

# Norm-taker or Norm-shaper: Is China Socialising into Norms of Intervention?

Written by Elizabeth McGowan

This PDF is auto-generated for reference only. As such, it may contain some conversion errors and/or missing information. For all formal use please refer to the official version on the website, as linked below.

## Norm-taker or Norm-shaper: Is China Socialising into Norms of Intervention?

<https://www.e-ir.info/2023/09/11/norm-taker-or-norm-shaper-is-china-socialising-into-norms-of-intervention/>

ELIZABETH MCGOWAN, SEP 11 2023

The People's Republic of China (hereafter China) has demonstrated varied and multifaceted engagement with the developing norm of intervention and its associated practices. An increasingly globalised and interdependent world has seen the rise of global actors, with the recognition and prioritisation of human security challenging traditional norms of sovereignty, hard borders and non-interference. The expectations of responsible Great Power behaviour are changing, with increasing emphasis on Sovereignty as Responsibility and intervention to uphold international peace and security and human rights. China faces increasing pressure from the West to contribute to peacekeeping and intervention practices. Simultaneously, China must stem Western fears of a belligerent rising China to combat the "China Threat" discourse. China also faces pressure from its other social group, the developing countries of the Global South, who look to China to uphold traditional values and principles of non-interference and sovereign rights.

China has increased its contributions to peacekeeping activities and in 2016 became the second-largest contributor to United Nations (UN) peacekeeping budgets (Hirono/Yang/Lanteigne, 2019:586). In the case of Israel-Palestine, China 'provided Palestine with \$1 million dollars in cash as emergency humanitarian assistance' (United Nations Security Council (UNSC), 2021:8). Under increasing pressure, China even provided military personnel to the Mali mission in 2013. Scholars have tried to explain trends in China's intervention actions and vetoes in the UNSC. Theories have evolved to address China's fear of instability (Verhoeven, 2014), desire to increase international status (Fung, 2019), and even socialisation into the international system and Western norms in order to be accepted as a Great Power (Johnston, 2007).

Socialisation theories can fall into the trap of treating norms as static and neglect the agency of the socialising actor. Scholars like Chin have proposed "two-way socialisation" theories which address this issue and explore how China might be influencing the development of norms (2012). Hirsch also challenges the idea that norm emergence is a linear, goal-oriented process, arguing instead that norms reflect a dynamic process of development whose outcome and success is hard to predict (2014). He hints at the importance of language in norm "localisation", where "global and local actors change the framing and content of an international norm in order to resist, adapt, or incorporate the norm" (2014:813). However, most studies neglect to analyse how China employs the language of intervention<sup>[1]</sup> and what that might reveal about China's understanding and appropriation of intervention norms, particularly in relation to China's split identity between the Global South and the Great Powers.

This paper attempts to answer the question of whether China is socialising into international norms of intervention, or whether it is playing the part of both norm-taker and norm-shaper to maintain and improve its position in international society. The study analyses UN discourse and, in particular, China's use of language on international platforms to discuss intervention in the Middle East and Israel-Palestine. The legitimising power of language is often overlooked in International Relations (IR) scholarship. This study demonstrates that language becomes a means of control for China in various contexts, either limiting intervention in the UNSC or promoting traditional values, reinforcing social leadership of the Global South. Chinese officials have recently emphasised that China should increase its "power of discourse" (*huayu quan*) in international society, as, according to Li Shengming, vice-President of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, discourse power is "a powerful apparatus to advance a country's political and economic interests" (cited in Pu, 2012:375). China has developed and promoted an expanded lexicon of intervention,

# Norm-taker or Norm-shaper: Is China Socialising into Norms of Intervention?

Written by Elizabeth McGowan

giving it flexibility in how it uses language to prevent, delegitimise, control and justify intervention practices. While it might appear like China is socialising into global norms of intervention, an analysis of the discourse in the UN shows that China is manipulating the language of intervention to shape norm development and establish its position in its two peer groups.

The paper will proceed first by exploring the development of norms, engaging with Finnemore and Sikkink's norm lifecycle thesis (1998) and theories of socialisation. It will then use this framework to study China's engagement with the norm of intervention in the UN and broader international society. The second half of this paper will present a discourse analysis of the language of intervention and how China employs it on different international platforms.

## Conceptual Framework

To understand China's interaction with norms of intervention, it is important to consider norm development and internalisation processes. Finnemore and Sikkink present in-depth analyses of norm lifecycles which identify three key stages: norm emergence, norm cascade and norm internalisation (1998). The first stage involves norm entrepreneurs, who encourage "a critical mass of relevant state actors to adopt the norm" (Finnemore/Sikkink, 1998:895). Once enough states have adopted the new norm, international pressure builds as states try to gain domestic legitimacy and international society's acceptance. This second cascade stage "is characterized more by a dynamic of imitation as the norm leaders attempt to socialize other states to become norm followers" (Finnemore/Sikkink, 1998:895). State actors, international organisations and norm entrepreneurs become "agents of socialization by pressuring targeted actors to adopt new policies and laws and to ratify treaties and by monitoring compliance with international standards" (Finnemore/Sikkink, 1998:902). This institutionalisation and codification of the norm leads to its internalisation. The norm becomes so common-place that its presence is no longer noticed. Socialisation is thus "the dominant mechanism of a norm cascade" (Finnemore/Sikkink, 1998:902).

One of the dangers of this approach is that norm development can seem linear and inevitable. Norms are not static. Western, international and Chinese norms and principles are dynamic, adaptable constructs. Waltz describes emulation or ridicule (deviation) as part of the norm cascade (1979); yet China's engagement with intervention norms displays both. Norms can also be heavily politicised and the internalisation of the language of an international norm does not necessarily indicate internalised universal definitions and interpretations of that norm.

Socialisation is "a process whereby an individual acquires a social identity and learns the norms, values and behaviour appropriate to his or her social position" (Pu, 2012:345). In IR, socialisation occurs when a state or society adopts and conforms to norms, values and behaviour evident in international society. Neorealists view this process through a logic of consequence. Waltz, for instance, treats socialisation as an emulating process, whereby "competition produces a tendency toward the sameness of the competitors" (1979:127). In a military setting, "contending states imitate the military innovations contrived by the country of greatest capability and ingenuity" (Waltz, 1979:127). However, this paper focuses on a constructivist understanding of norm development, and of socialisation as a process of norm diffusion and internalisation. Thus socialisation is viewed through a logic of appropriateness determined by the international community.

Johnston outlines three microprocesses of socialisation in his study on China's socialisation into international institutions (2007). Mimicking refers to "borrowing the language, habits, and ways of acting as a safe, first reaction to a novel environment" (Johnston, 2007:22). Fung suggests that a state will care about its status when they are "novices to the community" and thus comply with established norms and values to prove membership of that community (2019:8). This differs from Waltz' emulation as it is not a rational imitation of successful exemplars. China is no longer a novice in international society.

The second microprocess is social influence, where "status markers bestowed by a social group" influence the actor (Johnston, 2007:22). The state will act on what the community has indicated as appropriate behaviour. In 2005, United States (US) Deputy Secretary Zoellick made a keynote address to the National Committee's Members' Gala, declaring: "We need to urge China to become a responsible stakeholder in [the international] system" (NCUSCR,

# Norm-taker or Norm-shaper: Is China Socialising into Norms of Intervention?

Written by Elizabeth McGowan

2005:6). The US and the international community expected China to be an active member and take responsibility for the values and norms the international community wished to uphold. The third microprocess is persuasion or internalisation of norms and behaviours (Johnston, 2007:23).

However, it would be inaccurate and presumptuous to limit analyses to these three microprocesses. There has been a relatively new body of scholarship developing around theories of two-way socialisation. Chin describes this approach as an acknowledgement of the already emergent power's normative influence in "reshaping the norms, rules, and principles of the international institutions, and perhaps, gradually, reshaping the system more broadly" (2012:214). Pu advocates this approach because it avoids some of the assumptions of socialisation: "socialisation tends to be apprehended as a bettering of the socializee (non-Western powers), because of an implicit teleological assumption of normative change as international progress" (2012:348). It is becoming increasingly evident that the West does not hold the monopoly over norm preferences. Even the West is not a homogenous bloc in terms of norm preferences; exemplified by varied attitudes towards sovereignty and intervention.

Socialisation relies on the state's identification with the community of which it is (or wants to be) a legitimate member. Waltz argues that "[t]he socialisation of non-conformist states proceeds at a pace that is set by the extent of their involvement in the system" (1979:128). Social conformity pressures are stronger within institutions, where increased interaction between agents of the state and of the institution allows for greater identification, alignment of interests and values and, therefore, socialisation. Socialisation is a result of the desire to be recognised as a legitimate member of these institutions, existing in a society where "different countries recognise certain fundamental rules of the game but are also differentiated in terms of power, prestige, and responsibilities" (Pu, 2012:352).

Fung breaks down the idea of international society and social membership further to focus on status (an overlooked factor in IR scholarship). This approach provides a more comprehensive insight into China's understanding of its position in international society through identifying different and overlapping peer groups/status groups: "in regards to status, states focus on maximizing social benefits from specific peer groups, rather than the unspecified singular entity of the international community" (Fung, 2019:41). Fung defines status as the standing or rank attributed by the members of a status community, which is "a hierarchy composed of the group of actors that a state perceives itself as being in competition with" (2019:41). The peer group makes up this community and represents a collective to which the state can identify and align with. States may exert a normative influence once they are secured within a peer group in order to rise as a leader or figurehead. This may be to redefine what is viewed as responsible behaviour and changing the community's standards. The final section of this essay will discuss the extent to which we see this trend in China and the implications of China's normative influence in this regard.

## Conceptual Evolution of Intervention Norms

This chapter explores how the norm of intervention has developed within international society, while contextualising China's dual identity, split between the Great Powers and the Global South, and its rise to become part of the UN.

### *Norms of Intervention*

The principle of non-intervention is generally understood to denote a foreign policy respecting the sovereign rights and territorial integrity of a foreign state, avoiding interference into their domestic affairs while maintaining diplomatic and trading relations, avoiding military confrontation unless in the context of self-defence. Officially, however, there is no scholarly consensus on a precise definition of non-intervention (Hirono, 2019:615).

Nevertheless, the principle of non-intervention is incorporated in the UN Charter and international law. Article 2 of the charter stipulates that "all Members shall refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state, or in any other manner inconsistent with the Purposes of the United Nations" (UN Charter, n.d.). It argues for the sovereign equality of all states, non-interference in domestic affairs, pacific settlement of disputes, and non-use of force except for purposes of self-defence. In 1981, the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) adopted the "Declaration on the Inadmissibility of Intervention and Interference in the Internal Affairs of States" (UNGA, 1981). Developing decolonial states particularly favoured the principles of non-

# Norm-taker or Norm-shaper: Is China Socialising into Norms of Intervention?

Written by Elizabeth McGowan

intervention, hoping it would protect regime security from the hegemonic powers.

Despite the inclusion of non-intervention principles in the Charter, there are also chapters formally introducing the norm of intervention. Chapter VI states that if a dispute is “likely to endanger the maintenance of international peace and security” and the parties involved are unable to reach a negotiated peace, the UNSC may investigate and “recommend appropriate procedures or methods of adjustment” (UN Charter, n.d.). Chapter VII authorises intervention from the UNSC in order to ‘maintain or restore international peace and security’ (UN Charter, n.d.). According to Mansour, “[i]ntervention is defined as the dedication of capacities (material and immaterial/ideational) to act in select theatres, be it for material gain or appropriateness” (2019:657). The UNSC is authorised to apply economic or diplomatic sanctions, or even send military force in direct interventions, but may also sanction indirect intervention, such as mediation, recommendations and fact-finding missions.

After the humanitarian catastrophes of Rwanda (1994), Cambodia (1970s) and Srebrenica (1995), and the end of the Cold War, new emergent norms of humanitarian intervention gathered support in the international system. Deng advocated the principle of Sovereignty as Responsibility in 1996 and the sovereign rights of states became conditional upon their ability to fulfil their responsibilities towards their populations. Globalisation has seen the rise of non-state global actors and “the creation of additional regimes designed to manage a more interdependent global system” (Foot, 2001:9). The focus of international security concern was placed on human security, changing the perception and conditions for legitimate intervention. Chen argues that human rights have become “a norm as important as sovereignty, if not more important, in international society”, though it is arguable whether this norm has been fully and equally internalised among all states (2009:161). Responsibility to Protect (R2P) doctrine was established in international law in 2005. This legitimated military intervention in cases of genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity. The R2P norm has certainly not reached the final stage of norm internalisation and is still highly debated, particularly the third pillar, which allows foreign states to intervene on behalf of a suffering population. The emphasis is placed on pillar two, building state capacity to assist the state in protecting its citizens even though the doctrine stipulated that all pillars were to have equal weighting.

## *China’s interaction with norms of intervention*

Non-interference and non-intervention have been encased in the founding principles of China’s foreign policy since the end of the Second World War. The Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence were codified in an agreement between China and India in 1954. Significantly, these principles outlined “mutual respect for each’s territorial integrity and sovereignty”, “mutual non-interference in each other’s internal affairs”, and “equality and mutual benefit” (FMPRC, 2014). These concepts and the very terminology are reiterated in much of China’s discourse nationally and internationally and have become part of China’s lexicon of intervention. For example, China’s 2010 “white paper on national defense” explicitly reiterated that “China unswervingly pursues an independent foreign policy of peace and promotes friendly cooperation with all countries on the basis of the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence” (Ministry of National Defense, 2010).

The emphasis on sovereignty and territorial integrity is inspired by historical experience, particularly the first and second Opium Wars and China’s ‘Century of Humiliation’. The highest priority for the Chinese government is the survival and legitimation of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). To do this they need to prove capable of protecting national interests of securing “state sovereignty, national security, territorial integrity, and national reunification” (Fung, 2019:9). Beijing does not want to risk establishing a precedent for international interference in its Taiwan issue or the situations in Tibet and Xinjiang by “relax[ing] its position on the principle of respecting sovereignty and non-interference” (Chen, 2009: 158). Linguistically, Chinese policy circles have been trying to encourage the use of the less-politically sensitive term non-traditional security ( *fei chuantong anquan*) to avoid the implications of human security and human rights on China’s domestic affairs (Lanteigne, 2019:639).

In 1971, when China became a member of the UN, they had strictly opposed UN peacekeeping, which it saw as “a thinly veiled disguise for the great powers’ imperialism” (Zürcher, 2020:124). Since then China seems to have developed a “much more diversified position on intervention, voting for robust peace enforcement missions, committing combat troops on mission, and is actively engaging in the discourse regarding the responsibility to

# Norm-taker or Norm-shaper: Is China Socialising into Norms of Intervention?

Written by Elizabeth McGowan

protect” (Fung, 2019:4). China wanted to become an active member of international society and prove itself a worthy and legitimate member of the Great Powers, particularly after the reputational damage of Tiananmen Square (1989).

China has no official definition of intervention and “the principles of “non-intervention” (*bu ganyu*) and “non-interference” (*bu ganshe*) have been used interchangeably in official Chinese documents” (Sorensen, 2019:604). However, there are indicators that the definition of intervention is adopting a narrower meaning of direct intervention, to which China has shown a strong aversion. Though recently its involvement and contributions to peacekeeping missions has seen a marked increase, China stands firmly against regime change, particularly after the experience of Libya. There is a fear that UN-sanctioned interventions might be a ‘trojan horse’ for regime change and that civilian protection or international order could be an excuse to oust a problematic regime (Mu, 2013:112).

On the other hand, China’s indirect intervention practices have been more forthcoming. Chinese rhetoric tends to avoid using ‘intervention’ with regards to these actions and emphasises the legitimacy of multilateral cooperation, so long as “it [proceeds] with respect for sovereignty, under the UN authorization, and [is] at the invitation of the target state; and force is only [used] when all other options have proven ineffective” (Carlson, 2004:10). China also avoids the negative connotations of the term ‘intervention’ with regards to its economic activities in other states. Mansour has argued that the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) was a ‘welcome “positive intervention”’ (2019: 669). Beijing has supported multilateral development finance mechanisms in Asia, Africa and the Inter-American regions, institutions which ‘offer complementary alternative options for development financing and could turn into default options if conditions necessitate’ (Chin, 2012:212). Chinese loans have become increasingly attractive due to the competitive interest rates and flexible repayment schedules (Chin, 2012:216). Significantly, however, there was a marked increase in Chinese mediation activity after the BRI was launched in 2013, despite the claim to have no political conditions tied to economic development (Hoffman/Legarda, 2018).

## *China’s identity and peer groups*

China’s interaction with intervention norms is driven by “inherently social calculations, [...] a [dynamic and changing] logic of appropriateness and a desire to conform to an intersubjective standard of good behavior” (Fung, 2019:5). Fung identifies two status peer groups with which China identifies: the Great Powers and developing ex-colonial states (2019). This duality comes through in various international interactions: “[n]owhere is the paradoxical duality of China’s identity more apparent than in its involvement in the global aid regime, where it is at once a recipient and provider of international aid” (Yeophantong, 2013:346). Likewise, with regards to intervention, China wants to prove itself a responsible power and an active and reliable member of the UNSC, while also presenting itself as a defender of traditional norms of non-interference and the independence of Global South states.

China’s identification with the Global South is reflected in its membership in the G77+China and its observer position in the Non-Aligned Movement. Although the Global South is not a homogenous entity, it shares common “experiences of a power disparity with the global elite” (Fung, 2019:50). China experienced colonisation and unequal treaties during the Qing and Republican eras, instilling its political culture with a ‘special understanding’ for the sanctity of state sovereignty (Hirono/Yang/Lanteigne, 2019:579). China wants to prove itself a social leader of the Global South, representing its interests in the UNSC and making efforts to limit and control what constitutes responsible and legitimate intervention. This emphasis on non-intervention has become the foundation of China’s relations with the Global South, due to a shared sensitivity to Western Powers’ management undermining their sovereignty, or even the use of intervention as an excuse to dominate or overthrow existing governments. Perhaps, as Jingdong has argued, this self-identification with the Global South is ‘more reflective of a United Front approach of an earlier era than an unequivocal solidarity with the developing world in both normative and material terms’ (2020).

## *China’s interaction with the UN*

Beijing’s leadership only gradually and incrementally began to engage with the requirements for full entry into international society after Mao’s death and the advent of Deng Xiaoping’s reform agenda (Foot, 2001:8). Nevertheless, China has become far more active in both the UNSC and UNGA which provide valuable platforms for Chinese foreign policy and international interactions.

# Norm-taker or Norm-shaper: Is China Socialising into Norms of Intervention?

Written by Elizabeth McGowan

Being part of the UN is crucial for China's international status and position in international society. As Professor Paul Taylor has aptly explained: "[b]eing accepted as a candidate for high office in the UN, for instance by membership of its key committees, and the performing of key roles in the system, had come to be regarded as legitimising their autonomy" (cited in Zhongying, 2005:96). In Xi Jinping's speech in the UNGA in 2015, he reiterated that the UN is the "universal and most representative and authoritative international Organization" (UNGA, 2015:18). Beijing has not only sought to maintain the UN as the highest international authority, but also to play its part in that authority and to hold key positions both in the formal organisation and in its peacekeeping regime to prove its status as a responsible power. By supporting the international system through the UN, Beijing has consolidated its position somewhat and earned the credibility to push for modifications or limits on norms and activities such as intervention (Fung, 2019:140). The UNSC has become a useful platform from which to investigate China's non-intervention policies. As one of the five permanent members, China can use its veto to promote Chinese national and regional interests, as well as to limit or prevent certain Great Power interventions. This veto power, however, is balanced with status concerns, and the desire to be accepted by the other powers. China uses the platform and its veto not to prevent interventions and uphold sovereign rights and independence, but to *limit* and *control* the developing norm of intervention by stressing multilateralism and the authority and legitimacy of the UNSC in sanctioning interventions.

Additionally, the UN is a vital platform through which China can "deal effectively with the role strain that is a function of its multiple identities" (Foot, 2014:1088). The UNGA represents the principle of universality, which is defined by Beijing "not in terms of universal values or global solidarism, but as global representation of pluralist policy positions or values" (Foot, 2014:1091). The UNGA presents a broader range of political preferences and geographical representations. China can stand with its Global South peer group in the UNGA and voice its traditional values more freely than the Great Power dominated UNSC.

In order to consolidate its position as a Great Power, "Beijing has been compelled to make adjustments, and at times major compromises" in practice, while to sustain its representation among the Global South, it has maintained "rhetorical adherence to its fundamental principles such as respect for sovereignty and non-interference in domestic affairs" (Jingdong, 2020). In this way, "the primary tool in Chinese diplomacy [has become] rhetorical" (Johnston, 2003:40). The following chapters will analyse the use of this rhetoric in UN discourse on the Middle East and Israel-Palestine, investigating how language is used to shape intervention action and norms from a consolidated international position.

## Methodology

Much of the literature on China's intervention practices focuses on veto patterns and trying to determine the criteria for intervention. This paper, on the other hand, determines to analyse the language of intervention and non-intervention norms to gain an insight into China's very understanding of the principles. The value and impact of language is often overlooked in critical scholarship. Language shapes how actors engage with concepts and ideas as well as how they communicate and relate to one another. Studying how actors use language can reveal how they think as well as whether the concepts and ideas they are expressing are internalised/naturalised in their discourse, or whether the language is being consciously manipulated for political goals.

As intervention has not yet reached the norm internalisation stage of the norm lifecycle, it is not a naturalised discourse, thus rendering a traditional Foucauldian Discourse Analysis inappropriate. Therefore this paper employs a critical discourse analysis approach, focusing on the use of language of intervention. Ultimately it will attempt to answer whether the language of intervention is being assimilated and naturalised, indicating socialisation, or whether China has adopted the language consciously in order to use it to its advantage in the international arena.

This analysis will rely predominantly on statements made in the UNSC and the UNGA.<sup>[2]</sup> This will allow for a comparison of how the context and society in which the statement is given affects the language used. It will provide an insight into how China's representatives present themselves and their engagement with intervention principles to the international community through their use of language. The analysis will also cross-reference and compare with official government statements and speeches as well as with media releases. The media is an important source for language analysis as "analyzing the discourse of an official Chinese newspaper can, at the very least, shed light on

# Norm-taker or Norm-shaper: Is China Socialising into Norms of Intervention?

Written by Elizabeth McGowan

how the government aims to present the Chinese position” (Kounalakis, 2016:151). This paper will use the online archives of the China Daily Global, which is owned by the CCP State Council Information Office. It is one of the most influential English language journals in China with a global circulation of 700,000, a multimedia readership of 350 million (China Daily, 2021a).

The paper focuses on the discourse surrounding China’s involvement in the Middle East and, more specifically, in the Israel-Palestine conflict. The Israel-Palestine conflict is particularly interesting, not only because it has been an issue for many decades with sustained concern from regional neighbours and the international community as a whole, but it also presents a case where China has little investment in the region and there are fewer factors influencing the adoption of norms of intervention. Overall, China seems to be showing an increased interest in the Middle East, gradually developing a foreign policy strategy in the region. China has shown relatively sustained support for Palestine throughout the conflict and has been active in promoting a three route implementation plan, attempting to consolidate the establishment of the two-state solution (People’s Daily, 2021).

The international community has been vocal in their desire to pursue peace in the region through the two-state solution. Israel’s occupation and settlement of the West Bank and Gaza were declared illegal under international law by the UNSC (2016). Nevertheless, Israel still occupies the West Bank and claims the whole of Jerusalem as its capital (while the Palestinians claim East Jerusalem as the capital of the future Palestinian state). The US is one of the few states to recognise Israel’s claims. Violent conflict broke out in May this year after the eviction of six Palestinian families in the Sheikh Jarrah (part of the occupied Palestinian territories). Despite the ceasefire between Israel and Hamas, which came into effect on 21 May 2021, ending 11 days of fighting, both sides claimed victory and it was short-lived. On 16 June 2021, the fighting resumed as incendiary balloons were launched from Gaza into Israel, provoking the Israeli Air Force to initiate multiple airstrikes in the Gaza Strip. According to the health ministry in Gaza, there were at least 243 casualties; more than 100 were women and children. Israel claims to have killed 225 militants during the fighting, and suffered 12 casualties, including two children (BBC, 2021).

The proceeding discourse analysis will be thematically structured, demonstrating how China engages with the Israel-Palestine conflict in international organisations as a permanent member of the UNSC through the rhetoric and language of intervention.

## A Critical Discourse Analysis Approach

While on the surface, the employment of language of intervention may suggest that China is socialising with intervention norms, a more comprehensive study of how the language is used reveals implicit attitudes and behaviours of intervention.

### *The Language of intervention*

Due to the politicisation of the language of intervention, China has to be careful how it employs language to discuss intervention activities, whether direct or indirect, in order to retain its legitimacy and reputation as a responsible power, not only among its domestic population, but also among its peer group of developing states. Similarly, it cannot prevent other Great Powers from undertaking unilateral action, but it can develop a strong international rhetoric to delegitimise unilateral and non-UN mandated interventions.

The negative connotations of ‘interference’ and ‘integration’ remain ingrained in international discourse, providing China with a powerful political tool to use against Western interventions. When discussing Chinese interventions it “blurs its own intervention actions by applying different Chinese words that are essentially similar to intervention, such as conciliation, mediation, creative engagement and involvement” (Mu, 2013:33). Wang Yizhou from Peking University, coined the concept ‘creative involvement’. This term not only legitimises ‘involvement’, but actively encourages China to play an active and creative role in international affairs. Wang argues that “creative involvement is different from the US style of interventionism because it builds on a full exploration of all possible diplomatic means and a prudent approach towards the use of force”, while also focusing engagement in constructive state building (Sorensen, 2019:600/601).

## Norm-taker or Norm-shaper: Is China Socialising into Norms of Intervention?

Written by Elizabeth McGowan

As China became more involved in international society and institutions, it engaged more flexibly with the norm of non-intervention. When that position was gradually consolidated, it began to adapt the use of language of intervention to limit and control the application and meaning of the norm, trying to present itself as a responsible Great Power and a leader of the Global South. Consequently, not only has Beijing used alternative terms to avoid the connotations of 'intervention', but it has also expanded the lexicon of intervention to allow for more flexibility in its engagement with intervention norms. China condemns intervention and vows to "remain committed to the basic principles of sovereign equality and non-interference in other country's internal affairs, as enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations" (UNGA, 2019:46). Meanwhile, China's definition of intervention was reduced to indicate only direct interventions through economic sanctions, military deployment or, increasingly, regime change interferences. This gives more flexibility to include development and mediation interventions (and other indirect intervention actions) in the discourses without evoking the opposition encountered by 'intervention'.

Just as China has developed a split identity as both a Great Power and a Developing Country in the Global South, represented in the UNSC and the UNGA respectively, so too have they developed an intervention discourse rhetoric appropriate for both peer groups and UN platforms.

In the UNGA China is much more vocal in supporting norms of non-intervention and sovereign rights. On average the speeches given by the Chinese representative are longer than their statements in the UNSC. In a speech given by Xi in 2015, he emphasised the importance of sovereign equality and 'that the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all countries are inviolable and their internal affairs are not subjected to interference' (UNGA, 2015:19). China's identification with the Global South is made clear in the UNGA, with Xi supporting "greater representation and say of developing countries, especially African countries, in the international governance system" (UNGA, 2015:21). In fact, Xi declared that "China's vote in the United Nations will always belong to the developing countries", claiming representation and social leadership of the Global South and its values (namely non-intervention) (UNGA, 2015:21). Furthermore, any intervention in other states' affairs is framed as developmental aid. China would "share its development experience" with "no intention of exporting [their] development model or lecturing others" (UNGA, 2019:46). Not only is this caveat intended to avoid criticism of intervention activity, but it also presents an implicit criticism of the West's liberal peace agenda. Xi even defined sovereign rights as the "right to independently choose social systems and development paths" to reiterate the benefits of China's development programme over the West's" (UNGA, 2015:19).

In the UNSC China presents a different attitude. In contrast to in the UNGA and in the context of Middle East, the language China employs focuses on legitimising interventions and *controlling* and *limiting* interventions to particular methods. While in the case of Belgium and Germany's draft resolution on Syria in 2020 China vetoed intervention, staunchly opposing the 'illegal sanctions' that had been imposed for years, it is important to recognise that this veto was placed because of the rejection of China's proposed amendment to prevent any unilateral action (UNSC, 2020:21). One of the conditions for responsible intervention for China is multilateralism. Similarly, China proceeded in its statement to support 'the international community in stepping up humanitarian relief efforts' so long as this was 'on the basis of respecting Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity' (UNSC, 2020:21). We can see this trend in the discussions on the Israel-Palestine conflict. Here China is more supportive of intervening to aid the peace process but avoids the term 'intervention', instead calling for 'pragmatic assistance' to aid the Palestinians (UNSC, 2001:14). The international community is called upon to protect the 'legitimate rights' of the Palestinians in the face of 'Israeli military occupation', using rhetoric to paint Israel as the colonial interventionists, violating Palestine's sovereign rights (UNSC, 2001:12). Regional powers, such as the Middle East Quartet, are called upon in China's rhetoric to play a 'constructive role' and 'exert its influence' to 'alleviate the difficult humanitarian situation in Gaza' (UNSC, 2008:15). This uses the discourse on human security, while also advocating intervention which, through linguistic implication, is strictly not military. Thus we can see how China uses the broader and more flexible language of intervention to legitimise the actions of the UNSC, while still upholding values of sovereign rights and non-intervention.

*Consensus, multilateralism and diplomacy: what constitutes legitimate intervention*

Language has a social power to legitimise and justify certain behaviours and actions. China uses the language of intervention to shape what constitutes legitimate intervention practice, particularly within the UNSC.



## Norm-taker or Norm-shaper: Is China Socialising into Norms of Intervention?

Written by Elizabeth McGowan

As previously mentioned, China's discourse in the UN often refers to consensus and multilateralism. China heavily criticises unilateral action, arguing that "[u]nilateralism and protectionism are posing major threats to the international order" (UNGA, 2019:46). China also emphasises working through the institutions of the UN together as an 'international community' (UNSC, 2008:15 and UNSC, 2020:21) and supports the contributions of regional organisations. For example, in 2021 China declared its support for the League of Arab States, the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation and other regional organisations in their involvement in the Israel-Palestine conflict (UNSC, 2021:8).

Intervention discourse is used to promote specific means and methods of intervention that could be deemed more justifiable, legitimate or less intrusive than direct military intervention and economic sanctions. In the Israel-Palestine conflict, China has been an advocate of negotiations and dialogues, arguing that "political talks are the only correct approach to the question of the Middle East" (UNGA, 2008:14). Similarly, China's statement at the veto of the resolution on Syria in 2020 urged "all parties to strengthen dialogue and negotiation, actively promote a Syrian-led and -owned political process and work together" (UNSC, 2020:21). Not only does this promote dialogue and negotiation, but it also emphasises state-led mediation rather than international/foreign direction in the political processes. China's mediation efforts in the Middle East have been relatively well received due to the lack of historical presence in the region, unlike the US or other European countries. This has given Beijing the ability to engage with all conflict parties. For example, in Afghanistan, where China was willing and able to engage both the government in Kabul and the Taliban. In Israel-Palestine China has repeatedly supported 'monitoring mechanisms' (UNSC, 2001:14) and encouraged international involvement to "vigorously help Palestine to strengthen its capacity-building and accelerate its economic development" which will help alleviate the humanitarian situation (UNGA, 2008:14). Indeed, China often puts significant emphasis on development initiatives in line with its evolving developmental peace theory.

Finally, the language of intervention has been used to justify intervention activities. This can clearly be seen in the discourse surrounding Israel-Palestine. China declared in 2001 that the conflict "pose[d] a grave threat to the Middle East peace process and to regional stability", justifying any intervention on behalf of international peace and security as stipulated by the UN Charter (UN Charter, n.d.). China also emphasised the legitimacy of the Palestinian cause both in the UNSC and the UNGA, stating that they had a "just struggle to regain their legitimate national rights and interests" (UNGA, 2001:19). In 2021 China has reiterated that "Israel's illegal settlement activities in the occupied territories constitute an obstacle to peace between Palestine and Israel and to the prospect of the two-State solution" (UNSC, 2021:8). Not only does this again class Israel as a threat to peace and security, but also implies that Israel has engaged in illegal intervention activities, occupying territory like a colonial power and breaking international law, thus requiring international intervention to resolve its aggression.

### *Criticising the West: delegitimising Great Power intervention*

Due to the persistence of non-interference norms, Chinese leaders have associated the concept of intervention with "powers' coercive actions toward the weaker" and therefore it has become a word that "often comes to Chinese minds to describe the Western countries' actions that should be denounced" because they are perceived as 'immoral' (Mu, 2013:33). Intervention rhetoric thereby becomes a valuable political tool to critique the West. Critique often surfaces implicitly in the UNGA. In 2019, China reiterated its commitment to the 'principle of independence' and argued that China "will neither subordinate [themselves] to others nor coerce others into submission", deliberately drawing comparison to the West's legacy of colonialism (UNGA, 2019:46). In the same statement, China critiques the imposition of unilateral sanctions and 'long-arm jurisdiction over other countries', contending that this behaviour goes against international law, and is 'a typical bullying practice' (UNGA, 2019:47).

These general criticisms (one would assume were directed to the Western Powers) are more explicitly stated in the UNSC. After China's amendment to the proposed 2020 resolution on Syria was rejected, it produced a statement which heavily criticised the imposition of "unilateral coercive measures", namely sanctions (UNSC, 2020:21). The amendment tried to prevent such measures, which China claimed were illegal and "stifling the livelihoods of the Syrian people" (UNSC, 2020:21). The statement questioned the morality and intentions of the US, saying it "claims to uphold the spirit of humanitarianism, but it has politicised humanitarian issues and ruthlessly bashed the

## Norm-taker or Norm-shaper: Is China Socialising into Norms of Intervention?

Written by Elizabeth McGowan

Government and the people of Syria”, playing on fears of regime change norms (UNSC, 2020:21).

Chinese media provides an interesting study here as it projects an image of international society and foreign policy created by the government for the consumption of the domestic and international public. One recurring theme is the idea of the West's 'double standards'. The language of double standards is often evoked by the China representatives, both in international fora like the UNGA as well as the media. The People's Daily published an article in August 2021 titled "America's double standards aggravate humanitarian crisis". By recognising Jerusalem as the capital of Israel and relocating the US embassy in Israel to the city, China claims the US "undermined Palestine's right to establish an independent state" and has "totally disregarded the humanitarian crisis in the Gaza strip" (Su, 2021).

Below are the top six headlines that result from a search on the China Daily Global website for 'Palestine'<sup>[3]</sup>:

- "Constructive engagement"
- "UN calls for political solution to end conflict between Israelis, Palestinians"
- "Natural get-together"
- "Proposals made to help solve Palestine Issue"
- "Mess-Making Muscling in"
- "US only pretends to defend Muslims' rights"

The final two headlines evoke this criticism of double standards. In "Mess-Making Muscling in", Ya suggests that the historical trend of US interventionism in Iran and Syria bode ill for Israel-Palestine (Ya, 2021b). The US' support for Israel will present an obstacle to peace and the repeated vetoes issued by the US suggest that rather than genuine concern for peace and security, the US has used the region for 'the geopolitical games of great powers' (Ya, 2021b). A second article, "US only pretends to defend Muslims' rights", argues that America has double standards because it does nothing to stop the prejudice shown against American Muslims (China Daily, 2021b).

China is able to use this negative image of the US to create a contrasting portrayal of itself as a responsible power of the Global South. The other headlines from the China Daily present a positive depiction of Chinese involvement in the conflict. The article "Constructive Engagement" introduces intervention under another name. In direct contrast to the US's 'mess-making' (Ya, 2021b), China "does not seek to compete with or replace any country in the Middle East, nor to attempt to fill the vacuum" (Ya, 2021a). Instead, China stands in solidarity with developing countries, including the Middle East, and "promotes a just and reasonable international order and global governance" (Ya, 2021a). China is presented as a responsible power, ready to mediate and aid in the resolution of regional problems while upholding norms of non-interference in internal affairs.

The language analysis above has shown how China uses intervention rhetoric to give more flexibility in practice and carve out its place in international society. Contextualised, the discourse demonstrates how China displays partial socialisation in the UNSC in order to be accepted by the Great Powers, while still upholding traditional norms of non-interference in the UNGA in solidarity with developing countries.

### Implications: Is China a norm-taker or a norm-shaper?

The previous section analysed how the language of intervention reflects norms and principles and how far they have been internalised or utilised by China and its representatives. This section will proceed to explore the broader implications of this analysis, discussing the power of discourse and what it might reveal about China's conceptualisation of international norms and its understanding of its position and identity in international society. It is divided into four key themes: responsibility, international society, norm-manipulation and normative hegemony.

#### *China's understanding of responsibility*

It is worth considering how the language of intervention has reinforced or created notions of responsibility. Particularly in the UNGA, China has tried to present itself as a responsible power, a leader and great power, but one

## Norm-taker or Norm-shaper: Is China Socialising into Norms of Intervention?

Written by Elizabeth McGowan

that differs from the West.

In order to be accepted into international community by the Western Powers, China is expected to adopt notions of responsibility and act “in accordance with both the formal and informal rules governing society and its institutions” (Yeophantong, 2013:334). This involves adopting the language and norms of the West, including intervention principles and actions. The legitimacy of the CCP stems not only from the ability to maintain domestic economic growth, but to also protect its interests in the international sphere while presenting the image of a respected ‘responsible great power’ (Hirono/Yang/Lanteigne, 2019:584). With the increasing internalisation of human rights norms, China is increasingly pressured to accept norms of intervention on behalf of human security and engage in peacekeeping operations to gain a good reputation (Chen, 2009:160).

Around the mid-1990s, China officially identified itself as a “responsible power” (Deng, 2015:120). China now has a lexicon at its disposal to manipulate the meaning of responsible power. Responsibility was already encapsulated in the key foreign policy concept *fuzeren de daguo*, first expressed by Jiang Zemin in his speech to the Russian State Duma in 1997, predating Zoellick’s ‘responsible stakeholder’ concept (Yeophantong, 2013:331). Just like how China uses the negative connotations of intervention to delegitimise unilateral action and the interventions of the West, China is able to create an alternative image of the responsible power (largely promulgated in the UNGA), playing on common identities and alignment with the Global South.

In UN discourse on climate change, China and the Global South have repeatedly called for a ‘principle of common but differentiated responsibility’ (UNGA, 2016:11). China uses its identity as a developing country to limit international expectations and place the onus on developed/industrialised countries (Deng, 2015:124). “Despite its growing power and its focus on developing into a ‘responsible great power’, Beijing retains a degree of wariness about being seen as assuming too much global responsibility” and instead promotes consensus and multilateralism as conditions for legitimate and responsible action (Snetkov/Lanteigne, 2014:136).

Nevertheless, China’s response to the Asian Financial Crisis in 1997-8 created a sense of regional responsibility which filled the gap left by the indecisive and unresponsive West. While the Great Powers are trying to associate responsibility with sovereignty and intervention, China is actively trying to differentiate these concepts. Deng highlights how China’s leaders separated responsibility from domestic politics, denying that “responsibility” gave any “license for international interferences on China’s human rights practice” (Deng, 2015:121). Meanwhile, this differentiation is reinforced by a rhetoric of accusation towards the West for having double standards (Su, 2021). China contrasts itself with the West, claiming a moral bedrock grounded on the Five Pillars of Peaceful Coexistence and emphasising its ‘peaceful development’ and intention not to destabilize international politics for the sake of its own narrow national interests’ through irresponsible interventions (Richardson, 2011:289).

### *China’s position in international society*

Through its engagement with international norms and the associated discourse, China is simultaneously trying to establish a position within the international community while also trying to influence exactly what that community is. China does not only want to be part of the broader international community; it also wants to be part of the society of Great Powers. Foot argues that international society has become looser as it has globalised, which “implies a larger range of views over what constitutes the dominant norms and a weakening of the basis of agreement over what best promotes global order” (2001:12). As the UNGA has expanded and globalised, China has gained more influence and standing. They were sceptical of American post-Cold War views of a new world order, suspicious of underlying hegemonic intentions, and countered them with more statist ideas of “an international order (*guoji zhixu*), which was multipolar and respected state sovereignty” which is reflected in their intervention rhetoric (Snetkov/Lanteigne, 2014:127).

China has become increasingly assertive in its intervention rhetoric, with a trend appearing between the UNSC and UNGA and over time. One argument might be that China acts differently as an arriving/developing state than as a Great Power/arrived state. China has developed its military and economic capacities and is now part of the international community so can influence the definitions and implementations of the norms it has been expected to

# Norm-taker or Norm-shaper: Is China Socialising into Norms of Intervention?

Written by Elizabeth McGowan

assimilate to. However, this may prove a dangerous assumption. There is a lack of scholarship on how to determine whether a state has 'arrived'. China still claims both peer groups of the Great Powers and Developing World (Fung, 2019). Furthermore, its ranking on the Fragile States Index is 95<sup>th</sup> of 174 with a score of 68.9 (Fragile States Index, 2021). Tunisia is only marginally worse with a score of 69.2 while the US and Israel are 143<sup>rd</sup> and 148<sup>th</sup> respectively (Fragile States Index, 2021). China is fighting against the classifications of liberal and illiberal states which only reinforces artificial Western Liberal categorisation of states perpetuating an international hierarchy and excluding 'illiberal states' from full acceptance into international society.

There is some domestic tension within China about what China's position in international society should be. On the one hand, scholars emphasise the importance of being accepted as a 'responsible great power' and of a positive international image of China, promoting "stronger Chinese cooperation with other great powers and a more active Chinese role in international — and regional — multilateral organizations" (Sorensen, 2019:597). On the other hand, there is growing expectation for Chinese leaders to "more actively and directly protect and promote Chinese citizens, investments and activities abroad, and in the process show willingness to demonstrate or even use China's — now stronger — economic and military capabilities" (Sorensen, 2019:597). The People's Liberation Army are increasing the pressure for more assertive action, using capabilities for power projection, which was recently demonstrated by the establishment of the first official Chinese overseas military base in July 2017 in Djibouti (Sorensen, 2019:601). As the legitimacy of the CCP relies on its ability to protect and promote Chinese national interests, this domestic pressure has a significant influence in pushing leaders to engage with and attempt to shape international norms and society.

## *Norm-manipulation*

Rather than socialising with norms of intervention, China has demonstrated conscious use of the language and rhetoric of intervention to establish its position in international society and have its voice heard. This section will look further into how, why and to what effect China is acting more as a norm-shaper than a norm-taker when it comes to intervention.

Johnston provides a useful overview of the potential rise of a revisionist state (2003:11). In the first stage, the actor is outside of the international community, with low participation in institutions. The second stage sees the revisionist state become a participant in international institutions without accepting the norms of the community. In the third stage, "[t]he actor may participate in these institutions and may abide by their rules and norms temporarily, but if given a chance, it will try to change these rules and norms in ways that defeat the original purposes of the institution and the community" (Johnston, 2003:11). Key here is that Johnston highlights how socialisation and norm lifecycles are not inevitable or linear processes. If this framework is applied to China we may argue that China has partially socialised with norms of international society, such as intervention, in order to be accepted into international institutions. Although China heavily emphasises multilateralism and the authority of the UN (and is thus currently unlikely to desire to undermine it), China has been challenging other institutions by manipulating current norms and presenting alternatives to Western structures. For instance, China has developed its "own set of principles, norms, rules, and operational standards for giving foreign aid" encapsulated by Zhou Enlai's "Eight Principles for Aid to Foreign Countries" (1959) and has established "lending functions and norms that are specific to China Eximbank" (Chin, 2012:220). China does not necessarily want to undermine international institutions, but they are challenging the normative hegemony of the West, and specifically of the US.

It is becoming increasingly evident that China is influencing international norms, especially in the development of peacekeeping. China has been very deliberate with how it engages with peacekeeping interventions, sending specific personnel with strict mission guidelines. For instance, the personnel sent to the Mali operation in 2013 were not 'combat forces' but 'guard teams' and would "not be directly involved in military conflicts", according to Yang Yujun, Ministry of National Defense Spokesperson (People's Daily, 2013). The forces were dispatched for "military operations other than war", or MOOTW (*feizhanzheng xing junshi xingdong*) (Lanteigne, 2019:640). Whether merely rhetoric or substantive principle, this language demonstrates China's understanding of and influence on responsible peacekeeping. Fung identifies three "cognate concepts in the global peace and security order — regarding the responsibility to protect, the developmental peace, and a 'Community for a Shared Future of Mankind' — [which]

## Norm-taker or Norm-shaper: Is China Socialising into Norms of Intervention?

Written by Elizabeth McGowan

highlight how China is making a practical push, albeit on the margins, to produce its own norms that limit the intervention regime” (2019:140).

With R2P, Beijing has “aimed to develop the norm in a direction that gives primacy to the preventative aspects of R2P in hopes of diminishing the instances where the norm of non-interference in the internal affairs of states is breached”, and when it is breached, Beijing has focused efforts on state capacity-building (Pu, 2012:359). China is not alone in its fear that “the concept could become a rationale for interference in essentially domestic affairs and for the strong to infringe on the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the weak” (Luck, 2008:5). In 2011 Brazil proposed the concept of ‘responsibility while protecting’. The BRICS countries have become progressively proactive in the evolution of norms. Regional organisations can not only “[reflect] the interests of participating countries, [but also] strengthen the legitimacy and influence of these countries’ normative preferences” (Pu, 2012:358). China has introduced additional rhetorical innovations regarding ‘responsible protection’, further undermining intervention and regime change rhetoric (Fung, 2019:139).

### *Normative hegemony*

This paper has already explored how the language of intervention is used by China to evoke criticism of the West and delegitimising intervention actions. More significantly, this criticism undermines the normative hegemony of the West.

In the norm lifecycle, Finnemore and Sikkink identify a tipping point which occurs when enough states adopt the norm for it to cascade. However, they nuance this theory, arguing that “states are not equal when it comes to normative weight” and “some states are critical to a norm’s adoption” (Finnemore/Sikkink, 1998:901). This suggests the existence of a normative hierarchy in the international system and that states may vie for normative hegemony. In fact, “[a]ny hegemonic system has both a materialist foundation and an ideational basis” (Pu, 2012:350) and thus socialisation becomes a vital process for the establishment and maintenance of hegemonic order, legitimising the hegemonic power and their grounding ideologies. When “[e]lites in secondary states buy into and internalize norms that are articulated by the hegemon”, they also “pursue policies consistent with the hegemon’s notion of international order” (Ikenberry/Kupchan, 1990:283).

By the fifteenth century, discourse power was dominated by the West. Centuries of imperialism left a discursive legacy and even after the collapse of colonialism, the language and concepts of the West remained influential. The 2008 financial crisis was one of the major international events which destabilised the West’s normative hegemony and led to the questioning of fundamental values and the nature of their political and economic systems. Exogenous constraints on members of international society relaxed in correlation to “the weakening of U.S. hegemonic leadership in the Bretton Woods system and the diminishing capacity of the G7 to support established institutional norms and rules” (Chin, 2012:228). Consequently, there was an increasing trend towards two-way socialisation. This left space for other countries, including China, to challenge the idea that Western ideas and culture are superior, and to begin introducing their own normative influence. China was able to selectively internalise global norms, while also strengthening its normative influence in global institutions and the Global South, manipulating discourse to greater reflect China’s norms and values.

Ikenberry and Kupchan suggest another hegemon will rise to fill the vacuum left by the US in its descent from global hegemony (1990). However, Chinese leadership have encouraged the development of a multipolar international society, claiming that this multipolarization (*duojihua*) would be a good thing for China (Johnston, 2003:29). Pu argues for a power diffusion model, whereby “the existing America-led unipolar system will not be replaced by a new hegemonic system, but by a more equal distribution of power” (2012:360). Emerging powers are still wary of taking on too many responsibilities.

### *An alternative argument: how ‘the rest’ adopts the language of the West*

An alternative argument can be formulated with the application of a postcolonial critique, contending that in order to be heard, China has had to adopt the language of the West. On the surface this may appear to be socialisation as China adopts the language and norms of intervention in international discourse. However, the inconsistencies in

# Norm-taker or Norm-shaper: Is China Socialising into Norms of Intervention?

Written by Elizabeth McGowan

action and implementation of these norms suggest that China's socialisation remains on a rhetorical level, and the norm of intervention is used as a tool to establish its position within international institutions.

This argument draws inspiration from Spivak's claim that the subaltern voice is silenced as it is mediated through dominant systems of representation and thus remains suppressed in a neo-imperialist hierarchy (2010). This is not to assume that China represents a suppressed subaltern, but rather that it had a lack of access to institutionally validated language, this validation stemming from the West and their institutions. In her essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?", Spivak uses the analogy of the British outlawing *sati*, the Hindu practice of burning a widow on her husband's funeral pyre (2010). Although the intentions behind the act were to save lives and give women a degree of free choice, the ultimate result was the suppression of Hindu culture and the reinforcement of British 'civilisation' and Indian 'barbarism'. Western pursuit of norms of intervention may promote human security, but it also reinforces international hierarchies of responsible powers and of those powers whose intervention is deemed legitimate, while denouncing states that do not fit Western definitions of the liberal state. Some postcolonial debates even argue that the liberal state has become a new standard of civilisation, legitimating international interference. China has explicitly acknowledged this in Xi's address to the UNGA in 2015, which called for the "respect [of] all civilizations" and promoted the "creative development of human civilization. . . [through] dialogue and exchanges instead of trying to exclude or replace one another" (UNGA, 2015:20). China, now to some extent an accepted member of international society, is challenging these standards from within the system. It is promoting Mandarin in developing countries as well as introducing its own discourse on responsible power, non-interference and developmental peace. If what we are seeing now is the decline of Western normative hegemony, the subaltern will have space to promote its own validated language within the international system.

China is neither in singular terms a rule-maker nor a rule-taker; it is both. Rather than electing for drastic changes to the international system, China has arguably come to advocate a 'gradualist' approach that favours incremental reforms and, above all, the pursuit of world order and stability, if not maintenance of the status quo itself (Yeophantong, 2013:343).

## Conclusion

Is China socialising into international norms of intervention? Intervention and R2P have not reached the final stage in the norm lifecycle and remain dynamic and developing concepts that have not been internalised equally across international society. China has had to balance limited socialisation of these concepts to ameliorate both the Western Powers who want China to play a more active and responsible role in international society, and the Global South who expect China to uphold traditional principles of non-interference and sovereign independence. The language of intervention has been expanded to give China greater flexibility in its discourse about intervention practices, demonstrating how "the 'sacred' notion of non-intervention[...] has become a tactical tool rather than a deeply held value" (Verhoeven, 2014:67).

China is trying to build their reputation as a responsible Great Power, to be accepted in international society and a member of key international organisations. In practice it has taken a more flexible approach to international norms of intervention as a means to gain this recognition and acceptance from the other Great Powers. However, China has politicised the language of intervention to control the application and extent of interventionism. Simultaneously China is distancing themselves from the West, arguing that they present an alternative to Western Liberalism and liberal democratic peace/development, aligning themselves instead with developing nations in the UNGA. China is thus able to use language to be both a norm taker and shaper and to direct the development of intervention norms and consolidate its identity and position in both the UNSC and the UNGA as representative of the Global South and a responsible developing power.

This study has been limited to UN discourse, in particular discourse concerning Israel-Palestine and Middle Eastern Peace Processes. A lengthier study might be able to analyse intervention discourse in regional institutions and across a broader timespan. Additionally, China seems to be developing an alternative model to liberal peacebuilding and development processes. Further research could investigate how this intervention discourse links to developmental peace theory, and the evolution of a Chinese model for foreign policy, the international system and

# Norm-taker or Norm-shaper: Is China Socialising into Norms of Intervention?

Written by Elizabeth McGowan

economic interventions.

## Bibliography

- British Broadcasting Company (2021) 'Gaza-Israel conflict in pictures: 11 days of destruction', *BBC News Online*, retrieved from: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-57205968> [accessed 10.08.2021].
- Carlson, A. (2004) 'Helping to Keep the Peace (Albeit Reluctantly): China's Recent Stance on Sovereignty and Multilateral Intervention', *Pacific Affairs*, 77(1), 9-27.
- Chen, J. (2009) 'Explaining the change in China's attitude toward UN peacekeeping: a norm change perspective', *Journal of Contemporary China*, 18(58), 157-173.
- Chin, G. (2012) 'Two-way socialisation: China, the World Bank, and Hegemonic Weakening', *The Brown Journal of World Affairs*, 19(1), 211-230.
- China Daily (2021a) 'Growing from Strength to Strength', *China Daily Online*, retrieved from: [https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202106/01/WS60b58330a31024ad0bac2ae0\\_2.html](https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202106/01/WS60b58330a31024ad0bac2ae0_2.html) [accessed 09.08.2021].
- China Daily (2021b) 'US only pretends to defend Muslim's rights', *China Daily Global Online*, retrieved from: <https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202107/14/WS60ee2fc1a310efa1bd661a66.html> [accessed 09.08.2021].
- Deng, F. (1996) *Sovereignty as Responsibility: Conflict Management in Africa*, Brookings Institution Press.
- Deng, Y. (2015) 'China: The Post-Responsible Power', *The Washington Quarterly*, 37(4), 117-132.
- Finnemore M. & Sikkink K. (1998) 'International Norm Dynamics and Political Change', *International Organization*, 52(4), 887-917.
- Foot, R. (2001) 'Chinese Power and the Idea of a Responsible State', *The China Journal*, 45, 1-19.
- Foot, R. (2014) "'Doing some things' in the Xi Jinping era: the United Nations as China's venue of choice", *International Affairs*, 90(5), 1085-1100.
- Foreign Ministry of the People's Republic of China (FMPRC) (2014) 'The Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence', retrieved from: [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/wjb\\_663304/zwjg\\_665342/zwbd\\_665378/t1179045.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/zwjg_665342/zwbd_665378/t1179045.shtml) [accessed 02.06.2021].
- Fund For Peace (2021) *Fragile States Index: The Fund For Peace*, retrieved from: <https://fragilestatesindex.org/global-data/> [accessed 11.08.2021].
- Fung, C. (2019) *China and Intervention at the UN Security Council: reconciling status*, Oxford University Press.
- Hirono, M. (2019) 'China's conflict mediation and the durability of the principle of non-interference: the case of post-2014 Afghanistan', *The China Quarterly*, 239, 614-634.
- Hirono, M., Yang, J. & Lanteigne, M. (2019) 'China's New Roles and Behaviour in Conflict-Affected Regions: Reconsidering Non-Interference and Non-Intervention', *The China Quarterly*, 239, 573-593.
- Hirsch, M. (2014) 'Ideational Change and the Emergence of the International Norm of Truth and Reconciliation Commissions', *European Journal of International Relations*, 20(3), 810-833.
- Hoffmann, M. & Legarda, H. (2018) 'China as a conflict mediator: maintaining stability along the belt and road',

# Norm-taker or Norm-shaper: Is China Socialising into Norms of Intervention?

Written by Elizabeth McGowan

retrieved from: <https://www.iiss.org/blogs/analysis/2018/08/china-conflict-mediation-belt-and-road> [accessed 09.06.2021].

Ikenberry, J. & Kupchan, C. (1990) 'Socialization and Hegemonic Power', *International Organizations*, 44(3), 283-315.

Jingdong, Y. (2020) 'Book Review: China and Intervention at the UN Security Council', *Australian Institute for International Affairs*, retrieved from: <https://www.internationalaffairs.org.au/australianoutlook/book-review-china-and-intervention-at-the-un-security-council/> [accessed 15.03.2021].

Johnston, A. I. (2003) 'Is China a Status Quo Power', *International Security*, 27(4), 5-56.

Johnston, A. I. (2007) *Social States: China in International Relations, 1980-2000*, Princeton University Press.

Kounalakis, M. (2016) 'China's position on international intervention: a media and journalism discourse analysis of its case for "Sovereignty" versus "Responsibility to Protect" principles in Syria', *Global Media and China*, 1(3), pp. 149-167.

Lanteigne, M. (2019) 'China's UN Peacekeeping in Mali and Comprehensive Diplomacy', *The China Quarterly*, 239, 635-654.

Luck, E. (2008) 'The United Nations and the Responsibility to Protect', *The Stanley Foundation*, retrieved from: <https://stanleycenter.org/publications/pab/LuckPAB808.pdf> [accessed 12.06.2021].

Mansour, I. (2019) 'Treading with caution: China's multidimensional interventions in the Gulf Region', *The China Quarterly*, 239, 655-675.

Ministry of National Defense (2010) 'China's National Defense in 2010', retrieved from: [http://eng.mod.gov.cn/publications/2021-06/23/content\\_4887922.htm](http://eng.mod.gov.cn/publications/2021-06/23/content_4887922.htm) [accessed: 12.08.2021].

Mu, R. (2013) 'China's non-intervention policy in UNSC sanctions in the 21<sup>st</sup> century: the cases of Libya, North Korea, and Zimbabwe', *Institute of International Relations and Area Studies*, 12, 102-130.

National Committee on US-China Relations (NCUSCR) (2005) 'Whither China? From Membership to Responsibility', *NCUSCR Newsletter*, 2C\_0405B2, 6-9.

People's Daily (2013) 'China to send security force for peacekeeping mission in Mali', *People's Daily Online*. retrieved from: <http://en.people.cn/90786/8303006.html> [accessed 11.08.2021].

People's Daily (2021) 'China proposes 3 routes to implement two-state solution: FM', *People's Daily Online*, retrieved from: <http://en.people.cn/n3/2021/0719/c90000-9873895.html> [accessed 21.07.2021].

Pu, X. (2012) 'Socialisation as a two-way process: emerging powers and the diffusion of international norms', *The Chinese Journal of International Politics*, 5, 341-367.

Richardson, C. J. (2011) 'A Responsible Power? China and the UN Peacekeeping Regime', *International Peacekeeping*, 18:3, 286-297.

Snetkov, A. & Lanteigne, M. (2014) "'The Loud Dissenter and its Cautious Partner" – Russia, China, global governance and humanitarian intervention', *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific*, 15, 113-146.

Sorensen, C. (2019) 'That is not intervention; that is interference with Chinese characteristics: New Concepts, distinctions and approaches developing in the Chinese debate and foreign and security policy practice', *The China*



# Norm-taker or Norm-shaper: Is China Socialising into Norms of Intervention?

Written by Elizabeth McGowan

*Quarterly*, 239, 594-613.

Spivak, G. C. (2010) 'Can the Subaltern Speak?', in *Can the Subaltern Speak? : Reflections on the History of an Idea*, ed. R. Morris, Columbia University Press, 21-78.

Su, J. (2021) 'America's double standards aggravate humanitarian crisis', *People's Daily Online*, retrieved from: <http://en.people.cn/n3/2021/0708/c98649-9869875.html> [accessed 21.07.2021].

United Nations (n.d.) *United Nations Charter*, retrieved from: <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/un-charter> [accessed 10.08.2021].

United Nations General Assembly (1981) *Declaration on the Inadmissibility of Intervention and Interference in the Internal Affairs of States*, 91<sup>st</sup> plen. mtg., UN Doc A/RES/36/103, 78-79, retrieved from: <https://undocs.org/pdf?symbol=en/A/RES/36/103> [accessed 10.08.2021].

United Nations General Assembly (2008) *The situation in the Middle East*, UNGAOR, 63<sup>rd</sup> Sess., 59<sup>th</sup> plen. mtg., UN Doc A/63/PV.59, retrieved from: <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/649228?ln=en> [accessed 08.08.2021].

United Nations General Assembly (2001) 56<sup>th</sup> Sess., 46<sup>th</sup> plen. mtg., UN Doc A/56/PV.46, retrieved from: <https://undocs.org/en/A/56/PV.46> [accessed 08.08.2021].

United Nations General Assembly (2015) 70<sup>th</sup> Sess., 13<sup>th</sup> plen. mtg., UN Doc A/70/PV.13, retrieved from: <https://undocs.org/en/A/70/PV.13> [accessed 27.07.2021].

United Nations General Assembly (2016) 71<sup>st</sup> Sess., 11<sup>th</sup> plen. mtg., UN Doc A/71/PV.11, retrieved from: <https://undocs.org/en/A/71/PV.11> [accessed 08.08.2021].

United Nations General Assembly (2019) 74<sup>th</sup> Sess., 9<sup>th</sup> plen. mtg., UN Doc A/74/PV.9, retrieved from: <https://undocs.org/en/A/74/PV.9> [accessed 08.08.2021].

United Nations Security Council (2001) *UNSC Meeting Records: The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question*, 56<sup>th</sup> year, 4438<sup>th</sup> mtg., UN Doc S/PV.4438, retrieved from: <https://undocs.org/en/S/PV.4438> [accessed 07.08.2021].

United Nations Security Council (2008) *UNSC Meeting Records: The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question*, 63<sup>rd</sup> year, 6060<sup>th</sup> mtg., UN Doc S/PV.6060, retrieved from: <https://undocs.org/en/S/PV.6060> [accessed 08.08.2021].

United Nations Security Council (2020) *Letter dated 10 July 2020 from the President of the Security Council addressed to the Secretary-General and the Permanent Representatives of the members of the Security Council*, UN Doc S/2020/693, retrieved from: <https://undocs.org/en/S/2020/693> [accessed 19.04.2021].

United Nations Security Council (2021) *UNSC Meeting Records: The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question*, 76<sup>th</sup> year, 8804<sup>th</sup> mtg., UN Doc S/PV.8804, retrieved from: <https://undocs.org/en/S/PV.8804> [accessed 08.08.2021].

Verhoeven, H. (2014) 'Is Beijing's non-interference policy history? How Africa is changing China', *The Washington Quarterly*, 37(2), 55-70.

Waltz, K. (1979) *Theory of International Politics*, Colombia University: Waveland Press inc.

Ya, F. (2021a) 'Constructive Engagement', *China Daily Global Online*, retrieved from: <https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202108/05/WS610b2916a310efa1bd666b36.html> [accessed 09.08.2021].

## Norm-taker or Norm-shaper: Is China Socialising into Norms of Intervention?

Written by Elizabeth McGowan

Ya, F. (2021b) 'Mess-making muscling in', *China Daily Global Online*, retrieved from: <https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202107/19/WS60f4b422a310efa1bd662a6d.html> [accessed 09.08.2021].

Yeophantong, P. (2013) 'Governing the World: China's Evolving Conceptions of Responsibility', *The Chinese Journal of International Politics*, 6, 329–364.

Zhongying, P. (2005) 'China's changing attitude to UN peacekeeping', *International Peacekeeping*, 12(1), 87-104.

[1] 'Language of intervention' refers to the language used to discuss cases of interference or intervention as well as language within the same semantic field, such as the related concepts of sovereignty and territorial integrity.

[2] This study is limited to working with English translations of key statements and information provided by Chinese representatives and news companies. It uses high-profile and widely circulated materials to provide a more representative discourse sample.

[3] as of 10.08.2021.