China Reinterprets the Liberal Peace

Silvia Menegazzi

Abstract

China's assertiveness is growing. While in the past China's foreign policy kept a low profile in international affairs, global developments, prime amongst which in the Middle East, highlight China's growing influence in world politics and its ensuing role in shaping global norms. Within the liberal peace discourse, China's reinterpretation of international norms can be seen as the result of a mixture of prior local norms - sovereignty and non-interference - and changes within the international environment - namely conflicts in North Africa and the Middle East. Particularly, in terms of intervention and peace-building practices, China insists that a number of preconditions - which are encapsulated in the notion of Responsible Protection (RP) - have to be met in order to consider intervention in sovereign states. This paper argues that in order to achieve a full picture of Chinese foreign policy and its normative underpinnings, it is necessary to explore the debate within non-state actors beyond the government apparatus, such as think tanks and research institutions.

Keywords: *China / Foreign Policy / UN Security Council / Libya / Syria / Think tanks / Liberal peace / Responsible protection (RP) / Responsibility to protect (R2P)*

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Introduction

China's future is at stake. The domestic political agenda is at odds with long term stability: public participation in the Chinese political system is changing; the pluralization of political processes that contemporary China is undergoing is evident, and Chinese society appears far less homogeneous than in the past, whereby many actors, once marginalized, have entered the decision-making process. At the global level, China's growing assertiveness has shifted international attention towards East Asia. Debates about China's status quo and its revisionist behaviour have mushroomed: will China in future accept the norms and values established by the West or will it reinterpret these challenging the international system? China's new political leadership, in its fifth generation, will have to deal with the controversies derived from Deng Xiaoping's political agenda - modernization with a low international profile - that still permeate the Chinese state and society.

In this light, this paper analyses two key concepts in global foreign policy debates and China's evolving interpretation of these: human security (HS) and the responsibility to protect (R2P). Despite the fact that China's security thinking and practice have gained considerable attention amongst political elites, the debates on these two concepts differ starkly in China and the West. The Chinese approach clearly highlights how the norms of human security and R2P are still deeply intertwined with those of national security, sovereignty and collective security (particularly socio-economic threats). In this sense, the Chinese tend to adopt a more traditional view of security. At the same time, China seems to pursue alternative peace-building paths in post-conflict situations, based on the notion of "strategic and cooperative partnerships", suggesting also an effort to reshape the neoliberal agenda.

In this context, the roles of non-state actors and specifically think tanks in Chinese foreign policy are critical. Research institutions and think tanks in China are evolving and increasing in influence, often providing information, analyses and advices to the Chinese government and party leadership. Besides, in this new political climate, think tanks allow us to analyze Chinese foreign policy through a double lens: on the one hand, being close to the party-state machine, they shed light on how official positions are often formed and consolidated; on the other hand, they allow us to understand how thinkers outside official channels discuss and interpret China's foreign policy priorities and approaches. In other words, although in the case of China, reliable data is not always available, in order to have a clear picture of Chinese foreign policy, delving outside official channels and resources is of the essence. This paper thus explores how

foreign policy - and specifically HS and R2P - is discussed by Chinese think tanks (*zhiku*-智库) - or research institutions (*yanjiusuo*-研究所). Following a general discussion of these concepts in the Chinese non-state context, this paper delves into their application in specific conflict settings in the MENA (Middle East and North Africa) region: the Libyan war and the Syrian crisis. In assessing China's role, this last section will combine non-official with official views and resources.

1. The role of think tanks in China's foreign policy debates

Before illustrating how Chinese Foreign Policy (CFP) deals with international norms and specifically liberal peace norms, it is essential for the purpose of this paper to introduce how Chinese foreign policy is discussed amongst non-traditional actors.[1] At present, the authoritarian and hierarchical concentration of power within the Chinese Communist Party seems to collide with the power-hungry within the lower ranks of the Party itself, who are able to build popular consensus within the Chinese population, increasingly participate in public debate, but lack the support of the Party's top hierarchy. According to some estimates, this segment of the population may account for hundreds of party officials.[2] In this context, the emergence of a collective system of leadership alongside the search for popular legitimacy has pushed Chinese officials to seek professional expertise within think tanks and research institutions.[3] While there is no standard practice of how this is done, we can still identify some general trends.[4]

Think tanks and research institutions in China emerged in the 1960s from a mix of working units and research institutions, following the Soviet model. Today, they represent an important microcosm of and laboratory for policy-making in China. During the Mao era, think tanks were essentially embedded into the CCP decision-making process, playing marginal roles in view of the scarcity of official information and communication.[5] With the economic opening of the Deng era, policy-making communities and intellectuals outside the government apparatus increased in number and were entrusted with greater freedom. This led to their gradual upgrade into the periphery of the policy-making community.[6] Today, Chinese think tanks have grown in number as well as in the quality of their work. Recent analyses show that the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 2011 ranked as the second country in the world with the

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[1] For the purpose of this paper non-traditional channels are defined as actors which are not directly part of the Chinese government or the Chinese Communist Party (i.e. government agencies and ministries). Specifically, the analysis will focus on think tanks and research institutions.

[2] Isabel Hilton, "The scandalous trial of Bo Xilai is not without risks", *The Guardian*, 28 September 2012, http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2012/sep/28/bo-xilai-trial-not-without-risks.

[3] Cheng Li, "China New Think Tanks: where officials, entrepreneurs and scholars interact", in *China Leadership Monitor*, No. 29 (Summer 2009), http://www.hoover.org/publications/china-leadership-monitor/article/552.

[4] For more information see Patrick Köllner, "Think Tanks: Their Development, Global Diversity and Roles in International Affairs", in *GIGA Focus International Edition*, No. 6/2011, http://www.giga-hamburg.de/dl/download.php?d=/content/publikationen/pdf/gf_international_1106.pdf.

[5] Initially IR think tanks in China were embedded in the institutional structure of the government apparatus and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). David Shambaugh, "China's International Relations Think Tanks: Evolving Structure and Process", in *The China Quarterly*, No. 171 (September 2002), p. 575-596.

[6] Quansheng Zhao, "Chinese Epistemic Community, Intellectuals and Chinese Foreign Policy", in *Policy and Society*, Vol. 25, No. 1 (July 2006), p. 39-59.

largest number of think tanks (425).[7] As for the "Top Fifty Think Tanks-worldwide outside the US" ranking, China ranked fourteenth, winning the first place for the country with the "Top Think Tank in Asia" above Japan. [8] In 2011 China also ranked third for "Best New Think Tanks Ideas", second only to the United Kingdom and the United States, the countries with the longest think tank traditions, entering a ranking where China was not even mentioned just two years earlier.[9]

Following the "First Forum of China Think Tanks" held in Beijing in 2006, Chinese authorities compiled an official rank of the "top 10 think tanks". Today, the most important Chinese IR think tanks include: the China Institute of Contemporary International Relations (CICIR), the Shanghai Institute of International Studies (SIIS), the China Institute of International Studies (CIIS), the China Center for International Economic Exchanges (CCIEE) and the Center for International and Strategic Studies (CISS) at Peking University.[10] In some cases these institutes are administrated directly by the Communist Party, such as the International Strategy Research Institute (ISRI) or by the army, such as the China Institute for International Strategic Studies (CIISS). Chinese think tanks and research institutions can be very different from their counterparts in the West, calling for definitions that go beyond Western criteria.[11] Although scholars and experts cannot publicly criticize Beijing's foreign policy, they can nevertheless stimulate political discussion at the margins, through internal reports (*neibu*-内部), official meetings and informal discussions with CCP officials. At the same time, the administrative linkages, such as supervising units working inside the government, and personal ties (*guanxi*-关系) allow think tank experts to build personal ties with and influence over official actors.[12]

Chinese think tanks have multiple functions: they serve as intelligence-gathering bodies for government officials and agencies; they provide analysis and recommendations on potential new policies, laws and regulations, including drafting legal documents to be considered by the government; and they provide assessments of new policies.[13] Chinese IR think tanks usually focus their agenda on medium and long-term issues of strategic importance for China's foreign policy and world politics in general, from globalization to the world economy. Last but not least, Chinese think tanks publish scientific books and annual reports on international affairs and global governance. For instance, a common feature of IR think tanks is to publish scholarly journals in both Chinese and English, in which internationally-renowned Chinese IR

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[7] India for instance ranked third, but with almost less than an half the number of think tanks (292). See James G. McGann, *The Global Go To Think Tanks Report 2011*, http://www.gotothinktank.com/2011-global-tank-index.

[8] Ibid., p. 16.

[9] James G. McGann, *The Global Go To Think Tanks Report 2009*, http://repository.upenn.edu/think_tanks/2.

[10] For a detailed list of think tanks in China see the *Global Think Tank Directory*, http://www.gotothinktank.com/directory/asia.

[11] A valid attempt to define think tanks in the Chinese context was made by Zhu: "China's think tanks could be defined as stable and autonomous organizations that research and consult on policy issues to influence the policy process". See Zhu Xufeng, "The Influence of Think Tanks in the Chinese Policy Process: Different Ways and Mechanisms", in *Asian Survey*, Vol. 49, No. 2 (March-April 2009), p. 337.

[12] Ibid. p. 337.

[13] Kerry Dumbaugh and Michael F. Martin, "Understanding China's Political System", in *CRS Report for Congress*, No. R41007 (10 May 2012), http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/R41007.pdf.

experts discuss international affairs and China's foreign policy, often generating new ideas. Today, many Chinese experts concur that the role of think tanks is best captured by the expression *chuangxin*-创新, which literally means "discard old ideas and bring forth new ones".[14] While journal articles rarely affect Chinese Foreign Policy directly, they may influence decision makers' opinions or at least help them contextualize and broaden their positions. A notable example was the think tank debate over China's "Peaceful Rise".[15]

Concerning organizational structure, think tanks are generally divided into centers and institutes. Research centers like the Center for Counter-Terrorism Studies at CICIR, usually deal with a particular topic, such as terrorism, globalization or security studies. In this case, discussions on international issues provide policy analysis and recommendations directly. Other research institutes instead focus on specific regions or countries, such as the Institute of European Studies at SIIS. Larger research institutions and think tank are instead divided into departments comprising both regional studies and issues-area studies, such as the CIIS. Meetings with officials are a regular feature of think tank activities, often followed by official and unofficial reports and published documents.[16] Finally, a particular characteristic of Chinese think tanks is "external exchange": all institutions hold regular meetings with foreign research institutions and delegations; they also host international seminars and conferences on relevant topics for Chinese foreign policy and IR studies.

2. China reinterprets the liberal peace

Recent peace studies have highlighted that state building processes in post-conflict settings often have a neoliberal flavour (from tax reforms to democratization), often tied to Western interests.[17] In view of the linkages between Western foreign policy and (neo)liberal peace-building, how do emerging powers, and specifically China, (re)interpret and discuss international peace norms?

Since the end of the Cold War, the question of legitimate armed intervention has dominated international political debates. Many Western states advocate the right to intervene, seeing it as a responsibility, a duty or even an obligation of the international community to stop mass atrocities wherever they take place.[18] The opposing view

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[14] Xu Xiaohu and Hu Qingping, "从最新'全球智库调查报告'看中国智库的发展" (An analysis of Chinese think tanks development from the last Global Go To Think Tanks Report), in 当代世界与社会主义 (*Contemporary World and Socialism*), No. 2/2012, p. 115, http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog_5376efbf0101cfmf.html.
[15] Bonnie S. Glaser and Evan S. Medeiros, "The Changing Ecology of Foreign Policy-Making in China: The Ascension and Demise of the Theory of 'Peaceful Rise'", in *The China Quarterly*, Vol. 190 (June 2007), p. 291-310.
[16] Interview by the author with think tank expert, Shanghai, August 2012.
[17] Heather Marquette and Danielle Beswick, "State Building, Security and Development: state building as a new development paradigm?", in *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 32, No. 10 (November 2011), p. 1703-1714, http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2011.610565.
[18] Based on the Responsibility to Protect principle, military intervention is justified for humanitarian purposes upon two broad sets of circumstances: large scale loss of life and large scale ethnic cleansing. See International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty (ICISS), *The Responsibility to Protect*, Ottawa, ICISS, December 2001, http://responsibilitytoprotect.org/ICISS%20Report.pdf.

tends to see humanitarian intervention as hypocritical behaviour, driven often by industrialized economies as a means of serving their interests by imposing neoliberal reforms. The well-known "liberal peace" agenda - including democracy, human rights, free markets and rule of law - is intimately related to intervention, to the extent that following the decision to intervene, the question of what kind of peace to promote naturally follows suit.[19] The liberal peace agenda therefore consists of two essential elements: the question of intervention, including its modalities and procedures, and the question of peace-building, including the specific norms and policies external actors promote in post-conflict (or at least post-violence) settings. Below we explore how the Chinese think tank debate discusses these two elements of the liberal peace.

As well known, the PRC has not always supported Western approaches to international intervention and peace-building. China's recent vetoes in the UN Security Council on the Syrian crisis are a clear reminder of this stark fact.[20] Nevertheless, China's different interpretation of international norms on intervention and peace-building need explanations that go beyond the overrated "East versus West" dichotomy. Some attribute China's resistance to its "global peace engagement strategy".[21] The two pillars of this strategy are UN peacekeeping operations (PKOs) and international peace-building operations (IPBOs).[22] Although China's commitment to PKOs is recognized internationally, with participation in UN activities that often exceed Western figures, China's stance on IPBOs remains far more cautious.[23] China firmly opposes any military action, humanitarian intervention or regime change, as well as any other activity which compromises state sovereignty or violates the UN Charter: "On issues of peace and security in the Middle East, China has always fulfilled its obligations in a constructive way. We stand for peace and oppose war. We stand for equality and oppose power politics. We stand for principles and oppose interference".[24]

As the paragraphs below argue, the Chinese interpretation of the liberal peace agenda focuses on the necessary conditions for intervention, including both conditions prior to and post intervention. In order to intervene in conflict settings, a UNSC resolution is necessary but insufficient if it does not come with the guarantee that regime change will not occur. At the same time, after intervention and during peace-building, actors

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[19] Oliver P. Richmond, "The problem of peace: understanding the 'liberal peace'", in *Conflict, Security and Development*, Vol. 6, No. 3 (October 2006), p. 291-314, http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14678800600933480.

[20] Zhong Sheng, "Why China vetoes UN draft resolution for Syria issues", in *People's Daily Online*, 8 February 2012, http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/90780/7723539.html.

[21] Zhao Lei, "Two Pillars of China's Global Peace Engagement Strategy: UN Peacekeeping and International Peacebuilding", in *International Peacekeeping*, Vol. 18, No. 3 (June 2011), p. 344-362.

[22] Whereas UN mandated peacekeeping operations are limited to supporting the implementation of ceasefire or peace agreements, peacebuilding operations are much broader, including political, humanitarian, developmental and human rights programmes conducted both by the UN and other state and non-state actors. Ibid. p. 344.

[23] Yongjin Zhang, "China and UN peacekeeping: from condemnation to participation", in *International Peacekeeping*, Vol. 3, No. 3 (Autumn 1996), p.1-15; Pang Zhongying, "China's Changing Attitude to UN Peacekeeping", in International Peacekeeping, Vol. 12, No. 1 (Spring 2005), p. 87-104; and International Crisis Group, "China's Growing Role in UN Peacekeeping", in *ICG Asia Report*, No. 166 (17 April 2009), http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/asia/north-east-asia/china/166-chinas-growing-role-in-un-peacekeeping.aspx.

[24] Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Statement by Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi of the People's Republic of China at the High-level Meeting of the Security Council of Peace and Security in the Middle East*, 26 September 2012, http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/wjb/wjbz/2461/t979876.htm.

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involved in the reconstruction effort have to keep clear of political processes which compromise state sovereignty. They can, nevertheless, be involved in economic reconstruction that results, according to China, in a win-win situation for all parties involved.

China's global strategy on how to achieve and maintain peace and development differs from Western norms in three main respects. First an adherence to sovereignty as opposed to humanitarian intervention; second, the prioritization of economic development versus democratization; and third a belief in top-down state building, whereby states freely choose which political system to adopt, which economic reforms to implement and how to conduct public participation. This does not mean a clear Chinese rejection of international/Western peace norms. There has rather been a complex process of *sinicization*[25] of such norms, whereby Chinese civilization and culture have permeated into the conceptualization of Chinese foreign policy norms.[26]

With regards to the liberal peace agenda, two key notions are human security (HS) and the responsibility to protect (R2P). Both concepts have been hotly contested in academic discourse and policy practice. Traditional notions of security have undergone transformation during the last two decades. The term *human* has penetrated academic and policy debate following the 1994 UNDP declaration.[27] Nevertheless, the controversial definition of human security immediately raised disagreements as to whether the term refers to threats to human well-being, or in a narrower sense, threats to individuals in violent conflicts calling into question the principles of sovereignty and noninterference. The principle of R2P is even more contested. Following conflicts in Rwanda (1994) and Kosovo (1999), in 2001 an attempt was made to institutionalize a new international security framework through the work of the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty. Its purpose was to answer the "question on when, if ever, it is appropriate for states to take coercive - and in particular military - action against another state for the purpose of protecting people at risk in that other state".[28]

Within Asia, China's interpretation of human security displayed the most complex evolution.[29] Originally, in China the notion of human security (*renlei anquan*-人类安全)

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[25] Peter J. Katzenstein, "China's Rise: Rupture, Return, or Recombination?", in Peter J. Katzenstein (ed.), *Sinicization and the Rise of China. Civilizational Processes Beyond East and West*, Routledge, 2012, p. 1-38.

[26] Zheng Yongnian, "亚洲的安全困境与亚洲集体安全体系建设" (Asia's security predicaments and construction of a collective security system in Asia), in 和平与发展 (*Peace and Development*), No. 5 (October 2011), p. 2, http://www.cssn.cn/news/514190.htm.

[27] According to Owen, following the 1994 UNDP Report, the dichotomous broad-versus-narrow conceptualization of human security generated up to 21 different interpretations of the term. See Taylor Owen, "Human Security - Conflict, Critique and Consensus: Colloquium Remarks and a Proposal for a Threshold-Based Definition", in *Security Dialogue*, Vol. 35, No. 3 (September 2004), p. 375, http://www.taylorowen.com/Articles/2004_SD.pdf.

[28] International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty (ICISS), *The Responsibility to Protect*, cit., p. vii.

[29] Paul M. Evans, "Human Security in Asia in a Conservative Era: Against the Odds, Twice", in Chandra Chari (ed.), *War, Peace and Hegemony in a Globalized World: The Changing Balance of Power in the Twenty-First Century*, Abingdon and New York, Routledge, 2008, p. p. 88. See also Paul M. Evans, "Human Security and East Asia: In the Beginning", in *Journal of East Asian Studies*, Vol. 4, No. 2 (May-

has always been associated with national security and sovereignty rights.[30] The Chinese government accepted the idea of human security and of protecting people's lives, rights and dignity and, although not using the term officially, it has shown a growing inclination to distinguish between internal security issues, such as environmental protection or social security, and international security issues regarding intervention and peacekeeping.[31] Nevertheless, the Chinese interpretation of HS as related to international security is mostly equated to the idea of building sustainable and long-term development. Clearly aware of Western peace-keeping (*weihu heping*-维护和平) and peace-making (*dizao heping*-缔造和平), as well as of debates on traditional security (*anquan*-安全) and non-traditional security (*fei anquan*-非安全), the Chinese stance on HS is premised on the notion that well-being should be promoted by the international community through mutual beneficially cooperation aimed at reaching the Millennium Development Goals.[32]

As for the protection of individuals in violent conflicts and the notion of R2P, China's approach is far more cautious. According to recent debates within Chinese think tanks, China should support intervention in the UN Security Council so long as its purpose is fully in line with the UN Charter. China has been particularly worried that R2P may become a tool for powerful countries to interfere in the affairs of the weak, or that it may be applied selectively and that its scope could be extended arbitrarily.[33] Interestingly however, China has not simply rejected the notion of R2P. The Chinese think tank community has rather engaged in an attempt at reinterpreting it by setting forth the notion of Responsible Protection (RP). RP is built on six basic elements: 1) the objects of protection must be innocent people and not specific political parties or armed forces; 2) the legitimacy of the "protection" executors must be established and the UN Security Council is the only legitimate actor to perform this duty; 3) the means of protection must be strictly limited. Protection can be considered legitimate if and only if diplomatic and political means are exhausted; 4) the purpose of protection must be clearly defined: it is forbidden to create greater humanitarian disaster or to use protection as a means to overthrow the government of a given state; 5) protectors are responsible for the post-intervention and post-reconstruction phases; 6) the ultimate supervisor should be the United Nations. The UN needs to establish mechanisms to monitor and evaluate outcomes and ensure accountability.[34]

As China's engagement within the international community is becoming more proactive, so has its debate on the prospects and modes of intervention in conflicts

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August 2004), p. 263-284,
http://www.ligi.ubc.ca/sites/liu/files/Publications/Human_Security_and_East_Asia.pdf.
[30] Note that the direct translation of the Chinese term 人类 renlei (human) is humankind or humanity and thus it designates a community rather than an individual.
[31] Chu Shulong, "China and Human Security", in *North Pacific Policy Papers*, No. 8 (2002),
http://www.iar.ubc.ca/programs/pastprograms/PCAPS/pubs/nppp8_final.pdf.
[32] Yang Jiemian, "试论 和平发展观 的发展 和 挑战" (Discussing development and challenges of the concept of Peaceful Development), in *Contemporary International Relations*, No. 5/2011,
http://www.siis.org.cn/Lunwen_View.aspx?lid=10000400.
[33] Qu Xing, "The UN Charter, the Responsibility to Protect, and the Syria Issue", in *China International Studies*, No. 33 (March-April 2012), p. 23, http://www.ciis.org.cn/english/2012-04/16/content_4943041.htm.
[34] Ruan Zongze, "Responsible Protection: Building a Safer World", in China International Studies, No. 34 (May-June 2012), p. 36, http://www.ciis.org.cn/english/2012-06/15/content_5090912.htm.

settings. The manner in which China has engaged in these discussions has not openly contrasted the original conceptualizations of the UNDP and the ICISS in 1994 and 2001 respectively. Nevertheless, China's increasing international involvement has pushed it into seeking a reinterpretation of these principles, which can be summarized as follows: 1) civilian protection should be "responsible". This means that coercive military action can only take place if political interests aimed at overthrowing a sovereign government are set aside; 2) intervention can only occur upon the approval of the UN Security Council; 3) responsibility does not end with intervention but post-conflict reconstruction is an essential part of the principle. In this sense, the Chinese approach to peace-building is inherently tied with the goals of economic stability and development.

3. Implications for China's foreign policy in the MENA region

At present, China's involvement in the MENA region represents a vital aspect of Chinese foreign policy. Economically, Beijing's interests (essentially related to trade and energy) are met by China's presence in the region. Politically, Beijing's role is highly strategic, with China positioning itself as an alternative and counterweight to the United States as well as an active global player in world affairs. The rhetoric of interests and strategies does not, however, entirely explain why China decided to abstain on UNSC Resolution 1973 regarding intervention in Libya or why, despite this, China is openly obstructing any move towards intervention in Syria. Empirically, the RPC's stance on Libya and Syria highlights how international norms are reinterpreted by China, shedding light on the motivations underpinning China's behaviour.

3.1 Libya

China's position towards Libya seemed to mark a break in the PRC's traditional reluctance to allow international intervention in sovereign states for the sake of human security and R2P. Due to China's unexpected abstention on UNSC Resolution 1973 (2011) which approved the No Fly Zone in Libya, the international community interpreted Chinese behaviour as a normative shift in favour of R2P. However, rather than a clear normative shift, the abstention was due to a combination of factors all strictly related to Chinese national interests: the need to ensure the safety of more than 35,000 Chinese workers on Libyan soil, the willingness to support friendly Arab countries that had already isolated Gaddafi's regime, and the economic interests at stake if China ended up supporting the losing side in the struggle for Libya.[35] Interests, of course, are always at stake when intervention takes place. In this sense, Chinese economic interests and thus the PRC's abstention worked against China's own pre-conditions for accepting intervention, particularly the guarantee against a regime change. Indeed, with the escalation of the conflict and NATO countries providing direct military aid to the Libyan opposition,[36] China's fragile consensus over UNSC 1973 was

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[35] "The Libyan dilemma", in *The Economist*, 10 September 2011,
http://www.economist.com/node/21528664.
[36] Michael Birnbaum, "France sent arms to Libyan rebels", in *The Washington Post*, 29 June 2011,
http://articles.washingtonpost.com/2011-06-29/world/35235276_1_nafusa-mountains-hans-hillen-libyan-rebels.

broken as the PRC accused Western powers of exceeding the UNSC mandate and using it as a pretext to oust Gaddafi's regime.[37]

China's position, however, should not be viewed as a blanket opposition to Western approaches: "China has always respected the will and choice of the Libyan people and believes that the Libyan people have the wisdom and ability to establish a political system and development path suited to their own national conditions. […] The international community should fully respect the sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity of Libya and provide concrete assistance to Libya within the UN framework in its post-conflict reconstruction".[38] This official PRC statement seems to be in line with the Responsible Protection notion discussed in Chinese think tanks as well as the broader Chinese approach to development.[39] With the conclusion of the NATO operation on 31st October 2011, China decided to take an active stance in supporting Libya's reconstruction, with a willingness to promote cooperation based on mutual trust. Chinese companies involved in the reconstruction effort have come mainly from the construction sector, and have been involved in railways and telecommunication projects.[40] The approach to Libya's reconstruction mirrors the Chinese experience in Afghanistan, where an effort has been made to respect Afghan national unification combined with UN-sponsored international assistance; build a security system that takes into account all Afghan factions and neighboring countries; promote dialogue within multilateral settings; and support reconstruction strategies based on developing the country's mineral resources and agriculture.[41] To summarize, the PRC's support for the Libyan intervention was possible due to a confluence of specific national interests. When however the intervention went beyond the Chinese view of RP (the protection of innocent people rather than regime change),[42] the consensus within the PRC crumbled. This did not entail a pull-back from Libya. On the contrary, China has become heavily involved in the Libyan reconstruction effort.

3.2 Syria

Those expecting a decisive change in Beijing's traditional stance towards foreign intervention were bitterly disappointed on 19th July 2012, when China (along with Russia) voted for the third time against a proposed UN Security Council resolution to

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[37] Simon Tisdall, "The consensus on intervention in Libya has shattered", in *The Guardian*, 23 March 2011, http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2011/mar/23/libya-ceasefire-consensus-russia-china-india.
[38] Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Position Paper of the People's Republic of China at the 67th Session of the United Nations General Assembly*, 19 September 2012, http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/zxxx/t970926.htm.
[39] Officially, the basic features of Chinese foreign aid are: helping recipient countries build their self-development capacity, impose no political conditions, adhere to equality, mutual benefit and common development, and focus on reform and innovation. See China's Information Office of the State Council, *White paper on China's Foreign Aid*, April 2011, http://english.gov.cn/official/2011-04/21/content_1849913.htm.
[40] "Chinese seek reconstruction role in Libya", *Reuters*, 5 February 2012, http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/02/05/us-china-libya-idUSTRE81404F20120205.
[41] Hu Shisheng, *Afghan Reconstruction vs. Regional Challenges and Responsibilities*, Beijing, China Institute of Contemporary International Relations, 8 October 2012, http://www.cicir.ac.cn/english/newsView.aspx?nid=4140.
[42] Chinese Permanent Mission to the UN, *Explanation of vote by Ambassador Li Baodong after adoption of Security Council resolution on Libya*, 17 March 2011, http://www.china-un.org/eng/gdxw/t807544.htm.

condemn Bashar al Assad's regime in Syria.[43] Western media was so frustrated that a moratorium was proposed on the use of the term "international community" for those situations where consensus does not exist.[44] In explaining China's opposition, Li Baodong, the Permanent Representative of the People's Republic of China to the United Nations Office in Geneva, affirmed that the draft resolution "was counterproductive, as it had uneven content that put pressure on only one party, which would only derail the issue from the track of political settlement and undermine regional peace and stability".[45] The Syrian conflict, he argued, "should be resolved by Syrians themselves".[46] China's strong criticism was based upon two assumptions: state sovereignty and civilian protection. Beijing's view, reinforced by the Libyan experience, is that the implementation of R2P has failed. Specifically, R2P did not create sufficient precautionary mechanisms to ensure that civilian protection alone would be the exclusive mission of international interventions. "China and Russia, advocating for *responsible protection*, will not approve military intervention after realizing that the West had abused the authorization of the UNSC resolution in the case of Libya".[47] In relation to the Syrian crisis, the think tank debate has fully shared the official view, justifying China's reasons for non-intervention.

China's reaction, according to recent analyses, can be explained by four main considerations. First, preserving regional stability should be *the* priority of the international community. Overthrowing Bashar al Assad's regime would cast the country into an even deeper civil war, destroy all economic achievements and thus harm people's lives and compromise definitively regional stability. Second, the principle of non-intervention is not only China's priority, but is also enshrined firmly in international law. Third, China focuses strictly on humanitarian issues. China will continue to offer humanitarian assistance, but only in terms of economic aid. Fourth, China has followed the concept of "diplomacy for the people" in conflict settings, interpreting this as the need to ensure the safety of Chinese citizens and corporations.[48] In the wake of Kofi Annan's six-point peace plan for Syria,[49] Hong Lei, Chinese Foreign Ministry Spokesperson illustrated the specific content of China's own four point proposal for the resolution of the Syrian conflict: first, the relevant parties in Syria have to implement an effective ceasefire (region by region or phase by phase) and cooperate with the mediation efforts of UN representative Lakhdar Brahimi; second, representatives able to implement a political transition assuring the continuity

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[43] The first Chinese veto was exercised in October 2011. On February 4, 2012, China again vetoed against a UNSC resolution that called President Bashar al-Assad to step down. On March 1, 2012 China voted against a UN Human Rights Council resolution condemning crimes in Syria. On 19 July 2012 China vetoed against a British-sponsored UN resolution on economic sanctions against the Syrian government.

[44] Richard N. Haass, "Syria: beyond the UN Veto", in CFR *First Take*, 19 July 2012, http://www.cfr.org/syria/syria-beyond-un-veto/p28732.

[45] United Nations Security Council, *Security Council fails to adopt draft resolution on Syria that would have threatened sanctions, due to negatives votes of China, Russia Federation* (SC/10714), 19 July 2012, https://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2012/sc10714.doc.htm.

[46] Ibid.

[47] Jin Liangxiang, "Will Bashar Assad inevitably collapse?", in *China.org.cn*, 13 November 2012, http://www.china.org.cn/opinion/2012-11/13/content_27095632.htm.

[48] Yao Kuangyi, "The Turbulence in West Asia and North Africa and China's Response", in *China International Studies*, No. 34 (May-June 2012), p. 132.

[49] United Nations Security Council, *In Presidential Statement, Security Council Gives Full Support to Efforts of Joint Special Envoy of United Nations, Arab League to End Violence in Syria* (SC/10583), 21 March 2012, http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2012/sc10583.doc.htm.

and effectiveness of Syrian governmental institutions should be appointed; third, the international community should work to implement the communiqué of the foreign ministers' meeting of the Action Group for Syria in Geneva, Kofi Annan's six-point peace plan and relevant SC resolutions. In doing so, the international community should also evaluate the positive efforts made by the Arab League and other countries in the region. In this sense, while China seeks to influence the international community's actions in the MENA region, it also pays close attention to regional efforts; Fourth, concrete steps should be made to ease the humanitarian crisis. In doing so "humanitarian issues should not be politicized and humanitarian assistance should not be militarized".[50] In the case of Syria, preconditions to intervene and future peace-building processes appear simply inconsistent with China approach to RP: a UNSC resolution could not guarantee that regime change would not occur; at the same time, aware of the Libya precedent and Western interests in the Middle East, China simply does not believe that post-conflict reconstruction in Syria (particularly political reconstruction) would be driven exclusively by local needs.

Conclusion

With its global power growing, China seems keen to engage actively in the evolving debate over international norms of peace and war, challenging the so-called liberal peace. Chinese conduct, as revealed by its preconditions to intervention (Syria) as well as its alternative paths to development in post-conflict areas (Libya), point out that overall, China does not operate completely at odds with Western norms. Notwithstanding, China's *reinterpretation* of such norms is often the result of a mixture between prior local norms - as in the case of sovereignty and non-interference - and rapid changes in the international environment. As China's role as a global player grows, the international community will have to engage with China's norm (re)interpretation and become aware of how these norms are evolving outside Western settings. Drawing from think tanks and research institutions, this paper suggests that in order to grasp a more detailed picture of Chinese foreign policy, official resources must be integrated with non-official ones Recently, and on more than one occasion, Chinese foreign policy has been examined through alternative categories: authoritative, quasi-authoritative or non-authoritative.[51] For the purpose of this paper, non-official sources from Chinese international relations think tanks and research institutions have been examined. The important role played by many of these institutes in the discussion of Chinese foreign policy illustrates changes occurring within the "opaque" process of policy-making in China, where in the post-Deng era, new strategies and ideas have blossomed outside the official political environment. Although these experts and institutions cannot be considered as sole or even principal source of decision-making in

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[50] Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Hong Lei's regular press conference on November 1, 2012*, 2 November 2012, http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/xwfw/s2510/2511/t984865.htm.

[51] Authoritative sources refer to the regime, quasi-authoritative sources to media articles conveying the PRC's messages and non-authoritative sources to low-level commentary and signed articles appearing in a wide variety of PRC and Hong Kong newspapers. See Michael D. Swaine, "Chinese Views of the Syrian Conflict", in *China Leadership Monitor*, No. 39 (Fall 2012), http://www.hoover.org/publications/china-leadership-monitor/article/129451. See also Michael D. Swaine, "Chinese Leadership and Elite Responses to the U.S. Pacific Pivot", in *China Leadership Monitor*, No. 38 (Summer 2012), http://www.hoover.org/publications/china-leadership-monitor/article/124546.

Chinese foreign policy, they nonetheless have to be taken into account in order to appreciate the micro-process of political debate that increasingly make their way into Chinese foreign policy making.

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