanding strategic engagement are multifaceted. First, engaging with international organizations serves China's national interests and helps amplify its hard and soft power. Needless to say, China has received a lot of economic benefits from economic and financial organizations. This is an important contributing factor for China's past three decades of economic growth. Its participation in security dialogue and cultural communication also assured peaceful relationships with most neighboring countries and enhanced mutual understanding. Second, China has changed its view on the principle of sovereignty under the circumstance of globalization. The increasing trend toward global interdependence has accelerated in the 1990s, encouraging the evolution of some of the central concepts underpinning international systems, including, fundamentally, the institution of state sovereignty¹³. Globalization and global governance has put nation states in a position of dilemma to some extent,

ICCS Journal of Modern Chinese Studies Vol.4 (1) 2011 as they are required to expose more and more internal affairs to the international society. Thus participation in international regimes means that part of the sovereignty must be transferred to the international society. With the humiliating historical experience of being invaded territorially, China has long been extremely sensitive and cautious about sovereignty. However, from the 1990s, it has gradually become acceptable for sovereignty transfer within international regimes. Third, ideology and value have experienced considerable transformation. In the Cold War era, ideology to a large extent influenced China's foreign relations, and thus determined its attitude toward international organizations. International organization diplomacy was limited by a confrontational mentality and the highlight on values in foreign policy. With the dilution of ideology in Chinese leaders' world outlook and the practice of foreign policy decision-making, international organization diplomacy has become active and ramped up. So far China's officials have said that although China has a distinctive political system and ideology, it can cooperate with other countries based on shared interest—although not, the suggestion seems to be, on shared values¹⁴. Fourth, China has become more and more committed to its international responsibility and national image. China has long been plagued by the China threat perception in the West and its neighboring countries. To neutralize the threat perception, China has conveyed clearly its devoted adherence to a peaceful rise in the past decade. However, the criticism and accusation of lacking transparency from Western countries never sees an end. Therefore, China determined to go out to show its commitment to peace and address its willingness to cooperate on the platform provided by various international organizations.

ICCS Journal of Modern Chinese Studies Vol.4 (1) 2011 national environment changes, the newly-emerging forum type of international organizations such as G20 have become more and more influential in many transnational agendas. This would definitely diversify the cooperation and interaction among different international actors. The third and the most important is that the decision-making institution is experiencing dramatic change. For quite a long time after the Second World War, developed countries have almost dominated all the right of decision-making in major international governmental organizations. However, developing countries are awarded more and more share of the right to make decisions and set up rules¹⁵.

While the international organizations and the international regimes are facing the agenda of structural reform, China itself also has the urgency to adjust its relationship with international regimes, including its foreign policy orientations with regard to international regimes. The international order is proceeding towards a more multi-polarized and cooperative one, which poses both opportunities and challenges for states. Robert Keohane, the founder of the theory of international regimes, famously noted that if world political economy is to continue to exist, the primary political dilemma would be how to organize international co-operations without hegemony¹⁶. And moreover, the nexus between states and international organizations has become far more indispensable than ever before. A country's influence in major international organizations can be transformed into effective leverages in terms of hard or soft power. Without exception, China must adapt its engagement with international regimes to the rapidly changing world situation. There are a series of questions to be considered and reflected on with regard to China's relation-

III. Shifting Regimes and Rising State

Both the current international regimes and the rising China are experiencing dramatic changes. In the context of fiercely undergoing globalization, with the compression of time and space made possible by modern technology, world politics has changed accordingly. First of all, nation-states are no longer the sole major entities in international society. More and more influential international organizations have risen up to play as global actors. Liberalists in international relations argue that international regimes have the function of attracting and persuading countries to be more cooperative; especially mature and institutionalized regimes with effective regulations and rules could spur states to cooperate while prevent them from conflicts. As the major components of international regimes, international organizations are not only becoming more and more important, but also experiencing profound changes.

The change of international organizations in international regimes under the current world situation could be elaborated from three aspects. First, the agenda focuses of international organizations have changed from high politics, namely, the traditional military security issues, international conflicts, peace and war to a series of low politics issues, such as non-traditional security, economic and financial crisis, social problems, environmental and energy issues, large-scale epidemics, and so on. Second, the types of international organizations are also experiencing some change, which in turn results in a change in the cooperation approach among states in the organizations. In the past, the concerted organization has been the prevailing type. Nowadays as the inter-

ship with international organizations in the new world contour and global landscape of international regimes. For instance, how to deal with the relationship between multilateral cooperation and the maintenance of national sovereignty; how to balance the participation in Western-led international regimes and the protection of China's own national interests; how to utilize international organizations as a useful platform to convince the international society that China is committed to a peaceful rise, and so on.

Given the transformation that international regimes are experiencing, specifically speaking, there are several aspects that China should pay attention to. First, China should continue to attach more importance to multilateral diplomacy with international organizations, and synthesize diplomacy with states and that with international organizations. China's diplomacy is becoming less country-oriented and more multilateral and issue-oriented. The shift toward functional focuses has complicated China's bilateral relationships, regardless of how friendly other states are toward it¹⁷. Therefore any bilateral relationship must have complementary diplomatic efforts in a diversity of issue-oriented cooperative frameworks, which are supplied by international organizations in different areas. The participation in international multilateral regimes helps reshape and recalibrate the relationship with other powers. The existence of interest divergence among states is inevitable. However, the cooperation with other states within the multilateral frameworks can effectively help reduce and eliminate the divergence and prevent it from leading to conflicts¹⁸. Second, the interaction with international organizations can by no means just be the recognition of and abidance by international regulations, neither does it mean restraints and constraints on China by international regimes;

ICCS Journal of Modern Chinese Studies Vol.4 (1) 2011 rather it requires China to confirm and accept justice and fair rules and regulations, reject and decline the unreasonable and unjust ones, and under some occasions contribute some creation and development to international regimes¹⁹. Third, China must bear in mind the fact that it is still a developing country, even though its international influence is booming. Internationally recognized as it is, many thorny and urgent domestic issues and agendas still remain to be solved. For example, the expanding wealth disparity, the legitimate governance of minority ethnic groups, the economic structural and industrial reforms, the aging population in large scales in the coming decades, and so on. None of these domestic issues is less urgent than its international responsibility. Therefore China should adhere to its domestic reforms while engaging with international organizations, and should make use of international resources and talents to help address its domestic issues.

IV. Pointing to the Future: Free-rider or Stake-holder?

The interdependence between states and international organizations is further increasing. Nation states more and more rely on international organizations to address regional security, economic, and social problems. Nation states have to accept such a basic fact that international organizations have gained more and more share in dealing with many international affairs. The strengthening of the relationship between states and international organizations is also an irreversible trend. As a result, those states who want to enjoy more say and leverage in international affairs must first have enough share in a wide range of major international organizations. No single country can afford to stay outside international

regimes which are now basically characteristic of a series of international organizations and forums. Under such circumstances, the borderline between domestic and foreign agendas has been more and more blurred. Many domestic affairs can not be solved without international involvement, and sometimes, even though states are not willing to, they just have no choice but to expose their domestic affairs into much more transparent and open international debate and discussion. This challenge, rising from the ramping influence and rising position of international organizations, is also an opportunity for states as well.

It is under such circumstances that China gradually changed its attitude towards international organizations and began to conduct comprehensive engagement with international regimes. These international organizations had further helped China's economic development and its modernization. China has harnessed abundant resources including capital and technology to meet its rapid necessity since the beginning of reform and open-up policy²⁰. Participation in a wide range of international organizations has also strengthened China's leverage on a series of global affairs and thus raised its international influence. There is no doubt that China has gained a lot from international organizations.

Many foreign scholars therefore criticize China's participation in international organizations as free-riding. China has been accused as a free-rider in a variety of areas such as technology transfer, arms control and climate change issues²¹. Those who have little knowledge about China's domestic situation even assert that China always speculates to enjoy the benefits and escape from obligations by labeling itself as a developing country. Namely, the identity of China as a developing country does not match the reality, in

ICCS Journal of Modern Chinese Studies Vol.4 (1) 2011 their assumption. Western countries also claim that China has burdened too little responsibility while enjoying the benefits from international participation. In response to the Western criticism, China has championed a slogan of acting as a responsible great power (*Zuo Fuzeren de Daguo*). Meanwhile it has consciously increased its contribution to the international society by a large volume. For example, China kept raising its percentage of the UN membership fees in the past years. It also has expanded its foreign assistance to other developing countries. China continues to contribute to regional peace and stability, especially the in the Asia-Pacific region.²² China promised not to depreciate RMB in the 1997 Asian financial crisis, and also played an important role in the recovery of the stagnating world economy hit by the last financial tsunami. In almost all the areas of global agendas, China has taken much more cooperative and accountable stances and steps.

Although China may have initially joined international organizations for its own ends, the level of its liberal action has increased hand-in-hand with the increase in the number of international organizations China participates in. This supports neo-liberal institutionalist theory, which asserts that international regimes and organizations will influence state behavior through the limitations they impose on state freedom of action, specifically, by reinforcing reciprocity between states and making defection from the norms easier to punish²³. The concept of socialization has also recently gained currency among Western scholars and policy analysts. They argue that "states are embedded in dense networks of transnational and international social relations that shape their perceptions of the world and their role in the world. States are socialized to want certain

things by the international society in which they and the people in them live.²⁴ If this socialization theory is true, China is being gradually socialized into the current international system. Then international society should see the future of China as a responsible stake-holder as promising.

The unprecedented degree of interdependence among states under profound globalization has put nation states, particularly those great powers in the same boat, which they could not escape from. China has been bound with the whole international system, particularly in the economic area. This helps it forge common grounds and reinforce cooperation with other countries. Taking US-China relations as an example, many argue that the ever-growing economic interdependence would add to the stability of bilateral relations. It is because of this economic interdependence that the United States sees the policy of engaging with China much more effective than that of containing China. The primary goal in Sino-American economic relations is to secure China's full compliance with the rules of the global trading system²⁵. Some Western scholars also claim that China will not pose a threat but will be a responsible actor because "China today is growing not by writing its own rules...it is playing our game." That game is globalization, and its dominant rules are set predominantly by the West. Therefore, China will increasingly become a responsible stakeholder in the existing global order²⁶. This argument has some credit, because indeed the relationship between China and the international system has profoundly and irreversibly changed during the past decades. As some Western scholars also acknowledge, China has changed its role from "the resistor to the international system", to "the reformer of the international system" and now "the protector of the

ICCS Journal of Modern Chinese Studies Vol.4 (1) 2011 international system"²⁷.

As shown above, the accusation of "free-rider" and the evaluation of "stake-holder" simultaneously exist with regard to China's growing role in international organizations. In the future engagement with international organizations, China is facing an even greater challenge of dealing with the balance between national interests and international contribution, rights and obligations, leadership and accountability. As China continues to rise, and US and European powers decline relatively, China will be expected and required to provide more public goods for the international system. However, it is self-evident that only when China strengthens its own hard and soft power both at home and internationally could it provide more public goods to the international society, and thus contribute more to international organizations.

Footnote*

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² See Li Dongyan, "Zhongguo Dingwei Guojizuzhi Xinjuese" (China Defines Its New Role in International Organizations), *Renmin Ribao* (People's Daily), November 8th, 2010.

³ <http://www.uia.be/ybonline>.

⁴ Wang Yizhou, "Zhongguo yu Guojizuzhiyanjiu de Ruogang Wenti" (A Few Issues on China and International Organizations), *Shehuikexue Luntan* (Social Science Forum), No.8, 2002, p.7.

⁵ Liu Tiewa, Speech on "China and United Nations: from the Perspective of Chinese Participation in Peacekeeping Operations", Waseda University, January 25, 2011.

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- ¹⁶ Wang Yizhou, op.cit., p. 12.
- ¹⁷ Wang Jisi, op.cit., p.73.
- ¹⁸ Guo Longlong, “Zhongguo yu Guoji Duobian Jizhi” (China and International Multilateral Regimes), *Guoji Zhanwang* (World Outlook), No. 10, 2001, p.74.
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