

Sovereignty, Human Rights, and Responsibility: Changes in China's Response to International Humanitarian Crises

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Abstract The question of whether human rights are above sovereignty has dominated China's human rights discourse. Relying on a sovereignty-human rights spectrum, this article reviews China's behaviors, particularly its participation in the UN Security Council, in managing the three major international humanitarian crises in the post-Cold War era—Rwanda, Kosovo, and Darfur, and finds that there have been impressive changes in China's response to the crises. Yet, a content analysis of China's official discourse on human rights finds that China's attitudes towards sovereignty and human rights have not changed much. Drawing on constructivist international relations theory, this article attempts to explain the paradox. It is argued that the international discourse on the “responsibility to protect” has brought about changes in international norms regarding violations of human rights and humanitarian law, and that, having undergone in recent years an identity change from a defensive power of bitterness and insecurity to a rising power aspiring to take more responsibility, China is more concerned about its national image and more receptive to international norms, which has led to the changes in its response to international humanitarian crises.

Keywords Sovereignty · Human Rights · Responsibility · China · International Humanitarian Crises

Introduction

The question of whether human rights are above sovereignty has dominated the human rights discourse in China, and the Chinese answer to the question used to be

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clear-cut. Official documents have upheld sovereignty without reservation and viewed it as a precondition to human rights.¹ This means that any measure to protect human rights should not infringe upon the principle of state sovereignty. Perhaps the clearest evidence of the centrality of sovereignty in Chinese political thinking is its relationship with the country's foreign policy philosophy. Sovereignty can be argued to embrace at least three of the five principles of peaceful coexistence, namely, mutual respect for each other's sovereignty and territorial integrity, mutual non-aggression, non-intervention in each other's internal affairs, equality and mutual benefit, and peaceful coexistence.² The disciplining power of this official discourse on the relationship between sovereignty and human rights has been reflected by Chinese scholarly support for the principle that state sovereignty should be placed above human rights.³ However, as a stronger and more open country increasingly taking the central stage in world affairs, has China changed its position on the relationship between human rights and state sovereignty in recent years? This article attempts to answer this question by examining and explaining the changes in China's response to international humanitarian crises, as a country's attitude towards humanitarian intervention hinges upon its view on the relationship between human rights and state sovereignty.

There are two weaknesses with the English literature on China's human rights policy. First, while many previous studies on this topic have focused on whether and how China has responded to external pressure to improve its domestic human rights record,⁴ few studies have examined its domestic human rights discourse for clues of a potential shift in attitude towards human rights. There are a few exceptions. For example, Robert Weatherley reviews the Chinese scholarly debate on human rights, and finds that while most Chinese academics have endorsed the government's position on human rights, a handful of scholars have published different ideas, which may be of significance.⁵ Dingding Chen traces the human rights discourse in China between 1978 and 2004 on the basis of Chinese official documents and state law,

¹ For example, the first whitepaper on human rights issued by the Chinese government in 1991 states,

China has always maintained that human rights are essentially matters within the domestic jurisdiction of a country. Respect for each country's sovereignty and non-interference in internal affairs are universally recognized principles of international law, which are applicable to all fields of international relations, and of course applicable to the field of human rights as well...The argument that the principle of non-interference in internal affairs does not apply to the issue of human rights is, in essence, a demand that sovereign states give up their state sovereignty in the field of human rights, a demand that is contrary to international law.

See Information Office of the State Council of the PRC, "Human Rights in China," November 1991, <http://www.china.org.cn/e-white/7/index.htm>.

² In this article, I adopt a broad definition of the principle of sovereignty. That is, the principle of sovereignty in this article is often meant to cover the principle of non-intervention in internal affairs.

³ Examples are Dong [1]; Zhongguo Renquan Yanjiuhui [2]; Zhongguo Renquan Fazhan Jijinhui [3]; He [4]; Lu [5] and Wen and Jian [6]. For more objective and innovative discussion on the legitimacy of humanitarian intervention, see [7–9]. In particular, among the Chinese literature on the relationship between sovereignty and human rights, a comprehensive and balanced explication stands out, which is offered by Luo Yanhua [10].

⁴ For example, see [11–14].

⁵ See [15].

and he argues that cognitive changes resulting from self-reflection upon China's past by the Chinese government, particularly in relation to the Cultural Revolution, have created the conditions for China's changing attitudes towards human rights ([16], p. 159). Yet, since what is done is inconsistent with, sometimes even contradictory to, what is said in Chinese politics, an empirical study of both China's domestic discourse and its behaviors would be of considerable value to understanding China's human rights policy. Second, while China's human rights policy concerns both improving the country's domestic human rights situation and dealing with international human rights issues, few scholars have examined China's participation in international organizations with regards to international human rights issues. This study aims at overcoming these two weaknesses.

This article is organized in the following way. I first examine the changes in China's response to international humanitarian crises by reviewing China's participation in the United Nations Security Council in reacting to three major international humanitarian crises—Rwanda, Kosovo, and Darfur. These three crises are widely regarded as pivotal to the evolution of contemporary debate on humanitarian intervention. They have also recorded the evolution of China's position regarding the tension between sovereignty and human rights. I will rely on a sovereignty-human rights spectrum to map the changes in China's response. Then I review China's official discourse on human rights to examine whether the changes in China's response to international humanitarian crises have resulted from the country's change of attitude towards human rights. Finally, I draw on constructivist theory of international relations to explain the changes in China's response to international humanitarian crises. I argue that there have been changes in China's identity as well as in the international discourse on international humanitarian intervention, and that China's identity change made itself more concerned about its national image and more sensitive to international human rights and humanitarian norms, which has brought about the changes in China's response to international humanitarian crises. I further argue that the discourse on responsibility inside China is quite distinct from the international discourse on responsibility: the former emphasizes China's responsibility towards the international society, whereas the latter embraces states' responsibility towards both the international society and individuals. While China increasingly acts in accordance with international human rights and humanitarian norms, the gap between Chinese and western views on human rights still exists.

The Changes in China's Response to International Humanitarian Crises

To examine whether there have been changes in China's response to international humanitarian crises, it is necessary to examine China's participation in the UN Security Council which is charged with preserving international peace. Three post-Cold War case studies have been selected to serve this purpose, specifically Rwanda, Kosovo, and Darfur. Since *zhuquan* (sovereignty) and *renquan* (human rights) are often viewed as two ends of the spectrum of Chinese human rights policy alternatives, I will refer to a sovereignty-human rights spectrum to measure China's position in response to international humanitarian crises.

Rwanda

During the Rwandan genocide in April–May 1994, China, like many other countries, failed to take any effective action to stop the atrocity. Table 1 lists China's voting records regarding Rwanda. Generally speaking, China played a passive role in the UN Security Council in reacting to the Rwanda crisis.⁶ While expressing its concern for the situation in Rwanda, China stood on principle, arguing that international intervention efforts should only be made through the United Nations and crucially with the consent of the affected country. In accordance with this belief, China abstained on Resolution 929 and Resolution 955. In Resolution 929, the Security Council agreed to set up a multinational operation for humanitarian purposes in Rwanda, welcomed member states to achieve the UN objectives through “the establishment of a temporary operation under national command and control aimed at contributing, in an impartial way, to the security and protection of displaced persons, refugees and civilians at risk in Rwanda,” and authorized the member states to conduct the operation “using all the necessary means to achieve the humanitarian objectives [17].” When explaining China's abstention on Resolution 929, Wu Jianmin, then Spokesperson for China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, said, “We have consistently argued that the indispensable condition for the UN peacekeeping operations to succeed is to gain consent from the parties concerned and to cooperate with the affected states and regional organizations. It is still hard to ensure that the Security Council's resolution that approves of taking action will gain consent and cooperation from the affected parties. Based on these considerations, China voted abstention.”⁷ As for Resolution 955 on establishment of an international tribunal for Rwanda, although 13 members of the Security Council voted in favor of the motion, China abstained due to concerns that a precedent would be set undermining states' sovereign control over its internal affairs.⁸

The 1990s witnessed the outbreak of an increasing number of ethnic conflicts that challenged the role of the UN. These would have a dramatic impact on the discourse of peacekeeping and peacemaking with multilateral humanitarian intervention without the consent of the host state becoming an important practice. In response to this trend, China insisted that traditional rules for peacekeeping operations including the preservation of sovereignty and non-intervention in internal affairs should continue to hold, and that peacekeeping operations should aim at resolving conflicts to restore affected countries' sovereignty and territorial integrity. To some extent, therefore,

⁶ *Renmin Ribao* [The People's Daily], “Lianheguo anlihui jue ding chechu dabu yuanlu renyuan” [The United Nations Security Council Decided to Withdraw the Majority of Assistance Personnel to Rwanda], April 24, 1994; *Renmin Ribao* [The People's Daily], “Anlihui jue ding zengpai lianlu budui” [The Security Council Decided to Increase the UN Aid Personnel to Rwanda], May 17, 1994.

⁷ *Renmin Ribao* [The People's Daily], “Wajiaobu fayaren fabiao tanhua, dui chaoxian hewenti chuxian jiji jin zhan gandao gaoxing, zhichi guoji shehui wei jinkuai jie jue luwanda weiji suo zuo de nuli, xiwang yemen dangshi gefang tongguo tanpan xunqiu jie jue wenti tujing.” [Spokesperson for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs: Being Delighted for the Positive Progress with the North Korean Nuclear Issue, Supporting the Efforts Taken by the International Society to Resolve the Rwandan Crisis as Soon as Possible, and Hoping the Major Parties of Yemen to Seek Solution to Problem through Negotiation], June 24, 1994.

⁸ Xu Shiquan and He Hongze, “Anlihui Jiang She Lu wenti Guojifating” [The Security Council Will Establish International Court with regard to the Rwandan Issue], *Renmin Ribao* [The People's Daily], November 11, 1997.

Table 1 China's participation in the UN Security Council during the Rwanda crisis

Date	Resolution Title	China's Vote	Voting Summary	Note on Content of Meeting
04/21/1994	Security Council Resolution 912 (1994) [On adjustment of the mandate of the UN Assistance Mission for Rwanda due to the current situation in Rwanda and settlement of the Rwandan conflict]	Yes	Yes: 15 No: 0 Abstention: 0	Reducing the UN Assistance Mission for Rwanda from 2500 people to 270 people
05/17/1994	Security Council Resolution 918 (1994) [On expansion of the mandate of the UN Assistance Mission for Rwanda and imposition of an arms embargo on Rwanda]		Adopted without voting	Expanding the UN Assistance Mission for Rwanda to 5500 people
06/08/1994	Security Council Resolution 925 (1994) [On extension of the mandate and deployment of the two additional battalions of the UN Assistance Mission for Rwanda and settlement of the conflict in Rwanda]	Yes	Yes: 15 No: 0 Abstention: 0	
06/22/1994	Security Council Resolution 929 (1994) [On establishment of a temporary multinational operation for humanitarian purposes in Rwanda until the deployment of the expanded UN Assistance Mission for Rwanda]	Abstention	Yes: 10 No: 0 Abstention: 5 (Brazil, China, New Zealand, Nigeria, and Pakistan)	Approving of France and Senegal's deployment of 2500 troops to Rwanda to protect civilians
07/01/1994	Security Council Resolution 935 (1994) [Requesting the Secretary-General to establish a commission to examine violations of international humanitarian law committed in Rwanda]	Yes	Yes: 15 No: 0 Abstention: 0	
11/8/1994	Security Council Resolution 955 (1994) [On establishment of an International Tribunal for Rwanda and adoption of the Statute of the Tribunal]	Abstention	Yes: 13 No: 1 (Rwanda) Abstention: 1 (China)	To establish an international tribunal to try Rwandan citizens having committed genocide and violated international humanitarian law

United Nations Bibliographic Information System, Dag Hammarskjöld Library, <http://unbisnet.un.org>; and relevant reports in *Renmin Ribao* [The People's Daily]

China viewed France's sending troops to Rwanda after the humanitarian crisis as interference in Rwandan internal affairs, attributing its actions to the pursuit of self-interest under the cover of United Nations offices.⁹ Based on China's behaviors and words during the Rwandan humanitarian crisis, we can conclude that during that time China strictly adhered to the principles of state sovereignty and non-intervention and put much more emphasis on sovereignty than on human rights.

Kosovo

During the humanitarian crisis in Kosovo in 1998–1999, China consistently argued that the Kosovo issue should be viewed as an internal matter for Yugoslavia, and that the UN should not intervene without first receiving a request from Yugoslavia.¹⁰ It is clear that China's adherence to the principle of sovereignty was in part based on its calculation of interest. This was a calculation all the more sensitive during that period, given Beijing's threat to attack Taiwan had the latter declared independence and its own concerns about ethnic problems in Xinjiang and Tibet. In seeking to maintain legitimacy for its right to tackle these problems as it wished, China not only sought to uphold the principle of sovereignty but lent support to the Serbian government, despite the deterioration of Kosovo's human rights situation.

Table 2 lists China's voting records in the UN Security Council regarding the Kosovo crisis. When explaining China's abstention on Resolution 1160, Shen Guofang, then Deputy Permanent Representative of China to the UN, said, "If the Council is to get involved in a dispute without the request from the country concerned, it may create a bad precedent and have wider negative implications."¹¹ He continued, "We do not believe that the situation in Kosovo posed a threat to international peace and security."¹² Throughout the Kosovo crisis in 1998–1999, China maintained the position that the Kosovo issue was a Yugoslavian matter. This position was starkly different from that of other parties including UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, who declared in early 1999—when the Yugoslavian army massacred Albanian civilians—to lend "100%" support to the Statement by the President of the Security Council that strongly condemned the massacre and required a swift and complete investigation.¹³ Nonetheless, opposition from Russia and China

⁹ *Renmin Ribao* [The People's Daily], "Di er dai weihe xingdong chuyi" [General Discussion on the Second-Generation Peacekeeping Actions], January 21, 1995.

¹⁰ See *Renmin Ribao* [The People's Daily], "Waijiaobu fayanren tan kesuowo wenti, zhongguo zhengfu renwei lianheguo anlihui buyi jieru shuyu nansilafu neizheng de kesuowo wenti" [Spokesperson for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on the Kosovo Issue: Chinese Government Believes that the United Nations Security Council Should Not Intervene into the Kosovo Issue, Which is Yugoslavia's Internal Affair], March 11, 1998.

¹¹ Agence France Presse, "UN Slaps Arms Embargo on Yugoslavia," April 2, 1998.

¹² *Renmin Ribao* [The People's Daily], "Anlihui jue ding dui nan shishi wuji jinyun, zhongguo tou qiquanpiao" [The Security Council Decided to Impose Weapons Embargo on Yugoslavia, and China Voted Abstention], March 31, 1998.

¹³ *Renmin Ribao* [The People's Daily], "Kesuowo weiji, anlihui quan zhe tusha pingmin shijian, nanzhengfu yao wokeer xianqi lijing, e pai fu waizhang fu nan jinji tiaojie, mei cheng beiyue dongxi nan pozaimiejie" [The Kosovo Crisis: The Security Council Condemned the Massacre of Civilians, Yugoslavian Government Demands Walker to Leave, Russia Sent Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs to Yugoslavia to mediate, and USA Claimed that NATO's Air Strike Is Imminent], January 20, 1999.

Table 2 China's participation in the UN Security Council regarding the Kosovo crisis

Date	Resolution Title	China's Vote	Voting Summary	Note on Content of Meeting
03/31/1998	Security Council Resolution 1160 (1998) [On the imposition of an arms embargo against Yugoslavia]	Abstention	Yes: 14 No: 0 Abstention: 1 (China)	To impose arms embargo against Yugoslavia including the Kosovo area and to set up a commission to monitor the enforcement of the resolution
09/23/1998	Security Council Resolution 1199 (1998) [On situation in Kosovo, Yugoslavia]	Abstention	Yes: 14 No: 0 Abstention: 1 (China)	Calling for ceasefire and dialogues among the parties concerned, and requiring the Yugoslavian army to immediately stop all actions on civilians and to allow the EU watch group to conduct effective monitoring in Kosovo
10/24/1998	Security Council Resolution 1203 (1998) [On agreements for the verification of compliance with the provisions of resolution 1199 (1998) on the situation in Kosovo, Yugoslavia]	Abstention	Yes: 13 No: 0 Abstention: 2 (China and Russia)	With the provisions that approve of NATO's using force dropped, the Security Council demands Yugoslavian government and Kosovar Albanian leadership to comply fully and swiftly with Resolutions 1160 and 1199 and cooperate fully with the OSCE Verification Mission in Kosovo and the NATO Air Verification Mission over Kosovo
05/14/1999	Security Council Resolution 1239 (1999) [On relief assistance to Kosovo refugees and internally displaced persons in Kosovo, the Republic of Montenegro and other parts of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia]	Abstention	Yes: 13 No: 0 Abstention: 0 Non-voting: 2 (China and Russia)	To invite the UNHCR and other international humanitarian relief organizations to extend relief assistance to the internally displaced persons in Kosovo, the Republic of Montenegro and other parts of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, as well as to other civilians affected by the ongoing crisis
06/10/1999	Security Council Resolution 1244 (1999) [On the deployment of international civil and security presences in Kosovo]	Abstention	Yes: 14 No: 0 Abstention: 1 (China)	To approve of the agreement between Yugoslavia and NATO

United Nations Bibliographic Information System, Dag Hammarskjöld Library, <http://unbisnet.un.org>; and reports in the *Renmin Ribao* [The People's Daily]

after NATO had decided to use force against Yugoslavia meant that approval from the UN Security Council would not be forthcoming.

On March 24, 1999, NATO launched air strikes against Yugoslavia to force the latter to withdraw its army from Kosovo. On May 14, 1999, the UN Security Council passed Resolution 1239 to invite the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and other international humanitarian relief organizations to extend relief assistance to the displaced persons in the area. On June 10, 1999, the UN Security Council passed Resolution 1244 to confirm the agreement reached by Yugoslavia and NATO. China abstained from voting on both resolutions. Shen Guofang stated China's position:

NATO seriously violated the Charter of the United Nations and norms of international law, and undermined the authority of the Security Council, thus creating an extremely dangerous precedent in the history of international relations...Respect for sovereignty and non-interference in each other's internal affairs are basic principles of the United Nations Charter. Since the end of the cold war, the international situation has undergone major changes, but those principles are by no means outdated. On the contrary, they have acquired even greater relevance. At the threshold of the new century, it is even more imperative for us to reaffirm those principles. In essence, the "human rights over sovereignty" theory serves to infringe upon the sovereignty of other States and to promote hegemonism under the purposes and principles of the United Nations Charter. The international community should maintain vigilance against it.¹⁴

What is clear is that during the Kosovo crisis, China unreservedly emphasized the principles of state sovereignty and non-intervention. Prioritizing state sovereignty over human rights, China believed the international community should stay out of the Kosovo issue. This was why it abstained on all the major UN resolutions regarding the issue. Interestingly, for some resolutions, such as Resolution 1199 and Resolution 1244, even though all the other 14 members of the Security Council, including Russia, voted for them, China alone continued to abstain.

Darfur

Darfur represents probably the first occasion upon which China became heavily involved in an international humanitarian crisis. The context of the crisis was particularly important for China with Beijing having been criticized for purchasing oil from Sudan and selling weapons that had been used in the ethnic conflicts in Darfur. External pressures were particularly focused with Western media alleging that 70% of Sudan's total export went to China, and 70% of the revenue that the Sudanese government got from oil export was spent on the army.¹⁵ According to

¹⁴ United Nations, Security Council 4011th Meeting Record, 10 June 1999, New York, pp. 9–10, <http://daccessdds.un.org/doc/UNDOC/PRO/N99/854/44/PDF/N9985444.pdf?OpenElement>.

¹⁵ The Economist, "Never Too late to Scramble—China in Africa," October 28, 2006; *New York Times*, "War in Sudan? Not Where the Oil Wealth Flows," October 24, 2006; Associated Press, "China Won't Tolerate Threats to Darfur Peacekeepers," November 28, 2007; and Johan Brosche [18].

China's own statistics, out of the country's 317.43 million outward foreign direct investment in Africa in 2004, 146.70 million went to Sudan, three times as much as to any other African country [19]. When the Darfur humanitarian crisis started receiving media attention in 2004, China seemed originally unaware of the political consequence of this involvement, and it tried to continue its usual way of dealing with international humanitarian crisis, emphasizing the principle of non-intervention. As Table 3 shows, China had abstained from the votes on nearly all the major resolutions on Darfur before 2006. Moreover, some media reports alleged that China had used veto threats in the UN Security Council to block tough actions—for example, economic sanction—on Sudan.¹⁶ Yet, gradually the intensity of pressure surrounding the Darfur crisis began to exceed the Chinese government's expectation. China has been blamed for partnering with Sudan for oil, selling arms to the Sudanese government, and blocking tougher actions on Sudan in the UN Security Council. In an unprecedented show of condemnation, US congressmen, NBA athletes, Hollywood celebrities, and human rights activists threatened to boycott the 2008 Beijing Olympics.

In response to mounting criticisms surrounding its relations with Sudan, China changed its approach to the Darfur issue dramatically. Since mid-2006, there have been signs of increasing Chinese pressure on Khartoum to restrain its actions and accept UN peacekeeping plans.¹⁷ President Hu Jintao has pressured Sudanese President al-Bashir to cooperate with the UN on multiple occasions.¹⁸ In early April 2007, Zhai Jun, a senior Chinese official, traveled to Darfur to visit three refugee camps. In May 2007, China appointed Liu Guijin as a special envoy to Darfur. Table 4 lists the meetings that Chinese leaders and diplomats have held with Sudanese counterparts. Partly due to the Chinese pressure and persuasion, the Sudanese government accepted the UN's heavy support package for phases 2 on April 16, and a hybrid African Union/UN force on June 12, 2007.¹⁹ The important role that China had been playing in pressing the Sudanese government to compromise was confirmed by Zhai Jun [20]. In particular, thanks to China's diplomatic efforts, Resolution 1769 was adopted on July 31, 2007 to authorize the deployment of a hybrid African Union/UN operation in Darfur. As President of the Security Council for that month, China actively coordinated the dialogues and consultations that led to the resolution. Beyond exerting behind-the-scene pressure, Chinese diplomats were even given to taking the usual step of speaking out about their dissatisfaction with the Sudanese government. For example, Liu Guijin stated publicly at the end of January 2008, "The world is

¹⁶ For example, see International Herald Tribune, "China and Darfur," August 4, 2006; and Adam Wolfe, "The Increasing Importance of African Oil," *Power and Interest News Report*, March 20, 2006, <http://harowo.com/2006/03/20/the-increasing-importance-of-african-oil/>.

¹⁷ For more details, see Gareth Evans and Donald Steinberg, "China and Darfur: 'Signs of Transition'," *Guardian Unlimited*, June 11, 2007.

¹⁸ For example, see Howard W. French and Fan Wenxin, "Chinese Leader to Visit Sudan for Talks on Darfur Conflict," *New York Times*, January 25, 2007.

¹⁹ In November 2006, then UN Secretary General Kofi Annan proposed a three-phased UN assistance to African Mission in Sudan (AMIS), which included a light support package, a heavy support package, and eventually a "hybrid" AU-UN force. In the first phase, the UN supports AMIS with a package of support of 21 million US dollars, in the second phase, the UN deploys 3000 African soldiers and helicopter to reinforce AMIS, and in the third phase, a "hybrid" UN-African Union force is deployed in the Darfur.

Table 3 China's participation in the UN Security Council regarding Darfur

Date	Resolution Title	China's Vote	Voting Summary	Note on Content of Meeting
06/11/2004	Security Council Resolution 1547 (2004) [establishment of a UN advance team in Sudan as a special political mission]	Yes	Yes: 15 No: 0 Abstention: 0	
07/30/2004	Security Council Resolution 1556 (2004) [On endorsing the deployment of international monitors and imposing an arms embargo against the Sudan]	Abstention	Yes: 13 No: 0 Abstention: 2 (China and Pakistan)	Threatening to take measures in accordance with Article 41 of the UN Charter if the Sudanese government does not disarm the Arabic militia in Darfur within one month
09/17/2004	Security Council Resolution 1564 (2004) [On expanding the monitoring mission in Darfur and on the establishment of an international commission of inquiry to investigate human rights abuses in the Sudan]	Abstention	Yes: 11 No: 0 Abstention: 4 (China, Russia, Algeria, and Pakistan)	Requiring the Sudan to improve the security situation in Darfur and threatening to impose economic sanction on the Sudan and its oil industry if it fails to meet the requirement
11/19/2004	Security Council Resolution 1574 [On a comprehensive Peace Agreement in the Sudan]	Yes	Yes: 15 No: 0 Abstention: 0	
03/24/2005	Security Council Resolution 1590 (2005) [on establishment of the UN Mission in Sudan (UNMIS)]	Yes	Yes: 15 No: 0 Abstention: 0	
03/29/2005	Security Council Resolution 1591 (2005) [On establishment of a Security Council Committee to monitor implementation of the measures in Darfur]	Abstention	Yes: 12 No: 0 Abstention: 3 (China, Russia, and Algeria)	Banning those who are suspected to have violated international humanitarian law from traveling abroad, freezing their properties in other countries, prohibiting the Sudanese government from transporting weapons to Darfur, and establishing a sanction commission
03/31/2005	Security Council Resolution 1593 (2005) [Referring the situation in Darfur since	Abstention	Yes: 11	Threatening that Sudanese military officers or administrative officials, pro-government

1 July 2002 to the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court]		No: 0 Abstention: 4 (Algeria, Brazil, China, and the United States)	guerrillas, and members of the anti-government military groups who commit war crime and anti-humanity crime will be referred to the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court
03/29/2006	Security Council Resolution 1672 (2006) [On implementation of measures specified in paragraph 3 of resolution 1591(2005) with respect to Sudanese individuals]	Abstention Yes: 12 No: 0 Abstention: 3 (China, Qatar, Russia)	
05/16/2006	Security Council Resolution 1679 (2006) [On implementation of the Darfur Peace Agreement]	Yes Yes: 15 No: 0 Abstention: 0	Calling for the deployment of a joint African Union and United Nations technical assessment mission within one week
08/31/2006	Security Council Resolution 1706 (2006) [On expansion of the mandate of the UN Mission in Sudan (UNMIS) to support the implementation of the Darfur Peace Agreement]	Abstention Yes: 12 No: 0 Abstention: 3 (China, Qatar, and Russia)	Deciding to strengthen UNMIS by up to 17,300 military personnel and by an appropriate civilian component including up to 3,300 civilian police personnel and up to 16 Formed Police Units
07/31/2007	Security Council Resolution 1769 (2007) [On establishment of AU/UN Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID)]	Yes Yes: 15 No: 0 Abstention: 0	To deploy 25000 UN-AU troops to Darfur, with the majority of them from Africa
07/31/2008	Security Council resolution 1828 (2008) [on extension of the mandate of the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID)]	Yes Yes: 14 No: 0 Abstention: 1 (United States)	
07/31/2009	Security Council Resolution 1881 (2009) [on extension of the mandate of the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID)]	Yes Yes: 15 No: 0 Abstention: 0	

United Nations Bibliographic Information System, Dag Hammarskjöld Library, <http://unbisnet.un.org>; and reports in the *Remmin Ribao* [The People's Daily]

Table 4 China's meetings with Sudan regarding Darfur

Date	Meeting
08/16/2004	Special envoy Lu Guozeng visited Khartoum, with aid of 5 million RMB
04/23/2005	President Hu Jintao met with Sudanese President Omar Hassan al-Bashir in Jakarta
09/07/2006	Vice-President Zeng Qinghong met with Sudanese Assistant President Nafie Ali Nafie
11/02/2006	President Hu Jintao met with President al-Bashir in the Beijing Summit of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation, exerting pressure on the latter over Darfur
01/16/2007	Special envoy Zhai Jun visited Sudan
02/02/2007	President Hu Jintao visited Sudan
03/2007	Chairman of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress Wu Bangguo and State Councilor Tang Jiaxuan met with Sudanese Assistant President Nafie Ali Nafie
04/08/2007	Special envoy Zhai Jun visited Khartoum and Darfur
05/22/2007	Liu Guijin, special envoy to Darfur, visited Khartoum and Darfur
06/23/2007	Liu Guijin visited Khartoum
07/19/2007	Hu Jintao met with Sudanese First Vice President Salva Kiir Mayardit in Beijing
10/24/2007	Liu Guijin visited Khartoum
11/24/2007	Vanguards of Chinese engineering units arrived in Darfur as part of the UN peacekeeping operations
02/2008	Liu Guijin visited Khartoum and Darfur
06/11/2008	President Hu Jintao and Vice President Xi Jinping met with Sudanese Vice President Ali Osman Mohammed Taha in Beijing
07/11/2008	State Councilor Dai Bingguo met with Sudanese Presidential advisor Mustafa Osman Ismail
07/29/2008	Vice President Xi Jinping met with Awad Ahmed al-Jaz, special envoy of the Sudanese President
08/29/2008	Liu Guijin visited Khartoum
03/27/2009	Vice President Xi Jinping met with Awad Ahmed al-Jaz, special envoy of the Sudanese President

running out of patience over what's going on in Darfur."²⁰ Meanwhile, China proposed a dual-track strategy to Darfur that emphasized pushing forward both political negotiations and peacekeeping mission. It also attached importance to development issues and provided aid for economic and social growth in Darfur. Rarely has China, which has been reluctant to get involved into international hotspots, been so active in dealing with an ongoing international issue.

The Darfur issue has raised a significant challenge for China's central foreign policymaking doctrine by bringing into question its outright support for the principles of sovereignty and non-intervention. First, while seldom exerting pressure on other countries publicly in accordance with these principles, the Chinese government has

²⁰ Sudan Tribune, "China Issues a Warning to Sudan over Darfur Crisis," January 30, 2008.

deliberately played a visible role in pressuring the Sudanese government, in order to improve its national image that has been undermined by the Darfur issue. It is noteworthy that Zhai Jun and Liu Guijin often held press conferences after their visits to Darfur and Khartoum, introducing to domestic and foreign media China's diplomatic efforts to pressure the Sudanese government and alleviate the Darfur crisis. This new found openness represents a remarkable departure for Chinese diplomacy, which has usually favored behind-the-scenes negotiation. Liu has also alluded that the Sudanese government decided to accept the AU/UN hybrid peacekeeping force and Resolution 1769 because of China's pressure, even though he was still careful to frame China's action as "persuading the Sudanese government to be more flexible and be more concerned about the humanitarian and security situation [21, 22]." Second, in the search for a solution to the Darfur crisis, Chinese diplomats have not only held official talks with the Sudanese government, but have also met with rebel leaders in Darfur, which marked another remarkable change in the way China dealt with international issues. China has embraced a strict interpretation of sovereignty for a long time: it has believed not only that a country's internal affairs should be free of external interference, but also that the State should enjoy monopolistic control over internal affairs. Since China began to focus on economic development and opened itself to the outside world three decades ago, the Chinese government has been very careful not to have any direct dealings with anti-governmental actors in other countries. Nonetheless, during his visit to Sudan in February 24–28, 2008, Liu Guijin met with Minni Minawi, Sudan Liberation Movement/Army leader, a move that would have been unimaginable in the past [23]. Third, even before China started to play an active role in searching for a solution for the Darfur crisis in 2007, it had held a much softer position concerning humanitarian intervention than it did during the Kosovo crisis. During the Kosovo crisis, China had consistently denied that the Kosovo crisis had posed a threat to international peace and security and should be managed by the Security Council. Yet, during the Darfur crisis, China has not challenged the general perception that the severe humanitarian situation in Darfur constituted a threat to international peace and security. China mainly justified its abstentions on Resolutions 1556, 1564, 1591, 1593, 1672, and 1706 on the basis of its disagreement on what is the most effective and appropriate approach to solve the problem and whether the adoption of the resolutions would contribute to the political process to solve the problem. China contended that the Security Council should bear in mind the complexity of the Darfur issue, employ a positive approach to the Sudanese government, and create positive conditions for political negotiation. When China's suggestion to include "with the consent of the Government of National Government" in the text of Resolution 1706 was not accepted, instead of blocking the adoption of the resolution, China chose to abstain from voting on it.²¹

Reviewing China's response to Rwanda, Kosovo, and Darfur, we can find that the principles of sovereignty and non-intervention in other states' internal affairs have been the key concern guiding the Chinese government's response to these crises. Yet, despite its keen rhetorical adherence to these principles, there is now evidence

²¹ United Nations Bibliographic Information System, Dag Hammarskjöld Library, Security Council 5015th Meeting, 5040th Meeting, 5153rd Meeting, 5158th Meeting, 5423rd Meeting, and 5519th Meeting, <http://unbisnet.un.org>.

that China has shifted its position away from the one extreme of the sovereignty-human rights spectrum, namely, sovereignty. This has not, however, been a straightforward or simple trend. Indeed, what is clear is that while in its response to the Rwanda crisis, China was a defender for sovereignty and a passive follower of western powers regarding some human rights issues. By the time of its response to the Kosovo crisis, China was an *active* defender for sovereignty, spurred by the fear that NATO's intervention in Kosovo would set a precedent for external powers to exploit in relation to China. This, if anything, makes China's response to the Darfur crisis all the more important, the shift from a defender for sovereignty and an actor pursuing economic interest at the expense of human rights and humanitarian concerns to an active player in alleviating the humanitarian crisis. Although still upholding the principle of sovereignty, China would seem to have quietly departed from a rigid interpretation of sovereignty for a more flexible one; this is something that must be explained.

What is parallel to the changes in China's response to international humanitarian crises is its subtle change of approach to some neighboring dictatorial countries. For example, after Myanmar's military government cracked down the country's largest anti-government protest in two decades in September 2007, China dispatched its special envoy Wang Yi to Rangoon in mid-November, pressuring Myanmar to cooperate with the United Nations. While seldom criticizing other countries for their internal affairs, China urged the Myanmar government to speed up its democratization and improve its people's livelihood, which marked another example of departing from the principle of non-intervention.²²

China's Official Discourse on Human Rights

Has China changed its official position on the relationship between sovereignty and human rights? In order to evaluate the degree to which the changes in China's response to international humanitarian crises represented a change in its attitude towards human rights and sovereignty, I have conducted a content analysis of its official discourse on human rights drawn from *Renmin Ribao* news reports of press conferences held by spokespersons for China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The justification for limiting the review to this publication is that all press conferences held by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs are supposed to be reported by *Renmin Ribao*, which is China's top state-run newspaper; and accordingly these reports usually summarize or quote what the spokespersons have said.

From January 1, 1990 to July 30, 2009, there have been 125 reports about the spokespersons' answering human rights-related questions. As Table 5 shows, these 125 occasions can be divided into eight categories based on the content of the spokespersons' remarks and whether the spokespersons have taken a defensive position. For each category, the number and percentage of occasions on which the principle of sovereignty or non-intervention has been employed are listed in the bracket. For example, on 106 out of these 125 occasions, the spokespersons made remarks on China's domestic human rights situation, with 83, or 78.3%, of them in

²² See [24, 25].

Table 5 The employment of the principle of sovereignty or non-intervention in remarks on human rights by spokespersons for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs

	China's domestic human rights situation	China's foreign policy related to human rights	Both domestic and foreign policies related to human rights	Human rights in foreign countries	Total
Defensive (Percentage) [Sovereignty or Non-intervention (Percentage)]	83 (78.3%) [67 (80.7%)]	4 (50%) [1 (25%)]	1 (33.3%) [0 (0%)]	0 (0%) [0 (0%)]	88 (70.4%) [68 (77.3%)]
Neutral or positive (Percentage) [Sovereignty or Non-intervention (Percentage)]	23 (21.7%) [2 (9.1%)]	4 (50%) [0 (0%)]	2 (66.7%) [0 (0%)]	8 (100%) [5 (62.5%)]	37 (28.8%) [7 (19.0%)]
Total (Percentage) [Sovereignty or Non-intervention (Percentage)]	106 (100%) [69 (65.1%)]	8 (100%) [1 (12.5%)]	3 (100%) [0 (0%)]	8 (100%) [5 (62.5%)]	125 (100%) [75 (60%)]

defensive tone and 23, or 21.7%, of them in a neutral or positive tone. Many of these 83 defensive remarks have been made in response to the U.S. Department of State's annual country report on human rights practices, or to western countries' draft resolutions on China's human rights situation in the UN Commission on Human Rights, or to the recent foreign criticisms on the human rights situation in Tibet. The trend in recent years has been that western countries have stopped drafting resolutions to criticize China's human rights record at the UN, and, as a result, China's defensive remarks have been mainly in response to criticisms from the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, U.S. congress, and the European Union. On 67 out of these 83 occasions (80.7%) when defensive remarks were made to counter foreign criticisms on China's domestic human rights record, the principle of sovereignty or non-intervention was employed to deflect and accuse the critics of interfering in China's internal affairs. This simple illustration shows the importance of sovereignty in China's official discourse on human rights. External criticisms of China's human rights situation can be easily labeled as "interference in China's internal affairs under the excuse of 'human rights'." A typical Chinese response to western criticisms is as such:

We consistently believe that human rights are essentially under a state's own sovereignty. States should protect and promote human rights according to their respective situations. The United States has no right to domineer the internal affairs of China and other countries. We are determinedly opposed to such behaviors as interfering in the internal affairs of other countries under the excuse of human rights.²³

²³ *Renmin Ribao* [The People's Daily], "Wajiaobu fayaren jiu mei 'renquan baogao' da jizhe wen, meiguo wuquan dui zhongguo neibu shiwu zhishou huajiao" [Spokesperson for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Answers Journalists' Questions regarding the U.S. "Human Rights Report:" U.S. Has No Right to Domineer], February 3, 1995.

Table 5 shows that the spokespersons have been more likely to resort to the principle of sovereignty or non-intervention when defending China's domestic human rights record and when commenting on human rights events in other countries. It is also noteworthy that there has not been a tendency to decreasing employment of the principles of sovereignty and non-intervention. The most recent examples of using these principles to counter foreign criticisms were the spokesperson's responses to the US Department of State's 2008 Country Report on Human Rights Practices issued on February 25, 2009 and the US statement on the human rights situation in Tibet on March 10, 2009.²⁴ Although the Chinese government accepts that human rights are universal, its consistent practice of employing the principle of sovereignty reflects its preference for particularizing human rights. From the Chinese point of view, therefore, western countries are entitled neither to monopolize the interpretation of human rights norms, nor to impose their values and standards on China. Human rights should be contingent on culture and political-social circumstance. As Qian Qichen, then Minister of Foreign Affairs, has said at his press conference on March 27, 1991, "Some people argue that 'human rights have no border,' which is not consistent with reality...If there are international human rights standards, they should be embodied in various international covenants, and sovereign states have right to participate, or participate conditionally, or not to participate, in them. By no means can one or several countries or groups impose their own standards on other countries."²⁵

While emphasizing the principles of sovereignty and non-intervention, China also advocates dialogues and exchanges between different nations on human rights. According to the *Renmin Ribao* reports of the press conferences of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, on 39 out of the 125 occasions (or 31%), the ministers and spokespersons called for dialogue and cooperation between China and western countries on human rights. While 21 of these 39 occasions have been in the last five years, it does not imply that the Chinese government's calling for dialogues has been a recent phenomenon. In fact, the Chinese government has been doing so since early 1990s. Based on the above observations, there is no evidence that China's attitude towards sovereignty and human rights has undergone a fundamental change.

Nonetheless, this does not mean that the way in which the Chinese government treats external criticisms has been unchanged. Indeed, China has attached more and more importance to human rights in official documents.²⁶ Since 1991, China has issued some 30 white papers on human rights, covering various issues including Tibet, women, children, food, environment, prisoners' conditions, etc. In 1997,

²⁴ *Renmin Ribao* [The People's Daily], "Waijiaobu juxing lixing jizhehui: fengquan meifang tingzhi jie fabiao guobie renquan baogao ganshe bieguo neizheng" [Regular Press Conference Held by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs: Advising the United States Not to Intervene into the Internal Affairs of Other Countries through Publishing Country Report on Human Rights Practices], February 26, 2009; and *Renmin Ribao* [The People's Daily], "Waijiaobu fayanren biaoshi: zhongfang dui meifang shezang yanlun jianjue fandui" [Spokesperson for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Says: China Determinedly Opposes the U.S. Statement on Tibet], March 12, 2009.

²⁵ *Renmin Ribao* [The People's Daily], "Zai Yao Guang juxing de xinwen fabuhui shang, qian qichen waizhang da zhongwai jizhe wen" [In the Press Conference Organized by Yao Guang, Minister of Foreign Affairs Qian Qichen Answered Questions from Domestic and International Journalists], March 27, 1991.

²⁶ See [16], pp. 169–173.

“respecting and safeguarding human rights” was for the first time written in the report at the 15th national congress of the Communist Party of China. Similar words have also appeared in the party’s reports at the 16th national congress in 2002 and the 17th national congress in 2007. China signed the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) in 1997 and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) in 1998. On March 14, 2004, the National People’s Congress of China amended China’s Constitution by adopting the sentence “the state respects and safeguards human rights.” Moreover, the *Renmin Ribao* reports of the press conferences of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs indicate that China has been more and more confident in its human rights record. The spokespersons for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs have become more sophisticated in their strategies with answering human rights-related questions, frequently countering U.S. criticism by pointing out that the human rights record of the U.S. has a poor claim on setting the benchmark. This strategy has taken a more policy form since the year of 2000, when, to counter the criticisms from the United States in its annual country report on human rights practices, the Information Office of China’s State Council began to issue a counterpart annual report on the US’s human rights practices.

Based on the above review of China’s official discourse on human rights, we can conclude that while China attaches increasing importance to human rights and becomes more confident on its domestic human rights situation, its attitude towards sovereignty and human rights has not changed very much. It stills hold to the doctrine that sovereignty is above human rights.

A Constructivist Explanation for the Changes in China’s Response to International Humanitarian Crises

What has let to the changes in China’s response to international humanitarian crises, given that its attitude towards sovereignty and human rights has not changed very much? In this part, I attempt to answer this question by drawing on insights and concepts from constructivist international relations theory. I will provide a constructivist explanation for the paradox that with its attitude towards sovereignty and human rights roughly unchanged, China has changed its response to international humanitarian crises.

A Constructivist Perspective

As an application of sociology to international relations and an outgrowth of critical international relations theory, constructivism has changed the configuration of international relations theory in the 1990s. The analysis in this article mainly draws on theoretical insights offered by Alexander Wendt and Peter Katzenstein [26, 27]. Wendt emphasizes the systemic effects of international politics on states and pays special attention to structure. Contrasting to neorealists who view structure as distribution of material capacities among states, Wendt views it as “distribution of ideas.”²⁷ He further refers to shared ideas as culture, which is part of the structure.

²⁷ See ([26], p. 309).

Meanwhile, Wendt defines norms as “shared beliefs,” ([26], p. 185) which tend to be one form of culture. On some occasions, Wendt defines culture as “shared knowledge” and norms and rules as its manifestations ([26], p. 253). Constructivists believe that norms, as part of the structure, have both constitutive and causal effects on agents. As Peter Katzenstein says in *The Culture of International Security*:

[We] use the concept of norm to describe collective expectations for the proper behavior of actors with a given identity. In some situations norms operate like rules that define the identity of an actor, thus having “constitutive effects” that specify what actions will cause relevant others to recognize a particular identity. In other situations norms operate as standards that specify the proper enactment of an already defined identity. In such instances norms have “regulative” effects that specify standards of proper behavior. Norms thus either define (or constitute) identities or prescribe (or regulate) behavior, or they do both.²⁸

Similarly, Wendt defines three degrees to which norms can be internalized by states: the first degree of internalization refers to the situation in which states observe cultural norms “because they are forced to,” the second degree of internalization “because it is in their self-interest,” and the third degree of internalization “because they perceive the norms as legitimate ([26], p. 250).”

What is also relevant to the analysis in this article is Wendt’s theory on the relationship among identity, interest, and behavior. For Wendt, an agent’s identity affects its interest, interest is rooted in identity, and identities and interests determine states’ behaviors. Identities and interests are socially constructed by domestic politics and the international system ([26], chapter 5). Furthermore, Wendt argues that “[a]gents themselves are on-going effects of interaction, both caused and constituted by it ([26], p. 316).” He shows that identity can be produced and reproduced through the interactions among states, particularly through cultural selection such as imitation and social learning. More specifically, he argues that identity is rooted in an actor’s self-understanding and others’ representation of the actor ([26], chapter 7). Wendt put it plainly, “identities and their corresponding interests are learned and then reinforced in response to how actors are treated by significant Others ([26], p. 327).”

Drawing on these insights, I argue that the changes in China’s response to international humanitarian crises can be explained by the changes in international cultural norms and in China’s identity and interest. International human rights and humanitarian norms have experienced great changes in this decade, with the concept of “the responsibility to protect” that emphasizes states’ responsibility to provide basic protection for individuals being widely accepted. At the same time, as a result of its domestic socio-economic development and its interactions with other countries, China underwent an identity change from a defensive power of bitterness and insecurity to a confident ascending power aspiring to take more responsibility, which inevitably redefined China’s interest and made the country more receptive to international pressure and more willing to behave in accordance with international norms. Nonetheless, I argue that China has undergone only the second degree of

²⁸ See [27], p. 5.

internalization of international human rights and humanitarian norms: it has changed its response to international humanitarian crises not because it embraced “the responsibility to protect,” but because, in order to be regarded as a responsible power, it needs to act in accordance with the international human rights and humanitarian norms as accepted by most other countries. This explains the paradox that with its attitude towards sovereignty and human rights unchanged, China has changed its response to international humanitarian crises.

A Constructivist Explanation for the Changes

Discourse on international human rights and humanitarian norms concerns those beliefs about appropriate state behavior, in terms of state-society relations and the obligations of the state in particular. These have been inspired by and enshrined in a body of international human rights and humanitarian principles that most countries in the international community loosely agree on. Given their subjective, intangible nature there has been, and continues to be, contestation among different and sometimes rival interpretations and forms of implementation that these norms should take, particularly where the lack of a clear hierarchy in the normative structure of international society has seen such norms come into conflict with other types of norms such as sovereignty [28]. While some countries like China tend to employ the norm of sovereignty to particularize the western notion of universal human rights, western countries tend to uphold human rights as above sovereignty. Thus, the discursive field on international humanitarian crises tends to be dichotomized between states who are concerned about sovereignty and states who advocate human rights.

In the post-Cold War period, humanitarian intervention practices have tended to give leverage to human rights in its contestation with sovereignty. In our increasingly global society, any massive violation of human rights can be examined live by billions of TV viewers, and advances in global communication technology have generated strong monitoring mechanisms over nearly all governments. Meanwhile, developed countries have been in a hegemonic position in human rights discourse by dictating the terms of discourse on the matter of proper state-society relations, for their economic success has done much in the eyes of developing countries to legitimate or encourage pragmatic acceptance of this leading role. Compared to developing countries, western industrial countries put more emphasis on political and civil rights than on economic and social rights. However, the principle of sovereignty is still one of the most fundamental principles to define international relations. It is still often utilized by many governments to resist external pressure regarding humanitarian issues. As a result, human rights activists and pro-humanitarian intervention politicians often resort to protest and “the diplomacy of shaming” to exert pressure on the states that are responsible for humanitarian crises.

A new trend in the debates on humanitarian intervention is that the dichotomized discursive field regarding violations of human rights and humanitarian law has been changed greatly by the rising discourse of “the responsibility to protect.” In 2001, the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty established by the Canadian government proposed the principle of “the responsibility to protect” that “sovereign states have a responsibility to protect their own citizens from avoidable catastrophe, but ... when they are unwilling or unable to do so, that responsibility must

be borne by the broader community of states.”²⁹ In 2005, when the UN was celebrating its 60th anniversary, the 2005 World Summit Outcome Document endorsed the principle. The UN Security Council Resolution 1674 adopted on April 28, 2006 also reaffirmed the principle “regarding the responsibility to protect populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity.”³⁰ According to the principle of “the responsibility to protect,” sovereignty should by no means be a guise for some irresponsible governments to hide their massive human rights violations, even though humanitarian intervention should be carried out and regulated carefully by the United Nations. The assertion of the principle of “the responsibility to protect” has disrupted the opposition between sovereignty and human rights, and the premise for this is the UN’s upholding humanitarian crisis prevention above sovereignty. China has been a member of the international community to endorse the principle.

However, it is premature to argue that China has accepted the principle without reservation. In fact, “the responsibility to protect” has received little discussion in Chinese public media. According to my full-text search on all articles in *Renmin Ribao* since 2000, this state-run newspaper has never mentioned “the responsibility to protect.” Nor has the concept been fully debated among Chinese scholars.³¹ If “the responsibility to protect” represents a new trend in international human rights and humanitarian norms, it has not been fully internalized by China. China has acted generally in accordance to international human rights and humanitarian norms in dealing with some international incidents in this regard, in particular the Darfur crisis, not because China has embraced these norms wholeheartedly, but because these incidents have affected China’s interest: they would undermine China’s national image had China acted otherwise. Generally speaking, China has undergone only the second degree of internalization of these norms.

Nonetheless, the Darfur case indicates that China has been more responsive to external criticisms in recent years than in the 1990s. Underlying this responsiveness are changes in China’s identity and interest. China has experienced a dramatic identity change through its interactions with western countries. In the 1990s and early 2000s, China faced tremendous external pressure from western countries regarding its domestic human rights record. From 1990 to 2004, western countries had for 11 times introduced resolutions in the UN Commission on Human Rights to criticize China’s domestic human rights record, and the Chinese government has consistently worked with other developing countries in the commission to foil these attempts [33]. China has viewed these draft resolutions as attempts at shaming, and its own diplomatic efforts to foil them as defending China’s national image. Moreover, in the early 1990s, the Chinese government called on its people to be wary of western “peaceful evolution” (*heping yanbian*). Western pressure was viewed as a conspiracy to interfere in China’s internal affairs and to impose western political system on China. Yielding to this pressure was considered tantamount to betraying China and surrendering to the West. In China’s “anti-peaceful evolution”

²⁹ International Commission on Intervention and State sovereignty, *The Responsibility to Protect*, December 2001, <http://www.iciss.ca/report-en.asp>.

³⁰ United Nations, Security Council Resolution 1674.

³¹ Some rare examples of Chinese scholarly articles on “the responsibility to protect” are Li [29]; Luo [30]; Li [31] and Li [32].

(*fan heping yanbian*) discourse, the enmity between the West and the East was emphasized, and the western pressure for China to improve its human rights situation was represented as part of the decades-long plan to disrupt China's socialist system. At the same time, the Chinese government has tended to argue for collective human rights. Since 1991, in its white papers on human rights, China has emphasized that the right to subsistence and development is the most important human right [34]. China also argued that human rights are community-based, and China's human rights situation should be coherent with its unique cultural characteristics. China supported the "Asian values" advocated by Lee Kwan Yew, former Prime Minister of Singapore. As a matter of fact, the Chinese government has actively promoted the education of traditional Chinese culture in universities since 1990s.

Generally speaking, in the 1990s, western countries tended to represent China as the Other, a country that lacked respect for human rights and suppressed its people's quest for democracy and freedom, and China tended to view western countries as critics of ill intention who used human rights as an excuse for hidden agenda. This critic/defender role relationship implied that China's interest hinged on resisting external criticisms. China has acted as a defender, employing the principles of sovereignty and non-intervention in internal affairs as a buffer against external criticism and focusing on economic development and augmentation of material power.

In contrast, in recent years, both China's domestic political evolution and the interactions between China and other countries have brought about great changes in its identity and interest.

On the side of domestic politics, there has been a greater awareness in Chinese society for individual dignity and rights in recent years. To correct China's GDP-centered development strategy and pay more attention to social problems, the Hu Jintao leadership team has proposed two overarching slogans, "scientific outlook on development" (*kexue fazhan guan*) in 2003 and "harmonious society" (*hexie shehui*) in 2004. Both of them center on valuing humanity. In his report at the 17th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, Hu Jintao called for building a society that "puts people first" (*yirenweiben*) [35]. These domestic political changes have driven the Chinese government to pay more attention to human rights, which in turn, more or less, influences China's foreign policy.

On the other hand, the pattern of the interactions between China and western countries has changed greatly in recent years. The diplomacy of shaming adopted by western countries towards China's human rights record in the 1990s has declined. In the 2000s, especially since 2005, except continuing to criticize China's human rights record in its Department of State's annual country report of human rights practices, the United States generally ceased to criticize China's human rights situation in international organizations. Moreover, in September 21, 2005, Robert Zoellick, then Deputy Secretary of State of the United States, gave an important speech that encouraged China to be a "responsible stakeholder [36]." The United States' accommodating policy towards China has encouraged the latter to reaffirm its aspiration to be a "responsible great power" (*fu zeren de daguo*), which had been China's goal since the Asian financial crisis. As Wendt argues, a state's identity is constituted by its interactions with other states, and it is reinforced in response to how others treat the state. A friendlier international environment in recent years has helped to change China's identity from a defensive power of bitterness and

insecurity to a confident ascending power aspiring to take more responsibility. For example, in his report at the 17th National Congress of the party, Hu Jintao outlined his judgment of the world situation by saying, “Historic changes have occurred in the relations between contemporary China and the rest of the world, resulting in ever closer interconnection between China’s future and destiny and those of the world.”³² And when treated as “a responsible stakeholder” by the United States and other countries, China would be more likely to identify itself as a responsible power. It is the relations between China and the rest of the world that have constructed China’s identity.

The identity change has influenced China’s definition of interest and in turn its behavioral pattern. In the 1990s, facing criticisms and the diplomacy of shaming, China saw little opportunity to improve its national image. As a defensive power of bitterness and insecurity, China set self-strengthening by pursuing material power as its utmost important task. This was best manifested in Deng Xiaoping’s strategy of “hiding the capacities, biding the time” (*taoguang yanghui*). By contrast, in recent years, as a result of the identity change, China has attached more importance to soft power. China has been much more concerned about national image, and it has been making efforts to construct itself as a responsible great power. For example, on July 17, 2009, when addressing the 11th meeting for Chinese diplomats, Hu Jintao demanded the diplomats to enable China to have more influence in politics, more competitiveness in economy, more attractiveness in national image, and more charm in morality.³³ To achieve this goal, China has no choice but to act in accordance with the morality and justice understood by the international community.

China’s concern about its national image manifested itself not only in political leaders’ speeches, but also in scholars’ research interest, particularly the number of scholarly articles on the subject. I conduct a content analysis on the numbers of Chinese scholarly articles on “national image” or “international image” as well as on “soft power.” Table 6 shows that the numbers of articles from Chinese core journals with “national image” (*guojia xingxiang*) or “international image” (*guoji xingxiang*) as their keyword, subject, or part of their titles have grown impressively in the last few years, especially since 2006, which occurred at the same time as China’s increasing efforts to press Sudan to cooperate with the United Nations. Meanwhile, in recent years, the scholarly discussion on “soft power” has also increased dramatically. As Table 7 shows, the numbers of articles from core Chinese journals with “soft power” (*ruan shili*) as their keyword, subject, or part of their titles have grown dramatically since the year of 2004.

In sum, due to China’s identity change from a defensive power of bitterness and insecurity to a confident ascending great power, China has a broader definition of its interest—it become more concerned about improving its national image and

³² Hu Jintao, “Hold High the Great Banner of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics and Strive for New Victories in Building a Moderately Prosperous Society in All.”

³³ *Xinhua Ribao* [Xinhua Daily], “Hu Jintao zai di shiyi ci zhuwai shijie huiyi shang fabiao zhongyao jianghua yaoqiu: Zhengzhi shang geng you yingxiangli, jingji shang geng you jingzhengli, xingxiang shang geng you qinheli, daoyi shang geng you ganzhaoli” [Addressing the Eleventh Diplomatic Envoy Meeting, Hu Jintao Demands: More Influence in Politics, More competitiveness in Economy, More Attractiveness in National Image, and More Charm in Morality], July 21, 2009, http://xh.xhby.net/mp2/html/2009-07/21/content_36151.htm.

Table 6 Articles with “National Image” (*guojia xingxiang*) or “International Image” (*guoji xingxiang*) as Keyword, Subject, and Part of Title, Respectively, from Core Chinese Journals

Year	Keyword	Subject	Title
1990	0	1	0
1991	0	2	0
1992	0	1	0
1993	0	3	0
1994	1	1	0
1995	1	4	0
1996	4	5	1
1997	2	5	0
1998	3	3	0
1999	6	11	1
2000	6	8	3
2001	3	8	0
2002	3	9	2
2003	3	9	0
2004	10	12	5
2005	12	14	3
2006	31	66	13
2007	30	41	13

Zhongguo Qikan Quanwen Shujuku [Chinese Journal Fulltext Database], www.cnki.net

augment its soft power. China is thus more concerned about its image to the eyes of other countries, wishing to be accepted and recognized not only as a member of the international community but also as a “responsible great power”. Even though the Chinese official discourse has seldom mentioned “the responsibility to protect,”

Table 7 Articles with “Soft Power” (*ruan shili* or *ruan quanli*) as Keyword, Subject, or Part of Title from Core Chinese Journals

Year1	Keyword	Subject	Title
1993	1	1	1
1994	0	1	0
1995	1	1	0
1996	0	0	0
1997	0	0	0
1998	1	1	0
1999	3	5	2
2000	4	4	0
2001	3	4	2
2002	3	3	0
2003	8	10	1
2004	24	27	11
2005	23	29	8
2006	47	49	17
2007	80	94	45

Zhongguo Qikan Quanwen Shujuku [Chinese Journal Fulltext Database], www.cnki.net

China has great incentive to act in accordance with other countries' expectation. It becomes more willing to take responsibility and more sensitive to international human rights and humanitarian norms in its foreign policymaking. Given these changes, when the Darfur crisis harmed China's national image and could possibly jeopardize the Beijing Olympics, China changed its policy towards the crisis dramatically and played a more active role in seeking a solution to the crisis. Thus, although China's attitude towards the relationship between sovereignty and human rights has not changed very much, its actual response to international humanitarian crises has changed, attaching more importance to human rights and humanitarian concerns.

Conclusion

This article examines the changes in China's response to international humanitarian crises by reviewing China's participation in the UN Security Council to manage the three major post-Cold War humanitarian crises—Rwanda, Kosovo, and Darfur. Based on a sovereignty-human rights spectrum to measure China's position and behaviors, it finds that China has been playing a much more active role in alleviating the Darfur crisis in recent years, and there have been impressive changes in its behaviors. Then, this article examines China's official discourse on human rights by conducting a content analysis of the *Renmin Ribao* reports of the press conferences held by China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs. It is found that China's general attitude towards sovereignty and human rights has not changed much, and that the country has consistently emphasized that sovereignty is above human rights.

Drawing on insights from constructivist international relations theory, I offer an explanation for the paradox that China's response to international humanitarian crises has changed impressively despite its unchanged attitude towards the relationship between sovereignty and human rights. It is argued that there has been a rising discourse on "the responsibility to protect" in the international discursive field regarding humanitarian intervention, which breaks the discursive dichotomy between sovereignty and human rights and empowers the claim for human rights. At the same time, resulting from its domestic political changes and its interactions with other countries, China has experienced a dramatic identity change in recent years, from a defensive power of bitterness and insecurity to a confident ascending great power aspiring to take more responsibility. This identity change has made China more concerned about its national image and more sensitive to international human rights and humanitarian norms. As a result, China has been acting more in accordance with these norms, which brought about the changes in its response to international humanitarian crises.

However, given China's domestic political constraints, there is still a long way for it to completely transform its self-identity and internalize international human rights and humanitarian norms. Distinct from western countries which view humanitarian assistance and intervention as natural practices of liberal democracies, China has been actively dealing with international humanitarian crises, particularly the Darfur crisis, mainly because it is to its interest to do so. China has only undergone the

second degree of internalization of international human rights and humanitarian norms. The norms have had a regulative effect in defining China's interest and regulating its behavior. China has aspired to take more responsibility so as to enhance its national image as "a responsible great power" and to increase its influence in the international community.

Whereas the growth of discussion on responsibility both inside and outside China has broken down the dichotomy between sovereignty and human rights in the discursive field, there is still a large gap between Chinese and western understandings of responsibility. While the Chinese discourse emphasizes China's responsibility towards the international society, the western discourse on responsibility, particularly "the responsibility to protect," emphasizes states' responsibility towards individuals. The former has been consistent with a collectivist mentality, and the latter has been derived from individualism. These different understandings of responsibility are parallel to the different perceptions of human rights by China and western countries. Scholars who embrace a culturist perspective on human rights generally hold that the Chinese approach to human rights is collectivistic, whereas the western approach is individualistic.³⁴ Despite the rise of the discourse of responsibility, the East–West gap on the issue of human rights continues to exist.

The interactions between China and western countries have entered a new stage. On the one hand, the challenge for China is to contribute to the common good of the international community in collaboration with other countries so as to cultivate a positive national image and augment its soft power. In the longer run, China may even succeed in constructing a set of common values with other countries in building a "harmonious world." Yet, these will be impossible without China's internalization of international norms. On the other hand, western countries are facing a window of opportunity to encourage China to be a more responsible power. Hopefully, the analysis of the changes in China's response to international humanitarian crises in this article will contribute to seeking a new beneficial mechanism of interaction between China and the West.

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³⁴ For example, Li Yunlong, a professor at the Central Party School of China, said, "China does not treat individuals as the basic unit of society, nor has it reduced human rights to individuals. It has not adopted an approach that allows every individual to safeguard his or her own rights. Instead, China regards human rights as interest that the society has bestowed on every individual, which is not only related to human individuals, but more to the interest of the society as a whole." See Li Yunlong [37]. *Dongfang Wenhua yu Renquan Fazhan* is a volume on the relations between culture and human rights from comparative and global perspectives. Other works on East Asian perspective on human rights include Luo Yanhua [38].

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