

China and the International Human Protection Regime: Beliefs, Power and Status in a Changing Normative Order

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Introduction

The 21st Century has witnessed both a deepening of scholarly and policy interest in norms associated with human protection, as well as the creation of a number of global, mostly UN-associated, institutions designed to enhance protective capacity. Academic appraisal of actions intended to promote humanitarian outcomes has mushroomed. Debate and discussion of topics such as the protection of civilians in armed conflict, the ‘Responsibility to Protect’ (R2P), or modes of accountability for mass atrocity crimes appear regularly on UN agendas. This includes the UN Security Council, which debates these protections in the context of its primary mandate to respond to threats to international peace and security. The Security Council’s understanding of how global insecurity is generated has noticeably widened since the 1990s, and many resolutions dealing with humanitarian disasters have been passed under mandatory Chapter VII UN Charter provisions.

Beijing’s recently enhanced material power, together with its steadily increasing willingness to provide global public goods, makes it essential to study its approaches to these issues. These developments in China’s place in the global system require consideration of the extent to which the Chinese leadership might be using Beijing’s increased influence to shape the UN’s agenda in this normative area, or instead whether such global norms have any capacity to shape a more powerful China’s behaviour. Such questions are additionally important to consider at a time when the post 1945 liberal international order appears to be weakening.

Certainly, China has significantly increased its *potential* to shape the normative architecture of global governance: it has slowly gained better representation and a greater voice in governance arrangements. It has decided to be more vocal than in the past in articulating what it regards as both the responsibilities that this new status carries as well as the benefits that successfully initiated multilateral institutional policies bring to the legitimation of its new global role. Indeed, China has been steadily moving away from an argument that emphasized its developing country status and material inadequacies towards one where it has come to accept, under Xi, that its status as the second largest economy in the world has conferred upon it a new social role that carries “special responsibilities” to sustain global order.¹

However, despite this potential for influence, its greater material power, and apparently growing sense of responsibility, the issue area of human protection is one of particular challenge for China. The Chinese government articulates a basic

¹ For a general discussion of these matters of responsibility see Mlada Bukovansky, et al, *Special Responsibilities: Global Problems and American Power*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

commitment to maintenance of a pluralist state-based order and is resistant to the erosion of the principle of non-interference in internal affairs, except under certain narrowly defined circumstances. The human protection regime challenges these beliefs. Indeed, it involves normative contestation at the global level of a particularly fundamental kind since it pits the security of the individual against the sanctity and security of the state-based international system. It appeals to universalist principles at a time when China seems more determined to protect pluralism and difference.

Furthermore, global institutional developments in the field of human protection represents a policy area of considerable domestic salience to China since this area not only touches directly on matters of state sovereignty and non-interference, but also on state-society relations. Norms that are of high domestic salience to China have been found most likely to make progress in circumstances where they correspond closely with domestic norms² – a proposition that necessitates a close examination of the content of the domestic values that the Chinese elite holds and wishes to protect.

At the same time, China’s status as a permanent member of the UN Security Council, the impressive enhancement in its material power, and recognition that, as a great power, it has a responsibility to contribute to the global commons in order to legitimate that great power status implies that it cannot ignore these normative developments.³ As the Chinese government itself noted in its 2005 UN reform document, “when a massive humanitarian crisis occurs, it is the legitimate concern of the international community to ease and defuse the crisis.”⁴ The puzzle related to questions of status, therefore, is how can Beijing both shape this normative regime in such a way that is seen by significant others as appropriate and helpful to the norm’s progression, and that at the same time does not validate the regime’s underlying values where they come into conflict with the beliefs the Chinese government wishes to see promoted and protected?

By beliefs, I am referring to those ideas that derive from China’s historical, cultural and ideological experiences and as they bear on global humanitarian action. In terms of status, I focus on its concerns to reflect and project itself as a responsible great power through normative engagement. This is not to suggest that there is a direct translation between these beliefs and status concerns into policy outcomes. The beliefs need to be thought of as both legacies as well as political resources that can be sparingly or expansively deployed in these new international circumstances. In addition, we should expect to find a mediated version of these beliefs via the

² Rosemary Foot and Andrew Walter, *China, the United States and Global Order* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

³ Bukovansky, et al, *Special Responsibilities: Global Problems and American Power*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

⁴ “Position Paper of the People’s Republic of China on the United Nations Reforms,” 7 June 2005.

concern with responsible great power status as the leadership moves from preferences to actual policy. Nevertheless, the argument is that both beliefs and status provide a valuable route to understanding China's relationship with normative developments in the UN-related human protection regime, and more broadly help us to assess China's relationship with these especially challenging aspects of the global normative order.

In what follows, I define what is meant by the human protection regime, outline the importance of the China case to the fate of this normative agenda, provide some detail on the nature of China's belief system as it relates to humanitarian action, suggest how matters of status intersect with those beliefs, before finally and briefly attempting to apply some of these ideas to two areas of China's involvement with the human protection regime.

The Human Protection Regime Defined

The elements that make up this developing regime share a concern to protect populations from wide-scale abuses including genocide and other mass atrocities. In a speech at the University of Oxford in February 2011, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, described the protection regime as “a subset of the more encompassing concept of human security” that “addresses more immediate threats to the survival of individuals and groups.”⁵ Alex Bellamy, more than any other scholar, has worked to delineate the components of this “emerging normative architecture,” and has pointed to “the Responsibility to Protect (R2P); the UN Security Council's protection of civilians agenda and changing peacekeeping practices; the development of the International Criminal Court; discrete agendas focusing on Women, Peace and Security (WPS) and Children in Armed Conflict; the further entrenchment of human rights law and international humanitarian law, and the adoption of protection as a core mandate of a variety of international organizations and NGOs.”⁶ Other elements could be added, perhaps, such as the international refugee regime and the expansion in its agenda of protection.

The Importance of the China Case to the Protection Regime

Of the rising or so-called emerging powers, China is in many respects in a class of its own in its ability to shape the global normative environment. China's resurgence has been particularly apparent since its membership of the World Trade Organization in 2001, a rise that in turn spawned the international and to some degree the domestic expectation that China should contribute more fully to the provision of global public goods.⁷ Moreover, since 2013, it has had a President that

⁵ Un Secretary General Ban Ki-moon, “Human Protection and the 21st Century United Nations”, 2 February 2011, at http://www.un.org/apps/news/infocus/sgspeeches/search_full.asp?statID=1064.

⁶ Alex J. Bellamy, “The Changing Face of Humanitarian Intervention,” *St Antony's International Review*, 11:1, 2015, pp. 15-43, at p. 16.

⁷ As President Obama put it in November 2009, he welcomed China's greater role, “a role in which a growing economy is joined by growing responsibilities.” Quoted in Bukovansky, et al, *Special Responsibilities*, p. 1. For

appears more willing than his predecessors to accept the obligations that greater economic and political clout have imposed on the country.

In many respects China's great power identity has begun to outstrip that of its developing country identity. Latterly, for example, Beijing has appeared to take more seriously its special status as permanent member of the UN Security Council. While it remains a middle-income country, nevertheless it has the second largest economy in the world together with the second largest defence budget. It offers aid and investment to many states around the globe and more than one hundred countries count it as their leading trading partner. Though China's real GDP growth rates have declined from 10.4% in 2010 to 6.7% in 2016, and there are many weaknesses in its economy still to be confronted, let alone overcome, it has a large and growing middle class. The World Bank estimates that between 1981 and 2010, 679 million people in China were raised out of extreme poverty (that is a daily income of less than \$1.25 per day)⁸ and Chinese scholars and officials often point to this success when advocating the important lessons that can be learned from China's own developmental experience.⁹

The evidence of China's great power identity, together with its remaining underlying developmental weaknesses, have sparked a scholarly and policy debate in China over the last few years about whether the government should start to play a more active global role.¹⁰ This has been a lengthy debate among Chinese elites not least because the revered former leader and architect of the 'Reform and Opening' policy, Deng Xiaoping, was associated with the *taoguang yanghui* formulation. This formulation advocated that China should stand back internationally – should 'bide its time' and 'hide its brightness' -- when dealing with international matters in order to maintain a sharp focus on its paramount domestic economic development agenda.

the most-frequently-referenced American statement, see Robert Zoellick, Deputy Secretary of State, "Whither China: From Membership to Responsibility? Remarks to National Committee on U.S.-China Relations," New York, September 21, 2005.

⁸ The World Bank, *World DataBank, Poverty and Inequality Database*.

⁹ See e.g. He Yafei, (Vice-Minister of the Overseas Chinese Affairs Office of the State Council), "A Proactive Approach to Global Governance is China's Historic Choice," *China Quarterly of International Strategic Studies*, Vol. 1:2, July 2015, p. 197.

¹⁰ Shaun Breslin, "China and the global order: signaling threat or friendship?" *International Affairs*, 89:3, May 2013, esp. pp. 619-24; David Shambaugh, *China Goes Global: the Partial Power* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013) pp. 18-20; Pichamon Yeophantong, "Governing the World: China's Evolving Conceptions of Responsibility," *Chinese Journal of International Politics*, 6:4, 2013, pp. 329-64; Wang Yizhou, "China's new foreign policy: transformations and challenges reflected in changing discourse," *The Asan Forum*, 2:2, March-April 2014, at <http://www.theasanforum.org/archives/march-april-2014/>

Eventually, the debate began to coalesce around an argument that reflected China's new great power identity. Some scholars averred that even when Beijing's interests were not directly engaged, China should take on global roles that reflected its great power status, taking the opportunity at the same time to promote its own values rather than acquiescing in or adopting those prominent in the West.

Professor Wang Yizhou of Peking University, for example, advocated a relaxation of the strict principle China had erstwhile adopted of non-interference in a country's internal affairs, in favour of what he termed "creative involvement": that is, China should "proactively and voluntarily participate in the discussion and resolution of regional and international issues", as well as provide the "institutions, assistance and global public goods that can benefit people throughout the world."¹¹

A number of the developments associated with the evolving human protection norm occurred when Presidents Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao led China. While they maintained rather close adherence to Deng's admonition that China should remain chary of assuming prominent global leadership positions, they also recognized China's role in the UN Security Council as "an important responsibility for safeguarding world peace and stability".¹² However, greater ambition has been a marked feature of the Xi Jinping era and he, undoubtedly, has shaped the direction of this more recent scholarly debate about China's world role. In conversation with then UN Secretary-General, Ban Ki-Moon, in June 2013 President Xi promised more Chinese effort to promote the "peaceful settlement of international disputes, support the UN's Millennium Development Goals, work with other parties to tackle climate change and make more contributions toward world peace and human development."¹³ Notably, in a deliberate link between Chinese power and the obligations that came with that power, Xi informed the Secretary General that he understood that China, "As a permanent member of the UN Security Council" had "heavy responsibilities to assume", adding that Beijing had "the capability to assume them."¹⁴

China and Humanitarianism: beliefs and status

What then are those Chinese beliefs that appear to be shaping its responses to this human protection regime and the demands that regime makes on those states that are accorded special privileges in the global system? Four dimensions seem pertinent: (1) classical Chinese political thought including Confucian ideas of statecraft, (2) China's colonial history including the post-1911 Republican order, (3) the Maoist or Marxist-influenced political system in place after 1949, and finally (4) the perceived success of its developmental experience particularly since Reform and Opening in

¹¹ "New Direction for China's Diplomacy," interview with Wang Yizhou, BeijingReview.com.cn, 8 March 2012, at http://www.bjreview.com.cn/world/txt/2012-03/05/content_439626.htm#.

¹² Yeophantong, "Governing the World", p. 331, quoting President Jiang Zemin.

¹³ "Chinese President meets UN Chief," *Xinhua*, 20 June 2013.

¹⁴ "Chinese President Meets UN Chief".

late 1978.¹⁵ Culture, historical experience, and ideology are reflected in these four dimensions, but importantly they each point in a similar direction and reinforce the argument that priority has to be given to building a strong state in order to advance human protection.

Undoubtedly, this conclusion could be seen to relate primarily to the Chinese government's desire to protect its own one-party rule, an argument that obviously has merit. However, that explanation is too narrow and incomplete: it cannot tell us what specific policies the Chinese government would choose in response to developments in any of the various components of this protection regime, and it fails to distinguish between those parts of the regime that are perceived to threaten the CCP's core interests and those that may instead advance some aspects of those interests.

First, classical ideas, which stress the unity between state and society, have played and continue to play an important role in shaping Beijing's responses to humanitarian crises. China's government may indeed use Confucian thought strategically in the contemporary era, but Confucian and other traditional philosophical ideas resonate in ways that reduce the tension between instrumentalism and belief.

The traditional belief that it is the "state rather than the individual that is the locus of moral agency and the subject of moral duty" reinforces an official sense that it is the state itself that needs to be protected in order that it can provide for its citizenry in time of need.¹⁶ Imperial tradition dictated the prime goals of the emperor to be "to preside over a stable and harmonious order".¹⁷ If the emperor was deemed responsible for his people's well-being, the converse was also true: were the people to fall into peril, then the mandate of heaven needed to be removed and the emperor replaced. As Yeophantong puts it, "The ruler's capability to cater to the interests of the people, in other words, became a tangible measure of that ruler's legitimacy, with the building of society's material foundations proving important in this regard."¹⁸ A well-ordered and stable state was, then, viewed as critical to establish and would guarantee harmony between the centre and its people, as well as between the centre and its "peripheral neighbours" (to use a Chinese phrase).

Modern day reiterations and extensions of that argument appear frequently in Chinese official discourse. Liu Tiewa and Zhang Haibin note the former Foreign Minister, Yang Jiechi's, view that the "healthy and powerful and sovereign state" is

¹⁵ In particular, I am drawing on and extending Miwa Hirono's work here. See references below.

¹⁶ Miwa Hirono, "Three Legacies of Humanitarianism in China," *Disasters*, 37 (S2), 2013.

¹⁷ Vivienne Shue, "Legitimacy Crisis in China?" in *State and Society in 21st Century China: Crisis, Contention, and Legitimation*, edited by Peter Hays Gries and Stanley Rosen (New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2004), p. 31.

¹⁸ Yeophantong, "Governing the World," pp. 336-7.

not only “beneficial to the stability, good governance and balanced development of a country” but also vital to the health of international society.¹⁹

Secondly, China shares with a number of other developing countries the experience of imperial exploitation and encroachment. This has spurred its support for a Westphalian interpretation of state sovereignty and the sovereign equality of states, its reluctance to move from a strict interpretation of Article 2(7) of the UN Charter that references non-interference in the domestic jurisdiction of states, and a skepticism with regard to the presumed impartiality of international law. As the historian Rana Mitter has put it: “It is understandable why sovereignty looms so large: after all, almost every incursion onto Chinese soil between 1839 and 1945 was based on some interpretation of international law, however dubious: the opium wars, the refusal to return German colonies to Chinese sovereignty at the Paris peace conference, the Japanese occupation of Manchuria.”²⁰ In a contemporary international system that some Chinese commentators, such as Sheng Hongsheng, describe as emphasizing coercive rather than consensus-based relationships, the fear is that the “sovereignty priority” will be replaced with a “human rights priority” under which “international criminal law uses its sharp swords to pierce through the ‘last layer of armor’ that is state sovereignty.”²¹

Marxist-Leninist-Maoist beliefs similarly reinforce the kinds of ideas that Sheng, quoted earlier, endorses and especially the sense that normative ideas or legal rules, like human rights, have a class character. In Mao’s China, human rights or humanitarian action were essentially depicted as tools of the bourgeoisie and designed to “cover up class contradictions, and to deceive the proletariat and the working people.”²² Rights were not to be claimed against the state, but were granted by it. As *Red Flag*, the Chinese Communist Party journal, put it, “human rights are not ‘heaven given,’ they are given and regulated by the state and by law; they are not universal, but have a clear class nature; they are not abstract or concrete; they are not absolute but limited by law and morality.”²³

Finally, following the advent of “Reform and Opening” under Deng Xiaoping and subsequent leaders, the Party-State has given priority to economic development and

¹⁹ Liu Tiewa and Zhang Haibin, “Debates in China about the Responsibility to Protect as a Developing International Norm: A General Assessment”, *Conflict, Security and Development*, 14:4, 2014, p. 411.

²⁰ Rana Mitter, “An Uneasy Engagement: Chinese Ideas of Global Order and Justice in Historical Perspective,” in Rosemary Foot, John Lewis Gaddis, and Andrew Hurrell (eds.) *Order and Justice in International Relations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 222.

²¹ Sheng Hongsheng, “China in the Post-World War II International Legal System,” in *China Quarterly of International Strategic Studies*, 1:2, p. 209.

²² Wen Yi Bao, quoted in Hirono, “Three Legacies”, p. S208.

²³ Quoted in Sarah Teitt, R2P IDEAS in brief, p. 3. See also Kent, *Between Freedom and Subsistence: China and Human Rights*, Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1993.

developed the idea of socialist humanitarianism. To some degree, they could be said to be drawing on the ideas of Republican leader Sun Yatsen who developed the concept of the “People’s Livelihood” and argued that it was critical to provide the “Four Great Necessities” of food, clothing, shelter and means of travel with the help of both state and international capital. Contemporary official Chinese attitudes to human rights similarly emphasize the need for China and other states to provide for these basic material needs.

In more recent times, President Hu Jintao has looked further back for inspiration and has linked the search for sustainable development to Confucian ideas. His aim to build a “harmonious society” was projected as a response to some of the social ills that China’s development model had generated. The next Chinese President, Xi Jinping, downplayed the idea of societal harmony placing greater weight on resurrecting the notion of the “China Dream” and the “great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation” as the source of domestic unity. These formulations are associated with making China an all-round developed and prosperous society by 2049 under the guidance of a revitalized and purified Communist Party. Realisation of the China dream requires the Party-State to work to spread the goals of China’s development successes across the country, especially to China’s western regions,²⁴ to bring the remaining tens of millions out of absolute poverty, and to reinforce their bonds with the Party-led political system.

China, Humanitarianism and the International Status of a Responsible State

However, while these beliefs are powerfully held, global norms also retain the ability to constrain, and particularly to constrain those states that care about status in global politics.²⁵ According to Yong Deng (though his point is arguable), China’s sensitivity to matters of status is “unparalleled” in the global system.²⁶ And Pichamon Yeophantong has shown how concern with appearing responsible has a long and deep tradition in Chinese statecraft.²⁷ This results in a paradox that confronts the Chinese leadership. As Ian Clark has rightly noted, if China seeks recognition as a responsible great power that is deserving of a role in shaping global norms, it must first show itself to be a willing and constructive participant in the extant global order.²⁸ That participation in itself restricts China’s policy options, influences external perceptions of its social status, and has some capacity to realign its domestic beliefs.

²⁴ Hirono, “Three Legacies,” p. S208.

²⁵ Alastair Iain Johnston, *Social States: China in International Institutions, 1980-2000* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007).

²⁶ Deng, *China’s Struggle for Status*, p. 9.

²⁷ Yeophantong, “Governing the World.”

²⁸ Ian Clark, “International Society and China: the Power of Norms and the Norms of Power”, *The Chinese Journal of International Politics* 7: 3, 2014, pp. 315-40.

Indeed, there is some evidence that China has tried to link its domestic beliefs and their relationship with humanitarian outcomes at the domestic and international levels in ways that bolster its international status. President Hu’s “harmonious society” was linked to the idea of a “harmonious world” and enunciated largely as a possible alternative to the conflictual world the US government had brought into being through its intervention in Iraq in 2003. The “China Dream” and “rejuvenation” associated so strongly with Xi Jinping carries within those terms the promise that China’s reemergence as a great power deserving of respect by other great powers legitimates its role as a model for others. As He Yafei has argued, the China model ought to be emulated: its success in reducing poverty implies that “China has a great deal to offer in regard to its development experiences.” It can provide “roadmaps for other developing nations engaged in the same endeavor.”²⁹

More obviously, since the global financial crisis of 2008, China has coupled the perceived need to spread what it depicts as the human benefits of its development model³⁰ with the provision of what Xi and his officials refer to as global and regional public goods. China’s overseas development assistance, as well as its role in UN peace operations and vital contributions to the UN peace operations budget are projected as major contributions to humanitarian work in other countries. Beijing proudly repeats that it provides more peacekeeping troops than all the other P5 members combined, and notes UN Secretary general Ban Ki-Moon’s comments praising this “solidarity” with the UN.³¹ Similarly, the “One Belt, One Road” initiative, with its emphasis on building infrastructure and enhancing connectivity, and underpinned by the China-created Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, apart from its geo-strategic meaning, also represents a major vehicle for China to cement the linkages between its deeply-rooted concept of humanitarianism and state-led development.

Implications for the Human Protection Regime: R2P and Peacekeeping

Evidence of the influence of these ideas is apparent in the Chinese government’s conduct towards two major dimensions of the human protection regime: the elaboration and implementation of R2P’s Three Pillar approach, and Beijing’s role in UN peace operations.³² In both cases, it recognizes the need, as a P5 member and responsible great power, to be involved with these matters. As others have noted, Beijing’s participation in peacekeeping is valued in part because it allows the

²⁹ He, “A Proactive Approach,” p. 197.

³⁰ Zhang Weiwei, *The China Wave: Rise of a Civilizational State* (Hackensack, NJ.: World Century Publishing Corp., 2012); *The China Horizon: glory and dream of a civilizational state* (Hackensack, NJ.: World Century Publishing Corp., 2016).

³¹ UN News Centre, http://www.un.org/apps/news/infocus/sgspeeches/print_full.asp?statID=1990.

³² For a more extended treatment of this argument see Foot, “The State, Development, and Humanitarianism: China’s Shaping of the Trajectory of R2P”, in Alex Bellamy and Tim Dunne (eds). *The Oxford Handbook of the Responsibility to Protect*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

country “to cultivate the image of a responsible great power, and cultivate the image of [a] state which protects international peace.”³³ With respect to humanitarian disasters, it acknowledges the need for an international community response.³⁴ Notable too, however, is that it has also developed forms of involvement that promote and reflect its dominant beliefs.

With respect to R2P, for example, China has been particularly vocal in placing emphasis on Pillar One – it is the “state’s responsibility to protect its citizens” from the four mass atrocity crimes identified in R2P as the trigger for some form of action.³⁵ It also acknowledges the import of Pillar Two of R2P, which stresses the responsibility of international actors to help states build the capacities that will aid a state’s efforts to prevent wide-scale abuse. On Pillar Three, which promises international action of a more interventionist (though not necessarily coercive) kind, Beijing remains circumspect. In any response to crises that might involve one or more of the four crimes, China emphasizes the need for host state consent (or in some circumstances regional organizational consent) to international involvement.

What form should that capacity building take? Here we can find clues in the way that China approaches UN peace operations or has described mass atrocity crimes such as genocide in other countries. In response to the mass atrocities in Darfur, China’s Special Envoy to the country described the “key problem” to tackle as a lack of development and resultant poverty, rather than genocide.³⁶ With regard to UN peace operations, China does not involve itself in activities designed to promote a liberal democratic peace in war-torn societies but promotes instead the notion that development – particular the building of infrastructure -- should be the central element of peacebuilding. Here, its own experience post-Reform and Opening, plus earlier imperial ideas on the relationship between rulers and led, as well as Republican notions of the vital role that infrastructure plays in the development of a modern state, all perform important shaping roles. That China stays a long time once it is committed to a peace operation also suggests that it views peacekeeping and peacebuilding through the development lens. As Roy Kamphausen has noted, during January to April 2013, China “sent its 15th peacekeeping engineer detachment to the [DRC], its 11th peacekeeping engineer battalion to Lebanon, its 16th PLA medical team to Zambia, its 13th peacekeeping force to Liberia, and its 2nd peacekeeping task force to South Sudan.”³⁷

³³ Shogo Suzuki, “Seeking ‘Legitimate’ Great Power Status in Post-Cold War International Society: China’s and Japan’s Participation in UNPKO”, *International Relations*, 22:1, 2008, p. 56.

³⁴ See footnote 4.

³⁵ The four crimes are genocide, ethnic cleansing, crimes against humanity and war crimes.

³⁶ Quoted in Liu Tiewa and Zhang Haibin, “Debates in China about the Responsibility to Protect as a Development International Norm”, *Conflict, Security and Development*, 14:4, 2014, p. 15.

³⁷ Roy D. Kamphausen, “China’s Military Operations other than War: The Military Legacy of Hu Jintao”, paper presented in Stockholm for SIPRI, 18-19 April, 2013, p. 5.

For China, then, strengthening these forms of state capacity and contributing more broadly to the development goals of states—as defined by the incumbent government—is a route to peace, a way of building close state-society relations, and a key contribution to the prevention of wide-scale abuse. There is little if any reflection in Beijing on what it means to build the capacity of a government in power that might have been involved in gross violations of human rights. These Chinese ideas leave little room for the protection of the individual, and show scant interest in holding individuals accountable for acts of mass killing or egregious violations of human rights. Instead, Beijing prefers to claim a mutually beneficial relationship between the building of state capacity, social stability, and humanitarian outcomes.

Conclusion

China under President Xi has made two major changes that are of significance to the further development of the international human protection regime. First, Xi appears more decisive and, as confirmed at the 2014 4th Plenum meeting, as well as in statements made more recently, intends China to play a more active role in global governance. Secondly, unlike his predecessors, he regards China’s contribution to global order as coming primarily through advancement of a Chinese-style model of development. Whereas Presidents Jiang and Hu saw that contribution as coming predominantly from the fact that China’s rapid advancement did not disrupt, Xi’s is a more China-centred and self-regarding approach. In addition, it mattered to Jiang and Hu that China be regarded as a responsible great power by significant others. In the case of Xi, he appears to place more emphasis on China’s status as a power with special responsibilities, almost seeming to take for granted that China’s successes as a resurgent power on the path to fulfilling the “China dream” will garner the admiration and support of external others.

This makes it important, then, to understand the beliefs that the Beijing leadership under Xi wishes to promote as well as this changed understanding of what garners it a respected international status. I have argued in this article that those beliefs in the relationship between the strong state and humanitarian outcomes for people rather than individuals are deep-seated. They date from imperial times but have been much reinforced by developments since. In contemporary times and with respect to two key aspects of the international human protection regime we see a gradual increase in Beijing’s willingness to participate in regime shaping using its own political-economic model as a status marker.