

**Comparing the Chinese Central Government's Regional Foreign Policy and  
Domestic Response to Collective Protests: Same Priorities, Contrasting Outcomes**

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**Preliminary Draft:** *please do not quote or cite without author's permission*

**Paper presented at the  
Global Institute for Asian Regional Integration (GIARI)  
Waseda University, Japan  
3 August 2009**

Since Gourevitch (1978)'s *The Second Image Reversed*, several scholars of international relations have debated whether the system or the nation-state constitutes the most important unit of analysis in our attempt at understanding social and political reality; accordingly, they have explored the economic, political and cultural reasons why globalization shapes domestic politics (Milner and Keohane, 1996; Gourevitch, 1978; Frieden, 1991; Frieden and Rogowski, 1996), how domestic politics influence a country's external policy (Helleiner, 2002; Evans, 1997; Pauly and Reich, 1997), and the conditions under which international or regional politics may shape or be shaped by domestic politics (Katzenstein, 1978; Putnam, 1988; Cerny, 1995; Schmidt, 1995). Few scholars have however explored the ideational conditions<sup>1</sup> allowing foreign influence to constrain or be constrained by domestic politics and institutions in remaining authoritarian regimes like China. In the past decade, the policy areas upon which China has sought to promote diplomatic ties with its neighbors and other Asian countries seem to have been the same policy areas for which it is increasingly showing greater responsiveness to a rising civil society. These areas have predominantly been socio-economic, environmental, and security-based. Moreover, the foreign policy areas for which China has remained unwilling to diplomatically « bargain » are the same domestic policy matters on the basis of which Chinese citizens seeking change have been discredited, and at times punished – namely, human-rights related matters. Reasons for such variance primarily lie in the Chinese Communist Party (CCP)'s central objectives, namely to ensure the sustainability of its regime, and hence promote performance legitimacy via economic development. Yet

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<sup>1</sup> For Kang (2007), the historical significance of ideas in shaping regional diplomacy cannot be disputed. Looking at the period ranging between 1300 and 1900, he claims that China's tributary system allowed the exchange of recognition of China's centrality with Chinese culture, knowledge and technology. This informal power structure facilitated the spread of China's ideals.

the consistency in the central government's priorities across domestic and foreign policies and the need for regime sustainability have resulted in the adoption of two contradictory measures: *first*, Beijing has increasingly been using its economic position to discourage other countries from criticizing the regime on matters which do not constitute a priority to the Chinese government, including civil rights. Good bilateral or regional relations with China require that other countries « speak the political and economic language » of their Chinese counterpart, that is to say, that they refrain from challenging the latter on the basis of certain domestic issues that Beijing wishes no foreign countries to interfere in. *Second*, despite the growing constraints imposed by China on any possibility for a human rights dialogue regionally and internationally, the need for popular legitimacy and regime resilience in light of growing social unrest has also pushed China to better ensure the political representation of a wider range of societal interests since the early 2000s, mostly on the basis of social and economic rights. Recent policy reforms and laws have been implemented for the purpose of securing the freedom of expression upon the basis of a particular set of ideas and opinions, mostly socio-economic (i.e. land-, labour- and pension-related) ones.

This paper is divided into three parts. First, it elaborates on the theoretical *raison d'être* of a comparison between central government responses to collective protests on the one hand, and Beijing's foreign policy on the other hand, emphasizing some gaps in the current field of international relations. Second, it explores the ways in which domestic and foreign policies have been consistent ideationally, and the contrasting implications that such consistency has had in terms of promoting human rights, domestically and

internationally. Third, it draws conclusions as to some of the important theoretical and policy-related conclusions with respect to China's relations with its Asian neighbours.

### **The Theoretical *Raison d'Être* of the Project**

While some scholars have already attempted to draw a linkage between collective protests and China's foreign policy, they have done so by primarily looking at the potentially detrimental effects that social instability in China would have on the strength of its ties with other countries. Shambaugh (2004) emphasizes that China's domestic stability positively affects the stability of the Asia-Pacific region, and that if China were to become socially or politically unstable, internal instability could hinder the country's ability to secure and further its economic relations with its neighbors. For that reason, some scholars also claim that the domestic stability of China is the responsibility of its neighbors, as well as international and regional organizations (p. 98). While this linkage ought not be neglected, I wish to stress other aspects of the relationship between social unrest and foreign regional policy, emphasizing rather the consistency in the collective protests and societal demands Beijing accommodates at the expense of others on the one hand, and the foreign policy areas in which it wishes to have a dialogue with its Asian counterparts, on the other. I believe this comparison is relevant for two reasons. *First*, if we treat apples and oranges as « fruits » (Sartori, 1991), we can start drawing similarities between state-society and inter-state relations. Chinese civil society's interaction with the central government, though constrained in qualitatively different ways, can, just like Asian countries' relations with China, be reduced to different kinds of articulated interests to which Beijing chooses to respond in particular ways, or not respond. *Second*, the central government's foreign regional policy and domestic response to collective

protests both involve the need on the part of the Chinese authorities to take position on a wide range of political, military, economic and social matters. Not only have the number and frequency of officially reported protests increased significantly since 2005, but the types of claims upon which Chinese citizens mobilize since the early 2000s have become more and more diverse, pushing the central government authorities to redefine its position in a range of policy areas, and to review some of its existent laws and policies based on the changing configurations of and needs in China's society and economy. As such, the central government's policy response to collectively articulated societal interests constitutes a helpful indicator of the policy areas it tends to prioritize over the ones it chooses to neglect. Similarly, a country's foreign policy offers a macro-perspective on the country's priorities, but at the regional or international level. Comparing the central government's response to domestic protests with its foreign policy can both help identify whether China's policy priorities at the domestic level are in harmony with those at the foreign policy level, or not. Such a comparison may constitute a relevant indicator of state capacity and the coherence in regime behaviour<sup>2</sup>. This indicator could further help scholars predict the regime's relative likelihood of long-term viability. In the context of an authoritarian regime that is not undergoing any political transition, the more domestic and foreign policy priorities are in harmony, the more domestic interests are likely to influence foreign policy interests. This pattern is likely to be representative of a strong and coherent state. Conversely, the less in harmony domestic decisions and foreign policy behaviour are, the less likely domestic interests

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<sup>2</sup> So far, the statist literature seems to have left unexplored, state behaviour in foreign policy, and how helpful the level of coherence in state behaviour across domestic and foreign policy can be, to assess state capacity and autonomy. Indeed, the literature seems to have almost exclusively explored statist factors Skocpol (1979) and state-society relations (Migdal, 1994; Shue, 1994).

will shape certain foreign policy interests. Such a case scenario would be indicative of the lack of consistency in state behaviour, and most likely, a sign of state incapacity<sup>3</sup>.

The analysis seeks to address a gap in the current international relations literature exploring the effects of globalization on the role of the state. It does so in two ways. *First*, it suggests that non-democratic countries with a relatively strong<sup>4</sup> and influential state are more likely to better control some of the effects of globalization or regionalization and less likely to be permeated by the ideational forms of foreign influence they wish not to be permeated by, than democratic regimes. So far, scholars of international relations seem to have predominantly explored the relationship between regime type and globalization from the perspective of globalization's facilitation of the spill-over effects of societal pressure for regime change from one country to another, or the demonstration effects of democratization (Huntington, 1991). However, little has been written on the ability of certain regimes to constrain globalization or regionalization's spill-over outcomes. Whether or not the international system shapes or is shaped by domestic politics and structures on the basis of ideational conditions is likely to vary according to a country's regime type and the extent to which other countries depend upon it economically<sup>5</sup>. Non-democratic regimes that have been able to sustain themselves despite external pressure for political change are likely to benefit from the capacity to choose a wider range of matters upon which domestic interests should « dictate » foreign policy interests. Addressing the linkage may help scholars better

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<sup>3</sup> If incoherence in state behaviour is understood as a potential sign that state actors are incapable of ensuring that their foreign policy decisions be in accordance with their domestic priorities.

<sup>4</sup> I agree with Katzenstein (1978)'s claim that the way in which states respond to external economic pressures depends on whether their political institutions are strong and impermeable to societal influences, or not.

<sup>5</sup> It is assumed that the more economically dependent other countries are on China, the more the Chinese state will benefit from the ability to make autonomous decisions, when it deems it necessary.

understand why China's counterparts may, in some circumstances, face a dead-end while trying to pressure China to adopt certain policy measures it deems irrelevant.

*Second*, while it is true that changes in global conditions affect domestic preferences, interests and priorities (Milner and Keohane, 1996; Gourevitch, 1978; Frieden, 1991), the ways in which China's policies shift or may not shift as a result of foreign policy, which actors are more politically influential than others in the policy-making process, and how the central government is more willing to allow policy changes on the basis of some interests rather than other ones, have yet to be addressed. So far, the central government's level of autonomy with respect to foreign policy-making seems to have varied on the basis of policy areas. While Beijing has successfully discredited any foreign pressure for political or regime change, hence showing a high level of autonomy on political matters, it cannot manifest such level of independence with respect to other foreign policy areas, which both regime resilience and legitimacy highly depend on, including economic and military relations. The manifestations of such variance ought to be explored more closely.

### **China's Success in Pursuing Domestic Goals: Discouraging Human Rights Dialogue in Its Foreign Policy**

China's foreign policy both regionally and internationally has served the purpose of securing authoritarian regime resilience. As emphasized by the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the fundamental goals of the country's foreign policy « are to preserve China's independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity [...] »<sup>6</sup> To do so, three key foreign policy objectives had to be met. *First*, China needed to create propitious regional and international conditions for economic development, sustained growth, and

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<sup>6</sup> See PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs' website: <http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/wjdt/>

performance legitimacy<sup>78</sup>. In the context of its involvement in ASEAN, China concluded several protocols with the organization in the areas of « human resource development, public health, information and communication technology, transportation, development assistance, the environment, cultural and academic exchanges, and codevelopment of the Mekong River Basin » (Shambaugh, 2004, p.75).

*Second*, to further ensure regime resilience, China needed to create propitious regional conditions for the protection of its national sovereignty and security. Hence, Kang (2007) claims that the country's military initiatives in the past decades served territorial and defensive purposes, aimed at stabilizing its borders and pursue its national unification project (p. 90-93). China has been primarily concerned with: 1) *making sure that its relations with Taiwan be stable* and monitoring foreign countries' relations with Taiwan. China's investment in the People's Liberation Army (PLA) capabilities has not served imperialistic expansionary purposes, but has mostly aimed at safeguarding the country's power in its immediate periphery. Shambaugh (2004) emphasizes that the PLA's doctrine is not one of « forward projection » but one of « peripheral defense » (p. 86). Most military build up efforts have been pursued for a potential use of force against Taiwan, if the latter decided to secede (Cabestan, 2009; Shambaugh, 2004). Meanwhile, some key domestic policies that confirm the above have been adopted, including the anti-secession law passed in 2005 (Cabestan, 2009). The implementation of such a law particularly reflects the Chinese government's « peripheral defense » approach, in that it

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<sup>7</sup> This resonates with Helleiner (2002)'s claim that the implementation of liberal economic policies, and the social benefits and economic opportunities associated with China's opening, have been used, among other things, as tools to bolster national sentiment.

<sup>8</sup> The Ministry of Foreign Affairs similarly emphasizes the need « to create a favorable international environment for China's reform and opening up and modernization construction. » See website: <http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/wjdt/>

was an alternative to the passing of a unification law which would have ‘forced’ Taipei « to reunify with the mainland » (Cabestan, 2009, p. 13). As such, the anti-secession law appeared as a ‘moderate’ strategy, restraining any possibility for a change in the current status quo, yet leaving national unification as a distant likelihood. 2) *protecting the borders it shares with other countries*; this concern has not only been ubiquitous in China’s diplomatic ties with India, Japan, and Vietnam (Jones and Smith, 2004), but was also manifested in its reactions to social instability in neighbouring countries. For instance, the concern expressed by the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) with respect to the September 2007 Monk-led pro-democracy protests in Myanmar was not in relation to human rights violation per se, but a concern that instability spreads beyond Myanmar’s borders and affects China’s own domestic ‘peace’. The MFA’s spokesperson, Jiang Yu, indeed stressed « [...] that the problems [that arose] do not become more complicated or expand, and don’t affect Myanmar’s stability and even less affect regional peace and stability » (Reuters, 2007). 3) *eliminating any influence pro-independence groups like the Uyghurs and the Tibetans could have in neighbouring countries*. The need to eliminate regional and international threats to its national sovereignty has pushed China to be more pro-active in its involvement in regional politics. China’s involvement in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and ASEAN is particularly representative of such efforts. Comprising China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan, the SCO primarily seeks to counter threats of terrorism in the region, which is crucial to China in light of the existence of a nationalist Uyghur movement and past instances of terrorism in different parts of its territory. Additionally, one could interpret the SCO’s decision to expand strategic cooperation to free trade

partnerships in 2003 as part of China's overall efforts to pursue the development of its pipeline project and modernize the Xinjiang autonomous region, a condition that the central authorities deem necessary in order to eliminate domestic threats of separatism. The economic development of the region is perceived by the provincial and central authorities as necessary in order to eliminate the nationalist threat in Xinjiang.

*Third*, to further ensure regime resilience, China needed to control and reduce as much as possible any form of external pressure for a change in its regime. Its economic position and growing political influence in world politics have made it better able to reach this last goal. The need for good relations with China has increasingly come at the expense of the decline of the promotion of human rights on the part of several countries including industrial societies like Canada, France, and the United States, but also important trade partners like India. This has led scholars like Wu (2009) to question the assumption that globalization has the uniform effect of reducing the state's autonomy with respect to the promotion of national interests internationally. Indeed, taking the example of China's bilateral relations with Canada, Europe and the United States, the author shows that because the costs of bad economic relations with China would be too high for industrial societies, Beijing can successfully « manipula[te] economic power for political purposes », pressuring democratic governments to make decision that challenge the principle of religious freedom (p. 88). While the space that human rights occupies in the context of industrial countries' bilateral and regional relations with China has decreased considerably since the early 2000s, in the context of Asian regional relations, it has been almost entirely absent. Rather, priority has been given to economic and security-related interests, the latter of which, in some instances, may fundamentally undermine

human rights promotion. What are the implications of the above tendency with respect to Asian countries' relations with China? Human rights promotion seems not to have been a significant diplomatic concern in countries of the Asia-Pacific's relations with Beijing. Human Rights Watch (HRW) even stressed the need for Japan to create more opportunities to discuss rights abuses in China (HRW, 2008). If the above is true, Beijing's usage of economic influence is unlikely to serve the purpose of politically manipulating its Asian neighbours, but is rather likely to be targeted at Western powers exclusively. It nonetheless seems increasingly the case that good economic and military relations with China depend upon the absence of criticism with respect to its political regime.

China has not only successfully convinced its trade partners that economic relations ought not be hampered by political disagreements, but has also helped protect remaining totalitarian regimes in Asia, namely the DPRK and Myanmar. It mostly did so by using its membership in the UN Security Council to oppose the use of sanctions or any other form of pressure against these countries at different moments of recent history. For instance, in January 2007, China along with Russia vetoed a US-UK draft resolution in the Security Council which called on Myanmar to release all of its political prisoners since 1989, and cease its military attacks on ethnic minorities (UN Centre News, 2007). Despite the strategic motivations underlying China's good relations with existent totalitarian regimes in Asia (Shee, 2002), the sustainability of such regimes helps further protect the legitimacy of Chinese leaders' own establishment. The primacy of such domestic interests in shaping China's relations with its neighbors is particularly apparent when one looks at how Chinese leaders seek to protect the North Korean regime despite

strains in their bilateral relations, and despite Beijing's strong criticisms of its counterpart. Shambaugh (2003) emphasizes that Chinese officials have « sp[oken] with disdain, despair and heightened frustration when discussing the DPRK and China's relations with it » (p. 45). Yet, Shambaugh (2003) emphasizes that China « seeks to avoid the implosion or collapse of the DPRK regime and nation-state » (p. 45). It does so primarily based on calculations about the domestic effects that a regime change in North Korea [and the collapse of another communist state] would imply, including potential side effects on the Chinese economy, on the country's internal security, or on the overall legitimacy of its own regime (Shambaugh, 2003).

China's need to secure the resilience of its regime was manifested in its foreign policy internationally and regionally by an emphasis on economic opportunities and security-related priorities, and a growing tendency to use its economic influence to discourage any form criticisms with respect to human rights violation, thus discouraging any dialogue upon the basis of political representation or regime change. This strategy ironically contrasts with the central government inclination to expand political representation upon the basis of social and economic rights domestically, in recent years.

### **China' Domestic Policy: Towards a Greater Accommodation of Societal interests**

While Beijing increasingly pressures democratic governments to make decisions that challenge the principle of religious freedom and uses its economic influence to discourage any form of criticism with respect to its human rights situation, the central government has nonetheless (and perhaps ironically) been committed to expanding

political representation in a wide range of realms<sup>9</sup>. The expansion of these rights has been uneven from one sphere to another, prioritizing social and economic rights over demands for greater ethnic and/or religious representation or the free practice of religion. Efforts to accommodate have been particularly apparent since the early 2000s, and have resulted from changing structural conditions such as the rising number and frequency of instances of social and political unrest in the Mainland, as well as the decline in the state's control over information accessed by citizens, due to widespread Internet access. This accommodation has been manifested in four ways. *First*, the central government has taken measures to reform the petitioning system to ensure that citizens' complaints be properly considered and dealt with. *Second*, through the establishment of central government regulations on how to solve social disputes and protests locally, Beijing has urged local governments not to use force against protesters. In a similar vein, it has taken more measure to punish power abuses and corruption on the part of local officials. *Third*, the central government has implemented new policies and laws aiming at reducing the social and economic burdens that have increasingly led the Chinese population to take the streets and mobilize in recent years.

### *Reforming the Petitioning System*

In light of the majority of cases of land disputes that have remained unaddressed and/or unjustly dealt with over the recent years, the central government has acknowledged that

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<sup>9</sup> In arguing so, I do not wish to disregard the fact that in its attempt to ensure regime legitimacy and resilience, the central government has also taken anti-democratic measures to control its citizens' access to information. By limiting access to information about cases of protests in other parts of the country, Beijing has been able to control the potential spill over effects of instances of collective mobilization across localities. Moreover, media censorship in situations where information about a sensitive protests could not be hidden, has taken the form of information distortion for purposes of political propaganda.

the petitioning system suffers from serious weaknesses<sup>10</sup>. For instance, outcomes of petitioning are often more detrimental to petitioners than they should be, resulting from the arbitrary use of force or other forms of power abuse on the part of local officials. According to Li (2008), out « of 1,314 interviewed land-based petitioners in rural China, 21.8 percent said their homes were demolished or destroyed; 31.4 percent said their homes were ransacked, properties confiscated, and valuables taken away; [...] 25 percent were beaten by cadres; 25.8 percent were detained and arrested [...] and 29.7 percent experienced retaliation by thugs who were hired by cadres. » (p. 216) Despite the ineffectiveness of the petitioning system, the fact that only a minority of petitions cases are addressed and justly solved has not discouraged the Chinese population from resorting to the system of ‘letters and complaints’ to voice their social, economic and political grievances. Indeed, between 1995 and 2005, the number of petitions submitted to local governments has increased from 4.8 million to 12.7 million<sup>11</sup>. The increase in petitions, the fact that they are organized in large groups and involve public demonstrations, and hence their potential as a source of instability has led the central government to issue regulations for local officials as to the consequences of violating ‘Provisions for disciplinary action’<sup>12</sup>. Among the provisions were the need not to conceal information about or misreport the content of petitions and local government dealings of such complaints. More recently, in June 2009, Hu Jintao signed a decree to implement a law whose purpose is to facilitate the transparent handling of disputes pertaining to the mismanagement of rural land contracts. The law, which is to take effect in January 2010,

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<sup>10</sup> See Boxun News, “上方无效 中国农民自组护地队” [Ineffective Petitioning System: Chinese Peasants Form Self-Protection Teams], November 29<sup>th</sup>, 2006, <http://news.boxun.com/news/gb/china/2006/11/200611291719.shtml>

<sup>11</sup> Sin Chew Daily, “禁粗暴对待上访者将严惩引发民愤官员”, 25 July 2008.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

will force local governments to form arbitration committees at the county and municipal levels, which will be responsible for hearing disputes and the overall arbitration process<sup>13</sup>. In its attempt to « standardize the arbitration process », the central government is hoping that this law will positively affect « rural harmony and stability »<sup>14</sup>. Some of the efforts of the central authorities to increase the efficiency of the petitioning system seem to have been acknowledged by the rural population. Li (2006) indeed claims that « of 1,314 petitioners, 59.7 percent said that because of their petitions the center has strengthened its supervision over grassroots cadres. » (p. 217)

#### *Punishing the Arbitrary Use of Force and Power*

The central government has also discouraged local governments and local police from arbitrarily using violence against the population, suggesting that there ought to be room for some forms of political representation without involving physical repression. Given that authoritarian regimes have a tendency to emphasize the protection of police officers over that of protesters, such changes in central government priorities are particularly indicative of its willingness to adjust state-relations to changing realities within society. In July 2008, the Central Committee of the CCP Discipline Inspection Commission, the Ministry of Supervision, the Human Resources and Social Security Department, as well as the National Inquiry Bureau promulgated a new provision prohibiting the abuse power or force on the part of police officers while handling cases of

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<sup>13</sup> These reforms will however not apply to cases of land expropriation, which can only be addressed through litigation.

<sup>14</sup> See Xinhua News Agency, « China's Legislature Eyes Stability with Law on Rural Land Disputes Mediation », 27 June 2009, [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2009-06/27/content\\_11609910.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2009-06/27/content_11609910.htm)

collective petitions and demonstrations<sup>15</sup>. The central government authorities stated that the police's mishandling of protests and arbitrary use of violence would be severely punished, and that officers could run the risk of being removed from their functions<sup>16</sup>. One of the rationales underlying such a central government decision lies in the belief that the arbitrary usage of force on the part of local cadres and police officers against Chinese citizens is likely to aggravate societal conflict and increase the potential for large-scale mobilization and instability in rural China. Moreover, in issuing such regulations, Beijing's recent moves suggest that in order to ensure regime resilience and legitimacy, it is necessary for all levels of government institutions to have good relations with a rising civil society, and implement mechanism for state-society bargaining without in the absence of democratization.

In a similar vein, the central government has started punishing more systematically major cases of local government corruption having negatively affected the well being of the Chinese population. For instance, in July 2005, Ma De, a senior official in the province of Heilongjiang was arrested for, among other things, taking two million yuan in early 1999 from Shen Baichen, a contractor interested in construction projects requiring land seizures<sup>17</sup>.

### *Reforms Towards a Greater Representation of Socio-economic Interests*

In its attempt to better institutionalize the representation of some societal interests,

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<sup>15</sup> Sin Chew Daily, “禁粗暴对待上访者将严惩引发民愤官员”, 25 July 2008; 财经 [Caijing], “四部门发文明确信访工作文责制度” [Four Departments Issued Measures to Be Taken for a Clear System of Accountability], 25 July 2008, <http://www.caijing.com.cn/2008-07-25/100076447.html>.

<sup>16</sup> 扬子晚报 [Yangtze Evening News], “违规使用警力处置群体事件者将被追责”, 25 July 2007, [http://www.yangtze.com/gn/200807/t20080725\\_474993.htm](http://www.yangtze.com/gn/200807/t20080725_474993.htm)

<sup>17</sup> Congressional – Executive Commission on China, “Chinese Government Takes Steps Against Corruption While Land Abuses Continue”, 1 February 2006: <http://www.cecc.gov/pages/virtualAcad/index.php?showsingle=33854>

the central government has in recent years implemented policies and passed laws meant to reduce some of the social and economic burdens of its population. Land-based reforms for instance have been undertaken by the central government as part of its broader attempt to address some of the concerns of the rural and urban populations with respect to property access. These measures among others include Beijing's launch of the tax-for-free reform in 2000 "to abolish both the agricultural taxes and the surcharges, keeping only the agricultural product tax" (Lee, 2007, p. 259), the new land superintendence implemented in 2006 which was meant to ensure that local officials would not gain discretionary profits from the selling of land to urban contractors (Naughton, 2007; So, 2007), a new property law passed in 2007 (NPC, 2007), and increases in the number of arrests of officials accused of land-related corruption. Other central government actions to address land problems have taken the form of appointing particular key officials in the Ministry of Land and Resources whom the top leadership deemed would be better able to effect change at the local level. For instance, in September 2006, the State Council appointed the Minister of Land and Resources, Sun Wensheng, as State Superintendent General of Land<sup>18</sup>. The State Council presented this designation as another step taken in the process of regaining control of instances of local corruption, and more particularly, addressing the issue of land grab in rural areas<sup>19</sup>.

Additionally, some important reforms were implemented with respect to labour. In January 2008, the Labour Contract Law entered into force. Despite its limitations, law intended to serve the purpose of protecting the rights of the workers which are included

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<sup>18</sup> Xinhua News Agency, 'Chinese Government Appoints Minister as Superintendent General of Land', 21 September 2006: <http://www.china.org.cn/english/NM-e/181809.htm>

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

in their employment contract, reducing the risks that they be subject to abuses on the part of their employers. This law constituted an attempt to respond to rising social unrest on the basis of unemployment and labour management abuses. While the number of labour protests over the past years remains unclear, in 2007, “China’s labour dispute arbitration committees accepted 350,000 cases, an increase of 10.3 percent from 2006” (China Labour Bulletin, 2009, p. 8). These cases involved a total of 650,000 workers, and 13,000 collective disputes (ibid, p. 8).

## **Conclusion**

Scholars who believe that globalization and regionalization have eroded the relevance of the state have commonly treated the two phenomena as linear and as having uniform effects. We ought to pay closer attention to the different ways in which states feel the effects of globalization, based on a number of factors, including regime type, economic status and state autonomy with respect to foreign and domestic policy decisions. The more economically dependent are foreign countries upon a non-democratic regime, the more autonomous that regime will be, and the better it will succeed in using foreign policy to pursue its domestic goals. China’s growing economic influence both regionally and internationally has enabled it to mould its foreign policy according to its own domestic objectives successfully. As a result, the general ideas and interests that the country has sought to address in its domestic and foreign policy have overlapped, though the means employed by the central government to do so have differed. These common interests have revolved around the need to: *first*, sustain economic growth through bilateral and regional agreements of all kinds regionally, and the need to address the grievances of crucial groups in China’s labour force domestically, including workers and

peasants. *Second*, ensure regime legitimacy by actively engaging in regional activities that help secure border protection and national sovereignty on the one hand, and on the other, expanding political representation through reforms of the petitioning system and attempts to better control and monitor the behaviour of local officials domestically, in order to decrease risks of instability. *Third*, put prospects for greater political rights aside by discouraging foreign countries to criticize the nature of its regime internationally and support other non-democratic regimes regionally, and continuing to ignore or repress domestic groups whose demands constitute a threat to the viability of the political establishment, including religious minorities and/or ethnonationalist groups.

Certain regional policy implications ought to be considered, based on the above analysis. *First*, the central government is becoming more affirmative in the context of its relations with foreign counterparts, while domestically it is showing great caution in how it deals with societal pressure for policy change. Given that China is increasingly using its economic influence to control what industrial countries can say or not say about Chinese polity and society, it is likely to have a similar impact on less influential states, including several of its Asian neighbours; moreover, conflicts with China could emerge out of other countries' potential disagreements with Beijing's ideational stance. *Second*, by increasingly using its economic influence to politically manipulate other foreign powers and accommodating several domestic interests at the expense of others, the regime has succeeded in securing its resilience. The viability of the regime has implications for the sustainability of other non-democratic regimes in the region, including Myanmar and the DPRK. If authoritarian China survives and keeps supporting the latter two, they are also more likely to survive. Current geostrategic dynamics in the

Asia-Pacific are unlikely to change dramatically if these three regimes last. *Third*, to the extent that China's most important priorities are domestic and that its military build up serves purposes of territorial defense rather than expansionary ones, China's rise is however unlikely to constitute a threat to the national sovereignty of its Asian counterparts. While the above could not apply to the countries with which China has had border disagreements or disputes, it remains important to keep in mind that out of the 23 territorial conflicts Beijing has had with neighbouring states, only 6 involved its usage of force (Fravel, 2008). Shambaugh (2003) emphasizes that China is perceived by most countries in Asia as « a good neighbor, a constructive partner, a careful listener and a nonthreatening regional power » (p. 64). While it may not represent a military threat to some of its counterparts, its expanding political influence, as well as military and economic objectives could nonetheless challenge some of its partners' commitment to human rights promotion or protection.

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