



**China's Role in the World: A Perspective through
Global Health Governance**

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China's Role in the World: A Perspective through Global Health Governance¹

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Abstract

This paper analyses China's conceptions of global governance and its role in the world, through an examination of China's contributions in global health governance. It argues that China is engaged in a balancing act, where on one hand, it is working to preserve and strengthen the Westphalian international system in which state sovereignty is sacrosanct, and on the other hand, selectively deviating from its principled stance on sovereignty in order to shore up its credentials as a responsible stakeholder or to advance its own interests on a case-by-case basis. The tensions resulting from this dual approach are evident through China's behaviour in global health, where various factors have combined to affect China's sovereignty-centric approach to managing global issues. The external factors include the pressure of international opinion, the changing sources of global legitimacy and credibility, external resources and transnational networks, and the authority of international organizations such as the WHO. Internal factors include Chinese nationalism, and the growing domestic recognition of the need to manage non-traditional security issues including health. These factors combine to result in a fairly narrow and limited approach to global health governance. Given the rapid institutional innovations and changing norms in global health, China's existing approach is increasingly out of synch with the standards for responsible behaviour globally, reactive rather than proactive, and confined to narrow interests dominated by an economic conception of global health. As a result, there are significant gaps in China's substantive contributions to the global health agenda. The study of China's role in global health leads to the conclusion that China's approach to global governance may be unsustainable in the long run. That said, there is a vigorous debate within the intellectual elite in China on the nature of the evolving world order and China's role in it, which will have an impact on the evolution of China's conceptions of and contributions to global governance.

Keywords and phrases: China, Global governance, Global health governance

I. Introduction

Two central challenges sit at core of efforts to govern global issues. First is the need to move beyond the order established under US leadership after World War Two, given the ongoing tectonic shifts in the global geopolitical balance. Second is the need to manage the governance gaps created by a rapidly globalising world, where threats and opportunities are increasingly transnational and the nature of state sovereignty is more contested than ever before. The rise of China means that efforts to address these two

¹ I would like to thank Dr. Ann Florini and Dr. Toby Carroll for comments on earlier drafts of this paper.

challenges in global governance must increasingly engage with political and intellectual conceptions within China regarding its role in managing global issues.

Across the range of issues on the global agenda, health has become an established priority. There is now a myriad of global institutions, arrangements and initiatives focused on the challenge of global health, overlapping in some cases and acting at cross-purposes in others. A study of China's conceptions of and contributions to this varied and complex governing environment is important on several levels. First, China's integration into the global economy and the deepening interdependence across nations mean that shifts in China's health policies will have repercussions at the global level. Second, China could potentially provide alternative approaches to health governance. Third, China is playing a larger role in global issues, from peacekeeping operations to development assistance.² Its contributions to global health governance efforts can be expected to become more important in the future. A closer analysis of China's approach to global health governance will therefore be useful in revealing broader insights into China's role in global governance.

The paper is structured as follows: The next section situates the discourses in global governance next to China's overall conceptions of the world order and its role in global governance. Section III summarises the evolving discourses in global health governance, connecting the challenges in governing global health with broader developments in global governance. Section IV explores China's evolving perspectives on health and global health and analyses the various internal and external factors shaping China's role in global health governance. The next two sections specify the limitations to China's approach in governing global health, and examine the possible ways in which China's approach to global governance could evolve in the future. Section VII concludes.

II. China and Discourses in Global Governance

At the heart of global governance discourse lies an enduring debate over the nature of authority and the organising principles for world order. Seemingly irreconcilable tensions lie between the principle of sovereign equality and the reality of a harshly unequal world, where opportunities and challenges are increasingly transnational. The efficacy, legitimacy and relevance of the Westphalian system are highly disputed across regions, actors, and ideologies. These historical tensions are further complicated by the expansion in the range of actors effectively exercising authority on the global stage. States remain dominant actors, but non-state entities, from private companies to civil society organisations to multi-actor partnerships, are now increasingly able to harness material resources and influence global agendas and norms.³

The result is a set of highly contested discourses over the nature of world order, and competing visions of "future architectures". Should world order be based on states and sovereign equality, a global ruling elite of major powers, decentralised grassroots

² Han, Q. Chen, L. et al. (2008) "China and global health." *The Lancet*. 372(9648): 1439-1441.

³ Fidler, D. (2008). "A Theory of Open-Source Anarchy" *Indiana Journal of Global Legal Studies*. 257.

authority, global democracy, multiple regional authorities, or some form of networks among these and other actors?⁴ Invested within these various architectural options is a range of contrasting values and principle, ranging from deontological (e.g. that global democracy is the most accountable and legitimate process for managing global issues) to utilitarian (e.g. that networks are more effective in filling in governance gaps and possess the dynamism and flexibility in launching quick responses that are required in the age of globalisation).

None of these competing interpretations of global politics is universally accepted or legitimate. Instead, they reflect the diversity of norms and values about configurations of power and the objectives of global governance. It is clear that there is no shortage of ideas on how to meet the world's complex bundle of challenges. What has also been missing until more recently, is an examination of how these various discourses are responded to within China. Given China's growing economic and political strength, it is useful to consider the respective influences and impact of these aforementioned discourses within China, Chinese perspectives of the emerging world order, as well as domestic conceptions of China's role in managing global issues.

China and Global Governance

As China has become more engaged in global economic and political affairs, the country's intellectual communities and policy agencies are also working to understand the domestic implications of globalisation and how China's interests can be advanced in international system. This is happening within a context of intense scrutiny over China's rise, doubts about its intentions on the global stage, and pressure for China to articulate its role in the world. Given China's political structure, discourses on which norms and values should underpin China's worldview and resulting policies prescriptions are largely shaped by the Party leadership's concerns, and debated within elite policy and academic communities. That said, the points of view are far from uniform, and the domestic debate has to be taken into account in analyses of China's role in global governance.⁵

Within China, debates about the country's role in the world and the nature of the global order revolve around two fundamental questions. The first is whether the international system is 'good' or 'bad' for China. The second relates to whether China should accept the rules of the existing system or build an alternative system grounded in Chinese values and Chinese rules. Mark Leonard has captured the debate as existing between the 'liberal internationalists' and the 'neo-communists'. The former thinks that China should join the liberal international order and restore China's place in the world within and through the existing system, while the latter group is of the view that China should create an alternate order, centered upon Chinese values and beliefs.⁶

⁴ Khagram, S. (2006). "Future Architectures of Global Governance: A Transnational Perspective/Prospective." *Global Governance* 12(1): 97-118

⁵ Wang, G. and Zheng, Y. (2008) "Introduction" in *China and the New International Order*. Wang, G. and Zheng, Y (Eds). Routledge. p11

⁶ Leonard, M. (2008). *What Does China Think?* London, Fourth Estate. p92

This debate is further complicated by the continual changes within the international system over the very norms and standards underpinning good governance and cooperation. Therefore the analysis of China's role in global governance needs to be situated within a dynamic framework that captures the ongoing tensions within the international system on the evolving balance of power, criteria of responsible behaviour, and the nature of state sovereignty.

Wang Gungwu has argued that China's approach to thinking about world order is anchored in the fundamental belief of the "prevalence and inevitability of change".⁷ From this perspective even the best of institutions will fade, and should be used as long as they last. There is little faith in the prospect of a stable and prevailing international order, given China's observations of the failure of the League of Nations, the Second World War and the collapse of the Soviet Union. Chinese leaders are doubtful over whether or not the system of rules and norms underpinning the current international order will really last. Wang Gungwu argues that therefore, China will adopt a pragmatic approach in advancing its own state interest first within the existing order, and do little more to sustain or defend the system.⁸

China's engagement with the global system is still fairly new, and coupled with discernible wariness over the nature of globalization. Yu Keping, one of China's leading scholars, notes that it was only in 1998 that Jiang Zemin spoke "for the first time about "economic globalization" as "an objective trend of world economic development."⁹ Yu's overview of the Chinese debate on globalization exposes a high degree of the circumspection in the intellectual community over this topic. The key lines of concern are described as focused along six questions: Whether globalisation is an empirical fact or a myth "promoted by Western scholars as ideological cover for a new wave of imperialism"; whether globalization is "inherently capitalist or potentially socialist"; whether there are "political or cultural forms of globalization"; whether globalisation is on balance "advantageous or harmful for developing countries; whether it is "anything more than modernization, Westernization, or Americanization; and whether there is "a path toward modernization in the global age that is specifically appropriate for China."¹⁰

As a result, China has adopted a strategy of external engagement that has a conscientiously built-in policy of defending Chinese autonomy. Yu notes that "[u]nlike some Western political leaders who downplay state sovereignty in the global age,

⁷ Wang, G. and Zheng, Y. (2008). "Introduction" in China and the New International Order. Wang, G. and Zheng, Y (Eds). Routledge. p23

⁸ Wang, G. (2008). "Chapter 1 - China and International Order: Some Historical Perspectives" in China and the New International Order. Wang, G. and Zheng, Y (Eds). Routledge. p22, 27

⁹ Yu, K. (2009). Democracy is a Good Thing: Essays on Politics, Society, and Culture in Contemporary China. Washington D.C., Brookings Institution Press. p149

¹⁰ Yu, K. (2009). Democracy is a Good Thing: Essays on Politics, Society, and Culture in Contemporary China. Washington D.C., Brookings Institution Press. p 150, 151

Chinese leaders make sovereignty the basis upon which all political and economic activities take place, including economic globalization.”¹¹

China's Harmonious World

The closest that China has come in articulating its world vision is through President Hu Jintao's speech to the United Nations (UN) 60th Anniversary summit on “Making Great Efforts to Build a Harmonious World with Long-lasting Peace and Common Prosperity” In his explanation of the concept of a ‘harmonious world’ he emphasized the UN as the main platform for global cooperation – first as the core of a fair and effective collective security mechanism, second in advancing the millennium development goals, and in strengthening the effectiveness of the UN through multi-sectoral reform. The only point out of his four principles that did not focus on the UN was on the need to “respect the right of each country to independently choose its social system and development road and support the efforts of countries to realize rejuvenation and growth according to their own national conditions.”¹² The key characteristics of the Chinese harmonious world, then, are that sovereign states are the main actors, that international regimes and international organizations are the main platforms for action, and that there should be political space to accommodate a diversity of ideologies and social structures, and non-interference in the development paths of individual nations. It is clear the Chinese leadership believes its state interests are best advanced by staunchly defending the key principles of the Westphalian system, acting to keep current political divisions and international post-war institutions ‘as is’.¹³

The Evolving Global Order

However, even as China tries to uphold the status quo in the international system, the criteria for responsible behaviour and accepted notions of the nature of state sovereignty are changing *within* the system.

First, the UN system is itself adapting to the globalising world, moving beyond pure multilateralism and strict inter-governmental interactions. Normatively, the UN now recognises non-state actors as legitimate partners and actors in governance, and as a result, the UN's architecture for collaboration has become far more open, inclusive and experimental. The UN Global Compact, for example, is built on networks between UN agencies, the private sector, international NGOs, and research institutions.¹⁴

¹¹ Yu, K. (2009). *Democracy is a Good Thing: Essays on Politics, Society, and Culture in Contemporary China*. Washington D.C., Brookings Institution Press. p155

¹² “Hu Jintao Delivers an Important Speech at the UN Summit”
<http://www.mfa.gov.cn/ce/ceun/eng/zt/shnh60/t212614.htm>

¹³ Wang, G. (2008). “Chapter 1 - China and International Order: Some Historical Perspectives” in *China and the New International Order*. Wang, G. and Zheng, Y (Eds). Routledge. p22

¹⁴ Ruggie, J. (2003). “The United Nations and Globalization: Patterns and Limits of Institutional Adaptation,” *Global Governance*, 9(Summer).

Second, the revolution in information technology has eroded certain aspects of governmental ability to control information on its actions within national borders. The resulting increase in transparency and sheer amount of readily available data has shifted the sources of power and authority at the national and global levels, beyond strict military and economic might. Credibility via openness with information is now a key source of international legitimacy, and “establishing credibility means developing a reputation for providing correct information, even when it may reflect badly on the information provider’s own country.”¹⁵ The underlying standard for responsible behaviour is to disclose information unless there is a reason not to, rather than to have secrecy be the norm and disclosure the exception. Any loss of credibility on the international level would heighten external accountability pressure on the state in question. Try as China might to promote respect for the principles of sovereignty and non-interference and its responsible stakeholder credentials in parallel, knowledge of China’s domestic actions increasingly affects its credibility and normative influence at the global level.

On the concept of sovereignty, China has already made compromises in the economic realm, for example in the conditions it has signed up to through its membership in the WTO.¹⁶ China’s stance on humanitarian intervention has also shifted, gradually adopting a less hardline position on Westphalian non-intervention, as demonstrated by the government’s acceptance of the UN Responsibility to Protect concept and the change in its policies towards Sudan. China had abstained from an April 2006 UN Security Council vote on sanctions against Sudanese officials, but as the fighting continued in Darfur and threatened to spread into broader instability, China could no longer stand by its position that the massacre in Sudan was an internal matter. It played a key role in brokering the establishment of a UN-African Union peacekeeping force, and applied strong pressure on the Sudanese government to implement and agree to the plan.¹⁷ Chinese academics are also debating the exclusivity of state sovereignty, and the role of non-state actors in governance, reflecting the possibility of the emergence of alternative approaches in intellectual circles.¹⁸ That said, the Chinese state continues to take an absolutist stance on sovereignty in matters of territorial integrity, particularly Tibet and Taiwan.¹⁹ On information disclosure, China has shown the ability to disclose more information, in health issues such as HIV/AIDS and SARS, but only as a reactive response, rather than on the principle of openness and transparency. This point will be elaborated upon in the next section.

China’s Balancing Act

¹⁵ Keohane, R. and Nye, J. “Power and Interdependence in the Information Age”, *Foreign Affairs* 77(5).

¹⁶ Shan, W. (2008). “Chapter 3 - Redefining Chinese Concept of Sovereignty” in *China and the New International Order*. Wang, G. and Zheng, Y (Eds). Routledge.

¹⁷ Klein-Ahlbrandt, S and Small, A. (2008) “China’s New Dictatorship Diplomacy.” *Foreign Affairs*.

¹⁸ Zhang, Y. (2008). “Chapter 7 - Understanding Chinese Views of the Emerging Global Order” in *China and the New International Order*. Wang, G. and Zheng, Y (Eds). Routledge. p161

¹⁹ Shan, W. (2008). “Chapter 3 - Redefining Chinese Concept of Sovereignty” in *China and the New International Order*. Wang, G. and Zheng, Y (Eds). Routledge. p67

In short, there are two parallel tracks to China's strategic approach to the global system.²⁰ The first track is aimed at strengthening the state's long term ability to promote its own set of norms and standards of legitimate behaviour on the international stage.²¹ The alternative world order that the Chinese government hopes to create would be a system where (a) state sovereignty is sacrosanct and set above citizen rights; (b) states are able to integrate in existing multilateral institutions and pursue policies of economic liberalization, while maintaining control over domestic political structures and without external interference. China's unconditional development assistance to countries in the African continent is one example, as is the state's absolutist position on Tibet and Taiwan. The second track is aimed at establishing the Chinese government's credentials as a responsible stakeholder to keep up with evolving standards for good behaviour in the international system, selectively responding to pressure and criteria on how China should behave on key economic and security issues. This track requires China to make some compromises on sovereignty, and information disclosure, but also enables China to avoid confrontation, thereby creating strategic space for the pursuit of China's economic development and normative agenda goals in the first track.

It remains to be seen if China will be able to pursue these two parallel tracks sustainably, given the pressures it is under to negotiate and adapt to the globalising world. With the ongoing transformation in the norms and mechanisms underpinning global governance institutions, China has to strike a fine balance between defending and advancing its own strategic viewpoints, responding to evolving international norms, and promoting a normatively coherent framework for explaining its role in global governance.

III. Discourses in Global Health Governance

Health has risen on the global agenda over the past decade, and efforts to govern global health are met with challenges along four areas that reflect the challenges of global governance broadly. These are: (a) the impact of globalisation; (b) the emergence of new actors exercising authority on global issues; (c) competing normative approaches to global health; and (d) the shifting geopolitical order.

There is a great degree of plurality in global health arrangements across state and non-state agencies. These overlapping approaches and institutions reflect an enormous diversity of normative assumptions about inter-state cooperation, sovereignty, the relative roles of state and non-state actors and paradigms on the objectives of global health governance.²² The development of various normative approaches and discourses in global health have been mapped out in existing literature, and can be summarized briefly as follows.

²⁰ Wang, G. and Zheng, Y. (2008). "Introduction" in China and the New International Order. Wang, G. and Zheng, Y (Eds). Routledge. p6

²¹ Leonard, M. (2008). What Does China Think? London, Fourth Estate. p113, 114

²² Fidler, D. (2007). "Architecture amidst Anarchy: Global health's Quest for Governance." Global Health Governance 1(January): 17.

- a. Economism. Early modes of global cooperation in health reflected the economic interests of the 19th century great powers.²³ Cooperation took place at the borders between nations, and practices were constructed to meet the dominant interest of ensuring trade flows between powerful economies. The utilitarian concept of health as an input factor in the global economic system became mainstream with the ideological ascendance of neoliberalism.²⁴ As trade rules became formalized in the World Trade Organisation (WTO), health issues were dealt with within the context of protecting intellectual property rights, and preserving market incentives for innovation and economic growth. The World Bank's approach in the developing world set health firmly within the framework of economic development.²⁵

- b. Human rights. After World War Two, a rights-based approach to global health emerged, reflecting the influence of social democratic ideals in global governance.²⁶ The establishment of the World Health Organisation (WHO) and its Constitution acknowledged health as a fundamental human right.²⁷ The Alma Ata Declaration on Primary Health Care, and the 1978 Health for All by the year 2000 initiative was another major event in the development of this discourse.²⁸ At the start of the 21st century, global action on HIV/AIDS expanded the range of initiatives advocating a rights-based approach to health, deepening the global acceptance of health as a human right.²⁹

- c. International security. With globalisation, health also became important as a security issue.³⁰ The post-Cold War security agenda brought health into the forefront in issues from bioterrorism to pandemic infections and disease outbreaks.³¹ The United Nations Security Council Resolution 1308 (2000) made the linkage clear when it noted that “the HIV/AIDS pandemic, if unchecked, may pose a risk to stability and security.”

- d. Biomedicine. Advances in scientific knowledge and technology established health as an issue that can be best tackled through medicine. This

²³ Fidler, D. (2007). “Architecture amidst Anarchy: Global health's Quest for Governance.” *Global Health Governance* 1(January): 17

²⁴ Thomas, C. and M. Weber (2004). “The Politics of Global Health Governance: Whatever Happened to “Health for all by the Year 2000”?” *Global Governance* 10(2): 187-205.

²⁵ Fidler, D. (2007). “Architecture amidst Anarchy: Global health's Quest for Governance.” *Global Health Governance* 1(January): 17

²⁶ Thomas, C. and M. Weber (2004). “The Politics of Global Health Governance: Whatever Happened to “Health for all by the Year 2000”?” *Global Governance* 10(2): 187-205.

²⁷ WHO, 1948, Preamble

²⁸ Thomas, C. and M. Weber (2004). “The Politics of Global Health Governance: Whatever Happened to “Health for all by the Year 2000”?” *Global Governance* 10(2): 187-205

²⁹ Fidler, D. (2004). *SARS, Governance and the Globalization of Disease*. New York, Palgrave Macmillan. p39.

³⁰ Fidler, D. (2007). “Architecture amidst Anarchy: Global health's Quest for Governance.” *Global Health Governance* 1(January): 17

³¹ World Health Organisation. (2007) *The world health report 2007 - A safer future: global public health security in the 21st century*.

conception of global health argues that the impediments to health can be unlocked through scientific tools and medicine-based interventions.³²

The same tensions on the nature of sovereignty and world order which lie within competing approaches to global governance run through each of these four discursive approaches.³³ The intersection between the evolution of these four discourses, with the political challenges wrought by globalisation, has led to a plethora of health-centred partnerships, networks and other institutions, shifting the spaces between private and public approaches to governance and creating a rich diversity of competing and contradictory options for governing global health.

IV. China and Global Health Governance

A study of China's conceptions of global health governance is important on several levels. First, China's integration into the global economy and its massive population size mean that shifts in the country's health institutions and health priorities will have repercussions at the global level. Second, China could potentially provide alternative approaches to health governance, drawing on its own traditions and growing scientific capacity. Third, China is playing a larger role in global issues, from peacekeeping operations to development assistance in other developing countries.³⁴ Its contributions to global health governance efforts can be expected to grow in the future. A closer analysis of China's approach to global health governance will reveal broader insights into China's role in global governance.

Changes in Dominant Discourse

China's conception and treatment of health has gone through three broad shifts since the People's Republic of China was established.³⁵ In Mao Zedong's era, health was treated as a social right to be provided for by the state. Government-subsidised medical services were provided in urban areas through the workplace, and in rural areas through the 'barefoot doctor' cooperative medical scheme, grounded in the principle of universality. Under Deng Xiaoping's reform and opening up policy, economic development replaced revolution and ideology as China's overriding national imperative. This corresponded with shifts in the dominant global governance discourse towards neoliberalism, with the overall result that health was treated as an economic good, to be provided for through market forces. Healthcare reform focused on using market forces and user-pays medical care. By 1985, only 5% of villages were covered by the cooperative medical scheme,

³² Lee, K. (2009). "Understandings of global health governance: The contested landscape." In *The Crisis of Global Health Governance: Challenges, Institutions and Political Economy*. O. Williams and A. Kay (Eds). London, Palgrave Macmillan.

³³ Fidler, D. (2004). *SARS, Governance and the Globalization of Disease*. New York, Palgrave Macmillan. p39, 40

³⁴ Han, Q. Chen, L. et al. (2008) "China and global health." *The Lancet*. 372(9648): 1439-1441.

³⁵ Chan, L.-H. (2006). *The Evolution of Health Governance in China: A Case Study of HIV/AIDS*. Regional Outlook Paper No. 8, Griffith Asia Institute.

compared to 85% in the 1960s. The shift to providing health through economic incentives led to a sharp fall in rural primary healthcare coverage.³⁶

In both these periods, there was little consideration of health as a global issue. From around 2000 onwards, academic and policy communities in China began to reconstitute their conception of health as an international and national security issue³⁷, leading to a shift in the dominant discourse to a combination of biosecurity, economism and nationalism. This next section analyses the external and internal factors which have influenced a shift in China's thinking and actions on global health.

Globalisation and the Rise of Health on the Global Agenda

The first external factor is the rise of health on the global agenda. As China integrated with the global economy and given China's demographic size, health became one of the many issues that the global community began to be concerned about, within the overall concern over China's role in the global order. For example, the 1997 UN Theme Group on HIV/AIDS report entitled "China Responds to AIDS" gave warning about a potential pandemic in China amounting to 10 million infections in 2010 if the government did not launch an effective response. The Theme Group exerted more pressure on China in 2002 through its report entitled "HIV/AIDS: China's Titanic Peril" that pointed out the Chinese government's inadequate response to the growing HIV/AIDS crisis.³⁸ In responding to these pressures, and to ease broader international concerns about the China 'threat', the Chinese state began to play a more active role in existing international initiatives. In health, this included becoming more willing to disclose information about its HIV/AIDS situation, and to cooperate with international agencies in dealing with the crisis. Should China's economy continue to expand, the normative pressure on China can be expected to strengthen, not just for China to abide by prevailing international norms on health in its domestic policies, but also for China to play a bigger contributing role to global health governance initiatives.

WHO's Authority

China also has to contend with the recommendations, opinions, and information put forth by the WHO and the scientists working with the WHO, in negotiating its policies on global health, as shown by the 2003 SARS (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome) crisis. The WHO played a crucial role throughout the crisis that had an impact on how China responded as SARS spread within its borders and across the world. First, the WHO was the central coordinating body for scientific cooperation across territories to research the

³⁶ Zhang, D. Unschuld, P. "China's barefoot doctor: past, present, and future." *The Lancet*. 372(9653): 1865-1867.

³⁷ Zhang, Y. (2008). "Chapter 7 - Understanding Chinese Views of the Emerging Global Order" in *China and the New International Order*. Wang, G. and Zheng, Y (Eds). Routledge. p157.

³⁸ Chan, L.-H. (2006). *The Evolution of Health Governance in China: A Case Study of HIV/AIDS*. Regional Outlook Paper No. 8, Griffith Asia Institute.

nature of the virus, establishing a network of laboratories. Second, the WHO produced and disseminated crucial information related to SARS surveillance data, best practices for dealing with patients, and research on the causes of SARS. Importantly, the information was gathered and disseminated in ways that bypassed the state. In gathering data on SARS, the WHO was able to tap into non-state sources. In dissemination, WHO advisories and alerts went directly to individuals, rather than through state channels. These actions were undertaken without a specific legal framework, and therefore without formal authorisation by states, showing WHO's independent authority in establishing norms and standards which shaped the management of the SARS outbreak.³⁹ The WHO established itself as a credible authority on the crisis, while China suffered a severe blow to its international standing when its attempts to cover-up the extent of the SARS outbreak was revealed. The Chinese government's change in position in April 2003 to admit the full extent of the SARS outbreak and to declare the situation a national emergency, would not have occurred without the actions, countervailing authority and pressure from the global scientific community and in particular the WHO.

Nationalism

Given China's long civilization, Chinese society and government's desire to 'restore' China's place and dignity on the world stage, and the heightened international concern over the impact of China's emergence as a global power, "China must be the most self-aware rising power in history."⁴⁰ Nationalist sentiments therefore factor into Chinese conceptions of global health issues, both domestically within the populace about China's development, and externally between the state and international opinion about China's place in the world.

The desire to protect China's national image on the world stage has led the state to "securitise any issue it perceives to be damaging to its national interests."⁴¹ The weakness of the rule of law (courts in China are subordinate to the National People's Congress and do not have the power to interpret the law) and the lack of broader institutional checks in China means that nationalistic considerations can trump other concerns. Even though Guangzhou Province had implemented China's first ever Open Government Information regulations at the provincial level in January 2003, these regulations went unused as the crisis spread.⁴² Moreover, information about SARS was classified as state secret in the initial stages of the SARS outbreak, and release of information without state authorisation could be treated as an act of treason.⁴³ It was only when China's initial response to SARS was exposed to be ineffective and misleading,

³⁹ Fidler, D. (2004) SARS, Governance and the Globalization of Disease. New York, Palgrave Macmillan. p117, 118, 137, 142, 147

⁴⁰ Leonard, M. (2008). What Does China Think? London, Fourth Estate. p84

⁴¹ Yoon, S. (2008). "Sovereign Dignity, Nationalism and the Health of a Nation: A Study of China's Response in Combat of Epidemics." Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism. 8(1): 80-100.

⁴² Horsley, J. (2007) "Toward a More Open China?" The Right to Know: Transparency for an Open World. Florini, A (Ed). New York, Columbia University Press. p74

⁴³ Yoon, S. (2008). "Sovereign Dignity, Nationalism and the Health of a Nation: A Study of China's Response in Combat of Epidemics." Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism. 8(1): 80-100.

that the Chinese government changed tactics.⁴⁴ Nationalism can therefore be seen as both a restraining and enabling force in shaping China's active involvement in global infectious diseases like SARS. On one hand, the desire to project a positive national image to the world pushes the government to manipulate and restrict the flow of information deemed to affect China's external reputation. On the other hand, the value of keeping that reputation positive, provides added incentive for China to take drastic reforms and change course when the reputation is damaged. The default position of the Chinese government appears to be, however, a defensive and reactive one rather than one that embraces transparency as a governing principle, as shown by the continued revelations of government cover-ups in instances of health-related mis-governance. China's suppression of information about the melamine scandal in 2008, in order to ensure the projection of a positive national image during the Beijing Olympics, is only the latest example of how nationalist pride trumps transparency in the state's internal calculations.

External Resources and Networks

At the same time, external resources, both financial and expert/medical held by organisations ranging from the UN to the Global Fund and the Gates Foundation, provided incentives for China to engage with the international health system and global actors.⁴⁵ In the process, new networks and information channels were formed that affected China's domestic governance and policies on global health issues such as HIV/AIDS. First, engagement by the WHO Global Programme on AIDS and UNAIDS brought multiple agencies together, fostering important cross-sectoral discussions on a more holistic response to HIV/AIDS that had been impeded by the traditionally hierarchical and silo-ed structure of the Chinese government. Second, workshops that brought in multiple external agencies together with Chinese government officials were useful in changing mindsets and introducing new approaches to HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment. One workshop in particular, held in 1997, has been credited as pivotal. It brought the Chinese Academy of Preventive Medicine together with the University of California at Los Angeles, scholars across sectors, government officials and representatives from the WHO, UN and World Bank, to hold the "first open discussion of evidence-based but controversial intervention strategies that targeted those at high risk of HIV infection who were also highly stigmatized." The same participants of the workshop have gone on to identify effective strategies for HIV control in China, and to contribute to the development of strategic national plans for HIV/AIDS management.⁴⁶ The advantages of harnessing financial and state-of-the-art technical expertise has also shifted China's allegiance to state-centric models of international cooperation. In 2004 there were an estimated over 50 international NGOs and private foundations working on

⁴⁴ Yoon, S. (2008). "Sovereign Dignity, Nationalism and the Health of a Nation: A Study of China's Response in Combat of Epidemics." *Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism*. 8(1): 80-100.

⁴⁵ Chan, L.-H. (2006). *The Evolution of Health Governance in China: A Case Study of HIV/AIDS*. Regional Outlook Paper No. 8, Griffith Asia Institute.

⁴⁶ Z. Wu, S. Sullivan, Y. Wang, M. Rotheram-Borus, R. Detels. "Evolution of China's response to HIV/AIDS." *The Lancet*, 369 (9562): 679-690

HIV/AIDS prevention in China, not just providing technical and financial support, but also aiding in the timely dissemination of health information, and supporting Chinese local grassroots organizations in health service delivery.⁴⁷ In March 2005, the Chinese government welcomed public-private partnerships to deal with the HIV/AIDS problem.⁴⁸ It is an open question as to whether these engagements with international experts, international organizations, global civil society networks and hybrid governance mechanisms will have an impact upon the state's conceptions of what constitutes legitimate global governance.

Change within China and the New Security Concept

The final factor is an internal shift within Chinese academic and policy communities in the factors affecting China's national security. The 1998/9 Asian financial crisis, the HIV/AIDS epidemic and the 2003 SARS crisis, in particular, contributed to policy and academic communities within China expanding their notion of national interest and the security implications of non-traditional issues. A New Security Concept was proposed by the Chinese government in the late 1990s, and developed to include issues such as health, economy, environmental degradation, human trafficking and terrorism.⁴⁹

Leading scholars in China have also acknowledged not just the inter-connectedness of non-traditional security issues, that globalization means that "the fates of all nations are interlinked to an unprecedented degree." The recognition of this interdependence has also led to the affirmation that "[o]nly through global governance can the diverse problems confronting human society be resolved and a new global order be established."⁵⁰

On balance, China's actions and responses in global health are broadly consistent with its two-track approach to global governance. On one hand, China's strategic conceptions of world order are fundamentally Westphalian, and it is determined to preserve the validity of sovereignty as an inviolable principle in organising world affairs, to reap the benefits of global economic integration while maintaining control over its domestic political matters. On the other hand, China is aware of the importance of appearing to be a responsible stakeholder in the international system, which has required it to behave in ways that do not necessarily correspond to its core values and norms about global politics. We have seen how, in the case of HIV/AIDS and SARS, China's Westphalian approach directly clashed with a set of external factors, namely: changing international expectations on what constitutes responsible behaviour; the strengthening of global scientific authority in the form of the WHO; and the available technical and financial

⁴⁷ Wu, F. (2005). "International Non-governmental Actors in HIV/AIDS prevention in China." *Cell Research*. 15: 919–922

⁴⁸ Chan, L.-H. (2006). *The Evolution of Health Governance in China: A Case Study of HIV/AIDS*. Regional Outlook Paper No. 8, Griffith Asia Institute.

⁴⁹ Zhang, Y. (2008). "Chapter 7 - Understanding Chinese Views of the Emerging Global Order" in *China and the New International Order*. Wang, G. and Zheng, Y (Eds). Routledge. p156

⁵⁰ Yu, K. (2009). *Democracy is a Good Thing: Essays on Politics, Society, and Culture in Contemporary China*. Washington D.C., Brookings Institution Press. p176

resources held by international non-state actors and knowledge influence through transnational networks of experts. Within China, nationalist forces both inhibit and enable responsible governance, while the reconstitution of certain health issues as having international security implications has led China to take a more proactive stance on international cooperation on health.

V. Limitations to China's Approach

There are several limitations to China's conception of and approach to global health governance.

Innovations in Global Health Arrangements

First, China is playing a recipient or neutral, rather than contributory role in the ongoing innovations in global health governance mechanisms, displaying a relatively subordinate role in setting global norms and standards in health. It may be unsustainable for China to continue to take an approach grounded in state sovereignty and non-interference, given the challenges brought about by globalisation, the changing criteria for what constitutes responsible global behaviour, and ongoing innovations in the mechanisms of global health governance. Apart from the evolving partnerships between the UN and non-state actors described earlier, some of the other innovations include:

- a. Framework Convention on Tobacco (FCTC). Through public hearings, non-state actors were encouraged to participate in the FCTC drafting process. Collaboration extended beyond the WHO to other UN agencies, traditionally weak states, and international society.⁵¹ This process represented a new governance approach to international law, incorporating new actors, accepting them as having legitimate partners, and creating new relationships with old actors.
- b. The Global Fund to fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria (the Global Fund). Unlike traditional international organizations, NGOs are voting members in the Global Fund's governance, giving them a real decision-making role. Funds are also disbursed with the understanding that projects will involve both state and non-state actors.⁵²
- c. Global Health Surveillance. The revolution in information technology has eroded the ability and incentives for states to withhold health-related information. One example of this change is reflected in the International Health Regulations

⁵¹ Collin, J., K. Lee, et al. (2002). "The framework convention on tobacco control: the politics of global health governance." *Third World Quarterly* 23(2): 265-282.

⁵² Fidler, D. (2004). *SARS, Governance and the Globalization of Disease*. New York, Palgrave Macmillan. p56

(IHR) 2005, which allows the WHO to not only collect, but also act on, epidemiological information from non-governmental sources.⁵³

These innovations do not reflect a displacement of the state in global health governance, but rather a reconfiguration of the nature of sovereignty and authority in global affairs. Certainly the state remains the key actor in managing global issues. Even in global pandemic governance, the transformations in global surveillance architectures represent only one piece of the overall collective action problem. The effectiveness of pandemic preparedness and response actions are still focused around local government capacity.⁵⁴ However, non-state actors are increasingly being brought in as partners not just in implementation of collective action, but also in agenda-setting and rule-making.

China has partnered with civil society and business in its governance activities. Agencies from the Global Fund to the Gates Foundation and UNAIDS, as well as local NGOs, are all active in China. As noted earlier, China has also welcomed private sector participation in its local health governance. However, there is a stark distinction between the UN's approach to partnering with non-state actors, and China's actions. While the UN's partnerships are founded upon a recognition of civil society and business as independent actors and legitimate stakeholders in the governance process, China's approach is one that retains the position of the state as the sole source of authority. Civil society and business are treated as implementers and resource providers, while the government is the sole agenda-setter.⁵⁵

Reactive Governance

Second, China's behaviour in SARS and HIV/AIDS has been one of reacting to standards of responsibility set by external actors, rather than one of proactively proposing options, innovative approaches or actions for the world to better deal with transnational health threats. This reactive approach has damaged the Chinese government's credibility on the international stage, not to mention the negative health and economic impacts on China and other countries.⁵⁶ For a country that is increasingly self-conscious of the image it is projecting on the world stage, a policy of reactivity has become a liability that undermines official rhetoric on responsible behaviour.

⁵³ Lee, K. and D. Fidler (2007). "Avian and pandemic influenza: Progress and problems with global health governance." *Global Public Health* 2(3): 215-234.

⁵⁴ Lee, K. and D. Fidler (2007). "Avian and pandemic influenza: Progress and problems with global health governance." *Global Public Health* 2(3): 215-234.

⁵⁵ Chan, L.-H. (2006). *The Evolution of Health Governance in China: A Case Study of HIV/AIDS*. Regional Outlook Paper No. 8, Griffith Asia Institute.

⁵⁶ Fidler, D. (2004) *SARS, Governance and the Globalization of Disease*. New York, Palgrave Macmillan. p118

The Economic Imperative

Third, the government's conceptions of global health are narrowly defined within stronger national priorities for maintaining the country's economic growth rates and preserving overall security. That is, global health concerns are 'input factors' into broader equations affecting the desired outputs of growth and stability. The SARS crisis was estimated to have cost China US\$6 billion, and Hong Kong more than US\$6.5 billion in 2003.⁵⁷ A 2006 study on the economic impact of a pandemic influenza on the global economy estimated a mild scenario to cost 1.4 million lives and 0.8% of world GDP (US\$330 billion), and a worst case scenario to cost 142.2 million lives and 12.6% of world GDP (US\$4.4 trillion).⁵⁸ Indeed, in Yu Keping's listing of key issues that China should focus on in its 'harmonious world' diplomacy, disease is named under the category of "global risk management"⁵⁹.

The combination of China's reactive approach, its relatively thin subscription to standards of responsibility, and its narrowly defined conception of global health means that there are likely to be major gaps in the country's contributions to global health governance. Issues not picked up by international opinion or the powerful actors within the international system, and issues not affecting China's national economy or security, or national image, will be marginalised (e.g. non-communicable diseases). China's minimalist approach also means that it is unlikely to invest much intellectual capital or other resources in tackling the most pressing barriers and challenges in global health governance.

VI. Potential for Change?

Looking ahead, China's approach to global governance could evolve in two ways. First, China could continue its *realpolitik* strategy of abiding by international rules and standards of behaviour only in a nominal way, in order to exploit the economic opportunities of globalisation and to protect its own strategic space vis-à-vis other great powers. However, this appears unsustainable, especially given the ongoing evolution of the underlying norms of the international system. Statist concepts will be strongly promoted by China, but the criteria for responsible international behaviour is shifting.⁶⁰ Second, China could engage in the ongoing transformation of global norms, and re-

Speech by Dr Henk Bekedam, WHO Representative in China at the International Forum on SARS Prevention and Control, 15-16 December 2003.

http://www.wpro.who.int/china/media_centre/speeches/speech_20031215.htm

⁵⁸ McKibbin, W. and Sidorenko, A. (2006) Global Macroeconomic Consequences of Pandemic Influenza. Lowy Institute for International Policy.

⁵⁹ Yu, K. (2009). Democracy is a Good Thing: Essays on Politics, Society, and Culture in Contemporary China. Washington D.C., Brookings Institution Press. p179

⁶⁰ Lee, P. Chan, G. et al (2008) "Rethinking Global Governance: A China Model in the Making?", Contemporary Politics. 14(1): 3-19

examine its own interests within the broader context of the changing nature of state sovereignty and the deepening challenges of managing global issues.⁶¹

The core values and political vision projected through the ‘harmonious world’ concept appears increasingly out of synch with the evolving nature of the international system, and is unlikely to be a convincing expression of China’s role in the world. Indeed, the ‘harmonious world’ concept appears to reject the need for global consensus on particular standards for good governance. One of the key principles of this world vision staunchly defends non-intervention, urging “countries to tolerate different political, economic, and cultural patterns while condemning such behaviors as imposing one country’s culture, values, and institutions on another country”⁶². (180)

Beyond Westphalia

There is already growing recognition amongst scholars of the limits to China’s current approach. Even the broadly perceived success of the 2008 Beijing Olympics was sandwiched between global outcries over China’s Tibet policies and the suppression of the melamine scandal. Cheng Li, Director of Research from the Brookings John L. Thornton China Center argues that “Chinese leaders will soon realize, if they have not already, that China’s rise to prominence in the 21st century will ultimately depend on its ability to adapt to global governance norms, including political pluralism, openness, transparency and the rule of law”⁶³.

Pang Zhongying from Renmin University argues that “[l]ack of money and technology” should not continuously be China’s good excuse not to act immediately in addressing problems. The country needs to realize the dangers of global challenges.”⁶⁴ He further acknowledges that that China “has honored its commitments to international society but has played a relatively small role in shaping the system”. China is still using old policies and approaches, such that between China and the West there are “common interests but few common values”. As a consequence, “the base of China’s shared norms with international society is relatively weak”. “For a better world and a larger role in it, ... China must harmonize its policies and actions with the mainstream of international society.”⁶⁵ By way of prediction, Pang forecasts that “China’s interests, public and private, have been globalizing, and its practices, such as peacekeeping participation, have gone first before its norms and values. After these, sooner or later, in the pursuit of “a harmonious world,” China will actively or passively redefine its understanding of “sovereignty,” “non-intervention,” “peace,” “good governance,” and “sustainable development” as well”⁶⁶.

⁶¹ Zhang, Y. (2008). “Chapter 7 - Understanding Chinese Views of the Emerging Global Order” in *China and the New International Order*. Wang, G. and Zheng, Y (Eds). Routledge. p159

⁶² Yu, K. (2009). *Democracy is a Good Thing: Essays on Politics, Society, and Culture in Contemporary China*. Washington D.C., Brookings Institution Press. p180

⁶³ Li, C. (2008) “Debating China’s Future: Speed vs. Direction.” *China Security*. Spring Volume 10

⁶⁴ Pang, Z. (2007) “Boosting China’s Pivotal Role”. *FES Briefing Paper 6*

⁶⁵ Pang, Z. (2008) “China: Partner – Or Ward?” *Internationale Politik*. Global Edition.

⁶⁶ Pang, Z. (2007) “Boosting China’s Pivotal Role.” *FES Briefing Paper 6*

Gao Zugui from the China Institute of Contemporary International Relations (CICIR) notes “[d]uring the past thirty years of reform and opening up, China’s national interests have become more closely linked with the interests of international community as a whole. ... [and] China’s outlook on world affairs (including nation-state sovereignty) will continue to evolve, with Chinese elites further emancipating their minds.”⁶⁷

The Beijing Alternative

However, the voices debating the future of China’s role in global governance do not argue for a full-fledged embrace of new global governance norms. First, there remains an entrenched suspicion of a Western agenda that might be antithetical to Chinese national interests. Indeed, Yu Keping describes one of China’s policies in guarding against the downsides of globalisation as “[v]igilance against Westernization and Americanization”, in refusing to adopt values espoused in Western political systems.⁶⁸ Second, China’s continued economic success has led to growing national confidence in the strength of its governance policies, and greater interest in promoting China as a successful development model. Gao Zugui argues that the Chinese model “has made a great contribution to global development”. He lists, for example, China’s efforts to strengthen UN activities and UN reform, China’s contributions to regional community building in Asia, China’s efforts in multilateralism “in dealing with American unilateralism”, and further makes the point that “[i]n the Western-dominated global institutions, especially the IMF, WB and WTO, China and other developing countries speak their voices loudly or collectively. They seek to build a new international political and economic order.”⁶⁹ Embedded within these points is the theme of promoting the Chinese system as an alternative (rather than complement) to an American-led order.

VII. Conclusion

It remains to be seen how China’s approach to global governance will evolve in the future. The external factors which could influence China include forces such as international pressure, the changing sources of global legitimacy and credibility, external resources and transnational networks, and the authority of international organizations such as the WHO. Internal factors include Chinese nationalism, and the growing recognition within the government of the need to manage non-traditional security issues including health. As things stand, China’s fundamental conceptions of the principles underlying global order and the various factors shaping the state’s decisions on how to manage global health result in a narrowly defined approach to global health governance,

⁶⁷ Gao, Z. “Constructive Involvement and Harmonious World. China’s Evolving Outlook on Sovereignty in the Twenty-first Century.” FES Briefing Paper 13. December 2008

⁶⁸ Yu, K. (2009). *Democracy is a Good Thing: Essays on Politics, Society, and Culture in Contemporary China*. Washington D.C., Brookings Institution Press. p156

⁶⁹ Gao, Z. (2008) “Constructive Involvement and Harmonious World. China’s Evolving Outlook on Sovereignty in the Twenty-first Century.” FES Briefing Paper 13.

leading to major gaps in the ways in which China substantively contributes to the global health agenda. The study of China's role in global health leads to the conclusion that China's approach to global governance may be unsustainable in the long run. That said, there is a vigorous debate within the intellectual elite in China on the nature of the evolving world order and China's role in it, which will have an impact on the evolution of China's conceptions of and contributions to global governance.

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