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**No. 225**

## **Rising from Within: China's Search for a Multilateral World and Its Implications for Sino-U.S. Relations**

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**25 March 2011**

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## ABSTRACT

This paper addresses a much-debated question: what impact will the rise of China have on the existing international system? The paper attempts to provide some clues for our better understanding of this issue by examining China's views on and policy towards international multilateralism in general and some of the newly emerging multilateral mechanisms in particular, including the G20 and the BRICs. This paper concludes that while China will become more proactive in its multilateral diplomacy, in many cases selectively, and increase its influence in global multilateral settings, various concerns and constraints will make it unlikely for China to completely overhaul or even dramatically reshape the multilateral architecture at the global level. Many factors that have hindered China's leadership role in East Asian multilateralism are likely to restrain it at the global level in the same fashion. China is likely to repeat what it has done in the East Asian regional multilateralism in the past decade: participation, engagement, pushing for cooperation in areas that would serve Chinese interests, avoiding taking excessive responsibilities, blocking initiatives that would harm its interests, and refraining from making grand proposals. In addition, China is stuck in defining its identity, and caught up between posturing as a leader of the developing world on some issues and siding with the developed countries on other policy issues. Given all these constraints, China's involvement in global multilateralism is likely to be guided by pragmatism rather than grand visions. The paper also argues that China will most likely strive to rise from within the existing international order. Washington should be prepared to plan its China policy on this basis and Sino-U.S. relation will largely be shaped by the dynamics of contentions for power and interest, as well as cooperation and coordination between China and the United States in various multilateral institutions.

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# Rising from Within: China's Search for a Multilateral World and Its Implications for Sino-U.S. Relations\*

## Introduction

China's phenomenal rise in recent decades has sparked an intense international debate on what impact the re-emergence of the “Middle Kingdom” will have on the existing international system. An important dimension in addressing this issue is China's policy towards multilateralism, defined as a “practice of coordinating national policies in groups of three or more states, through ad hoc arrangements or by means of institutions.”<sup>1</sup> Scrutinising China's perception and policy towards multilateral institutions and regimes may provide some useful clues for observers to ascertain whether it is rising as a status quo or as a revisionist power.<sup>2</sup> Understandably, almost all the studies so far have focused on the implications of China's approach to multilateralism for Sino-U.S. relation and U.S. global leadership. Ever since the mid-1990s, when the debate began to gather momentum, observers have put forth a wide range of views. Generally speaking, there are three schools of thought in the debate: successful integrationists, pragmatists of various kinds, and doomsday pessimists.

Some scholars are unequivocally sanguine about the prospect of China becoming an integral part of the existing international order. This profuse optimism, to a large extent, is built on a positive assessment of China's involvement in various international institutions.<sup>3</sup> Kent, for instance, concludes that as compared to its behaviours prior to the early 1980s, China's “acceptance of, and integration into, the international system have been nothing short of extraordinary.”<sup>4</sup> Lampton believes that “China had gone from trying to build a Third World United Nations (to compete

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\* A short version of part of this paper has appeared in *The International Spectator*, Vol. 45, Issue 4, 2010. The author is grateful to Chen Gang for his insightful views. I also thank Bui Ngoc Na Uy and Irene Chan for their research assistance.

<sup>1</sup> Robert O. Keohane, “Multilateralism: An Agenda for Research”, *International Journal* XLV, Autumn 1990, p. 731.

<sup>2</sup> Iain Johnston, “Is China a Status Quo Power?” *International Security* 27:4 (Spring 2003).

<sup>3</sup> For instance, Harold K. Jacobson & Michel Oksenberg, *China's Participation in the IMF, the World Bank, and GATT* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1990); Hongying Wang & James N. Rosenau, “China and Global Governance”, *Asian Perspective*, Vol. 33, No. 3, 2009, pp. 5–39; Ann Kent, “China, International Organizations and Regimes: The ILO as a Case Study in Organizational Learning”, *Pacific Affairs*, Vol. 70, No. 4 (Winter, 1997–1998), pp. 517–532; Pieter Bottelier, “China and the World Bank: How a Partnership was Built”, *Journal of Contemporary China* (2007), 16(51), May, 239–258; Hui Feng, *The Politics of China's Accession to the World Trade Organization: The Dragon Goes Global* (London: Routledge, 2006).

<sup>4</sup> Ann Kent, *Beyond Compliance: China, International Organizations, and Global Security* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2007), pp. 222–223.

with the UN) in the 1960s to wanting the UN to be the principal legitimator of the use of force and economic sanctions in the international system.”<sup>5</sup> Johnston observes that China has demonstrated a cooperative attitude towards international security regimes from 1980 to 2000 largely as a result of social learning.<sup>6</sup> Steinfeld argues that China has continued to integrate itself into the Western economic order and plays the rules set and dominated by the West.<sup>7</sup> As a strong believer of China’s “peaceful rise”, Zheng Bijian argues that China intends to integrate its modernisation drive with economic globalisation and as a result, “China will not change the international order and configuration through violence.”<sup>8</sup> Foot argues that China has chosen accommodation to cope with a U.S.-hegemonic global order, even though China, at the same time, attempts to hedge by seeking to establish solid relations with other partners and attempting to push for a more egalitarian world system to dilute U.S. power.<sup>9</sup> Others argue that since China regards itself as an engaged beneficiary of the contemporary international institutional order, Beijing is interested in maintaining and consolidating this order.<sup>10</sup> The renowned historian Wang Gungwu, notes that China, as of now, appears to be one of the strongest supporters of the current world order, hoping to establish a multi-polar world to restrain the only U.S. superpower.<sup>11</sup> Ikenberry has argued quite strongly that even if the rise of China will inevitably weaken U.S. power and dislodge the unipolar structure, the U.S.-led liberal international order will continue to stay and will ultimately integrate a more powerful China into that order.<sup>12</sup> Lo agrees with this prediction by saying that China has not

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<sup>5</sup> David M. Lampton, *The Three Faces of Chinese Power: Might, Money, and Minds* (California: University of California Press, 2008), p. 4.

<sup>6</sup> Alastair Iain Johnston, *Social States: China in International Institutions, 1980–2000* (Princeton; Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2008).

<sup>7</sup> Edward S. Steinfeld, *Playing Our Game: Why China's Rise Doesn't Threaten the West*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010)

<sup>8</sup> Zheng Bijian, *China's Peaceful Rise: Speeches of Zheng Bijian* (Washington D.C.: the Brookings Institution, 2005), p. 2.

<sup>9</sup> Rosemary Foot, “Chinese strategies in a U.S.-hegemonic global order: accommodating and hedging”, *International Affairs*, 82, 1 (2006) 77–94

<sup>10</sup> G. John Ikenberry, “The Rise of China: Power, Interests, and the Western Order”, and Qin Yaqing & Wei Ling, “Structures, Processes, and the Socialization of Power: East Asian Community-building and the Rise of China”, in Robert Ross & Zhu Feng (Eds.), *China's Ascent: Power, Security, and the Future of International Politics* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008); Marc Lanteigne, *China and International Institutions: Alternate Paths to Global Power* (London and New York: Routledge, 2005)

<sup>11</sup> Wang Gungwu, “China and the International Order: Some Historical Perspectives”, in Wang Gungwu & Zheng Yongnian (Eds.), *China and the New International Order* (London and New York: Routledge, 2008)

<sup>12</sup> G. John Ikenberry, “The Rise of China and the Future of the West: Can the Liberal System Survive?” *Foreign Affairs*, January/February 2008.

developed or put forth the values and norms to create some sort of “Eastphalian” international system.<sup>13</sup>

The second school of thought believes that China has pragmatically regarded multilateral institutions as political tools for its own benefits. Among the observers in this category, some are cautiously optimistic and others are more concerned about the uncertainties that China’s involvement in global multilateralism might engender. For those who are cautiously optimistic, China is willing to accept and participate in the existing international system but at the same time, mostly uses it in a pragmatic fashion to maximise its own interests. They believe that China prioritises participation in multilateral institutions where it can exercise more decision-making or bargaining power, facilitate its domestic economic development, restrain the hegemony of the United States for the purpose of pushing for “multi-polarity” in the international system, and improve China’s international image.<sup>14</sup> Moore notes that China’s increasing engagement in major multilateral institutions reflects China’s strategic and realpolitik consideration on the one hand but also exhibits some liberal internationalist features.<sup>15</sup> Kissinger believes that while China has been a positive participant in the international system, the future of global economic order will largely depend on the Sino-U.S. interaction in the coming years.<sup>16</sup>

Those pessimistic pragmatists believe that China has been participating in the international institutions but it has taken a “supermarket” approach—“buying what it must, picking up what it wants, and ignoring what it doesn’t” largely because the Chinese leaders “see the international scene as fundamentally one of competition, not condominium.”<sup>17</sup> Shambaugh believes that China is likely to act cautiously as a “selective multilateralist” in world affairs, working together with like-minded partners on a case-by-case basis and at the same time, trying to eschew too many global

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<sup>13</sup> Chang-Fa Lo, “Values to Be Added to an ‘Eastphalia Order’ by the Emerging China”, *Indiana Journal of Global Legal Studies*, Volume 17, Issue 1, Winter 2010, pp. 13–26.

<sup>14</sup> Guoguang Wu & Helen Lansdowne, “International multilateralism with Chinese characteristics: attitude changes, policy imperatives, and regional impacts”, in Guoguang Wu & Helen Lansdowne (Eds.), *China Turns to Multilateralism: Foreign Policy and Regional Security* (Oxon: Routledge, 2008).

<sup>15</sup> Thomas G. Moore, “Racing to integrate, or cooperating to compete? Liberal and realist interpretations of China’s new multilateralism”, in Guoguang Wu & Helen Lansdowne (Eds.), *China Turns to Multilateralism: Foreign Policy and Regional Security* (Oxon: Routledge, 2008).

<sup>16</sup> Henry A. Kissinger, “The Chance for a New World Order”, *International Herald Tribune*, January 12, 2009.

<sup>17</sup> Gary J. Schmitt, “Introduction”, in Gary J. Schmitt (Ed.), *The Rise of China: Essays on the Future Competition* (New York: Encounter Books, 2009).

obligations or entanglements.<sup>18</sup> A report by the American National Intelligence Council predicts that whether China will work with multilateral institutions in accordance with the new geopolitical landscape by 2025 is one of the key uncertainties.<sup>19</sup> Many scholars share this sense of uncertainty. They believe that China's sheer size and rapid increase of power and now its display of growing assertiveness "represent a challenge to the established global order" and the future global multilateral architecture is "far from clear and not at all determined."<sup>20</sup> There is always the possibility that China might "use its influence in international institutions as a spoiler instead of a partner."<sup>21</sup> Others are concerned that some Chinese values or normative preferences might lead to a clash with the West over how to jointly address global issues, especially with regard to humanitarian intervention.<sup>22</sup> It is also argued that while China may continue to engage with global institutions, a more powerful China is likely to encourage "a shift from a universal conception of political values to recognising diversity in human civilisation, and recalibrating the multilateral order to set aside claims of universal civil and political rights to focus instead on solving common problems."<sup>23</sup>

Other scholars are utterly pessimistic about China's participation in international multilateral institutions. Mearsheimer strongly believes that there is almost no possibility of China successfully becoming part of the existing international order and "China and the United States are destined to be adversaries as China's power grows."<sup>24</sup> Jacques believes that the widespread positive view of China embracing the existing international order is deeply mistaken. He argues that "an increasingly powerful China will seek to shape the world in its own image" and that "in coming decades, the West will be confronted with the fact that its systems, institutions and values are no longer the only ones on offer."<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> David Shambaugh, "Beijing: A Global Leader With 'China First' Policy", *YaleGlobal*, 29 June 2010.

<sup>19</sup> American National Intelligence Council, "Global Trends 2025: A Transformed World", 2008.

<sup>20</sup> Jing Gu, John Humphrey & Dirk Messner, "Global Governance and Developing Countries: The Implications of the Rise of China", *World Development* Vol. 36, No. 2, 2008, pp. 274–292.

<sup>21</sup> David Shorr; Thomas Wright, "Forum: The G20 and Global Governance: An Exchange", *Survival*, 52: 2, 181–198, 2010.

<sup>22</sup> Lai-Ha Chan, Pak K. Lee & Gerald Chan, "Rethinking global governance: a China model in the making?" *Contemporary Politics*, Vol. 14, No. 1, March 2008, 3–19.

<sup>23</sup> Gregory Chin & Ramesh Thakur, "Will China Change the Rules of Global Order?" *Washington Quarterly*, 33:4, 2010, pp. 119–138.

<sup>24</sup> John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 2001), p. 4.

<sup>25</sup> Martin Jacques, *When China Rules the World: the End of the Western World and the Birth of a New Global Order* (New York: the Penguin Press, 2009).

The debate has gained new momentum in the wake of the financial crisis when Beijing displayed unprecedented confidence in engaging with various international institutions and started to make new proposals to reform various global economic and financial regimes.<sup>26</sup> In China, it is widely believed that the 2008/09 financial crisis marks the decline of the Western powers, particularly the United States, and the weakening of their dominance in the global system.<sup>27</sup> In relation to this perception, many people in China believe that it is opportune for China to play a more active role in shaping the future multilateral world. Certainly, designing a proper strategy in China's multilateral diplomacy is not a small matter and in recent years, there has been a heated debate in China as to what kind of multilateral world that best serves China's national interests and what China should do to pursue its goals in its multilateral diplomacy.<sup>28</sup>

This paper seeks to examine China's recent changing posture and policy towards the major emerging multilateral institutions and attempts to read into the debate among Chinese policy analysts to better understand the trends in China's search for global multilateralism in the foreseeable future. The focus is on the motivations of China's growing activism in multilateralism and China's perceptions and attitudes towards some of the newly emerging multilateral regimes and processes. This paper concludes that while China will become more proactive in its multilateral diplomacy, in many cases selectively, and increase its influence in global multilateral settings, various concerns and constraints will make it unlikely for China to completely overhaul or even dramatically reshape the multilateral architecture at the global level. Many factors that have hindered China's leadership role in East Asian multilateralism are likely to restrain it at the global level in the same fashion. China is likely to repeat what it has done in the East Asian regional multilateralism in the past decade: participation, engagement, pushing for cooperation in areas that would serve Chinese's interests, avoiding taking excessive responsibilities, blocking initiatives that

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<sup>26</sup> See for instance, David Shambaugh, "Beijing: A Global Leader with 'China First' Policy", *YaleGlobal*, 29 June 2010; William A Callahan, "China's grand strategy in a post-Western world", <http://www.opendemocracy.net>, 1 July 2010.

<sup>27</sup> There are, of course, different views in China regarding the resilience of the United States. But it seems to be the mainstream Chinese view that China's national strength has gained ground vis-à-vis the United States.

<sup>28</sup> Zhao Tingyang, "Tianxia gainian yu shijie zhidu" [The concept of *Tianxia* and world system], in Qin Yaqing (Ed.), *World Politics – Views from China: International Order* (Hong Kong: Peace Book, 2006), pp. 3–46; Liu Mingfu, *Zhongguo meng: Hou meiguo shidai de daguo siwei yu zhanlue dingwei* [The China Dream: Great Power Thinking and Strategic Positioning of China in the Post-American Era] (Beijing: China Friendship Press, 2010).

would harm its interests, and refraining from making grand proposals. In addition, China is stuck in defining its identity, and caught up between posturing as a leader of the developing world on some issues and siding with the developed countries on other policy issues. Given all these constraints, China's involvement in global multilateralism is likely to be guided by pragmatism rather than grand visions. It is hard to imagine, at least in the foreseeable future, that much of China's morality-ridden rhetoric with regard to multilateralism will be easily translated into concrete policy proposals to be embedded in the future multilateral world. The findings of this paper support the views of the pragmatist school of thought. The paper argues that China will most likely strive to rise from within the existing international order. Washington should be prepared to plan its China policy on this basis and Sino-U.S. relation will largely be shaped by the dynamics of contentions for power and interest, as well as cooperation and coordination between China and the United States in various multilateral institutions.

### **China Embraces Global Multilateralism**

China's growing interest in global multilateralism started roughly at the same time as the reform and opening up programme which was launched in the late 1970s. The 1980s witnessed a continuous process of integration into the international system with China's accession to numerous international institutions and regimes. Its accession to the World Trade Organisation (WTO) in 2001 marked a new phase in China's participation in global multilateralism. Since then, China has ostensibly become even more active in multilateralism as seen in various policy pronouncements by top decision-makers.<sup>29</sup> In 2002, at the 16<sup>th</sup> Congress of Chinese Communist Party (CCP), Chinese leaders stated that multilateral diplomacy should be an important component in China's international strategy. In 2005, China again emphasised that active participation in multilateral diplomacy should be one of the guidelines for China's foreign policy.<sup>30</sup> Chinese analysts believe that President Hu Jintao's speech at the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the United Nations in 2005 also signified China's growing interest in multilateralism. During that speech, Hu emphasised that in order to build a

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<sup>29</sup> For instance, President Hu Jintao's speech at the UN on 23 September 2009; [http://news.xinhuanet.com/world/2009-09/24/content\\_12103701.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/world/2009-09/24/content_12103701.htm).

<sup>30</sup> These guidelines include: major powers as the emphasis, neighbourhood as the key, developing countries as the foundation, and multilateral diplomacy as the stage [*da guo shi zhongdian, zhoubian shi guanjian, fazhan zhong guojia shi jichu, duobian waijiao shi wutai*].

“harmonious world,” multilateralism has to be observed and that the role of the United Nations has to be strengthened.<sup>31</sup>

In addition to almost all multilateral conventions and institutions of the United Nations and other multilateral regimes in various functional areas, China has also engaged other parts of the world multilaterally, although some of these multilateral engagements are fairly loose. For example, China has participated in the Asia-Europe Meeting since its inception in 1996. The Sino-EU summit has become a regular multilateral consultation mechanism between China and European countries. At the initiation of and with support from China, the Sino-African Cooperation Forum has become well-institutionalised. In Latin America, China has forged regular dialogue relations with the Rio Group, the Southern Common Market, and the Andean Community. In Central Asia, China plays an important role in steering the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation.

China’s involvement in multilateralism is even more notable in East Asia. China is a regular participant in various regional institutions and forums, such as 10+1 (ASEAN plus China), 10+3 (ASEAN plus China, Japan and South Korea), ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), East Asia Summit (EAS), Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), the Six-Party talks on North Korea, and the emerging China-Japan-South Korea trilateral cooperation. Despite the fact that China has become a follower and active participant in various regional multilateral institutions and forums, its involvement in Asian multilateralism has largely been driven by pragmatism—the pursuit of short-term national interests in accordance with changes in regional political and economic circumstances. This pragmatism is revealed in China’s super-activism in economic multilateralism (its push for free-trade areas, FTAs), enthusiasm for non-traditional security cooperation, and opposition to the adoption of conflict prevention and resolution measures.<sup>32</sup> China’s pragmatism in regional multilateralism is also evident by the fact that China has not made any grand proposal as to what kind of regional multilateral architecture the region should ultimately pursue, whereas grand visions and new proposals, for instance an East Asian Community and an Asia-Pacific Community, have been advocated by Japan and Australia respectively. As a result, China has opted to cooperate with other regional states in any multilateral

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<sup>31</sup> <http://politics.people.com.cn/GB/1024/3699888.html>, accessed 25 June 2010.

<sup>32</sup> Li Mingjiang, “China and Asian Regionalism: Pragmatism Hinders Leadership”, *RSIS Working Paper*, No. 179, 19 May 2009.

grouping that best facilitates cooperation and at the same time, to vigilantly guard against infringements of Chinese interests in any of the multilateral settings.<sup>33</sup>

Chinese pragmatism in regional multilateralism is largely derived from the following factors. First, China still believes that many regional institutions and regimes are largely dominated by the United States and its allies, especially in the political and security arenas. Second, Beijing fears that any Chinese attempt to revamp the regional multilateral architecture or to propose a grand design would be interpreted by the United States, other major powers in the region and even the smaller regional states as an effort on China's part to seek dominance in the regional international order. This would only feed into the apprehensions of regional states of the possibility of a Sino-centric regional order and would only help to consolidate the U.S.' role and its alliances in the region. Third, China is concerned that any leading role in regional multilateralism would incur many responsibilities and the obligation to provide regional public goods for other states in the region. China feels that its current capability does not allow it to take on excessive responsibilities given that there are still innumerable domestic socio-economic challenges.<sup>34</sup>

### **China's Pragmatic Views on Multilateralism**

China's pragmatic approach to the East Asian regional multilateralism is closely related to China's overall perception and views of multilateralism. Among Chinese policymakers and analysts, there is a profound sense of pragmatism towards multilateralism. It appears that China is more concerned about short- or medium-term tangible outcomes in its participation in various multilateral institutions and regimes as compared to the possibility of using these multilateral settings or creating new global multilateral processes to fundamentally alter the existing international system. New concepts and new ideas that China has put forth are mainly meant to undermine the moral ground of U.S. unilateralism or bilateral arrangements. Even China's aspiration to obtain more decision-making power in various multilateral settings is a reflection of its pursuit for pragmatic objectives.

First and foremost, China believes that multilateral diplomacy is a powerful instrument for coping with unipolarity and opposing hegemonism—a term usually used to refer to the predominant role of the United States in global affairs. From the

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<sup>33</sup> Author's interviews with Chinese Foreign Ministry officials, Beijing, June 2009.

<sup>34</sup> Author's interviews with Chinese Foreign Ministry Officials, Beijing, June 2009.

perspective of the Chinese foreign policymakers, a more institutionalised international order would be more stable than the current one which is dominated by one single superpower. They believe that multilateralism is useful in checking the unilateral impulses of the United States. And multilateralism will also help to facilitate the formation of a multi-polar world in which China is expected to play a more prominent role, together with other major powers. This is largely why China has persistently advocated building an international order on the basis of the “Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence” to diffuse the supremacy of any single power and fully acknowledge the diverse nature of contemporary international society.<sup>35</sup> China regards participation in multilateralism, through cooperation and coordination with other emerging powers if necessary, as a useful means to achieve other tangible goals, including pushing for a more equitable and fairer international political and economic order, striving for a larger share of decision-making power in various international institutions, especially in the economic and financial institutions (the World Bank and IMF), and boosting its international influence.<sup>36</sup>

In the security realm, for instance, China has advocated new ideas in multilateral security arrangements. To cope with the new international situation and challenges in the 1990s, the Chinese government proposed a New Security Concept in a series of Defence White Papers. According to this New Security Concept, the post-Cold War order requires all states to pursue a security policy that features “mutual trust, mutual benefit, equality and coordination.”<sup>37</sup> China’s advocacy of a new security concept, in the eyes of some external observers, is an update and expansion of the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence formulated during the Cold War.<sup>38</sup> However, China has offered very little thought as to how the New Security Concept can be put into practice to ensure international peace in an anarchic world. This has

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<sup>35</sup> The Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence or *Panchsheel* were jointly put forth by China and India in the 1950s as norms for relations between nations. The five principles, which include mutual respect for each other's territorial integrity and sovereignty, mutual non-aggression, mutual non-interference in each other's internal affairs, equality and mutual benefit, and peaceful coexistence, have become the formal guidelines for China's foreign policy since then.

<sup>36</sup> Guo Xiangang, “Zhongguo waijiao xin liangdian: yu xinxing guojia hezuo de tansuo yu shijian” [New spotlight in China's diplomacy: Exploring and practicing cooperation with emerging powers], *guoji wenti yanjiu* [International Studies], issue 1, 2010, pp. 5–9, 31.

<sup>37</sup> Information Office of the State Council: *China's National Defence in 2008*, [http://www.bjreview.com.cn/document/txt/2009-02/06/content\\_177309.htm](http://www.bjreview.com.cn/document/txt/2009-02/06/content_177309.htm)

<sup>38</sup> See, for example, Dennis J. Blasko, “China's Views on NATO Expansion: A Secondary National Interest”. *China Brief* 9, No. 5 (March 2009), 3; Bates Gill, “Contrasting Visions: United States, China and World Order”. Remarks presented before the U.S.-China Security Review Commission Session on the U.S.-China Relationship and Strategic Perceptions, Washington, D.C., 3 August 2001; <http://www.brookings.edu/views/testimony/gill/20010803.pdf>.

led to the suspicion that China has certain pragmatic objectives in promoting this concept, for instance, trying to expand China's influence in ways seen as non-threatening to its neighbours and trying to balance U.S. global power in a manner that serves China's interests.<sup>39</sup>

Second, Beijing believes that its participation in multilateralism could help diminish the "China threat" thesis and build a "responsible power" image for China.<sup>40</sup> Contrary to its previous perception before the 1990s that many of the international institutions were simply policy tools controlled by the most powerful countries, Beijing has realised that active participation in various multilateral regimes can help to reduce the apprehensions of other countries towards China's rise. Not only that, China has attempted to describe its preference for global multilateralism in highly moral terms. China has repeatedly stated that one of the purposes of building global multilateralism is to achieve the goal of *hexie shijie* (a harmonious world). In recent years, the Chinese leadership has laboriously preached the Confucian vision of a new world order centred on the concept *he* (peace, harmony, union). Official statements constantly advocate *he er bu tong* (harmonious but different) and *he wei gui* (peace as the ultimate objective). Beijing believes that this rhetoric can help to build and project a pacifist cultural image for China.<sup>41</sup> It also helps to demonstrate Beijing's cautious approach to putting itself in the limelight by working within the current international framework through its membership in the UN and regional cooperative initiatives.<sup>42</sup>

Third, China believes that multilateral diplomacy can provide new platforms for international cooperation, especially in the East Asian region, for the realisation of Chinese interests. China's foreign policy in East Asia over the past three decades has been aimed at creating "a peaceful international environment and a favourable situation in the neighbourhood"<sup>43</sup> for domestic economic and social development. To a large extent, Chinese elites are sincere when they stress multilateralism as an

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<sup>39</sup> Kerry Dumbaugh, *China's Foreign Policy: What Does It Mean for U.S. Global Interests?* CRS (Congressional Research Service) Report for U.S. Congress, 18 July 2008, p. 2.

<sup>40</sup> Lu Chenyang, "Zhongguo dui duobian waijiao de canyu ji duice sikao" [China's participation in multilateral diplomacy and policy suggestions], *Xuexi yu tansuo* [Study and exploration], No. 2, 2008, Serial No. 175, pp. 90–92.

<sup>41</sup> Qing Cao, "Confucian Vision of a New World Order?: Culturalist Discourse, Foreign Policy and the Press in Contemporary China", *International Communication Gazette*, 2007, Vol. 69(5), p. 435.

<sup>42</sup> Yongnian Zheng & Sow Keat Tok, "Harmonious Society and Harmonious World: China's Policy Discourse under Hu Jintao", *Briefing Series*, Issue 26, The University of Nottingham, China Policy Institute, p. 10.

<sup>43</sup> "Jiang Zemin's Report at 16th Party Congress", in *Selected Works of Important Documents since the 16th Party Congress* (Beijing: Zhongyang Wenxian Chubanshe, 2004), p. 36.

effective means to reduce international conflicts and achieve coordination and cooperation at the regional and global levels. Furthermore, China has detected a significant change in the nature of international affairs largely because of the dramatic deepening of globalisation and interdependence since the end of the Cold War. China now understands that many of the newly-emerged transnational externalities such as climate change, global financial instability, resource depletion, international terrorism, environmental degradation and pandemics cannot be tackled effectively by any single country but have to be dealt with through multilateral cooperation with other states.

### **Chinese Views on Emerging New Multilateral Regimes: Aspirations and Constraints**

There is a notable euphoria in China regarding the emerging global order. Decision-makers and analysts in China are very optimistic that the recent financial crisis is marking a weakening of the role of the West in global multilateralism, providing a good opportunity for China to become a more important player in international institutions. But at the same time, they also acknowledge that there are many constraints on China becoming a leading power in global multilateralism. Similarly in this case, the Chinese views on the major emerging multilateral regimes reflect a profound sense of pragmatism.

#### ***Desires and dilemmas in the BRICs grouping***

Among the emerging new multilateral regimes, the BRICs grouping<sup>44</sup> is largely perceived positively by China, which sees it as an important new institution and also an important platform to push for reforms of other major existing international institutions. Even before the addition of South Africa to the grouping, Chinese analysts frequently make the point that the BRICs countries boast 42 per cent of the global population, 14.6 per cent of the global GDP, and 12.8 per cent of the global trade. In recent years, the economic growth rates of the original four countries have also been impressive, contributing to almost half of global economic growth. And the four countries together hold a huge amount of international foreign reserves.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> The BRIC countries originally included Brazil, Russia, India and China and South Africa was recently added as a member.

<sup>45</sup> Zhang Maorong, “Jin zhuan si guo: heli you duo qiang?” [BRIC countries: How strong is their unity?], *Shijie Zhishi* [World Knowledge], issue 14, 2009, pp. 52–54; Wang Yusheng, “Jinzhuan si guo de meili he fazhan qushi” [The charm of the BRIC and the trend of its development], *Ya fei zongheng* [Asia-Africa studies], issue 5, 2009, pp. 27–29.

Chinese analysts believe that the BRICs mechanism will have a “major significance for the whole world” because this new multilateral institution is likely to accelerate development of the multi-polarisation of the international structure and to reform the unfair and unreasonable international political and economic system.<sup>46</sup> Chinese analysts believe that cooperation among BRICs countries is possible because they have many common positions and interests in international relations, particularly in the economic arena. They emphasise that at the strategic level, the four countries share the common goal of striving for a more equitable and reasonable international political and economic system. This perception of a common strategic objective seems to be the main driver for China’s enthusiasm in participating and taking an active role in the BRICs mechanism.<sup>47</sup>

Chinese analysts believe that the BRICs countries should be united to negotiate with the developed world and promote their common interests in world politics. Specifically, in the wake of the financial crisis, the BRICs countries could further their bilateral or multilateral cooperation in economic relations, for instance, currency swaps, more liberal trading arrangements, investment facilitation measures, climate change, and the development of new energy resources. These countries could also work together to resist protectionist trade measures by some developed countries.<sup>48</sup> China is agreeable that the four countries join hands to strengthen their common voice in various international economic institutions, for instance, the IMF. There have been concrete results in this regard. Before the G20 summits, the finance ministers and governors of their central banks have met to discuss issues of their common concern and coordinate their positions. During the April 2009 London G20 Summit, for instance, the BRICs countries publicised a joint statement requesting for more voting power and representation in the IMF.<sup>49</sup> These emerging powers have had several ministerial meetings to synchronise their positions on climate change and have also worked together to pressurise the developed countries to take more responsibilities for the reduction of carbon emissions.

China understands that there are also quite a number of constraints for multilateral cooperation among the BRICs countries. In addition to the different economic structures and levels of development among the four countries, India and

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<sup>46</sup> Wang Yusheng, “Jinzhuan si guo de meili he fazhan qushi”.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Zhang Maorong, “Jin zhuan si guo: heli you duo qiang?”

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

Brazil have different preferences regarding the liberalisation of agricultural products; China and India are competing over oil and gas resources in Russia and Central Asia; and the other BRICs countries are not happy to see an acceleration of the internationalisation of the Chinese currency, the renminbi or yuan (RMB).<sup>50</sup> Chinese analysts note that the cooperation among BRICs countries could also be limited at the global level because the West still enjoys predominant economic and technological prowess. In the foreseeable future, the BRICs countries will have to give priority to their respective cooperation with the Western developed countries instead of cooperation among themselves.<sup>51</sup> Beijing understands that the other members of the BRICs grouping may be attracted by other multilateral regimes. Russia is a member of the G8. India, “the largest democracy”, is strongly interested in forging cooperation with the “most powerful democracy”—the United States. Brazil is a member of the Organization of American States (OAS), in which the United States serves as the leader. India, Brazil and South Africa have a separate loose group in the name of “dynamic democracies”. All this means that, even if China is keen to further strengthen BRICs cooperation, other parties may not reciprocate China’s enthusiasm.<sup>52</sup>

China has also realised that the BRICs mechanism is likely to generate some impact on global economic issues, but will have little impact on global security matters. Ultimately, China is likely to regard the BRICs grouping as a useful multilateral platform to push for economic cooperation among these countries, to coordinate their positions on key issues of common concern such as trade and climate change, and to wrestle with the Western powers for a larger share of the decision-making power at the global level.

### ***High expectations for the G20 and potential constraints***

Compared to the BRICs grouping, China attaches far more importance to the G20 mechanism as a major platform for future global multilateralism. The G20, since its inception in 1999, has always focused on some of the most challenging economic problems facing the world, especially problems in the international financial system. China maintains that the G20 is a good mechanism for the common economic good of

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<sup>50</sup> ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Liu Jianfei, “Jin zhuan si guo he zuo bing fei tantu” [BRIC cooperation not always a smooth way], *dang zheng luntan* [forum of party and government officials], issue 9, 2009, p. 39.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

many countries.<sup>53</sup> China believes that the G20 is highly representative because its members include the developed G8, BRICs countries and other developing countries, and the EU. More importantly, analysts in China believe that the emergence of the G20 signifies the growing importance of emerging economic powers and reflects the changing economic power balance between developed nations and newly emerging powers.<sup>54</sup> At the same time, the growing importance of the G20 also means that American hegemony is being challenged and confirms that the emerging powers are indispensable in solving global problems.

Furthermore, Chinese analysts believe that the institutionalisation of the G20 and the greater voting power given to the emerging economies essentially mean that a new international order is in the making. The G20 which is gradually taking the place of the G8 suggests that the global governance system is readjusting in accordance with the international economic power structure which is moving from the complete dominance of the developed countries towards “North-South co-governance.” Also, the emergence of the G20 signifies the recognition by the rest of the world, especially the Western world, of China’s peaceful rise.<sup>55</sup> Chinese analysts conclude that the G20 is “a great positive historical move” and “a major breakthrough” in the evolution of a new world order. The G20, although presently an economic forum in nature, is likely to have a catalysing effect on the emergence of new orders in the global political and security sectors.<sup>56</sup> To some extent, China has achieved some of those goals through the G20 meetings in the past few years. Because of its growing economic clout, China’s participation in the G20 has contributed to the shift of power and a structural change within G20 toward emerging economies.<sup>57</sup> Moreover, the functioning of the G20 has significantly upgraded China’s global status.<sup>58</sup>

China believes that although the G20 may not be the best platform and while there are still many uncertainties about its future, it is nevertheless a preferred choice

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<sup>53</sup> Zhao Zongbo, “Guanyu ershi guo jituan huodong chengguo de ruogan sikao” [Thoughts on the achievements of the G20], *Dangdai jingji* [Contemporary Economy], February 2010, pp. 60–63.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Liu Rui & Xu Yiming, “Jinrong weiji zhi hou zhongguo dui G20 yingdang chiyou de jiben lichang” [Some basic positions that China should take towards the G20 in the wake of the financial crisis], *Shehui kexue yanjiu* [Study on social sciences], Issue 2, 2010, pp. 67–72.

<sup>56</sup> Zhao Xiaochun, “G20 fenghui yu shijie xin zhixu de yanjin” [“G20 summit and the evolution of the new world order”]. *Xiandai guoji guanxi* [Contemporary International Relations] 11 (2009).

<sup>57</sup> Mark Beeson & Stephen Bell, “The G-20 and International Economic Governance: Hegemony, Collectivism, or Both?” *Global Governance*, Vol. 15 No. 1 (January-March 2009), pp. 67–86.

<sup>58</sup> Geoffrey Garrett, “G2 in G20: China, the United States and the World after the Global Financial Crisis”, *Global Policy*, Issue 1, Vol. 1 (January 2010), pp. 29–39.

during the transitional period for China's peaceful rise and the upgrading of its status to a major world power. Chinese analysts believe that the coming 20 to 30 years will be a crucial period for China's rise and more frictions with the United States are expected. At the same time, China needs a fairly predictable, flexible and non-confrontational external environment to ensure the smooth progression of its grand plan for national rejuvenation. China believes that the G-20 could help to create that external environment. First of all, the G20 is a good platform for coordinating the macroeconomic policies of the world's major economies in order to stabilise the global economy so that China's own economy is not negatively affected by dramatic fluctuations.<sup>59</sup> Second, the G20 is a forum where emerging powers, especially China itself, can make their voices heard and attempt to obtain a larger share of representation and voting power in major international economic and financial institutions.<sup>60</sup> Third, the G20 is perceived as a useful mechanism for mitigating conflicts between China and other established powers, primarily the United States. In this sense, the G20 is a fairly ideal institution for China at this stage because it possesses certain characteristics, such as elasticity, representation, flexibility and manoeuvrability. In the G20, China can always find supporting forces and at the same time, divert or reduce pressures on it.<sup>61</sup>

Fourth, the Chinese scholars believe that the G20 will create many opportunities for China to participate in international affairs and cooperate with other countries for tangible economic benefits. The main tasks for China in the G20 include working jointly with other members to oppose trade protectionism, to push for a low-carbon economy in dealing with global climate change and to establish a new global financial order. In the global financial sector, China could push for further international financial monitoring cooperation and further reform of the international monitoring system and the international credit rating system. China should also strive for further reform of various international financial institutions, primarily involving the decision-making and higher representation for developing countries in the IMF. China should also push steadily for the diversification of the international currency

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<sup>59</sup> Zhao Zongbo, “Guanyu ershi guo jituan huodong chengguo de ruogan sikao” [Thoughts on the achievements of the G20], *Dangdai Jingji* [Contemporary Economy], February 2010, pp. 60–63.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Chen, Fengying. “G20 yu guoji zhixu da bianju” [“G20 and the dramatic transformation of the international order”]. *Xiandai guoji guanxi* [Contemporary international relations] 11 (2009).

system and support the stability of the system.<sup>62</sup> China has succeeded in some aspects. For instance, it has been able to increase its own IMF quotas from 3.72 per cent to 6.39 per cent and its voting power from 3.65 per cent to 6.07 per cent to become the third most powerful member in the IMF.<sup>63</sup>

Regarding the future relations between the G8 and the G20, Chinese analysts are divided in their views. Broadly speaking, there are three proposals. One view is that with the mitigation and end of the financial crisis, the ministerial meeting of the G20 will resume its function to serve as a dialogue mechanism between the developed and developing countries under the Bretton Woods system and the G8 will continue to tackle issues such as climate change, African development issues, and global trade issues under the G8+5 mechanism. The second view is that the G20 will become more institutionalised and is likely to expand to include security, social, and environmental issues in its discussions and replace the G8 as the centre for global governance. The third view is that the G20 will become more institutionalised but it will confine itself to economic and financial issues and the G8 will continue to play its role in other areas under the G8+5 mechanism.<sup>64</sup>

Many analysts in China believe that the second scenario would be preferable for China. They argue that China should regard the G20 as an important coordination platform for meeting the major global political and economic challenges and should attempt to replace the G8 with the G20. Replacing the G8 with G20 would mean a significant move towards the realisation of a multi-polar world. They further argue that the G8 cannot meet the requirements of a new international economic order because it consists of the most developed countries which all have roughly similar political ideologies and lacks the representative legitimacy to lead the trend of globalisation. The G8 has realised this problem and that is why it has attempted to adopt the G8+3 and G8+5 mechanisms. More importantly, the G20 is far more influential economically. In 2008, the total GDP of the G20 accounted for 85.8 per cent of the global total economy, while the total GDP of the G8 was about 53.6 per cent of the global total.<sup>65</sup> The economic growth rate of the G20 in the past decade, particularly during the financial crisis, has been much higher than that of the G8.

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<sup>62</sup> Liu & Xu, [“Basic positions China should take”], 67–72.

<sup>63</sup> <http://www.caijing.com.cn/2010-11-06/110561191.html>, accessed 15 January 2011.

<sup>64</sup> Chen Suquan, “*Ba guo jituan, ershi guo jituan yu zhongguo*” [G8, G20 and China], *Dongnanya Zongheng* [Around Southeast Asia], 2009, pp. 77–80.

<sup>65</sup> Liu & Xu, [“Basic positions China should take”], 67–72.

Moreover, it is predicted that in the coming decades, the growth rate of the G20, especially the emerging economies, will continue to be faster than that of the G8 and the emerging economies will account for a much larger share of the total global economy. Some Chinese analysts conclude that the replacement of the G8 by the G20 is only a matter of time.<sup>66</sup>

Chinese analysts note that although the G20 is a good opportunity for China, there are also notable constraints. First of all, so far the G20 is only an expedient, ad hoc, and under-institutionalised forum. As a result, the G20's policy proposals and prescriptions are not binding for its members. It will take more time and effort to upgrade the G20 into an institution for dealing with global governance, including broad international consensus on the definition of its functions, the establishment of a long-term and effective mechanism, the balance between representation and efficiency, and the differentiation of roles between the G20, the UN and other international organisations.<sup>67</sup> Some Chinese analysts believe that it may not be realistic to expect significant institutionalisation of the G20 at all because the 2008/09 financial crisis that gave birth to the G20 has not generated as deep a global recession as the one in the 1930s and consequently, the dominant position of the West has not been fundamentally weakened. In this sense, the G20 will have to contend with the G8 for leadership if the former is to become the leading institution in global governance.<sup>68</sup>

In addition, the G20 was initiated by the developed countries. Analysts in China have a fairly consensual view that the developed countries only intended to use the G20 as a policy tool to encourage the major developing countries to contribute to the solution of various global economic and financial problems. The developed countries never intended to create the G20 to fundamentally reform the existing global economic and financial system, nor did they intend genuinely to allow the developing countries to enjoy a greater role in the global economic system.<sup>69</sup> Many Chinese

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Cui, L. “G20 kaiqi le tansuo ‘quanqiu zhili’ xin lujin de jihui zhi chuang” [“G20 opens a window of opportunity for exploring a new approach to ‘global governance’”], *Xiandai Guoji Guanxi* [Contemporary international relations] 11 (2009).

<sup>68</sup> Liu Zongyi, “G20 jizihua yu zhongguo canyu quanqiu jingji zhili xueshu huiyi zongshu” [A summary of the conference on G20 institutionalization and China’s participation in global economic governance], *Guoji Zhanwang* [International Trend], issue 2, 2010, pp. 98–103.

<sup>69</sup> Xiao Shu & Gong Yuping, “San ci fenghui hou kan ershi guo jituan de fazhan qianjing” [An analysis on the G20’s prospect after three summits], *Dangdai Shijie* [Contemporary World], issue 11, 2010, pp. 51–53.

analysts note that the United States is willing to engage in the G20 mechanism because it is primarily interested in integrating other powers, including China, into the existing rules and regimes and to persuade the developing countries to share international responsibilities.<sup>70</sup>

Moreover, China believes that given the diversity of its members in terms of economic development and concerns, rivalry and competition are inevitable in the G20. Ultimately, the developing countries in the G20 may be disappointed by the mechanism because they may not be able to contend with the developed countries on an equal footing. At the global level, there is still a wide gap in wealth and knowledge between the developed and developing economies. And the Western developed countries still dominate the agenda-setting and discourse in global governance. The status quo of “global governance equals Western governance” has not been fundamentally changed.<sup>71</sup> Within the G20, there is relatively little divergence among the developed countries, whereas there is much divergence among the developing countries. Furthermore, the internal political and economic structures of the emerging powers are still very much flawed; there are still many concerns about long-term political stability and the prospect of economic restructuring for many emerging powers.<sup>72</sup> As a result, the G20 may not be able to coordinate the positions and policies of its members effectively.<sup>73</sup>

Chinese observers maintain that it is indisputable that the G20 has become an important platform for international economic cooperation, but given the fact that the international balance of power between the developed and the developing countries remains basically unchanged, the G20 is unlikely to become the key multilateral institution and there are still many uncertainties with regard to the future of the G20.<sup>74</sup> It may gradually become more institutionalised and play a more important role in world economy as globalisation deepens and economic interdependence among major economies further develop. Or it may eventually become irrelevant when the world financial and economic situation turns better. When the crises are over, member states

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<sup>70</sup> Liu Zongyi, [“A summary of the conference”].

<sup>71</sup> Xiao & Gong, [“An analysis of the G20’s prospect ”].

<sup>72</sup> Huang Renwei, “*Xinxing daguo canyu quanqiu zhili de libi*” [“Benefits and drawbacks of new emerging powers’ participation in global governance”]. *Xiandai guoji guanxi* [Contemporary International Relations] 11 (2009), 21–22.

<sup>73</sup> Zhao Zongbo, “*Guanyu ershi guo jituan huodong chengguo de ruogan sikao*” [Thoughts on the achievements of the G20], *Dangdai Jingji* [Contemporary Economy], February 2010, pp. 60–63.

<sup>74</sup> Xiao & Gong, [“An analysis on the G20’s prospect”]; Huang Renwei, [“Benefits and drawbacks of new emerging powers’ participation in global governance”].

of the G20 may find it more convenient to turn back to various regional groupings or smaller groupings, such as the G8, EU, NAFTA, and BRICS.<sup>75</sup>

Some analysts note that China's difficulty in defining its international status is also a factor. On many economic issues, China shares the same or similar views with the developed countries. But on many other issues regarding global governance, China tends to side with the vast developing world. It will be a challenge for China to balance its views and positions in the G20. Some analysts suggest that because the future international structure is likely to be multi-polar, China may have to opt for multilayer international multilateral institutions in different functional areas. They propose that China should promote an implicit G2 (China and the United States) and an explicit G20 and use these two institutions to promote and participate in other institutions. They suggest that China should pay attention to three key issues: first, regarding the Sino-U.S. strategic dialogue as the key to China's peaceful rise; second, treating the G20 as the most important platform for China's international economic cooperation; third, using the 10+3 platform as the most important one for China's regional cooperation. They conclude that China should regard the G20 highly, but should not overestimate its role; China should maintain its low profile posture and at the same time attempt to play a role in the G20; and finally it should continue to define its role as a major power advocating and representing the common interests of the developing world.<sup>76</sup>

### **Dilemmas in China's Search for a Multilateral World**

In addition to the pragmatic approach to various multilateral institutions and regimes, China would have to overcome a few notable dilemmas if it attempted to come up with grand designs for global and regional multilateralism and sought to play a leading role in regional and global multilateralism.

#### *Multipolarisation versus “China First”*

For many years, China has advocated for a multi-polar world. The Chinese vision for multi-polarity was largely aimed at checking the global influence of the United States. But there is also a dilemma for China. To build a multi-polar world, China would have to allow and encourage other emerging powers to become stronger and play a

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<sup>75</sup> Zhao Zongbo, [“Thoughts on the achievements of the G20”].

<sup>76</sup> Liu Zongyi, [“A summary of the conference”].

larger role in international politics. These powers would include some of China's neighbouring countries such as Russia, India, and Japan. In history, China had many unhappy encounters with these regional powers, including the Tsarist Russia's territorial expansion into the Far East at the expense of the Chinese empire and the Sino-Soviet hostilities during much of the Cold War, the Sino-Indian border war in 1962, and the militaristic Japan's bullying of China from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century to the end of World War II. Today, in the Asian continent, the relationships between China and these neighbouring powers are rife with competition and rivalry in Central Asia, South Asia, and East Asia. Encouraging these powers to be independent poles in international politics would entail a larger role for these neighbouring giants in sub-regional and global affairs, which may contradict with China's own aspiration of becoming a dominant power in East Asia and eventually, a global power.

Many analysts in China believe that China could obtain a better position in the global multilateral order by joining hands with other emerging powers, such as Russia, India, Brazil, and South Africa. But this is also a serious challenge for China. It is essentially the same logic as noted above. To encourage other emerging powers to work with China to build a multi-polar world, Beijing will need to support a larger political role of those countries in various international multilateral institutions. Chinese analysts tend to believe, perhaps rightly so, that augmented profiles of other emerging powers in world politics would weaken China's international influence. This is exactly the reason why China has straightforwardly resisted any effort to add some of the emerging powers to the United Nations Security Council as new permanent and veto-wielding members. This dilemma is clearly evident in the case of the BRICs grouping. Beijing regards the BRICs mechanism as a useful vehicle for China to promote multi-polarity in world politics and to push for major reforms of international multilateral institutions. But there is also a Chinese concern that other members of this loose coalition, particularly India and Brazil, might attempt to utilise this platform to aggrandise their own international influence, for instance getting into the UN Security Council as permanent members. In fact, at the end of the first summit of the BRICs countries in June 2009, India and Brazil did attempt to bring up this issue. China resisted the attempt by saying that the BRICs forum was mainly tasked to

discuss the impact of the financial crisis only and was not supposed to discuss the reform of the UN Security Council membership.<sup>77</sup>

### *Leadership versus Responsibility*

At the current stage, China is worried that a Chinese leadership role in major multilateral institutions and regimes would incur unbearable responsibilities for China. China's apprehension of taking too much international responsibility is evident in China's refusal of the G2 proposal. China believes that the G2 concept was an American conspiracy to nominally upgrade China's international status but in reality, it is to get China to accept international responsibilities that would go beyond China's capability.<sup>78</sup> Chinese analysts believe that China should continue its "low profile" strategy in global multilateral diplomacy due to several considerations. First, China has been the main beneficiary of the existing international regimes. At this stage, China should continue to integrate itself into the existing regimes instead of creating new ones. Also, China's economic and military power is still limited and it has a huge population and many domestic problems. This means that China still does not have the power to change or challenge the existing global regimes, which are still dominated by Western powers. If China would attempt to do so, it would only invite suspicion and even hostility from the West and as a result, China's ascent in the international system may be hampered. Second, China should focus on its surrounding neighbourhood and play an even more active role in East Asian multilateral institutions. This is so because China is one of the leading powers in the region and only when regional states have recognised China's dominant position could China move on to become a world power.<sup>79</sup>

China's hesitation to move to the next stage of global leadership is evident in its consideration of joining the G8. Many Chinese analysts are against the idea of China becoming an official member of the G8 on the basis of several considerations. First, China is at much variance with the G8 countries in terms of strategic interests, ideology and political system. Also, the members of the G8 have different views towards China's membership in the grouping. The United States and Japan, in

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<sup>77</sup> Interview with Chinese diplomats, August 2009.

<sup>78</sup> Liu Feitao, "G2 yu dangqian zhongmei guanxi de bozhe" [G2 and the fluctuations in Sino-U.S. relations], *Shijie Jingji Yu Zhengzhi* [World Economics and Politics], Vol. 449, No. 3, 2010, pp. 45–46.

<sup>79</sup> Lu Chenyang. "Zhongguo dui duobian waijiao de canyu ji duice sikao" ["China's participation in multilateral diplomacy and policy suggestions"]. *Xuexi Yu Tansuo* [Study and Exploration] 175, No. 2 (2008), pp. 90–92.

particular, are very much against China's joining the G8. Second, China's level of economic development and the maturity of China's economic policy are at much variance with those of the Western developed countries and thus, China cannot shoulder the responsibilities and obligations that are beyond China's economic clout. Third, being regarded as part of the G8 does not bring any benefits for China as a developing country. If China joins the G8, it would lose much of the freedom in its actions and would find it hard to convince other developing countries that China represents their interests. Joining the G8 would make China's position as a representative of the developing countries illegitimate because of the popular perception of the G8 as the club of the rich countries. This will be contradictory to China's international strategy of positioning itself as the protector of and pioneer for the interests of the vast developing world. Also, the G8 is far from being able to meet the global challenges in the post-Cold War era. Many global issues now increasingly need the participation and policy inputs from the emerging powers.<sup>80</sup>

In light of these considerations, Chinese policy analysts believe that the best option for China is to engage with the G8 as a dialogue partner. In this way, China can avoid taking responsibilities that do not confirm with China's capabilities and at the same time, China can position itself as a bridge between the developing world and the developed countries to push for global multilateralism and solutions of global problems in a fashion that best serves China's national interests. But China is sober-minded of the challenge of meticulously balancing its positions between the developed and the developing countries. On some issues, such as nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation, the Chinese interests and positions are closer to those of the developed countries, but on the establishment of a new international economic order, democratisation and human rights, China's interests are in line with those of the developing world. Chinese analysts contend that generally speaking, China, as the largest developing country, should still treat "South-South solidarity" as a cornerstone in China's foreign policy. This means that in multilateral diplomacy, China will more or less side with the developing world and at the same time, pay attention to coordination with the developed countries. Concurrently, China is aware that in order to transforming itself into a major global power, it should also consider to take certain international responsibilities and certain international obligations that

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<sup>80</sup> Liu & Xu, ["Basic positions China should take"].

are commensurate with its national strength and capabilities.<sup>81</sup> In any case, it will be a challenge for China to strike a fine balance between being a responsible power and avoiding being burdened by too many responsibilities and obligations.<sup>82</sup>

### *Tianxia versus Westphalia*

If there has been any Chinese thought for a grand design of a new multilateral world, it would have to be the Chinese discourse on the concept of *tianxia* (all under heaven). Chinese scholars argue that historically, the Chinese view of the world order was heavily influenced by the *tianxia* concept. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, China's quick rise in the international system has made its foreign policy community rethink whether and how China should have its own vision of world order that may lead to a post-hegemonic world. To fulfil the goal of developing the Chinese school of international relations studies and China's own perspective on the new international order, some Chinese scholars and philosophers like Zhao Tingyang suggested that China should not borrow concepts developed from Western experiences in international relations and should create its own concepts about the world order and world institutions by reviving the idea of *tianxia* as the key concept in restructuring the world order.<sup>83</sup> Zhao argues that the traditional China has always favoured peace, stability, order, and generosity towards other nations. The traditional China's relations with its neighbouring countries have been very different from the Western experience which has been rife with violence, wars, power politics, and hegemony. Zhao suggests that the *tianxia* conceptualisation could lead to “a form of selfless global unity” supported by “a global hierarchy where order is valued over freedom, ethics over law and elite governance over democracy and human rights.”<sup>84</sup> From the imperial China's perspective, *tianxia* blurs the conceptual boundaries between the empire and the world, domestic politics and international politics, and nationalism and cosmopolitanism. These scholars advocate an all-inclusive cosmopolitan system that would help to solve global problems through building multi-layer multilateral institutions that promote cooperation and embrace divergences in a magnanimous way.

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<sup>81</sup> Lu Chenyang, [“China’s participation in multilateral diplomacy and policy suggestions”].

<sup>82</sup> Wu Hongying, “Quanqiu hua yu G20” [Globalisation and G20], *Xiandai Guoji Guanxi* [Contemporary International Relations], No. 11, 2009, pp. 5–6.

<sup>83</sup> Zhao Tingyang, “Tianxia gainian yu shijie zhidu” [The concept of *Tianxia* and world system].

<sup>84</sup> William A. Callahan, “China’s grand strategy in a post-Western world”, <http://www.opendemocracy.net>, 1 July 2010.

Despite the lofty objective in the *tianxia* notion, many factors are likely to render the vision of building a future world order on the ground of China's traditional *tianxia* worldview as a utopian endeavour. First of all, since the beginning of its modernisation and open-door process more than a century ago, China started to accept the norm of sovereignty established by the Westphalia system and view the world politics using a similar lens like the Westerners. In fact, China has become a staunch defender of the Westphalia system by maintaining a rigid stance on the inviolability of sovereignty and non-interference in domestic affairs. Second, "The *Tianxia* System's main problem is that it doesn't explain how to get from an unstable and often violent present to the harmonious future."<sup>85</sup> Third, *tianxia* has received no official support. The Chinese leadership worries that the official support to the *tianxia* discourse would feed into the "China Threat" thesis and thus, be harmful for China's rise.

## Conclusions

The analyses of this paper provide abundant evidence to support the pragmatist views of China's role in the international order. The analyses in this article suggest that China harbours no grand revisionist ambition to overthrow the existing international system. China would be happy if it could play a bigger role in the existing system and is prepared to achieve this goal by gradually reforming the decision-making structure of various existing multilateral institutions and regimes. The findings of this article also confirm the usual Chinese argument that China has no incentive to create a new international system because it has been the biggest beneficiary of the existing system over the past three decades. China seems to be confident that it can continue to use these existing multilateral institutions to achieve its pragmatic objectives, for instance, balancing the predominant power of the United States, having a voice on major international issues, striving for more influence in world politics, improving its own international image, and pushing for cooperation in areas and on issues that would serve the Chinese interests.

China has attempted to use various multilateral forums to advocate the idea such as "a harmonious world" and its new security concept, but in overall, China is

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<sup>85</sup> William A. Callahan, "China's grand strategy in a post-Western world", <http://www.opendemocracy.net>, 1 July 2010.

still weak in shaping discourse in international forums.<sup>86</sup> China is still undergoing an intense debate on whether it should abandon or how it should modify the late Deng Xiaoping's "*tao guang yang hui*" (hide brightness and nourish obscurity) or "low profile" international strategy. Until the debate produces some sort of consensus, China's multilateral policy is likely to be at least partially affected by the path dependence of the low profile policy prescription. Pragmatism, however, does not mean that China will not seek to be more active in international multilateralism. On the contrary, various signs in recent years unmistakably indicate that China will attempt to be more broadly and deeply involved in multilateral diplomacy at the regional and global levels. However, China's involvement in international multilateralism is likely to be highly selective, as the cautious pessimism school of thought has argued. China is very likely to treat the United Nations as the most important multilateral institution to deal with international political and security issues and regard the G20 as the most important multilateral arrangement to cope with international financial and economic problems. At the same time, Beijing will meticulously utilise other *ad hoc* multi-party regimes and platforms such as the BRICs grouping to protect its national interests and aggrandise its international influence.

China's "rising from within" option will be a tough challenge for Washington and very likely will also, to a large extent, help shape the patterns of Sino-U.S. relations in the near future. On the one hand, this Chinese approach will help soothe American anxiety towards China's rapidly rising power. It will contribute to the mitigation of a lot of the negative perceptions and attitudes associated with power transition. American policy-makers and analysts who prefer an engagement policy with China will be able to find positive evidence in China's accommodation of the global order to make their case. More importantly, if China is keen to rise from within the existing international institutions, it would help to create potential opportunities for China and the United States to cooperate and collaborate on many international issues of common concerns. Such cooperation would in return, further bind the bilateral relations between the two countries.

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<sup>86</sup> Chen Kaihe, "Lun wo guo zai duobian waijiao huodong zhong de guoji gonggong guanxi celue" [China's international public relations strategies in multilateral diplomacy], *Waijiao Pinglun* [Foreign Affairs Review], No. 100, December 2007, pp. 68–74.

On the other hand, the ultimate goal for China, as discussed in this paper, is to secure the Chinese interests and compete for more decision-making power in the international system. China has demonstrated three pathways to realise these goals. First, it has attempted to use its own power and influence to balance American hegemonic power on issues that do not serve Chinese interests. This was usually done in coalition with other developing countries, for instance, in areas of human rights and humanitarian interventions. Secondly, it has sought to leverage on the collective influence of other emerging powers to bargain and wrestle power from the incumbent Western leading powers. And thirdly, it has attempted to trade “burden sharing” for “power sharing.” From the Chinese understanding, the United States and other Western powers are eager to bring China and other emerging powers on board to share responsibilities in tackling various global issues but they are not willing to give up their much larger share of decision-making power. China, together with other emerging powers, is likely to continue to press harder to have a larger say in international affairs when it is urged to take more responsibilities. This has evidently been the case during the recent financial crisis, particularly with regard to the restructuring of the IMF. It appears that China and other emerging powers will continue to be successful in gradually grabbing more decision-making power from the United States and other Western powers. A reasonable option for the United States is perhaps to “support reconfiguration of the global architecture to incorporate China into the discussion both of the development of international rules and of what it means to be a “responsible stakeholder.”<sup>87</sup> Barring any dramatic change of the U.S.- China policy, China’s “rising from within” behaviour is likely to allow the current state of “frenemies” or “neither friends nor foes” in Sino-U.S. relations to sustain in the foreseeable future.

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<sup>87</sup> C. Fred Bergsten, Charles Freeman, Nicholas R. Lardy & Derek J. Mitchell, *China's rise: Challenges and opportunities* (Washington, D.C.: Peterson Institute for International Economics, 2008).

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