

## CHINA'S SEARCH FOR ACCEPTANCE

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### INTRODUCTION

China's entry into the prestigious World Trade Organisation (WTO) is one of the latest examples of China's efforts to further enhance its international reputation by becoming a major player in the economic world and a more integral part of the international community. As China plays a more active role in the global arena, China's increasing economic growth cannot help but further advance its economic and political clout. Obviously Chinese leaders have long recognised this fact of international life and have embarked on an ambitious programme to enhance its economic and political power. China, by virtue of its P-5 status on the United Nations (UN) Security Council, already has some of the trappings of a great power; but heretofore, their power has been used mainly in a negative sense--

to prevent certain UN actions from taking place.

In today's interconnected and interdependent world, issues that previously were constrained within the domestic sphere of a sovereign state such as human rights and governance are increasingly being considered as global issues. In the eyes of the developed world, these are the two areas in which China does not have a very good track record. Therefore, China now finds itself on the horns of a dilemma. On one hand, as they embrace new standards of conduct and criteria for membership in the international community, if history is any judge, their grip over the Chinese masses will loosen. If so, loss of control and collapse of the communist government may follow. On the other hand, if they do not embrace the new standards of

world conduct, they may limit their economic growth rate and social acceptance.

In any case, in today's open communications environment, the Chinese government may not be able to constrain its growing affluent and educated masses desire for more personal liberty and autonomy. Consequently, China may find, as all cultures through history have shown, that change is inevitable. Cultures either change through evolution or are destroyed in revolution. For most in China, the Great Leap Forward was a traumatic exercise in revolutionary change; therefore, joining the international community is probably viewed as the lesser evil. To integrate successfully into the international society, China will have to improve its human rights conditions and governance. As will be explained later, status or international respect is one of its three interrelated goals of Chinese foreign policy. Thus, China will continue doing what it can to preserve and enhance its great power status while maintaining the communist political power structure.

Two questions come to mind: To what extent has China already integrated into the international community? And, how is it responding to foreign pressures to improve on its protection and promotion of human rights record within China in order to be regarded as a responsible nation? An attempt to establish that international status or prestige is one of the goals of

Chinese foreign policy is a central to this article. Further rapid economic development and modernisation of China is seen as the means to the desired ends of achieving enhanced status and international respect.

The new criteria for membership of the international community will be defined and steps taken by China to attempt to measure up to the new criteria will be discussed. It will also be pointed out that China has, in fact, made improvements and complied, at least superficially, with a number of regulations that have been set forth by the other major powers. This article will conclude that because of China's concern for sovereignty, it cannot yet be considered fully integrated because Taiwan will remain a major problem area as long as that issue is not peacefully resolved.

### **Status as a Goal, Economic Development as a Means to an End**

Denny Roy has identified three goals of Chinese foreign policy the enhancement of power, wealth, and status; he explained that these three are interrelated as power provides ways to attain wealth while status is an inevitable outcome of increased power and wealth. As applied to nations, few, if any, can take exception to this truism. This article focuses on the status element, defined by Roy simply as 'increasing international respect for China', of its foreign policy (Roy 1998:

215). As mentioned, an attempt will be made to answer the questions: To what extent has China already integrated into the international community? And how is it responding to foreign pressures to improve its protection of human rights at home? The questions relate to China's goal of achieving status since its international behaviour will either draw praise or criticisms from the international community.

Why status is so important to China is understandable. All Chinese take great pride in their country and believe that their country deserves respect for its long and accomplished history and the grand size of its land and population (Roy 1998: 38). More importantly, China has suffered humiliations in its recent history. Foreign powers' efforts to exploit trade relations in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century led to six major clashes: the Opium War (1839-42), the Arrow War (1855-60), the Taiping rebellion (1860-65), and the 1<sup>st</sup> Sino-Japanese War (1894-95) and the formation of secret Chinese anti-foreign societies such as the Triad and the Boxer. China was forced to cede Hong Kong to the British as a result of The Opium War and Taiwan was ceded to the Japanese following the 1<sup>st</sup> Sino-Japanese War. China was coerced into ceding other areas to other foreign powers including the Russians and Germans. These humiliations were followed up in the 20<sup>th</sup> century by Japan's occupation of Manchuria (1932-45) and its Invasion of China proper. Thus, a proud nation and a proud people had to endure many

intrusions on its sovereignty and loss of face as a result of foreign imperialism. Therefore, there can be little doubt that in today's world China would want to regain its status and restore its historic international image as a great power.

China re-entered the international community after its period of isolation and autarky with its 'open door policy', a policy which emphasises the importance of domestic economic reform, in 1979 under the leadership of Deng Xiaoping. According to Zhao Quansheng, there were four reasons that brought about this dramatic change of policy:

1. the national consensus that China must prioritise economic modernisation over the ideology of the Cultural Revolution era;
2. the re-emergence of China's international status after gaining the permanent seat on the UN Security Council in 1971 and the establishments of diplomatic ties with major powers and states;
3. the decline of communist ideology and the rise of pragmatist concerns for economic development; and
4. the realisation of the need to catch up to the Newly Industrialised Economies (NIEs) of South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Singapore, which have acquired rapid economic growth (Zhao 1996: 51-3).

## Membership Criteria

The 'Open door policy' was the impetus that moved China toward integration into the international community. As China strives for status, many domestic, socio-economic and political factors hinder its becoming a full-fledged 'responsible' member of the international society.

Let us first define the criteria for membership of the international community, then, discuss some of the various efforts taken by China to meet the criteria in its attempt to assimilate into the international community. According to Rosemary Foot, a new criteria or paradigm shift is emerging for membership into the world community. This new criterion is in the form of a shift. From the 'pluralist' conception where differences in values among states are accepted to a 'solidarist' conception in which the convergence of common values or common good is promoted and the sovereignty of individuals is given priority over states. The two areas that have become the new standards of civilisation are the protection of human rights and democratic governance (Foot 2001: 16-7). The Chinese do not accept these propositions as truisms. They strongly believe that these two areas should remain the sole concern of the state involved.

The reason why a solidarist view is displacing the former pluralist view as a new criteria or standard of civilisation,

according to Goldstein, is mainly due to the fact that the world is becoming more interdependent and interconnected. If this is a desirable or inevitable outcome, interdependence and interconnectedness is promoted by having a common set of core values. Major powers hold the view that conflicts in a sovereign state can easily affect neighbouring states, causing increased instability in the region, if not the world. The flow of refugees during conflict is a recurring example where neighbouring nations get involved and often are required to expend their scarce resources to meet the humanitarian needs of people from nations other than their own. Examples of these occurrences are many. One example of this 'spill-over' effect happened after the Gulf War when Iraq brutally cracked down on a Kurdish uprising, causing an influx of Kurdish refugees into Turkey resulting in depletions of resources in Turkey (Goldstein 1999: 330). As a result, other nations had to step in to alleviate Turkey's economic burden.

This shift towards a convergence of common values in the developed world presents a difficult dilemma for China. On the one hand, as mentioned earlier, China is actively seeking international respect. But on the other hand, the two criteria of human rights and democratic governance threaten the core values and authority of the Chinese Communist Party (Foot 2001: 17). These two contradicting factors do not allow China much leeway in its dealings with

the international community.

### **China's View on the New Criteria**

Despite the conflict in values, China has made progress towards integration. To acquire international status and stature and to achieve rapid economic development, China has joined hundreds of international inter-governmental and non-governmental organisations (Roy 1998: 146). China obtained a permanent seat on the Security Council of the UN in 1971. Through the UN, China has repeatedly tried and failed to push for the adoption of its 'Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence', a doctrine which places pre-eminence on state sovereignty and non-intervention as the basis of the international world order (Roy 1998: 147). One major reason behind this active push for support of the non-intervention position is the issue of Taiwan. Taiwan is seen as an integral part of China and its reunification with the mainland. Taiwan is seen in the eyes of the Chinese as inextricably linked to their national honour and prestige.

China has made numerous statements over the decades that it would use force, if necessary, to reclaim Taiwan and to protect its territorial integrity. China considers this to be a domestic issue – that a sovereign state has a right to do

what it deems best for the country within its own borders without interference or intervention from outsiders. Three of the major reasons why China advocates state sovereignty and non-intervention are:

1. China's concern for sovereignty resulting from humiliations suffered during the 'century of shame';
2. Its wish to protect its own socialist values and political and legal systems; and
3. A nationalistic desire to protect its territorial integrity with regard to Tibet, Xinjiang, and Taiwan (Wu 2001: 295).

Grave concerns were roused among Chinese leaders when, in 1999, the United States led NATO into bombing Kosovo in response to Milosevic's attempts to commit genocide on ethnic Albanians. Since this action was not authorised by the UN, China emphatically criticised the bombing because it fears that this kind of action might set a 'dangerous precedent' for a country (or a group of countries) to meddle in another state's domestic affairs (Wu 2001: 295). China fears that if the West could bomb Yugoslavia for what they believe was ethnic cleansing on the part of the Yugoslavian government in Belgrade, they might very well do the same to China should a crisis arise in Tibet, Xinjiang, or Taiwan (Wu 2001: 295).

### **China's Participation in the International Community**

Conversely, China has demonstrated an ability to prove itself worthy of respect by the world at large in that, at least on the surface, it is willing to play by many of the rules associated with the new international norms and standards. After its open-door policy took hold, China began its active participation in international economic and cultural organisations such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the Asian Development Bank, and to regularly participate in UN voting activities (Zhao 1996:58). Furthermore, after years of vigorously pressing negotiations with various states, China was finally admitted into the WTO. As pointed out, economic development and modernisation is a key goal in the development of Chinese foreign policy, therefore, it may be safe to assume that China will abide, at least in the near term, by the rules and regulations required by members of the WTO. According to a press released by the WTO, China has agreed to comply with rules and regulations set forth by the organisation. These include agreements to provide non-discriminatory treatment to all WTO members, to eliminate dual pricing practices and the use of price controls to protect domestic industries, and to eliminate and not to introduce any new export subsidy on agricultural products (WTO press release 2001).

### **China's Response to Human Rights Issues**

The aspect that shows that China is willing to work for acceptance as a 'responsible' great power is in China's willingness, albeit reluctant and sometimes conveniently forgotten or put aside, to conform to rules governing human rights issues. The protection of human rights has become an international issue that the major powers have incorporated into membership criteria of the international community. According to Seymour, "the view became widespread that serious human rights violations in a country were a legitimate subject of transnational concern, both for moral reasons and because serious human rights violations could pose dangers to the international community" (Seymour 1998: 217).

Nevertheless, China still asserts that human rights protection should remain within the control of the individual state and that international organisations have no authority to mandate or to impose regulations on sovereign states (Roy 1998:153). Although China remains adamant on this stand, it has agreed to many regulations and have initiated various conferences and issued white papers regarding human rights in an attempt to maintain good standing in the international community. The Tiananmen Square massacre was the first incident, which triggered almost universal international criticisms of

human rights conditions in China. Soon after, in 1991, China published its first white paper, "Human Rights in China", followed by a series of others including "Progress of Human Rights in China" in 1995, and "Progress in China's Human Rights Cause in 1996" in 1997 (Kim 1998:25). Not only has China made attempts to become more transparent with human rights issues at home, it has also shown its commitment to promote human rights by signing two major international covenants. They are the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights in 1997 and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights in 1998 (Foot 2001:17). Foot calls these Chinese moves as "an act that signalled Chinese understanding of the new normative requirements of international society and an unwillingness to remain an outsider..." (Foot 2001:17).

Taiwan remains a sticky issue in China's attainment of status and stature. Chinese leaders emphasise time and time again that it would take all measures, including the use of force to obtain reunification. On occasion, they result to outright sabre rattling through military exercises, the firing of missiles and the placing of additional missiles aimed ostensibly at Taiwan. This insistence that China has the option of reunifying Taiwan to the mainland by force if they so choose and the fact that China's military expenditures are steadily rising have raised concerns in many countries. In response to these international concerns, China

has established military-to-military diplomacy in which a large number of senior military officers and delegates were sent to visit more than fifty countries and vice versa (Godwin 1998: 187). In addition, to counter criticisms about the lack of transparency in China's defence policies, China released its first defence white paper, "China: Arms Control and Disarmament" in November, 1995 (Godwin 1998:187).

### **Conclusion**

It is obvious and no one can deny that China is a rising great power both in terms of economics and political clout. It has been recognised as a regional military power for decades and today, China continues to build its strategic and blue water naval forces, trying to become a true world military power. Nevertheless, China has realised that the criteria for membership in the international community is shifting toward the convergence of common values concept despite its argument that state sovereignty should be respected and outsiders do not have a right to interfere with a state's internal affairs. However, the reality remains that the world today has become too interdependent and that problems in one country cannot be ignored and that they do 'spill' over into neighbouring countries, thereby creating even greater problems even for nations who had nothing to do with the root causes of a particular nation's internal problems. .

This article has briefly addressed only a few aspects of the evolving global human rights issue and the new standards for civilised behaviour that are coming into being. In recognition of the new paradigm shift, in addition to joining various international organisations, China has taken important steps into improving human rights conditions as shown by the signing of two key international human rights covenants. These trends point to the direction that China is, in fact, making some efforts to play by the new rules in order to earn international status.

That said, even if China could strictly adhere to the new criteria, it could not be said that China would be fully integrated into the international community. As this article has argued, the issue of Taiwan and China's territorial integrity prevents China from completely complying with the idea of common values. China's fear of interference from outsiders should it attempt to use force to regain Taiwan is obviously real and there have been no signs to indicate otherwise. In Roy's words, "these twin goals (sovereignty versus image of a responsible nation), however, invariably come into conflict." (Roy 1998:153) It is up to China how it plans to balance these two goals and how it chooses to deal with Taiwan that will ultimately determine its status within the international community. Perhaps if they deal with the Hong Kong situation with utmost care and patience and continue to

develop their economic and social ties with Taiwan. The Hong Kong or some similar model will serve to bring the two together in a peaceful manner. The Chinese are known for taking the long view and as long as another absolute leader who embraces Mao Zedong adage that, "power grows from the barrel of a gun") does not gain control of the government, peaceful reunification of Taiwan and China is not beyond the realm of possibility.

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