

The relationship between that of the People's Republic of China (PRC) and the United Nations (UN) is that of a rather complex one, and came into being after Republic of China's (RoC) seat was replaced by the communist People's Republic of China. This was due to the Chinese Civil War which produced a cessation of the two major hostilities, the PRC and RoC. What emerged was the PRC's control of mainland China, which in turn forced the RoC to only control Penghu, Kinmen, Matsu, Taiwan and a few other outlying regions. The PRC gained the China seat of the UN on the 25th of October 1971, with the representative first attending the UN as China's representative on November 23rd, 1971. However, this decision did not come easy and illustrated some resentment from other permanent UN members, particularly that of the United States (US). The US attempted to expel the PRC, however was not successful in doing so, as the two-third vote was not attained. In turn, the PRC was admitted into the UN with 76 in favour and 35 opposed (17 abstained), receiving immense support, particularly from those of the third world countries.¹

When discussing such organisations as the UN, it is important to understand the theoretical underpinnings for which it has emerged as an international organisation, and also how it continues to function on a day to day basis. The UN emerged from the burning ashes of the League of Nations (LoN), and like the LoN is founded on the same theoretical ideologies, those of liberalism and liberal internationalism. In order to gain insight into how the interactions that exist between it as an organisation and its members, it becomes appropriate to analyse them with regards to the founding and underlying theoretical principles for which the function. The PRC is a state that is very much centred on the insurance of its sovereignty and privacy with regards to the internal politics of its state.² This in itself is clearly contrasting to that of the liberal internationalist approach. As under the doctrine of liberal internationalism, it argues liberal states should be entitled to intervene in internal politics in order to pursue liberal objectives. From this basis it can become very evident the theoretical

¹ Ting Lee, Y., 'A comparison of politics and personality in China and the US: testing the kernel of truth hypothesis,' *Journal of Contemporary China*, Vol 4, No 9, pp: 56-68

² He, Y., 2007, 'China's changing policy on UN peacekeeping operations,' *Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol 1, No 4, pp. 1-72

influences that the UN has had on the PRC, as well as many other arenas, including human rights, environmental issues. While at the same time, by taking not only a theoretical approach, the PRC's influences on the UN as an international organisation also begin to emerge.

With regards to the PRC and general participation in international organisations it can be considered rather ambivalent, as the PRC's involvement as a key member of the UN, being that of a permanent member of the UN Security Council (UNSC), illustrates the PRC's dedication to multilateralism and international organisation, however, it must be said that the PRC's involvement in such organisations, particularly those that involve international security, are approached rather cautiously and suspiciously, as to ensure the internal politics of the PRC remain as such, internal.³ Hence, with the PRC's cautious, yet willing approach to the UN illustrates the apparent increasing influence of the UN on the PRC, and the PRC's influence on the UN. Firstly, with regards to the PRC's influence on the UN, this can be seen to emerge in the area of the UN Peace Keeping Operation (UNPKO), as due to China being the largest developing country, and also that of a permanent member of the Security Council, the PRC's policies have a great impact of the development of the UNPKO. This has been apparent recently, after the EU's proposition to form a resolution for the atrocities occurring in Burma and Zimbabwe; however this did not evolve due to stark UNSC resistance and disagreement coming particularly from that of the PRC and Russia. This followed the opposition from the PRC with regards to Darfur and Kosovo. This in itself hugely depicts an environment controlled significantly by the growing power of the PRC, together with such countries as Russia and many developing nations.⁴

Another area, in which the PRC appears to wield great influence, and also control, is that of the UN Security Council. Over the past decade alone there have been

³ Chih-ji H. (2008) "The PLA and China's Policy toward United Nations Peace Keeping Operation," *All Academic Research*, pp. 1-23

⁴ Doyle, L., 2008, 'China and Russia veto UN sanctions on Mugabe,' *The Independent*, viewed 14/04/09, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/politics/china-and-russia-veto-un-sanctions-on-mugabe-865921.html>

numerous examples of the PRC's active nature, usually together with Russia, gradually rising to power in this particular environment. This has been illustrated in a number of areas, and the unification that is apparent between the PRC and Russia is said to be resulting in the UN being remoulded around their preferences.⁵ One particular aspect that can be analysed is that of the Human Rights Council (HRC). According to an audit of the UNSC⁶ the PRC is categorized in the smallest groups of the UN General Assembly, a group entitled *Axis of Sovereignty*⁷ which incorporates 19 states with lowest levels of human rights and therefore are the most conflicting with that of the European Union (EU). However, even with this being the case, it is clear that the PRC is becoming increasingly assertive, and one could argue this very factor has become significant largely due the pressure of the UN. Over the past decade alone, growing support for the PRC in the UN is accelerating at rates never seen before. According to one study⁸ proposals made by the EU have dropped from 70% approval from the GA, to just 50%, while the PRC are now receiving up to 75% with regards to their policy approval. This alone illustrates the PRC's significant influence in the UN and is provides a perfect example of the UN's growing integration and power in such an international organisation, regardless of the supposed theoretical conflict that is apparent between the international organisation and a member state.

Many argue that the concept of nationalism plays a very significant role in the power struggle that is escalating in the UNSC, and this is largely apparent in the idea that the PRC together Russia and many other third world countries are possibly at the initial stages of developing an anti-democratic, non-Western block to serve as a power balance to the EU and US in the UN. This is all too assisted through the surprising growing support across the board in the UNSC and UNGA.

⁵ Gowan, R.and Brantner, F (2008) "An Audit of European Power in the UN," *European Council on Foreign Relations*, pp 1-77

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Gowan, R.and Brantner, F (2008) "An Audit of European Power in the UN," *European Council on Foreign Relations*, pp 1-77

⁸ Ibid.

It seems rather ironic when discussing how the how the PRC influences the UN that they very influence can actually be due to the UN's pressure on the PRC, and therefore is actually the UN's influence on the PRC.

However, although the previous illustrations demonstrate a significant power struggle and growing influence of the PRC in the UN, it must also be demonstrated that immense influence the UN has had on the PRC over the years since its membership in 1971. The SARS virus was a true indicator of this very point, and served as a poignant reminder that the PRC still remains heavily influenced and reliant on such an international organisation as the UN. Rutland (2003), a specialist in crime management argued, during the 2002/2003 SARS crisis that badly affected the PRC, that the only way for the PRC to “rebuild its credibility was to align itself with outside groups such as the World Health Organisation (WHO) and its parents organisation, the UN.”⁹ However, this would have in turn meant that the PRC would have had to open its records and internal mechanisms up to foreign agencies, which theoretically is a very liberal internationalist approach, and not in accordance with much of the PRC's fundamental policies.¹⁰ This was apparent when Beijing demonstrated its huge reluctance to allow the WHO to intervene, as it meant that communications would come in to being with Taiwan. However although the PRC remained hugely reluctant, the PRC was under great scrutiny from much of the world, including that of the UN. What emerged, was the PRC use of propaganda to illustrate the seemingly ‘many steps’ that the PRC had taken with regards to Taiwan for example medical personal visits, in order to evade international scrutiny.¹¹ However, this very point illustrates that although the PRC can be considered to be that of a ‘not so good international citizen,’ it is still a state in which is highly influenced by not on the UN, but many international players.

⁹ Johnson, A (2003) *The sars epidemic and china's communication gap: what you should know*, <http://www.chinesetao.com/Diversity%20Inc.pdf>, Date accessed 14/04/09

¹⁰ Ibid

¹¹ Brown, D. (2003) *China-Taiwan relations: in the shadow of SARS*, http://www.csis.org/media/isis/pubs/0302qchina_taiwan.pdf, Date accessed 16/04/09

Another arena in which the PRC attains great influence from the UN, ironically often not in the best interests of many key ‘western’ members of the UNSC, is that of the growing convergence of the PRC with many developing countries. The UNGA offers a rich ground for interaction and alliances to be formed between member states. It is through this development that the PRC is becoming increasingly more powerful in the international stage. According to an audit of power within the UNSC¹² strong ties that the PRC is building with blocs of states from the Middle East and Africa are being specifically implemented in opposition to the EU and other ‘Western, democratic states’ in the UN. This has caused the “West” to fall into a state of disarray, after not only this action by the PRC, but also the hostilities between the EU and US regarding human rights during the Bush era.¹³ Therefore, the point arises one more time, the apparent opposition and reluctance that the UN places on the PRC, and also such states as Russia, is an illustration that in order for the PRC to advance in global power it has to utilize such mechanisms as the UN in order to build the strength to evolve to a place of significant power.

With regards to the other issues which are hugely apparent in the PRC like that of environmental degradation to name one, the UN plays a substantial role in assisting the PRC to achieve a better standards in this area. This is largely through the implementation of the UN Development Programme (UNDP) in the PRC. Currently the UNDP in the PRC is active in ensuring that the goals of the 11th Five-Year Plan are going to occur.¹⁴ As well as ensuring environmental standards are upheld within the PRC, the UNDP is also attempting to uphold compliance concerning the PRC’s adherence to multilateral agreements, including those in the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, including the Kyoto Protocol, UN Conventions on Biodiversity, Protection of the Ozone Layer, Persistent Organic Pollutants and the Montreal Protocol.¹⁵ The UNDP enable this through such means as policy assistance

¹² Gowan, R. and Brantner, F (2008) “An Audit of European Power in the UN,” *European Council on Foreign Relations*, pp 1-77

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ United Nations Development Programme (2009) *Environment and energy*, <http://www.undp.org.cn/modules.php?op=modload&name=News&file=article&catid=10&sid=8>, Date accessed 12/04/09

¹⁵ Ibid.

and legal reform, while also providing technology transfer and capacity building. Both the UN and the PRC have an increasing awareness that if the PRC does not improve its standards on environmental sustainability the world will not achieve MDG 7¹⁶. This is an illustration of the influence the UN has on key policy and behaviour of its member states and is an unusual, yet every increasing depiction of how the PRC is ever so slowly allowing the more liberal internationalist approach to become acceptable. Allowing the UN to get involved with such things as the PRC's policy making mechanisms appears to be that of a big step in itself for the PRC.

In conclusion, the relationship between that of the PRC and UN can be considered rather ambiguous and ironic in many situations, as although there is clear influence from both the member and the international organisation, it is becoming increasingly apparent that the UN's strong defence mechanisms, largely in the hands of the EU and US, are actually allowing the PRC to be a pivotal character in the organisation, which is not only due to the fact that the PRC has a permanent seat on the UNSC. When the relationships are examined in the UN, many ironic features emerge, and the idea of making an enemy purely because one is treated as the enemy immediately comes to mind. The apparent building of a democratic Western bloc in the UN, is being increasingly met by the possibility of a formation of a non-democratic Eastern bloc, to ensure a balance of power in the UN. The UNGA is a perfect place for such relations to exist and although it appears as though these relations are a result of the UN influence on the PRC, they are actually occurring as an influence on the UN, by the PRC. The UN provides the perfect place for the PRC to evolve into a global super power, raising particularly that of US and EU concerns. The integration that is being demonstrated between the PRC, Russia and many developing nations in the Middle East and Africa are providing the unity and cohesion needed to become extremely powerful. However, it must be illustrated that at the same time, such UN organisations as the UNDP is still demonstrating the PRC can sometimes be open to a more liberal internationalist approach, particularly in the area of policy assistance with regards to environmental sustainability. Overall, there is an influential

¹⁶ Heggelund, G., Backer, E. 2007, 'China and UN environmental policy: institutional growth, learning and implementation,' *International Environmental Agreements*, Vol 7, No 4, pp. 415-438

relationship occurring in both directions when it comes to discussing the UN and PRC, however it is growing increasingly obvious that the PRC in the UN is becoming a force to reckon with and is a hugely influential member of the UN, both policy and behaviour wise.¹⁷

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¹⁷ United Nations in China 2009, *Recent speeches of secretary-general*, 2009, Date accessed 16/04/09, <http://www.un.org.cn/index.htm>

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