Dissertation

Master of Advanced Studies in Humanitarian Action

Academic Year 2014-2015

What Made China Behaves Differently?
China’s Perception on Humanitarian Assistance
A case study on media coverage of the 2013 Typhoon Haiyan

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August 2015
Abstract
This dissertation analyzes the Chinese perception of humanitarian action using a case study on the media coverage of the 2013 Typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines between the Global Times and the New York Times. Through literature review and media analysis, the findings indicate that as a new player in the Western-centric humanitarian system, China is lacking confidence. Thus it does not feel comfortable to be compared with the US. Moreover, as China does not want to be seen as in the same box with the West, it is unlike to alliance between the West and China on humanitarian assistance. Based on these findings, this paper explores China’s potential role in international humanitarian assistance and proposes strategic recommendations for engaging with China.

Key words: China, perception, humanitarian assistance, humanitarian intervention, humanitarian action, de-westernization, politicization of aid, sovereign, responsible state
Acknowledgement

My sincere thanks go to my supervisor Dr. Valérie Gorin for her patience, motivation, insightful comments and support throughout my dissertation work. I could not have imagined having a better supervisor and mentor for my study.

Besides my supervisor, I am extremely thankful to all CERAH lecturers for their immense knowledge and valuable guidance.

Special thanks go to Ms Song Danhui, second secretary of the Chinese Delegation to the United Nations, for her inspiring inputs.

Last but not the least, I would like to thank my fellow students for their spiritual support throughout writing this paper.
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1. Introduction

Does China matter? When Gerald Segal, Director of Studies at the International Institute for Strategic Studies in London, asked that question on Foreign Affairs in 1999, he argued that China, “a middle power”, only matters because of a “theatrical illusion of power” perpetuated by the West. Therefore, it does not matter if China does not matter.¹

Now 15 years later, the answer to that question is still affirmative, however the explanation has become complicated. Of course China matters. It is a country with a population of 1.3 billion; the world’s second largest economy and a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council.

Then the next question would be, “to whom it matters?” Today, from the United Nations to the World Trade Organization, from peacekeeping missions to humanitarian assistance, China is a significant player that cannot be missed at the table. China’s role in the Security Council is seen to be a strategic actor to protect its national interest rather than promoting peace in other countries.² China is notably known for demonstrating strong opposition to state intervention. For example, as of May, 2014, China has vetoed four times to block a UN resolution on Syria. Frustrated with the results, Turkish prime minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan called for a reform of the Security Council as he said the system is “unfair and fails to reflect the will of most countries.”³

The world’s political power is slowly decreasing from the Atlantic alliance in the Pacific region as China’s power is rising, according to the ICRC’s report on the future of NGOs in the humanitarian sector.⁴ Thus, the exercise of power at the international level would become more complicated. To what extent does China want to play a role

in global humanitarian action?” The days are gone when Western humanitarian actors were welcomed by recipients. Recipients’ attitudes towards main international NGOs have shifted from suspicion and caution to deliberate violence, said Pierre Micheletti, former president of Médecins du Monde France⁵. Micheletti argued that as the non-governmental aid is currently dominated by one model of organization, funding and operational visibility, humanitarian aid needs to be de-Westernized: “We have a new challenge: to imagine a humanitarian movement that will not be a strict copy-and-paste reproduction of the model we bring with us today,” Micheletti said.⁶

China is a new challenge. Its participation has increased the effectiveness of humanitarian assistance and posed questions for the West for the analysis of China’s potential role as a humanitarian donor and how to integrate China into the humanitarian system. However, translating international humanitarian principles into norms that guide the behavior of new actors like China would be difficult.⁷

If the international community wants to understand China’s potential role in humanitarian assistance, it is necessary and important to understand how humanitarianism is translated into Chinese; what are the concerns behind Beijing’s decision on foreign aid; who are the main actors and if China is willing to integrate into the international system or not. The lack of understanding will hinder a constructive engagement with China and cause misunderstanding and tensions.

However, little research has been done by both Chinese and Western scholars on China’s perception on humanitarian issues. Since 1990s, the majority of studies have been mainly focusing on China’s aid in Africa, China’s view on international intervention and peacekeeping and China’s foreign aid policy.

The purpose of this paper is to try to contribute to fill a gap in the literature and provides answers to those questions through analyzing China understands of

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humanitarianism in media discourse, identifying its political concerns and motivation. It aims at answering the following questions:

1. What do the academic literatures tell us about the key concepts used so far to define China’s humanitarian assistance? How these concepts are understood by the Chinese government and the West and have evolved in the changing domestic and international environment?

2. How China’s main concerns in terms of humanitarian action were highlighted in the media discourse during the typhoon Haiyan in 2013 in the Philippines? And what caused those concerns?

3. Drawing from the literature review and the case study, is it possible to assess if China is a norm-taker or norm-maker?

Foreign aid is always a sensitive topic for China. China began to provide foreign aid in 1950 to other Communist countries, but it wasn’t until 2011 that China published its first white paper of foreign aid that gave an official account of how the money was distributed. One way to analyze the debate over perception is to use the media discourse as a forum to assess conflicting opinions. This paper will use the Philippines Typhoon Haiyan that killed over 10,000 people in 2013 as a case study to examine China’s perception on humanitarian action. Three days after the typhoon hit the Philippines, China’s initial $100,000 donation made international headlines saying the world’s second largest economy donated less than IKEA.

China’s initial “modest” donation has created international debates on how much the world’s second largest economy should donate. Domestic debates were on whether or not China should give aid to a country that has a territory dispute with China. Beijing argued that the Chinese people had also suffered during the typhoon, and the aid spent there should be taken into consideration first. However, Western media linked the “modest” donation of China with Beijing’s bad relationship with the Philippines due to their territorial dispute in the South China Sea. Due to the

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8 A white paper is a government report on any subject, according to Merriam-Webster.
international pressure, China later on bumped the number to $1.4 million and offered a hospital ship, while the US committed $20 million and an aircraft carrier with 80 aircraft and 5,000 troops on board.

The order of the paper is as follows: the first literature review section introduces humanitarianism in Chinese languages; identifies the main concepts and how these concepts have changed over time. The second section is organized chronologically to summarize the changing of the West from refusal to engagement with China, and China’s attitudes from being ideological to being pragmatic with limited flexibility. It illustrates humanitarianism with Chinese characteristics on how China provides alternative aid to their “partners” and explores the changes that China has brought and will further bring into the Western-centric model of humanitarian system. Furthermore, it explores China’s potential role in humanitarian assistance: a norm-maker or a norm-taker? The last discussion section examines, through a comparative case study of media coverage of Philippines’ Typhoon Haiyan, if Beijing’s perception of itself matches with the West.

2. Literature review on China’s perception on Humanitarian Action

It is noteworthy that there is little research on China’s perception on humanitarianism while addressing China’s humanitarian assistance. Google the term “China’s humanitarian action”, a quick look at the results mainly shows China’s aid to Africa; China’s humanitarian aid spending and its recent aid to Nepal and the Philippines. While searching the same term in Google scholar, the results show the majority of the academic studies focus on China’s position on humanitarian intervention.

The literature research was conducted through search of existing databases such as Google Scholar, Google and the library of the University of Geneva. The findings are based on hard copy and online news reports, journals in both English and Chinese.

The search terms used were “China”, “humanitarian action”, “humanitarian assistance”, “humanitarian intervention”, “perception”, “disaster relief” and “Philippines typhoon Haiyan”. Emphasis was placed on topics related to political
science, including China’s foreign aid, China’s potential role in humanitarian assistance, and China’s stand on international intervention. The researches were conducted by Think Tanks, universities and institutes. Of the documents found, a core group of “Western view”, 25 English-language, and “Chinese view”, 10 Chinese-language publications related to China’s perception on humanitarian assistance were selected from early 1990s to 2015.

In the first section, this paper explains the humanitarian concepts in Chinese language and examines how it differs from the “Western” definition. The second section analyzes how China’s threat/China’s rise in the 1990s has influenced China’s policy on humanitarian action in early stage. The third section explains humanitarian with Chinese characteristic that China developed in 2000s. Furthermore the section examines China’s major concern on the recent five years that focus on exploring its role in the global humanitarian system.

The findings show that the West’s interest in understanding China’s perception has grown as China has become increasingly active in the field of humanitarian assistance. Their attitude towards China has changed from being suspicious to cautious to cooperative. There is also an increasing interest in analyzing Chinese action in the past to better understand the different way China behaves: for example, the UK-based Humanitarian Policy Group (HPG)’s research project on Chinese humanitarianism through Chinese history. The founding also shows China’s attitude towards the West has shifted from negative to cooperative. China has become more flexible as it further engages in humanitarian action.

2.1. Humanitarianism in Chinese language

One of the challenges to understand China’s perception of humanitarian action is the complexity of translating the term “humanitarianism” into Chinese language. It

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is noteworthy that these concepts are time-evolving.

**Humanitarianism**: a direct translation is “rendaozhuyi yuanzhu”. It is a combination of “renwen zhuyi” (humanism) and “renben zhuyi” (humanistic psychology). The idea of “rendao”, humanitarian, has been rooted deeply in Confucius two millennia ago, and still influences the notion of morality in modern China. However, the term humanitarianism that means kindness and goodwill in the West is often appeared along with “Westernism” and associated with the idea of democracy in China.

**Humanitarian assistance**: in contrast, the term “jiuzai”, is more widely used in Chinese referring to both international humanitarian aid and domestic humanitarian aid. “Jiuzai” is a broader concept of “rendaozhuyi yuanzhu”. It does not limit strictly to emergency relief, but also post-disaster development. Different from the West, the main actor that plays a central role in leadership and management in China is the state. It is considered as a state’s filial duty, according to the Confucian virtue.

**Sovereignty**: “zhuquan”. This absolutist concept was significantly shaped during its “century of humiliation” period (1838-1949) when the country was invaded by foreign armies. Now it serves to sustain the domestic authority against foreign intervention. It heavily shapes China’s approach to peacekeeping and humanitarian intervention.

**Responsible State**: the concept is not clearly defined in both Chinese and English. It could be seen as "an obligation one should fulfill", or “accountability for the consequences of a person’s actions or inaction”. The term of being a responsible state, “daguo zeren” has been widely discussed in Chinese media regarding its

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13 Idem, p4
14 Idem, p7
15 Idem, p25.
responsibility to people in need. Four sets of China’s view of international responsibility have been identified: the internal responsibilities as a developing country, which is the most prioritized responsibility; the legal responsibilities as a normal sovereign state; and additional responsibilities as a great power; and the special responsibilities as a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council.¹⁹

2.2. Humanitarianism with Chinese characteristics

Different from the Western political system, Chinese political system features governing with Minbenism, meaning “the very reason for the existence of a government is to serve the harmony and welfare of the entire society, or it should be overthrown”²⁰ Thus, Beijing believes the rising Chinese system is not an alternative to the Western system, but it does challenge its exclusive legitimacy.

In the field of humanitarian assistance, newcomers in humanitarian action, such as China redefine the humanitarian responses in their own terms, which bring challenges to the monopoly of Western aid in terms of building partners and allies.²¹

Given China’s growing activities in international humanitarian assistance and its role in the UN Security Council, increasing concerns has been raised in the academy in the 2000s to see how China responses to humanitarian assistance differently. Western and Chinese scholars summarize the differences. The findings are as follows:

2.2.1 Aid channel

The West is more likely to rely on multilateral channels such as the World Bank, UN agencies and NGOs; While China relies exclusively on state channels.²²

2.2.2 Project

Chinese aid tends to focus on building of basic infrastructures such as roads, schools and stadiums and are more “visible” than Western projects which mainly

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¹⁹Idem, p9
²⁰Wei Pan, “Western System Versus Chinese System”, Briefing Series-Issue 61, China Policy Institute, School of Contemporary Chinese Studies, The University of Nottingham, July 2010, p2
²¹Pierre Micheletti. op. cité, p11
focus on education and democracy according to Sahr Johnny, Sierra Leone’s ambassador to China. The ambassador once commented: “The G-8 countries are putting in huge sums of money and they don’t see very much.”

What makes the Chinese projects more “visible”? Stefen Halper argues that Chinese projects that bring fast money and rapid economic progress will cast aside the Western-led development efforts. “While US and European gurus are busy lecturing Third World autocrats about good governance and transparency, Chinese engineers are building highways to the dictators' weekend homes,” Halper said.

2.2.3 Approach

Western donors’ aid often comes with conditions on how the aid should be used. While China provides foreign assistance with respect for sovereignty and with no political condition attached. Moses Maim, former editor of Foreign Policy, shared a story in his op-Ed on the New York Times in 2007, saying one of his friends who works for the World Bank complained China priced them out of the project to rebuild the rail network in Nigeria. He said the World Bank and the Nigerian government had agreed on the $5 million project that would help to clean up the country’s corrupt. Yet the Chinese government offered $ 9 billion, with “no bids, no conditions and no need to reform”. He calls China’s aid as “rogue aid” because it is “nondemocratic in origin and nontransparent in practice”. China is often accused of supporting the Sudanese government, however, Naím did not mention China’s later role in using its political and diplomatic leverage to install a hybrid African Union-United Nations peacekeeping mission in Sudan. In 2006 China-Africa Cooperation Forum, President Hu Jintao reportedly pressed president al-Bashir to accept to the UN deal. Later, President Hu appointed a special envoy for Darfur to voice Beijing’s policy on this issue, a sign that shows China’s stance towards humanitarianism is shifting from

25 Op-ed is a piece typically published by newspapers, magazines that express the opinions of a named author usually not affiliated with the publication's editorial board.
ideology to pragmatism and flexibility.

According to the 2014 White Paper on China’s Foreign Aid, Chinese principles include: helping recipient countries with self-development. No political conditions. Mutual benefit. Be realistic and keep pace with the times.28 The concept of self-development in Chinese foreign aid means China believes a country’s development depends on its own strength. It further explains why Chinese projects mainly focus on infrastructure as it lays a foundation for the country’s future independent development. What makes China stand in sharp contrast with the West is China insists on helping recipient countries to build capacity to self-develop without imposing any political conditions, while the West requests democratic reform to promote economic and political transitions, which in the eyes of China, will inevitably limit the recipient’s ability to develop independently.29

2.2.4 Hard line/ flexibility

China’s hard line on sovereignty and nonintervention almost implicate all the issues in the debates regarding to humanitarian intervention. However, many scholars tend to emphasize China’s hard line on these issues and overlook signs of limited flexibility. China’s attitudes towards humanitarian intervention can be examined in two areas: crises arising out of internal conflicts and crises out of cross-border incursions.30 The former is more hard-line, the latter is more flexible.

One of the challenges to understand China’s view on sovereignty-integration relationship is its limits and possibilities. In terms of internal conflicts, China opposes any form of military intervention because it has its own territorial anxieties such as Taiwan and Tibet; therefore, intervention is viewed as a direct threat. For example, it had exercised veto at the Security Council power three times since 2000 related to countries that have relationship with Taiwan.31

In terms of external conflicts, China has shown a more flexible position as long as

30Michael C. Davis, op.cité, p 244
31 Idem, p245
the host country and the Security Council approve. For example, China has sent 1955 staff officers and military observers to 19 peacekeeping missions as of December 2010.\textsuperscript{32} It is noteworthy that the Chinese definition of “host nation”, dangshiguoxiu, a term that was used in the Defense White Paper of 2002 and literally translated as “the state that is a party”, suggests the contents of all parties is not necessary.\textsuperscript{33}

Some Chinese scholars argue that these flexibilities are probably a sign saying China’s non-interventionist aid stance is on its way out. For example, China volunteered to help Iraq to fight against Islamic State, a move is viewed as a step away from its official non-interference policy.\textsuperscript{34}\textsuperscript{35} As these rising powers become ever stronger economically, the credibility of the South-South Cooperation model is strained, and non-interference increasingly unfeasible. As China’s aid and development program grow, some convergence with the Western development model may be unavoidable,” said Yunnan Chen, Research Officer at the Institute of Development Studies.\textsuperscript{35} Indeed, China’s limited interaction in humanitarian aid has shown its dilemma to balance between responsibility to protect and non-interference policy. However, her opinion is not confirmed by government officials.

2.2.5 Competitor/ partner

Given the difference of aid between China and the West, China has been seen as a competitor rather than a partner.

From the Western scholars’ point of view, China needs to improve its public information on aid that helps to improve efficiency and reduce the risk of corruption. Limited access to aid information on how the money is used makes it difficult to monitor and thus leads to myths and misconceptions among Western donors.\textsuperscript{36} For example, Beijing’s activities with countries from Africa to Asia to Latin America are

\textsuperscript{36} Sven Grimm, “Transparency of Chinese Aid: An Analysis of the Published Information on Chinese External Financial Flows,” Centre for Chinese Studies, University of Stellenbosch, August 2011. P 1
seen as building alliances with countries overlooked by the West: “While US and European gurus are busy lecturing Third World autocrats about good governance and transparency, Chinese engineers are building highways to the dictators' weekend homes.”

On the other side, Chinese scholars’ point of view, given the long history of colonialism, sees the West uses humanitarian intervention as a form of hegemony to “violate a country's territorial integrity and sovereignty under the name of human right protection without UN approval”. When UN secretary-general Kofi Annan gave his thoughts on international intervention in humanitarian crises in 1999, Tang Jiaxuan, China’s foreign minister, responded that “The issue of human rights is...an internal affair of a country, and should be addressed mainly by the government of that country through its own efforts.” Thus, the mistrust between two sides does not seem surprising.

From the view of beneficiaries or partners as Beijing calls them, China’s participation in humanitarian assistance “offers a new set of ideas and practices and breaks the monopoly of Western aid to define”, thus is welcomed by African countries. For example, according to the European Council on Foreign Relations, the support for Chinese position on sovereignty against external “interference” rose from 50% in 2000 to 74% in 2008.

Anshan Li, director of the Institute of Afro-Asian Studies and Center for African Studies, argues that the failure of the West lies in its unequal “donor-recipient” relationship: “China believes that assistance is not unilateral, but mutual. China views Africa as a promising, rather than ‘hopeless,’ continent.” The reasons why Western

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38 Nanan Jie, “Guoneiwai Guanyu Rendaozhuyi Ganshe de Yanjiu Zongshu, (research on Humanitarian Intervention Home and Abroad),” The Youth and Society 549, no. 03, January 2014, p255.
40 Opoku-Mensah, P. Y.op. cité, p12
aid is not working in Africa, as some Chinese scholars point out, lie in a series of self-evident assumptions in their minds such as “Western countries have responsibilities to help developing countries” and “developing countries cannot develop without help from the West.”

In addition, China’s attitude towards foreign NGOs has dramatically changed in recent years. A draft of “Foreign NGO Management law” was released in April 2015, which requests foreign NGOs to get approval from the police before conducting activities in China. According to an explanatory text of the draft, it was made “in light of the Chinese government's positive attitude toward some international NGOs”. However, in the eyes of the West, the message was the opposite of the slogan of the 2008 Beijing Olympics Games. “The message is clear: Those seeking access to China must beware the party line,” Ira Belkin, executive director of NYU Law School’s US-Asia Law Institute, and Jerome A. Cohen, the institute’s co-director, wrote in op-ed piece in the New York Times that it would be a mistake for China. “All they see are sinister “foreign agents” instigating change. It would be a mistake for China, and unfortunate for the rest of the world, if its leadership caves in to its most radical elements and tells the world that, while foreign investment is welcome in China, foreign ideas are not.” Therefore, it is less likely to see China working with NGOs in the near future until the mutual trust is built.

2.3. China’s potential role

The economic and political rise of China has shaped its role in international humanitarian environment, and its approach has changed from ideology to pragmatism, from threat-rigidity to flexibility and cooperativeness. China’s history of humanitarian assistance could be divided into three stages: Ever since China began

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43 Yanbing Zhang and Ying Huang, op. cité, p24
foreign aid in 1950, year 0 of foreign aid, the main beneficiaries from 1950 to 1978 were surrounding communist countries like North Korea and Vietnam that share the same anti-imperialist ideology. Up to 20% of foreign aid, 978 million of yuan ($157 million) was donated to North Korea and Vietnam from 1950 to 1963. Then from 1979 to 2003, as China focused on developing economy, it reduced the sum of its foreign aid. About 1.3 billion yuan ($209 millions) were spent on foreign aid from 1979 to 1994. Yet it expanded the scope from communist countries to African countries that were affected by natural disasters and started engaging with international humanitarian assistance through UN agencies. Beginning of 2004, China has shown interest in integrating into multilateral humanitarian coordination including expanding the scope of its foreign aid and increasing engagement.

China’s responses to international emergencies in recent years have shown the country has been acting actively in international humanitarian assistance. According to China’s foreign aid 2014 report, from 2010 to 2012, China has spent 89.34 billion yuan ($14.41 billion) to 121 countries in terms of grant, interest-free loan and concessional loan. China has also expanded its recipient from Asia and Africa to Latin America, the Caribbean and Europe. During that two years, the Chinese government provided 1.2 billion yuan ($193 millions) worth of emergency relief materials to countries in need: after the earthquake in Haiti, the earthquake in Myanmar, the floods in Pakistan, the war in Libya, and the crisis in Syria. Thus, it poses one lingering question for the West that is in the process of de-Westernizing the system: “is China a norm-taker or a norm-maker?” Perhaps it offers the West the opportunity to rethink its approach and how to better integrate China into the system.

To answer that question, it is worth to examine China’s potential role in humanitarian assistance, and consider China’s position towards the humanitarian principles. Western scholars argue that there have been little evidences that show China fulfilling international humanitarian norms in practice, practically when it

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47 “China Foreign Aid 2014”, op. cite, p2
48 Idem
49 James Reilly, “A Norm-Taker or a Norm-Maker? Chinese Aid in Southeast Asia,” Journal of Contemporary China 21, no. 73, November 16, 2011, p71
50 Andrea Binder and Björn Conrad, op. cité, p8
comes to conflict areas such as the turmoil in Syria. The principle of neutrality was often used as an argument by China.\textsuperscript{51} It puts China into a dilemma between responsibility to protect and noninterference.

China’s human rights record and its limited transparency of aid information have created mistrust and skepticism in the eyes of the West.\textsuperscript{52} China has shown little interest in forming an alliance as it has repeatedly emphasized that China’s aid program can be different from the West: “Developing country participants should not be treated in the same light as donor countries from the developed world.”\textsuperscript{53} Ambassador Liu’s remark seems to have sent out a clear signal that China has been reluctant to expand its interaction with the West because they have little in common in ideologies and principles. Some Chinese aid officers explain that “it would be inconvenient” for Chinese officials to be seen by aid recipients as collaborating with Western donors.\textsuperscript{54} Therefore, instead of having China to fit in the Western system, the system should find a new way to fit into the new contexts.\textsuperscript{55}

It seems forming alliances with China is unlikely to occur in the coming future. But Beijing’s desire is clear: it wants to be acknowledged as a responsible stakeholder of the international system.\textsuperscript{56} Then the next urgent question would be: how would China use its power? According to the ancient Chinese philosopher Xunzi, there were three types of leadership: humane authority, hegemony and tyranny. Among them, humane authority is seen as the best way to win the hearts and minds.\textsuperscript{57} The same doctrine is used by the US. For example, the US military use humanitarian aid to ease local communities’ anti-American tension in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as in Muslim populations in the Horn of Africa, in Djibouti, Ethiopia and Kenya.\textsuperscript{58}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{51} Idem, p9
\item \textsuperscript{52} Idem, p12
\item \textsuperscript{54} James Reilly, op. cité, p75
\item \textsuperscript{55} Kent Randolph, “Planning from the Future: En Emerging Agenda,” \textit{International Review of the Red Cross}, 2011, p 948
\item \textsuperscript{56} Andrea Binder and Björn Conrad, op. cité, p5
\end{itemize}
The problem is, as Yan Xuetong, one of China’s leading experts on China's foreign policy points out, that many Western countries tend to wrongly believe China throw money in aid to buy friendships. Instead, China wins the hearts of the world by winning hearts at home, according to an ancient Chinese philosopher: “This means China must shift its priorities away from economic development to establishing a harmonious society free of today’s huge gaps between rich and poor. It needs to replace money worship with traditional morality and weed out political corruption in favor of social justice and fairness,” Yan explains. While outside of home, China has to provide higher-quality moral leadership than the US to shape a friendly international environment for its rise, Yan suggests. However, Yan’s analysis overlooks China’s resistance to democracy and human right practices at home, which are the major obstacles of winning hearts home and abroad.

China desires to be seen as a cooperative and responsible great power. To further engage in humanitarian assistance is one way to establish a positive image. For example, Beijing has been hosting the Six-Party Talks that aim at ending North Korea’s nuclear program since 2003, and established regional security cooperation such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization in 2001 to assume its responsibility as a great power.

As discussed above, China has defined four sets of China’s view of international responsibility. Still, China is in the process of defining its roles and influence. Over the next decade, as Yan predicts, China’s new leaders who experienced the hardships of Cultural Revolution would play a constructive role in offering more security protection and economic support to less powerful countries.

2.4. Main conclusion from literature review:

59 Xuetong Yan, op.cité
61 Xuetong Yan, op.cité
The illustration shows the general shift in the attitudes of the West towards China which have changed from skepticism to cooperative, and show the interest in China has grown as China’s participant in international humanitarian system increase. It can be observed that Chinese humanitarian action has changed from ideology to pragmatism with limited flexibility in terms of peacekeeping.

China’s increasing participants have brought changes and challenges for the Western-dominated humanitarian system. In the process of reshaping the monopoly of Western aid, the West has shown increasing interest in exploring China’s potential role in humanitarian assistance. Beijing and the West have cooperation in the field of peacekeeping and war on terror. While in the field of emergencies responses and development, Beijing acts cautiously about working with the West due to the mistrust from both sides.

In the meanwhile, little has been mentioned in the literature on how China’s domestic political system influences its policy on foreign aid and position on humanitarian intervention. As Hong Kong, Taiwan, Tibet and the Muslim region Xinjiang keep demanding greater autonomy or even independence, it could be predicted that China’s line on sovereignty and nonintervention will become even harder. Another factor that mentioned little in the literature is increasing public awareness regarding China’s responsibility in disaster. For example, there were
debates on whether or not to aid a country that is not friendly with China such as the Philippines. Chinese public’s concerns have brought China to put international humanitarian assistance on its top agenda.

3 Discussion

The literature reviews have shown a gradual change in China’s perception of humanitarian action. However, due to the limited research on the perception issue from independent Chinese scholars or a third party, those studies cast doubts on whether or not it is a homogeneous perception. Thus, the following discussion will show how Chinese public’s concerns have shaped China’s position on humanitarian assistance through a comparative analysis of the media coverage on the Haiyan Typhoon. The media coverage of the Chinese newspaper the *Global Times* and American newspaper the *New York Times* from November 9 to 26, 2013 was analyzed. The reason why this paper chose these two newspapers is because they both covered China’s humanitarian assistance in the Philippines during that period, and both appeal to educated readers in each country.

3.1. Introduction of Global Times and New York Times

China’s *Global Times* (hereafter GT), Huanqushibao, is a daily newspaper under the People’s Daily, the official newspaper of the Chinese Communist Party. The Chinese-language version established in 1993 has a circulation of about 2 million today, which makes it the third-largest newspaper in China by circulation. Selecting and translating foreign news into Chinese is the main part of the GT’s work. On one hand, it broadens the outlook of its reader’s understanding of the world since many of them do not read English; on the other hand, it shows its readers what the world is talking about China.

The English-language version was established in 2009 as part of China’s ambitious plans to make its media to go global. The two newspapers share the same editorials, but work separately. This paper only examines the Chinese-language
version because its reports focus on international issues; while the English-language
version focus more on domestic issues.

The media landscape in China is complex. China’s media are in the process of
digitization as the country’s internet user population has reached up to 649 million,
almost twice the population of the US.62 Nevertheless, traditional state-owned media
still plays a major role. As the world’s largest newspaper market, China’s print media,
9000 magazines and 2,000 newspapers, continue to expand. Almost all revenue is
earned by circulation and advertisements regardless of its ownership.63

Among those print media, in the eyes of many Chinese readers, GT is seen as a
“hugely popular Chinese newspaper that is frequently portrayed as promoting an ever
more hardliner and nationalist take on the world”, as associate professor Allen
Carlson wrote in The Diplomat.64 However, in the eyes of some foreigner readers, the
GT is “China’s Fox-News”. It is “the angry Chinese government mouthpiece that
makes Bill O’Reilly seems fair and balanced,” an article of Foreign Policy titles.

Why is the GT so popular? The article explains, “The liberals say it is because GT
promotes and sells Chinese nationalism. The others say it is because GT is very sharp
and we dare to touch the sensitive issues.”65 However, through analyzing its editorial
section, Carlson argues that the diversity in the paper’s editorial section expresses
Chinese thinking of the world.

The New York Times (hereafter NYT) is an

American daily newspaper founded in 1851 and
has a circulation of 2.1 million in print and digital
subscribes. As the third-largest newspaper in the US, NYT is regarded as one of the
most influential news organization as it has won about 100 Pulitzer Prizes (6 of them

62Euan McKirdy, “China’s Online Users More than Double Entire U.S. Population”, CNN, February 4, 2015,
63 “Navigating China’s Complex Media Landscape”, PR News Asia, 2012,
http://www.slideshare.net/Lee282/ChinaChina-media-landscape-white-paper.
64Allen Carlson and Jason Oaks, “Is China’s Global Times Misunderstood?,” The Diplomat, September 14, 2012,
http://thediplomat.com/2012/09/is-Chinas-global-times-misunderstood/
65 Christina Larson, “China’s Fox News, Meet Global Times, the Angry Chinese Government Mouthpiece That
Makes Bill O’Reilly Seem Fair and Balanced,” Foreign Policy, October 31, 2011,
were China-related coverage), more than any other news organization.66

Its English-language China blog, Sinosphere, was launched to engage foreign correspondents to bring readers into the debates and discussions in China. However, in 2012, Chinese government blocked all access to the Times’ websites, both in Chinese and English after it reported that China’s former Prime Minister Wen Jiabao’s relatives have a hidden asset that is worth $2.7 billion.67

Op-ed contributor Stephen Harner of Forbes calls the Times “a loyal retainer of President Obama” as it remains a “reliable organ for the American “internationalist” to “propound and build the China-as-aggressor myth”.68 “Doing its duty for the Establishment, and for Obama’s legacy, The New York Times is propagating a “China threat” myth and is biased, unfair, untrue, and, in the end, dangerous for the United States,” Harner says.

3.2 Methodology

Newspaper stories usually provide a variety of sources of information to tell readers what is happening around the world. The way the information is transferred to the readers is “framed” to shape mass opinion. Framing is to “select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described,”69 according to Robert Entman. Therefore, framing affects the way news is presented to its readers. Through analyzing these framings, it highlights how news coverage can influence readers’ perception.

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This chapter will, based on framing analysis of the media coverage on Philippine typhoon Haiyan between GT and NYT from November 9 to 26, 2013, look at three framings from a different perspective. It will discuss what topics are being covered and what topics are being ignored, what message they try to send.

Results from the archives shows that during that period of time the GT had 17 articles related to the typhoon Haiyan including news report, op-ed and editorial. While the New York Times had 10 articles related to China’s disaster relief in Philippine, 5 of them were written on Sinosphere, the China blog of The New York Times. The framings between these two media will be analyzed by the choice of some keywords, key phrases that reinforce a particular perception of the reality of China’s perception of humanitarian action.

3.3 Framing analysis

The literature review provides evidence that China’s perception on humanitarian assistance is different from the West. Through the discussion below, this paper provides a better understanding in how GT and NYT framed the coverage of Typhoon and the motive behind the framings.

3.3.1. Framing one: no comparison/ highlight contrast

On November 11, Chinese government promised $100,000 in aid to the Philippines, along with another $100,000 through the Chinese Red Cross. On the same day, the US government promised $20 million in aid, followed by the Japanese government that offered $10 millions.

The amount of Chinese aid compared to other countries and organizations made international headlines. It was a “relatively modest aid” as the NYT called it, comparing to its $1 million donation to the Philippines after a storm in 2011, before territorial disputes in the South China Sea that soured the relationship. On November 14, after criticism from many Western media, China beefed up its contribution to $1.6 million. On the same day, The Sinosphere blog listed top givers to the Philippines and China. The comparison can be seen as part of a public relation campaign that

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70 Jane Perlez, op. cité
highlights the contrast between “modest” China and “generous” America and its allies Japan. In an op-ed piece of NYT, Carol Giacomo, a former diplomatic correspondent for Reuters in Washington, compared the US and China on Philippines Relief, saying the additional $1.6 million is still “pretty meager”, implying that the super economic power could give more.

On the contrary, GT tries to send out the message saying it is not the donation amount that matters. In an op-ed piece on GT, Gang Ding, Chief Journalist of Asia-Pacific Branch of International Department of People's Daily argued that aiding the Philippines is not a math test that makes the ends meet, it is a humanitarian emotional math: “If we have to calculate humanitarian action, then how the world should perceive us?” In an op-ed article on GT, scholar Liu Yang argued that China does not deserve these moral criticisms as its own people were also suffering from the Typhoon. “China deserves compliments for helping the Philippines people regardless of its government’s aggressive move in the South China Sea,” Liu wrote. These comments gave a guideline to readers about humanitarianism in Chinese language. As discussed in the literature review, the idea of humanity in Chinese was built on goodwill and moral conduct, not the amount of donation. Moreover, the Chinese understanding of responsibility state is to put its own people in the first place. The motive behind this is to guarantee a harmonious society.

The comparison seems to bother China. On November 18, China eventually offered to send its hospital ship, the Peace Ark, to the Philippines. The reason of this late offer is probably because it worried the Western media might compare its 300-beds ship with American’s aircraft carrier George Washington, and moreover, cause another round of sensational report of its military expansion.

GT’s editorial sent a message to the government that it should leave these comparisons behind and move forward: “China used to care too much about its face

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because it was lack of confidence. As we grow stronger from now on, we won’t care if our help is rejected or how others see us.” To make it sounds more credible, it was published on the front page of the GT on November 19, that “the Philippines thanks China for its donation”, in which it quoted the Philippines TV gmanetwork saying they appreciate and understand China’s initial donation. Furthermore, they interviewed Tuo Song, professor of political science at the University of the Philippines, saying the affected population was expecting medical aids from China, yet its government did not seem interested in Chinese offer. When it comes to international humanitarian assistance, China is lack of self-confidence as a new player. As the state-owned newspaper, GT tried to boost the government’s confidence through defending the government and building a positive image.

In sum, the West often compares the amount of donation rather than the use of the donation. And from the Western point of view, as the world’s second largest economy, it should make bigger contribution; however, for Chinese, it is the goodwill that behind the donation that matters. From China’s point of view, China’s first responsibility is its internal responsibilities. The motivations behind this is, first, to guarantee a stable and harmonious society as the Communist Party has been sensitive to the Chinese people’s reaction to the way it responses to emergencies. And second, it is also sensitive to the West. As a newcomer, China is not confident enough to be compared with leading players such as the US. Comparison or criticism from the West makes China lose its face. Thus, it is predictable that China’s humanitarian action would continue to follow its foreign policy—“keep a low profile, do something” in the coming years.

3.3.2. Framing two: responsible state / emotional state

When asked if China’s “modest” donation was scaled to the sour relation with Philippines due to the disputed South China Sea, Qin Gang, spokesman of China’s

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Foreign Ministry, argued that the Chinese people had also suffered from the Typhoon when it hit China’s southern province and killed at least eight people. Qin’s remark matched with China’s concept of how to be a responsible state: China’s first responsibility is to take care of its own people because it thinks it has not enough capacity to take care of both Chinese people and the affected population at the same time.

The government’s donation led to public debate on whether or not to aid unfriendly countries like the Philippines. According to an online survey conducted by GT on November 14, 91.8 percent of 5,000 responses said China should not aid the Philippines.

GT frames China as a responsible power, which reflects Beijing’s desire to be recognized as a responsible stakeholder of the international system. In response to the survey, GT’s editorial said those online outcries about Chinese decision to offer the Philippines do not represent China’s mainstream attitude which it said support aiding the Philippines regardless of its relationship with China, and called for the authorities to “lead society to perceive foreign aid more rationally...China, as a responsible power, should participate in relief operations to assist a disaster-stricken neighboring country, no matter whether it's friendly or not,” the editorial said. As a strong pro-government newspaper, this could be seen as an advisor for the government rather than criticism. In an op-ed piece, Ding Gang explained that the reason behind the negative results of the survey was because Chinese people could not feel their pain. November 9, 2013, the day after Typhoon hit the Philippines, was a big day for China as it ticked off the third plenary session of the 18th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China when Chinese leaders and the top legislature gathered in Beijing to discuss and approve big policy decisions. The meeting made headlines on the front pages of all the Chinese newspapers. The typhoon did not make it to the front page of the GT until

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78 Editorial, “Islands Spat Shouldn’t Block Typhoon Aid,” *Global Times*, November 12, 2013, [http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/824153.shtml](http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/824153.shtml).
November 15 when they dispatched two journalists reporting from the field. Before that, only photos of destructed houses were published on the front page. “The shortage of media reports from the field at the beginning caused psychological distance,” Ding said. In addition, Ding disagreed with some argument, saying China’s “love” to the Philippines is never “unconditional”. He said this “conditional love” reflects the misunderstanding of humanitarian action, which should be “unconditional”.79

In addition, on November 21, GT reported on its front page that China’s Peace Ark was sent to the Philippines. The ship is described as a “calling card for China”, as Rear-Admiral ShenHao, Commander of Shanghai Naval Base, told the media, “This mission displays our character as a great nation.”80 The front page story quoted a comment from Moscow Komsomolets newspaper saying “China’s increasing aid to the Philippines has proven that China is a responsible state, unlike the US and some other Western countries who aid the Philippines for geopolitical reason”. It is not surprising that the positive comments GT selected were from the country’s great power partner Russia who is teaming up with China to erode American dominance.

However, in the eyes of the NYT, China is an “emotional state” by analyzing its concerns behind the initial “modest” donation. It pointed out that territorial disputes and the online outcries are the factors that determined the initial size of aid, and assumed there was a debate at the mid-level of the government on how much to give: “The geopolitical tensions have been stoked by China's territorial claims in the South China Sea, and heightened by American efforts to reassert its influence in the region,” the news report said.81 It also quoted Michael Kulma, an expert on East Asia at the Asia Society in New York, saying “Chinese reluctance to give more aid could hurt its chances to make a favorable impression in the country.”82 On its China blog, it draws a conclusion that China’s initial “modest donation” have left an impression of being “emotional”. “China's first impulse when Typhoon Haiyan hit was to use its leverage

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79 Gang Ding, op. cité
80 Jane Perlez, op. cité
82 idem
to punish the Philippines.” The NYT quoted Paul Haenle, director of the Carnegie-Tsinghua Center for Global Policy in Beijing, “The message was: 'The Philippines, you are in the penalty box.'”

In addition, Austin Ramzy, NYT’s reporter in Hong Kong compared The Philippines typhoon and the 2008 Sichuan earthquake he covered in China. In terms of press freedom to cover the disaster, China blocked journalists from entering the disaster zones. And public discussion about corruption and shoddy building practices led to the collapse of schools that killed many students were not allowed in China. While in the Philippines, political squabbling was allowed. And in terms of post-disaster relief, Ramzy wrote he was astonished by the pace of reconstruction in China just six months after the earthquake. While in the Philippines, people were complaining about the slow disaster responses. “The questions of the past, of what went wrong and why, were buried by an all-consuming drive to grow, rebuild and move forward.”

Ramzy’s comparison pointed out the advantage and disadvantage of having the Communist Party as the main player in humanitarian settings. It can fasten decision-making and reconstruction process; it can also hamper the development by blocking some information that is viewed as harmful to the Party’s reputation.

To sum up, China cares about its international images. The Chinese leaders try to establish China’s international image as a responsible stakeholder has limited success. The limited press freedom, poor record of human right, as well as its limited access to aid information, have left a negative impression in international partners and instilled mistrust. Even though what China’s “emotional” behavior has its own geopolitical reasons, it wants to defend its own interest like every other state. The NYT’s framing has demonstrated that China, as a new player and a Communist country, has a lack of credibility in Western-centric model of humanitarian assistance. To build credibility, efforts on greater aid transparency are needed to show how the money is used.

83 Jane Perlez, op. cité
3.3.3 Framing three: Political show/politicization of aid

GT frames the American’s disaster relief in Philippines as a “political show”. Since November 15, GT’s news report from the field had been mainly focused on criticism against politicizing humanitarian aid: humanitarian efforts have been used as a reminder for regional countries that their partnerships with the US extend beyond security and trade. For example, on the front page of November 15, it titled “American and Japanese’s aid to the Philippines are accused politicized.” The reports framed the aid as a “show” for America and its allies Japan to show off their soft power. The sources, however, are anonymous “ordinary people” and a waiter in the Philippines. “What least thing that the Philippines need is political show,” a waiter in Manila was quoted. However, those quotes from ordinary people do not look professional. That report was followed by another story titled “GT reporters witnessed American’s disaster relief”, in which GT’s reporters said they felt like it was more like a “military drill” due to the size of their team and their powerful equipment. The report also quoted some affected population, screaming they could not see or feel the Americans. On the contrary, the next day on GT’s front page, it said “Philippines thanks China for its donation.” Those opinionated reports from the field outweigh factual reporting and probably used as a source to mobilize nationalist sentiments. As for the NYT, it frames the disaster relief as a “showcase for the soft-power contest in Asia”. It said China prefers to rush to help its close friends such as Pakistan, not its enemy Philippines. And for the US, when the typhoon hit, “the Pentagon did not waste much time offering a robust show of assistance”. Even though GT and NYT are criticizing each country, the fact is, as instrument of foreign policy, humanitarian aid from China and US are both “emotional” and “political”. Thus their criticism

85Carol Giacomo, op. cité
89Andrew Jacobs,op. cité
90idem
could also apply to their own country.

To sum, both GT and NYT frame the disaster relief as an opportunity to make a commitment and increase influence in the Philippines, an important strategic partner. China’s state humanitarianism rest on three legacies: the ideal of well-ordered state; anti-Western sentiment; and human-oriented approach. Therefore it is not surprising that it does not go along with the humanitarian principles such as neutrality and impartiality. Those principles are used by NGOs, not the state. Still, it seems contradictory that GT frames the American relief as a “political show”, yet avoided China’s political concerns behind its aid. However, it does not mean China’s humanitarian action is not possible because they do not respect these principles; only it contributes to create a variety of standards for performance.

3.4 Conclusion of discussion

This comparison of media coverage shows three significant findings. First of all, Western media tend to compare the amount of donation, which seems to upset China because as a new player in the humanitarian field, China will follow its foreign policy to stay low profile. Second, Chinese leaders want to establish an international image of being a “responsible power” through active participation in humanitarian activities, however, due to its human right record and non-transparent behaviors, the West perceives it as an “emotional” power. It also demonstrated China does not have much credibility in the Western-centric humanitarian system. Third, China’s state humanitarianism legacies do not match with humanitarian principles such as neutrality and impartiality, but it provides aid with no political strings attached.

4. Conclusion

The study was set out to explore China’s perception on humanitarian action and identify the traditions, principles and forms which are different from the West. The study also has identified China’s concerns and dilemmas in the field of humanitarian assistance and the reasons behind them.

The study of China’s perception is important for three reasons. First, China’s

increasing engagement in humanitarian action has generated international debates about its motivation and influence. Second, newcomers such as China have brought changes and challenges to the Western-dominated aid system. And because of their different ways of thinking and acting, they provide a new perspective to look at humanitarian action. Third, evidences have shown there is a lack of understanding of China’s principles and concerns, which might hinder constructive engagement with China in the near future.

The study sought to answer three questions: first, what are the key concepts underpinning China’s humanitarian assistance? And how are those concepts understood differently by Chinese people and has evolved in the changing domestic and international environment? The main concepts are as follows: humanitarianism, “rendaozhuyi yuanzhu”, which is often used of humanitarian assistance abroad; when it comes to domestic disaster relief, Chinese use the term “jiuzai”, which also means post-disaster development; The government plays a main role in both international context and domestic context. And the Communist Party has been sensitive to its people’s dissatisfaction with the government’s capability in disaster management.92 Last but not the least, responsible power, “daguo zeren”, is a term with four levels of setting. China puts the domestic responsibility first, external responsibility second, which explains why China shows “indifferent” to some international crisis when it has to handle a domestic crisis at the same time. In the case study, as the aid is government organized, it does not follow the humanitarian principles such as neutrality and impartiality. The government prioritized its own people, a sense of responsibility embedded in ancient Chinese society.

Second, what are China’s main concerns in terms of humanitarian action highlighted in the media discourse? China’s main concern is its international image. The negative comments and news report from the international community about China’s non-interference policy and its “modest” donation make China lose its face, and therefore put China under pressure to explain its motivations. And due to the complexity of its political concerns, it finds it difficult to explain itself to its people.

92 Andrea Binder and Björn Conrad, op. cit, p12
worries that too much explanation might cause extra misconceptions. Moreover, China does not feel comfortable being compared with the West. Even though its influence in humanitarian field is getting bigger, yet it does not seem confident enough to ignore how the West sees it. Therefore, it is safe to predict that China’s aid policy should still follow its foreign policy of “taoguang yanghui, yousuo zuowei”, keep a low profile, do something. As China has become the second largest economy, there has been a growing domestic demand to call for the government to be high profile. For example, in the case study, GT advised the government to be more proactive to participate in humanitarian assistance.

Third, is it possible to assess if China is a norm-taker or norm-maker? China’s increasing engagement in the humanitarian assistance has offered the West the opportunity to rethink its approach and how to better integrate China into the system. However, from China’s perspective, they are not in a position to change the Western-dominated system; what China is looking for is to form a new system with consensus with all the players. It believes it would be fair to set up new rules that are agreed by all the parties. A recent example is the BRICS countries launched its New Development Bank in Shanghai to challenge the World Bank.

At present, China is still in the process of defining its role and influence, its responsibilities and duties. Because China does not want to be seen as in the same box with the West, it is unlike to alliance between the West and China on humanitarian assistance. Nevertheless, China has shown flexibility when it comes to military intervention approved both by the sovereign state and the UN Security Council. Moreover, the comparison of media coverage of the Philippines typhoon Haiyan has shown a level of distrust between China and the Western actors. China’s assistance is mainly conducted on a state-to-state basis. The recent draft of “Foreign NGOs Management Law” is another sign to show Beijing’s skeptical attitude towards foreign NGOs. Therefore, China is unlikely to give up its nonalignment stance to form alliance with the West in the near future.

However, due to the limited research on China’s perception on humanitarian assistance in both China and the West and Chinese government’s reluctance to explain
its concerns, there is a need for more studies on the perception issues. Moreover, the paper has offered various opinions and studies conducted in the academic field, voices of practitioners from the field, Chinese NGOs or independent parties might offer new perspectives. In addition, the majority of the researches have been focused on China’s aid in Africa; there is a need for more case studies in Asia. At last, it is also worth to examine the topic from the beneficiaries’ point of view, to see how much China matters to them, how they see the Chinese way of aid differently from the West, and what they expect from China.
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