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Exploring the links between Chinese foreign policy and humanitarian action

Multiple interests, processes and actors

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About the author

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Executive summary

This paper outlines key elements of Chinese foreign policy and its sources; the evolution of China's humanitarian assistance; current funding volumes and flows; and decision-making and implementation structures. China's engagement in humanitarian aid derives from a very complex array of national interests and processes, paths and actors in foreign policy-making. China's emergence as a global player often brings with it accusations that its humanitarian action will be used as a disguise, or a means, to expand its power. As this paper demonstrates, such accusations are overly simplistic.

Multiple interests

China's humanitarian assistance relates to three kinds of national interest: diplomatic interests, international reputation and indirect economic and commercial interests. Of these, the most important in informing China's humanitarian action is its diplomatic interest in countries in the Global South. However, China's humanitarian assistance can also be driven by different sets of national interest on different occasions, rather than a particular set of criteria or policy framework. This makes the provision of assistance ad hoc rather than systematic.

Multiple processes

China draws on multiple and sometimes contradictory processes as it seeks to integrate into the norms and institutions of the international humanitarian system. China is largely a 'norm taker' in the international humanitarian system as far as aid to natural disasters is concerned. In the context of complex emergencies, however, the country remains uneasy about the norms of the current international humanitarian system, and sometimes shows signs of becoming a 'norm modifier', rather than necessarily framing its humanitarian policies in line with the traditional principles of the international humanitarian system. In particular, it is a strong proponent of the role of host governments in the provision of humanitarian assistance, and of the importance of development assistance in reducing poverty and humanitarian need. China is also seeking

a more proactive role in conflict-affected countries such as Myanmar, Afghanistan and South Sudan.

Multiple actors

While China's official humanitarian response remains centralised and coordinated, the actors involved in this area have multiplied, with an increasing number of companies and civil society entities either directly or indirectly contributing to humanitarian assistance. While these actors have symbiotic relations with the Chinese state, each has different interests, knowledge and expertise in conflict- and disaster-affected countries. The involvement of an increasingly broad range of players in humanitarian action will become increasingly important in the future, because humanitarian action, including short-term relief operations as well as longer-term programmes to enhance resilience, will increasingly depend on a wide range of knowledge and expertise.

Obstacles and opportunities

How does the link between the sources of foreign policy and humanitarian action give rise to obstacles or opportunities to meeting needs on the ground? This report identifies three findings.

- China sees increasing the quantity and quality of its assistance, where appropriate, as furthering its national interests. But giving priority to improving diplomatic relations through the provision of humanitarian aid can lead to preferential treatment for some recipients over others; aid may not be commensurate with actual needs on the ground, and opportunities to assist in other humanitarian crises may be missed.
- China's integration into the international humanitarian system, particularly in the context of natural disasters, is welcome news to people in need as well as to more 'traditional' donors in the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) because integration can facilitate better coordination with other international humanitarian actors. China's proactive behaviour in conflict mediation is also welcome. But the current lack of collaboration

between DAC donors and China could lead to a disproportionate focus on a small number of countries with which China happens to want to improve bilateral relations; to uncoordinated and wasted efforts within a particular area of humanitarian crisis; and to increased mistrust between DAC donors and China.

- The pluralisation of actors involved in humanitarian action represents an enormous opportunity, as more civil society actors and commercial companies participate in operations with more resources, local knowledge and individual contacts. However, the private sector can be insensitive to the impact of its activities on conflict, and new civil society actors may lack knowledge and experience of delivering humanitarian assistance in complex emergencies. It is imperative that state and non-state actors involved in Chinese humanitarian assistance adopt a conflict-sensitive approach to the provision of humanitarian aid, and develop their knowledge of the challenges of delivering humanitarian assistance in complex emergencies.

Policy recommendations to the Chinese humanitarian community and DAC donors

The paper makes the following recommendations to the Chinese humanitarian community and DAC donors:

- Cooperate in sharing knowledge and information about how to create a policy framework or criteria for Chinese humanitarian action, in a way that addresses global humanitarian trends and needs, not just the humanitarian needs of the countries with which China seeks to improve diplomatic relations.
- Recognise diversity in humanitarian assistance without necessarily privileging established definitions of what constitutes legitimate humanitarian action, and enhance dialogue on different ways of approaching complex emergencies, in order to address China's unease about humanitarian assistance to such crises.
- Encourage the Chinese government to contribute more to UN agencies, funds and programmes that deal with humanitarian crises, including the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the World Food Programme (WFP), the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF), the Department of Political Affairs (UNDPA) and the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) – in both natural disasters and complex emergencies.
- Explore ways in which China can contribute to local resilience, not necessarily only through the provision of humanitarian aid but also through development assistance, which accounts for the majority of China's aid programmes.
- Create opportunities for the Chinese humanitarian community and DAC donors to exchange perspectives and experiences and learn from each others' approaches to humanitarian issues.
- Support partnerships that enable international learning, training and capacity-building in China.
- Providing funding through UNHCR, WFP, UNICEF or the CERF, as well as, among others, with the ICRC and the other components of the Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement, both in the context of natural disasters and complex emergencies, could constitute a significant contribution to the global humanitarian effort.

1 Introduction

China's growing power has prompted an important debate about the essence of its foreign policy interests. Realists often claim that these interests lie in the expansion of China's material power in pursuit of global or regional hegemony (Mearsheimer, 2010). Others agree that the country's long-term ambition is to become a world power, but argue that the most important driver of Chinese policy is to maintain, and if possible enhance, the legitimacy of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) (Yang and Zhao, 2014). Still others contend that China seeks a peaceful international environment in which to continue its economic development, which is the essence of the country's national interest (Deng, 2008). There are, in short, many views about where China's foreign policy interests lie.

Views about the relationship between Chinese foreign policy and humanitarian action are similarly diverse. Is humanitarian action simply a means to enhance material power and influence in crisis-affected regions, in competition with Western states and other emerging powers? Or is China's humanitarian action designed to enhance its prestige and image in the world? The humanitarian community now recognises and acknowledges the importance of diversity in the international humanitarian system, but is still grappling with how to deal with new actors that do not necessarily support the humanitarian norms and rules generally accepted by the existing members of the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). China is one such new actor. In order to identify ways in which China and 'traditional' humanitarian actors can work together more effectively and efficiently, it is important to ask the central question of this paper: how does China's foreign policy shape its engagement in humanitarian action?

This paper is one of three case studies looking into the links between a state's foreign policy and humanitarian action. By examining the cases of China, Saudi Arabia and the UK (El Taraboulsi-McCarthy, 2017; Drummond et al., 2017), this work explores the increasingly complex relationship between foreign policy and state humanitarian action.

1.1 The state of the art: studies of China's humanitarian action

Studies of China's foreign aid (*duiwai yuanzhu*) pay surprisingly scant attention to humanitarian assistance, in the specific sense of responses to emergencies. The Chinese government, as do scholarly analyses, includes provision of humanitarian aid within the overall foreign aid programme. This is, in part, due to the fact that the amount of money China spends on what it calls humanitarian assistance (*rendao yuanzhu* or *rendao zhuyi yuanzhu*) is very small, totalling only 1.7% of its overall foreign aid budget (UNDP, 2015). However, humanitarian assistance is different in scope and nature, has different foreign policy implications, is based on a different set of national interests and different decision-making processes and involves different actors.

Within the small body of literature on China's humanitarian action, attention has been paid mainly to the historical roots of Chinese humanitarianism (Hirono, 2013a; Krebs, 2014), to political culture and tradition (Hirono, 2012) and to the potential of future cooperation between China and 'traditional' donors (Binder and Conrad, 2009). However, there has been little work on the mechanisms of Chinese humanitarian action, including resource flows (bilateral and multilateral channels and financial and non-financial flows), structures and architectures and policy-making processes. This limits understanding of how China makes aid decisions, and how these decisions are linked to its foreign policy.

1.2 Methodology and data collection

In order to examine the links between foreign policy and humanitarian action, this paper uses as its conceptual framework four sources of Chinese foreign policy formation: national interests, processes of international integration, the influence of various domestic actors and humanitarian values. Through this, the paper examines a specific set of empirical questions:

- How has Chinese humanitarian assistance evolved?
- What and how much humanitarian aid has China provided, where and why?
- What are the major institutions and actors involved in the provision of humanitarian aid?

A range of sources were consulted, including official documents, press statements and statements at the UN General Assembly and Security Council and in other fora, including the High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness. Databases consulted included the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA)'s Financial Tracking Service (FTS), Proquest, China Knowledge Resource Integrated Database (CNKI), *Renmin Ribao (People's Daily)* archives and Chinese government websites. The author also conducted interviews with policy-makers, academics and civil society actors in Beijing in June and July 2016 and January 2017. Contacting Chinese policy-makers is always a challenge because of the permission process within the government related to meeting foreign researchers, and because the officials who work on foreign aid are genuinely extremely busy. The central agency dealing with foreign aid, the Department of Foreign Aid in the Ministry of Commerce (MOFCOM), has about 70 staff dealing with foreign aid programmes covering more than 120 countries.¹ Another challenge – and one which China specialists always struggle with – is that views usually follow the official line, and rarely contradict or criticise government policies. Policies on humanitarian action are not as clear as in other areas, so fully understanding official views in and of themselves can be difficult. Interviews with officials were triangulated with another source as far as possible. Where appropriate, the author drew on past research on Chinese humanitarian assistance in Aceh in October 2009 and Nepal in January and March 2017.

1.3 Structure of the paper

The paper begins by outlining key elements of Chinese foreign policy and its sources (Chapter 2). This is followed by a discussion of the evolution of China's humanitarian assistance (Chapter 3), an overview of current funding volumes and flows (Chapter 4) and an analysis of structures for decision-making and implementation (Chapter 5). Chapter 6 concludes

1 Author's interview with a former Ministry of Foreign Affairs official, Beijing, 21 July 2016.

Box 1: What is humanitarian action?

Humanitarian action includes humanitarian assistance and other measures to mitigate suffering. According to the Good Humanitarian Donorship (GHD) initiative:²

Humanitarian action includes the protection of civilians and those no longer taking part in hostilities, and the provision of food, water and sanitation, shelter, health services and other items of assistance, undertaken for the benefit of affected people and to facilitate the return to normal lives and livelihoods (GHD, 2003).

The objectives of humanitarian action are 'to save lives, alleviate suffering and maintain human dignity during and in the aftermath of man-made crises and natural disasters' as well as 'to prevent and strengthen preparedness for the occurrence of such situations' (GHD, 2003). This definition and these objectives are very broad, and so open to interpretation. In particular, the second objective can mean that humanitarian action can encompass a wide range of activities including economic development and conflict mediation, which China is active in through its engagement in conflict- and disaster-affected regions.

There is debate about how the humanitarian community should deal with long-term needs. Traditionally, humanitarian assistance was rendered only at the time of an emergency, but the reality is that protracted crises make up the bulk of the humanitarian caseload. Some scholars recognise the importance of addressing long-term needs such as economic development and rehabilitation in tackling the root causes of humanitarian crises (Büthe, Major and Souza, 2012), while others have pointed to the danger of incorporating a longer-term development agenda into the scope of humanitarian aid if doing so expands the range of activities beyond emergency response (Barnett and Weiss, 2011: 12). Here, we take a broad view of humanitarian action as including both short- and longer-term contributions, reflecting the Chinese conception of humanitarian aid and the humanitarian consequences of Chinese actors' engagement in conflict- and disaster-affected regions.

2 The GHD initiative is 'an informal donor forum and network which facilitates collective advancement of GHD principles and good practices' (GHD, 2017a). As of October 2017, there were 42 members (GHD, 2017b).

the paper with a summary of key findings and recommendations regarding how China and DAC

members can work together to provide international humanitarian assistance more effectively and efficiently.

Box 2: What does ‘emergency humanitarian aid’ mean to the Chinese?

Officially, the Chinese government uses the term ‘emergency humanitarian aid’ (*jinji rendao yuanzhu*) to mean the short-term provision of food, goods, materials and personnel in times of emergency (Information Office, 2014). The reference is to emergencies outside China, not emergencies on its own territory. In Chinese political discourse and rhetoric, humanitarian aid and development assistance are linked, in that the latter is seen as leading to the creation of conditions of peace, and therefore helps to mitigate suffering (*ibid.*).

The Chinese government defines the rationale for and the goals of the provision of emergency humanitarian aid as follows: ‘Emergency humanitarian aid is provided when a country or region suffers a severe natural or humanitarian disaster. In such cases, China provides materials, or cash for emergency relief, or dispatches relief personnel of its own accord, or at the victim country’s request, so as to reduce losses of life and property in disaster-stricken areas, and to help the victim country tackle difficulties caused by the disaster’ (Information Office, 2011). Note that, since

China is not a signatory to the GHD (see Box 1), this paper does not assess its humanitarian action the GHD principles, to which it obviously does not subscribe.

In the early communist period (1949–76), ‘humanitarianism’ was regarded ‘as a tool of the bourgeoisie’ or as in the service of European and US ‘imperialists’ attempting to ‘cover up capitalism’s merciless exploitation and oppression ... and to deceive the proletariat and the working people’ (Hirono, 2013a: S208). Today, ‘humanitarianism’ is less politically loaded, but the communist legacy persists and the term is still not readily used, except to describe the short-term provision of food, goods, materials and personnel overseas. More commonly used terms include ‘emergency rescue’ (*yingji jiu yuan*), ‘emergency management’ (*yingji guanli*) and ‘disaster relief’ (*jiuzai*), all of which are used in international and domestic contexts. These terms – particularly emergency rescue and emergency management – cover not only post-disaster assistance but also industrial accidents, major traffic accidents and terrorist attacks.

2 The conceptual framework of Chinese foreign policy

Does China use humanitarian action merely as a foreign policy tool to expand its national interests? Despite the significance of this question, the literature does not pay much attention to the links between China's foreign policy and its engagement in humanitarian action. This paper, therefore, begins by describing some aspects of China's foreign policy, particularly as it relates to conflict- and disaster-affected regions in the Global South, from the Five Principles of Peaceful Co-Existence established in the 1950s to the 'Going Out' strategy officially advocated in 1997, 'Peaceful Development' in 2004 under Hu Jintao and the 'Belt and Road Initiative' under the current administration of Xi Jinping. Four major sources of foreign policy formulation are discussed, laying the foundation for the analysis of the links between foreign policy and humanitarian action that follows.

2.1 Key components of China's foreign policy

Before discussing the sources of China's foreign policy formation, it is important to trace what the Chinese government has said about its foreign policy and how it has developed. In the post-Cold War period, the government has focused on ensuring a peaceful international environment, allowing China to concentrate on economic development. Chinese foreign policy is subservient to domestic goals, the ultimate being maintaining, or if possible enhancing, the legitimacy of the CCP regime and the country's internal stability. However, while this ultimate goal has remained the same, over time the Chinese government has formulated various foreign policies appropriate to the historical and regional context.

This section is intended for readers who may not be very familiar with Chinese diplomacy. As such, it describes some of the 'must-know' foreign policies formulated by the Chinese government, and is limited to only those policies mentioned in later sections of the report. Here, we concentrate on how the Chinese government explains these policies, providing the

Box 3: What is 'China'?

This report uses the term 'China' to describe the Chinese government. However, it is important to bear in mind that 'China' is not a monolithic entity – 'China Inc.' – or that all foreign policy decisions are made in a top-down manner. While the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) retains ultimate power, China's foreign policy formation and implementation involve not only government agencies but also a wide range of other actors, including businesses across a range of sectors, academic institutions and various civil society actors, many of which house quasi-governmental officials (Jakobson and Knox, 2010; Gill and Reilly, 2007). These actors' policies and interests are rarely coordinated, and therefore could appear, or even be, contradictory, and even antithetical to China's foreign policy interests.

context in which China's humanitarian action has developed. Analysing these foreign policies in relation to China's overall international behaviour is beyond the scope of this paper, but later sections will explore how the government's description of its foreign policies relates to, or contradicts, the practices and realities of China's humanitarian assistance.

2.1.1 The Five Principles of Peaceful Co-Existence (*Heping gongchu wuxiang yuanze*)

China's foreign policy is underpinned by the Five Principles of Peaceful Co-Existence, signed by Premier Zhou Enlai and Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru in 1954, and endorsed at the Bandung Conference the following year. The Five Principles are: mutual respect for each other's territorial integrity and sovereignty; mutual non-aggression; mutual non-interference in each other's internal affairs; equality and mutual benefit; and peaceful coexistence. The importance of 'non-interference' and the 'equality'

of signatory states is particularly relevant to China's humanitarian action, as these principles form the foundation on which China provides humanitarian assistance to countries in the Global South.

2.1.2 Peripheral Diplomacy (*zhoubian waijiao*)

One of China's key foreign policy priorities since the 1990s has been to improve relations with neighbouring countries (or countries peripheral to China) in line with the Five Principles of Peaceful Co-Existence. This is not necessarily a new policy: even during the Mao period (1949–76) China was mindful of its relations with its neighbours. In the early 1990s, Peripheral Diplomacy was directed towards advancing China's programme of internal modernisation, and to that end resolving border disputes and encouraging regional cooperation, including with South-East Asia and the Central Asian states (Wang, 2014: 83). Today, Xi Jinping emphasises the importance of Peripheral Diplomacy as the second tier of China's overall diplomatic arrangements: 'Great powers as the keys; periphery takes the first priority; developing countries as bases; and multilateral [institutions] as an important stage'. The tenets of Peripheral Diplomacy are '*mulin, anlin, fulin*' ('be friendly, make them feel secure and help make them rich') (Xinhua, 2013). China's humanitarian action in neighbouring countries such as Myanmar and the Philippines is part of its Peripheral Diplomacy.

2.1.3 Responsible State (*fuzeren guojia*)

The term 'responsible state' has been a prominent feature of Chinese foreign policy discourse and analysis, often in relation to participation in multilateral institutions and/or contribution to the international public good. The international community expects China to be a more 'responsible' stakeholder in a variety of global issues (Zoellick, 2006). In turn, China's humanitarian assistance is often described as one example of the country acting as a responsible state.³

China's aim to act as a 'responsible state' has been supported by new roles for the Chinese military under the banner of its 'New Historic Mission' announced in 2004. One of the aims involves 'playing an important role in safeguarding world peace and promoting common

development' (Mulvenon, 2009: 2), including through participation in UN peacekeeping operations, providing humanitarian assistance and disaster relief and organising non-combatant evacuations. The Chinese military has improved its operational capability to work overseas, which has also increased the effectiveness of China's humanitarian assistance given that the military is a key actor in the delivery of domestic and international humanitarian assistance and disaster relief.

2.1.4 The Going Out strategy (*zouchuqu zhanlue*)

President Jiang Zemin formally promulgated the 'Going Out' strategy in 1997. Based on this strategy, Jiang emphasised the need, not only to continue 'bringing in' foreign investment, but also encouraging Chinese companies to 'go out' into the world. The result has been a marked increase in Chinese foreign direct investment (FDI). In non-financial sectors, FDI stood at just over \$118 billion in 2015, 17 times higher than 2005's figure of just under \$7bn (Shangwubu, 2006; Shangwubu Duiwai Touzi He Jingji Hezuosi, 2015a). Chinese overseas companies won new project contracts worth \$154bn, compared to \$22bn in 2005 (Shangwubu Duiwai Touzi He Jingji Hezuosi, 2006; Shangwubu Duiwai Touzi He Jingji Hezuosi, 2015b). One official figure puts the number of Chinese nationals working overseas at 512,000 (Shen, 2014). The 'Going Out' strategy has also paved the way for Chinese commercial engagement in the Global South, including in conflict- and disaster-affected regions.

2.1.5 Peaceful Development (*hepin fazhan*)

Another key issue that China has sought to address has been the perception in the outside world that it poses a threat to the established international order. Against this background, Hu Jintao, China's president between 2002 and 2012, called for a foreign policy strategy of 'Peaceful Development' in 2004. In 2009, a White Paper referred to Peaceful Development as 'a strategic choice' that aims 'to create a peaceful and stable international environment for [China's] development' (Information Office, 2011). The White Paper also stated that 'China strives to make due contribution to world peace and development. It never engages in aggression or expansion, never seeks hegemony, and remains a staunch force for upholding regional and world peace and stability' (Information Office, 2009). More recently, China's actions in the South and East China Sea and the development of its blue water navy have raised concerns about the country's intentions. However, it would be inaccurate to take the view that China's international

3 The definition of responsibility varies depending on the author. Shirk (2007) states that there is a Chinese 'recipe', which the Chinese government uses to claim that it is a responsible state. The ingredients are 'accommodating neighbors', 'multilateralism' and 'friendship through economic ties'.

activities are necessarily assertive: China's priority is still the maintenance of a communist regime underpinned by a successful economy. As such, Chinese foreign policy continues to focus on ensuring a peaceful international environment to allow the country to concentrate on economic growth.

2.1.6 The Belt and Road Initiative (*yidai yilu*)

The 'Belt and Road Initiative' (BRI) consists of the Silk Road Economic Belt and the Twenty-first Century Maritime Silk Road, both of which are transcontinental passages connecting Asia, Europe and Africa. Under the Initiative, China is committed to investing in infrastructure projects along these passages, and increasing 'connectivity' among the states within the BRI area and with China's western regions. In this context, it would not be surprising if China offered more humanitarian assistance to countries within the BRI area, to protect Chinese investment and to show goodwill. The impact of the BRI is already being felt within China's humanitarian sector. For example, the Chinese Red Cross is seeking to establish stronger people-to-people ties between China and other countries in the BRI area, outside of government-to-government aid channels (Zhongguo Hongshizi Bao, 2015).

2.2 Four sources of China's foreign policy

To examine the links between the sources of Chinese foreign policy and Chinese humanitarian action in more depth, this paper sketches out a conceptual framework based on four sources of foreign policy: national interests, international integration, domestic influences and humanitarian values.

2.2.1 National interests

National interests are one of the most important sources of any country's foreign policy. The literature suggests that there are five kinds of national interest that relate to foreign policy formation in China.

1. To protect 'core interests' (*hexin liyi*) as defined by the Chinese government. This includes the protection of 'state sovereignty, national security, territorial integrity and national reunification, China's political system established by the Constitution and overall social stability, and basic safeguards for ensuring sustainable economic and social development' (Information Office, 2011).

2. To become a hegemonic power in the Asia-Pacific region, if not on the world stage. Although the Chinese government claims that its concern is for peaceful development, and that China is not seeking to expand its power in order to dominate the region or the world, there are concerns that China and the US are each offering hegemonic leadership, inevitably leading to competition between the two over influence on other states.
3. To protect and expand the economic and commercial interests on which the legitimacy of the communist regime rests.
4. To display international prestige and burnish China's reputation by presenting itself as a responsible power.
5. To put into practice diplomatic rhetoric, including around 'South-South Cooperation' and Peripheral Diplomacy. These are key foreign policy frameworks in multilateral institutions where China takes a leadership role, such as the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO).

The national interests of a globalised China are so multifaceted that some are in contradiction. For example, if China gives priority to protecting economic interests in what others might call 'rogue states' such as Sudan (Interest 3), then this might contradict China's aim of enhancing its international reputation as a responsible power (Interest 4). China's humanitarian assistance to Haiti in the aftermath of the earthquake there in 2010 helped to promote South-South cooperation and showcase China as a responsible power (Interests 4 and 5), but it also meant that China had to soften its One China Policy because Haiti recognises Taiwan's sovereignty (Interest 1). In essence, like other states China cannot afford to focus on just one national interest. The country needs to address multiple and sometimes contradictory interests simultaneously.

2.2.2 International integration

China's foreign policy is also shaped by how the country positions itself vis-à-vis international norms and institutions created by the West, including the international humanitarian system. While multilateralism is one of China's foreign policy pillars, its participation in multilateral institutions and processes varies depending on the issue at stake – of particular importance to this paper is whether multilateral institutions are promoting cooperation concerning technical aspects of natural disaster response, for instance in search and rescue, or are concerned with the political

or social aspects of assistance. As far as the former is concerned, it is useful to refer to Johnston's (2008) discussion of the steps by which countries 'socialise' into international norms and institutions: through mimicry, social influence and persuasion:

Mimicking explains pro-group behaviour as a function of borrowing the language, habits and ways of acting as a safe, first reaction to a novel environment ... Social influence explains pro-group behaviour as a function of an actor's sensitivity to status markers bestowed by a social group ... Persuasion explains pro-group behaviour as an effect of the internationalization of fundamentally new causal understandings of an actor's environment, such that these new understandings are considered normal, given, and normatively correct (Johnston, 2008: xxv–xxvi).

In areas such as disaster relief China has followed the path of socialisation as Johnston describes, from mimicry to gradual integration into international systems, and as such can be seen as a 'norm taker'. However, where the issue is to do with the political or social aspects of assistance, including responses to complex emergencies, China does not accept several of the norms or policies advocated by the West – including the Responsibility to Protect (in its 2001 version), or UN Security Council draft resolutions on Syria. Here, China seeks to modify the ways in which the West attempts to resolve issues such as these. It is, in other words, a 'norm modifier'. This dual trajectory in China's foreign aid stance is discussed further in Chapter 3.

2.2.3 Domestic influences

Foreign policy is also developed under the pressure of a range of domestic actors and influences, including:

the interplay within and between not only the Communist Party of China (CPC), the Chinese Government and the People's Liberation Army (PLA) but also new foreign policy actors on the margins of the traditional power structure. These new actors include resource companies, financial institutions, local governments, research organizations, the media and netizens (Jakobson and Knox, 2010: vi).

An increasing number of foreign policy actors can lead to 'an increasing set of tensions and contradictions' between the interests and aims of government actors in Beijing and those of companies and businesses

(Gill and Reilly, 2007: 38–39). China's humanitarian action involves a variety of governmental and non-governmental actors, as detailed in Chapter 5. They have their own remits, which may or may not address China's foreign policy interests. The increasing number of Chinese non-governmental humanitarian actors means that China's humanitarian action is not necessarily foreign policy-driven, but its foreign policy itself may need to adjust to address the reality of Chinese humanitarian action.

2.2.4 Humanitarian values

Realists argue that all states share the same ultimate foreign policy aim of expanding their national interests (Morgenthau, 1948). This, however, assumes that foreign policy formulation takes place only at the state level. In fact, it can take place at 'three levels of analysis': systemic, state and individual (Waltz, 1959). Humanitarian actors are not just organisations with a particular set of interests: at the individual level, they also represent human beings with altruistic human motives and a 'concern [for] the protection of those in immediate peril and the prevention of unnecessary suffering' (Barnett, 2009: 1). For individuals actively engaged in China's humanitarian assistance, as in other countries there is empathy at a personal level towards people affected by natural disasters. Although they work as representatives of their state, they assert the humanitarian imperative, as well as the importance of assistance as a token of China's position as a 'responsible state'.⁴

While not commonly included as one of the conceptual frames to analyse the formation of China's foreign policy, discussing values opens up new opportunities to study and understand China's foreign policy-making in depth. However, this also raises an analytical challenge: how can one distinguish a particular foreign policy as deriving from a sense of humanitarian obligation from one that uses moral argument as an alibi for action that actually derives from other calculations? As far as China is concerned, a spirit of solidarity with disaster-prone countries in the Global South is significant. 'This spirit emanates not only from a shared vulnerability to natural disasters but also from a shared commitment to equality, sovereign integrity, and non-interference, all crucial elements of the worldview of many developing and non-Western societies' (O'Hagan and Hirono, 2014: 418).

4 Author interview with a Chinese government official, Beijing, June 2016.

2.3 Summary

China's foreign policy is shaped by four major drivers. The first is national interests, though these are so multifaceted that some are in contradiction with others. The second is the degree of China's integration into, or modification of, international norms and institutions. The third is the influence of domestic actors on foreign policy. Here, the growing pluralisation of foreign

policy-making will complicate Chinese humanitarian action. The fourth is humanitarian values. Using this conceptual framework, the following sections discuss how patterns of foreign policy behaviour are reflected in the way China's humanitarian action has evolved, and how decisions about humanitarian assistance are made and implemented. To set the scene, the next section offers an overview of the main developments in Chinese humanitarian action over the past half century.

3 The evolution of Chinese humanitarian action

How have the links between the sources of China's foreign policy and humanitarian aid evolved, and why have they done so in the way they have? This section examines the development of China's humanitarian action since the 1950s, exploring which of the four sources of China's foreign policy are relevant to the way in which the country's humanitarian action has developed over time.

3.1 Fluctuating interests in humanitarian assistance

Levels of interest in humanitarian action have varied over time, depending on the national interests defined by China's foreign policy – from spreading communist revolution to focusing on economic development and expanding activity beyond the country's borders.

China has delivered what is now called 'emergency humanitarian aid' since the 1950s, for example to North Korea and Vietnam. Until rapid economic development became China's ultimate aim, as emphasised by Deng Xiaoping's 'Opening Up' policy in 1978, the main objective of China's international humanitarian aid – as with its overall foreign assistance – was to support socialist states and the anti-colonial struggle. As Premier Zhou Enlai put it in 1964:

The point of departure of our foreign aid is: to assist our brotherly nations in realizing their socialist construction, strengthen the power of the overall socialist camp; to assist the non-independent countries in gaining independence; and to assist the newly-independent countries in achieving self-reliance, developing the national economy, consolidating their independence and strengthening the power of the various countries against imperialism according to the spirit of proletarian internationalism (Renminribao, 1964).⁵

During the 1980s and 1990s, China concentrated on domestic economic growth and deepening economic and diplomatic ties with the industrialised world. Large-scale humanitarian aid to North Korea, Vietnam and Albania ended (Li, 2012: 49), overall humanitarian spending decreased and the revolutionary rhetoric of Third World solidarity was muted. Policy changed again in the 2000s, when China renewed its interest in humanitarian assistance. The Sixteenth Party Congress in 2002, which reconfirmed the 'Going Out' strategy after President Jiang Zemin's promulgation of the concept in 1997, furthered China's opening up by making international economic and technical cooperation (which included humanitarian assistance) the basic premise of China's foreign policy (Li, 2012: 48–49).

In September 2004, China officially established a response mechanism for international emergency humanitarian relief and assistance (*rendao zhuyi jinji jiuzai yuanzhu yingji jizhi* (also called *yingji ban*), with the involvement of key ministries including the Ministry of Commerce (MOFCOM), Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) and Ministry of Finance (Zhong, 2015: 27). The mechanism was designed to establish an organisational framework and implementation system for China's international humanitarian assistance. An inter-ministerial liaison system for overseas aid was established in 2008, and upgraded to an inter-ministerial coordination mechanism in February 2011 (Zhong, 2015: 27).⁶ Alongside structural developments, the funding China devoted to humanitarian assistance increased significantly, to almost \$87 million in 2010, against an average contribution of \$4.55m between 2006 and 2009 (see Chapter 4 for more details).

China's renewed interest in humanitarian assistance was also demonstrated by the creation of the China International Search and Rescue (CISAR) team (*Zhongguo guoji jiuyuandui*) in April 2001 (Jin, 2011: 33). Since its first international mission, in response

5 The translation is from Zhou and Xiong (2017: 2).

6 In Chinese government terminology, 'coordination mechanism' has a higher bureaucratic status than 'liaison system'.

to the earthquake in Algeria in May 2003, the team has been deployed to disaster responses in Iran, Pakistan, Indonesia, Haiti, New Zealand, Japan and Nepal, among others. One of the key reasons for the establishment and deployment of the team is to display China as a ‘responsible great power’. According to then Deputy Prime Minister Hui Liangyu, the CISAR team ‘established our country’s good image as a responsible state even further’ (Xinhua, 2006), and similar language is used to describe the team in the state media (Renmin wang, 2015).

As noted, China has also modified its strict adherence to the ‘One China’ policy by extending assistance to Haiti, which recognises Taiwan as a sovereign state. This policy modification began in 2005, when China deployed peacekeepers to the country, but it was applied to humanitarian assistance following the earthquake there in 2010. Humanitarian assistance to countries without diplomatic relations with China was retrospectively legalised in the ‘Foreign Aid Management Method’ regulation in 2014. Article 3 of that regulation states:

Recipients of overseas development mainly include developing countries that have already established diplomatic relations with the People’s Republic of China and that require receiving aid, and international or regional organizations that have developing countries as the main actors. In emergency and exceptional circumstances such as humanitarian assistance, developed countries or developing countries without diplomatic relations with the People’s Republic of China can also be a recipient (Shangwubu Tiaoyue Falusi, 2014).

By providing only humanitarian assistance (not development aid), China is seeking to maintain the ‘One China’ policy in normal circumstances, while presenting itself as sufficiently benevolent to provide assistance in an emergency (and in the process encouraging host states to switch their diplomatic allegiance to Beijing).

3.2 Deepening internationalisation

China has taken steps to deepen its links with the international humanitarian community in addressing natural disasters, including, in an unprecedented step, accepting the help of international rescue teams from

Japan, Russia, South Korea and Singapore following the Sichuan earthquake in 2008 (Xinhua, 2008). As Chapter 5 details, a number of Chinese entities, including the CISAR team and the Ministry of Civil Affairs, have stepped up their cooperation with international institutions.

Nevertheless, the country has been careful to maintain some distance between itself and the structures of the international humanitarian system. China is not a member of the DAC or of OCHA’s Donor Support Group, for instance, nor is it part of the Good Humanitarian Donorship initiative. It is also a less prominent actor in UN-led coordination processes around reconstruction.⁷ This reticence towards deeper engagement with the international humanitarian system is an anomaly. In other domains – peacekeeping for example – China has shown a remarkable ability to adapt to, and in some cases reshape, multilateral mechanisms despite an initial lack of knowledge or familiarity. That it has not done so in relation to humanitarian assistance may be because its long-established tradition of assistance is based on a set of norms that do not necessarily align with the principles of impartiality, neutrality and independence regarded as standard in the current international humanitarian system. For China, deeper engagement with the structures and processes of the international humanitarian system brings with it different and unfamiliar ways of thinking about how to deliver aid.

The first normative basis that China upholds is the legitimacy of the state. First and foremost, Chinese assistance is premised on the state’s central role in humanitarian assistance, grounded in the concept of unity between the state and its people, which assistance in response to disasters is seen as enhancing. The second normative basis is the idea of a ‘communitarian ethic of obligation’, which sees one’s ethical obligations as expanding in concentric circles. This means that China’s first responsibility is to its own people, next to people in the Asia-Pacific region, and finally to populations in Africa and Latin America (Hirono, O’Hagan and Yeophantong 2012: 5). The third normative basis, deriving from more recent history since the Opening Up policy in the late 1970s, is that development such as infrastructure-building, rather than the establishment of democratic

7 Author interviews with UN officials in Aceh, November 2009, and Kathmandu, March 2017.

structures, will address poverty in the longer term. As reflected in China's approaches to humanitarian assistance, these normative bases could make it difficult for the country to adapt the way it delivers aid, and how it socialises into the international humanitarian order. Under these circumstances, any pressure from the West to bring China into the international humanitarian system is likely to produce resistance or actively anti-Western sentiment.

Alongside a reluctance to embrace deeper engagement with the international humanitarian system, the country also seems to be displaying early signs that it wishes to modify international humanitarian norms, in particular around the position and role of governments and the importance of development in addressing the causes of humanitarian crises. In a speech at the UN General Assembly on 8 December 2016, Chinese Ambassador Wu Haitao argued that the international community should address the following points in responding to humanitarian crises:

First ... international humanitarian assistance must abide by the UN Charter and the principles of humanism, neutrality and impartiality, respect the sovereignty, independence, territorial integrity and national unity of recipient countries and comply with international law and the law of the host countries. The international community must persist in using political means to seek peaceful solutions to disputes, avoid politicizing humanitarian issues, and uphold the non-military nature of humanitarian assistance.

Wu emphasised that humanitarian assistance must be delivered in a way that respects the sovereignty of the host state. This could be interpreted as a criticism of the tendency of some states in the international community (and more particularly Western states) to 'politicise humanitarian issues' with 'humanitarian assistance' that can be of a 'military nature'. Wu made a similar criticism in his statement on Syria at the UN the following day. Acknowledging that the US and Russia were actively engaged in diplomatic efforts to ease tensions, Wu said that 'any unilateral attempt to exert pressure or to politicize humanitarian issue will only cause further turbulence in the situation rather than bringing the situation around' (Xinhua, 2016). Clearly, China is trying to distinguish its humanitarian assistance from that of its counterparts in the international community.

In his General Assembly speech, Wu went on to comment on China's strong preference for tying humanitarian assistance to long-term development:

Secondly, helping developing countries realize development represents the fundamental way to reduce the need for humanitarian relief. The root of many problems facing our world today can be traced to poverty and backwardness. Therefore, their fundamental resolution lies in promoting development. While seeking to effectively respond to short-term humanitarian needs, the international community must work together to implement the 2030 Agenda and realize development (Wu, 2016).

Such a preference is also shared by others at the UN; on the same day as Wu was delivering his remarks, Peter Thomson, President of the UN General Assembly, likewise stressed the importance of 'the interlinkages between sustainable development, peace and security, and human rights and humanitarian action' (Thomson, 2016). However, Wu's emphasis on the role of development in reducing humanitarian needs is particularly strong. Development is not just one of the methods available to address humanitarian issues; rather, it is the 'fundamental resolution'. Again, China is not simply mimicking other actors in the international community: it is attempting to set itself apart and articulate a humanitarian approach 'with Chinese characteristics'.

These two trajectories of China's foreign aid policy – 'taking' international norms and 'socialising' into multilateral institutions on the one hand, and modifying international norms and distinguishing itself from its Western counterparts on the other – relate to China's multiple identities as a great power, as a rising power and as a developing country. China scholars consider the country to be at once both a great power and a rising power (Zeng and Breslin, 2016); while it is attempting to 'socialise' into the international community, doing so requires China to remain merely a follower in international society. At least in some issue areas, a country boasting the second-largest economy in the world will not be content with such a status. Rather, it wishes to lead international society by expressing its difference from other great powers, and seeking to modify norms and institutions established by these powers. This was expressed in Xi Jinping's report at the nineteenth National Congress of the Communist Party of China:

China champions the development of a community with a shared future for mankind, and has encouraged the evolution of the global governance system. With this we have seen a further rise in China's international influence, ability to inspire, and power to shape; and China has made great new contributions to global peace and development (Xi, 2017: 6).

China's expression of difference is also based on its 'developing country' identity, underpinned by what China calls a 'shared history' with other developing countries as victims of imperialism. In the above-mentioned report, Xi also stated that:

The path, the theory, the system, and the culture of socialism with Chinese characteristics have kept developing, blazing a new trail for other developing countries to achieve modernization. It offers a new option for other countries and nations who want to speed up their development while preserving their independence; and it offers Chinese wisdom and a Chinese approach to solving the problems facing mankind (Xi, 2017: 9).

China has also engaged in diplomacy and mediation to prevent or end conflict in Sudan since 2006, Afghanistan since 2014, South Sudan and Myanmar since 2015 and Syria since 2016. There are however significant limits to what Chinese mediation can offer, and the Chinese government has yet to engineer any meaningful breakthroughs in these conflicts. Efforts to engage with the Sudanese government, for instance, 'did not lead to any further mediation, nor was it cited as part of a commitment to active conflict mediation. It was mainly the result of [Chinese Ambassador Wang Guangya's] personal initiative and ability' (Large, 2008: 39). However, the very fact that China – a country that had previously adhered extremely strictly to the principle of non-interference in states' internal affairs – is now engaging with rebel groups diplomatically is a significant development. If China did become more proactive in this area in the future (and China's increasing global political and economic power suggest that it might), its diplomatic efforts could help mitigate humanitarian crises.

3.3 Summary

This chapter highlights two major features of the evolution of China's humanitarian assistance. The first is that national interest has always mattered in determining the ways in which China has provided humanitarian assistance. Those interests have evolved over time, from spreading communist revolution in the 1960s to protecting economic interests in the 1970s–1990s and to gaining a favourable international reputation in the 2000s, depending on the foreign policy direction of particular regimes at particular times. It is important to note that economic interests have historically been relevant, but assumptions that China's behaviour as a humanitarian actor derives only from economic interests is ill-founded as far as the historical evolution of its approach to humanitarian assistance is concerned.

The second finding is that the evolution of China's humanitarian aid has taken multiple, and sometimes contradictory, approaches towards international norms and institutions. On the one hand, China has integrated into international institutions and norms when it comes to some technical aspects of humanitarian aid in relation to natural disasters. On the other, it has tried to modify international humanitarian norms by emphasising the importance of host governments and development, while at the same time seeking a new role in mediating conflicts. In short, the internationalisation of China's humanitarian assistance has come with 'Chinese characteristics'. As such, China must be seen as both a 'norm taker' and a 'norm modifier'.

Having traced the overall evolution of Chinese humanitarian assistance from the 1950s to the 2000s, the next chapter focuses on the contemporary landscape of Chinese humanitarian assistance. National interests are a continuing theme, but close examination of the ways in which China provides humanitarian assistance reveals the problematic implications of multiple national interests as they relate to humanitarian action.

4 China's humanitarian assistance today: an overview

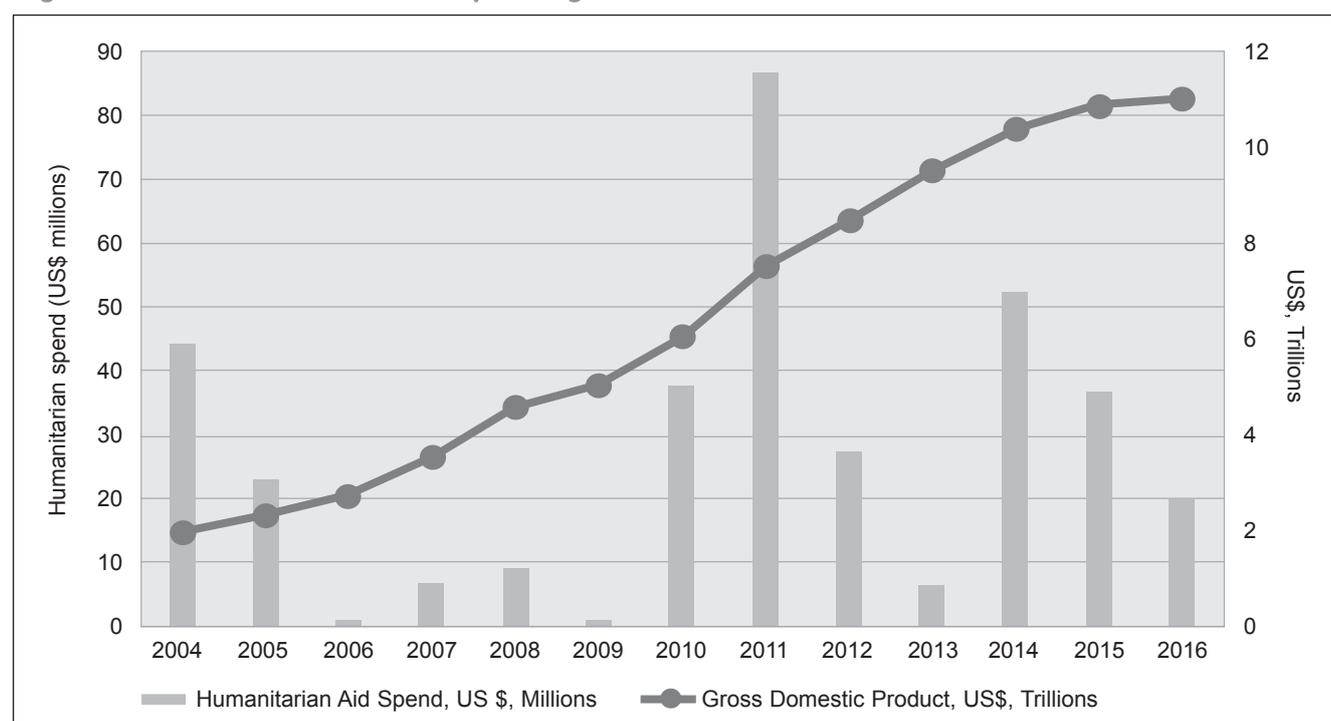
This chapter examines contemporary Chinese humanitarian assistance, exploring the government's financial contributions to humanitarian responses to major crises between 2011 and 2015, outlining the nature of China's humanitarian assistance, and assessing how the four sources of China's foreign policy influence its aid provision.

4.1 How much humanitarian aid has China provided, and for what?

Calculating exactly how much the Chinese government spends on humanitarian aid is not easy given the lack of published data and the fact that governments are not obliged to report their expenditure to FTS. In China's case, for example, FTS figures do not necessarily include the cost of deploying international

search and rescue teams. Even allowing for this limitation, FTS figures do show a clear and rapid increase in China's contribution to humanitarian aid over the last decade. As Figure 1 shows, the average contribution from 2004 to 2009 (excluding 2005, when China provided \$62m to the Indian Ocean tsunami response, for which all major donors (including China) contributed an exceptional amount of funding) was \$5.9m, while the average contribution from 2010 to 2015 (excluding 2013, when the contribution was unusually low due to the fact that there were no significant natural disasters that year) was around \$48m, an eight-fold increase. Even so, this is a far slower increase than the growth in China's GDP, which increased by just under 10% *every year* from 2003 to 2015.⁸ It is also less pronounced than the growth in China's net development aid, which from 2004 to 2011 increased by on average 24% *every year* (Kitano and Harada, 2014: 10) (see Figure 2).

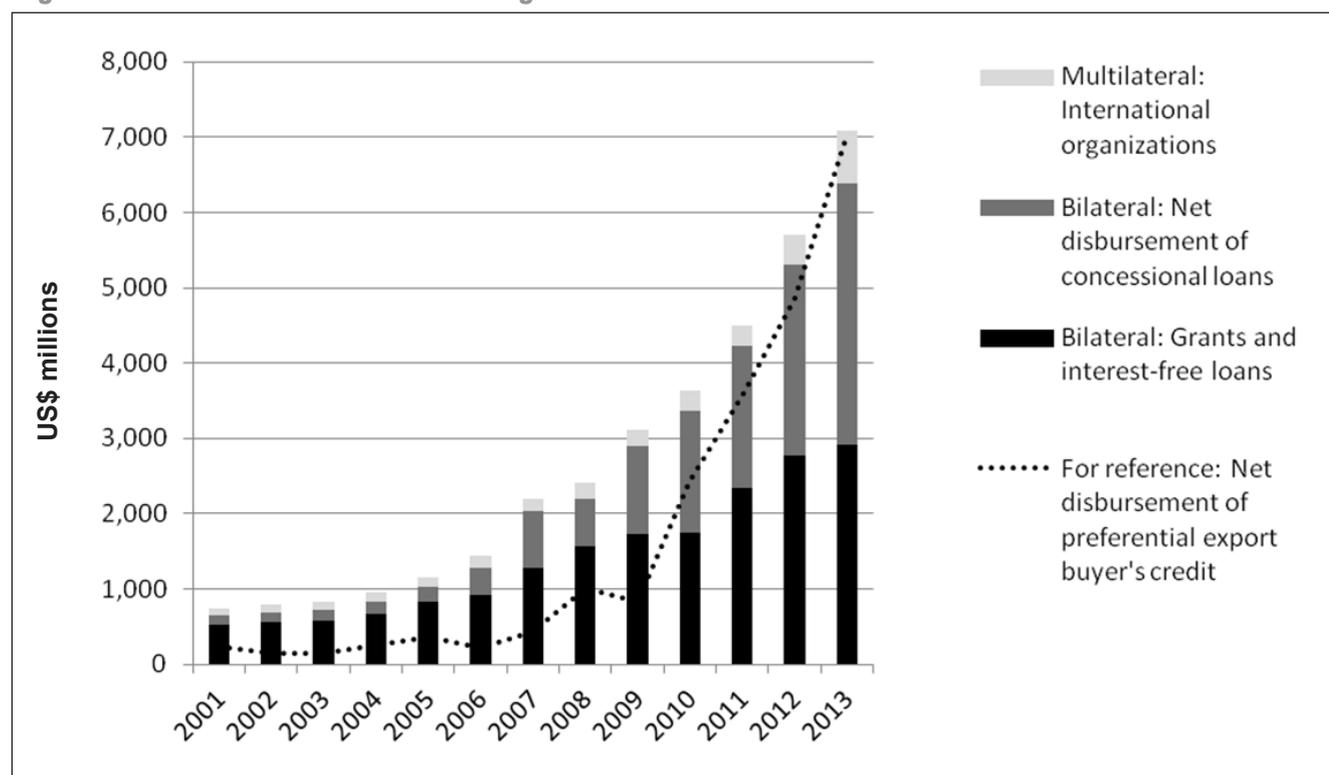
Figure 1: Chinese humanitarian spending and GDP, 2004–2015



Sources: UNOCHA FTS, World Bank

8 Data retrieved from data.worldbank.org.

Figure 2: China's estimated net foreign aid



Source: Kitano and Harada (2014: 18)

Table 1: China's humanitarian spending on natural disasters and complex emergencies, 2004–2016

Year	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Natural disasters ¹⁰	43	17.59	0.59	0.82	4.9	0	33.86	19.8	3.73	1.85	47.04	23.2	1.74
Food insecurity ¹¹	0	3	0.3	0.25	2.8	0	2.2	66.62	18.78	1	1	13	10.05
Unallocated ¹²	0	2.5	0.2	0.5	0.5	1.05	1.5	0.5	0.53	0.53	0.53	0.53	0.53
Other ¹³	1.21	0	0	5.3	1	0	0	0	4.35	3.2	3.91	0	7.5
Total	44.21	23.09	1.09	6.87	9.2	1.05	37.56	86.92	27.39	6.58	52.48	36.73	19.82

Source: OCHA FTS. (Figures US\$m)

China's humanitarian funding is spent on just one or two major crises a year, and many humanitarian crises receive little financial contribution from the Chinese government. For example, the \$68.5m China provided in 2011 to the response to the East Africa food crisis accounted for 79% of Chinese humanitarian funding that year. In 2014 China provided \$47m to the Ebola response (85% of its total expenditure), and \$22.6m to the Nepal earthquake response in 2015 (62%).⁹ As these examples indicate, the majority of China's humanitarian spending goes on natural disasters, rather than complex emergencies (see Table 1).

9 Data taken from OCHA Financial Tracking Service (FTS), <http://fts.unocha.org>.

What does the eight-fold increase in China's humanitarian contribution look like, in comparison to other established or emerging donors? With the exception of 2013, the country's humanitarian spending has ranked it somewhere between 19th

10 'Natural disasters' include earthquakes, typhoons, tsunamis and the Ebola crisis.

11 Cases of food insecurity in this table exclude those caused through sudden-onset events. This includes contributions to East Africa, North Korea and Zimbabwe.

12 'Unallocated' means contributions to the IFRC, ICRC, CERF and OCHA unearmarked by specific crises.

13 'Other' includes civil unrest, including in Sudan, Yemen and Syria.

Table 2: Humanitarian donors by OCHA FTS ranking, 2005–2015

	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015*
1	US									
2	European Commission									
3	UK	UK	UK	Sweden	Japan	Sweden	UK	UK	UK	UK
4	Norway	Norway	Sweden	UK	UK	UK	Sweden	Japan	Germany	Germany
5	Sweden	Netherlands	Saudi Arabia	Norway	Sweden	Japan	Japan	Sweden	Japan	Japan
6	Netherlands	Sweden	Norway	Japan	Canada	Norway	Norway	Germany	Sweden	UAE
7	Switzerland	Canada	Netherlands	Germany	Norway	Germany	Germany	Canada	Saudi Arabia	Sweden
8	Canada	Germany	Canada	Canada	Germany	Switzerland	Canada	Norway	Canada	Canada
9	Japan	Japan	Japan	UAE	Spain	Australia	Switzerland	Switzerland	Norway	Netherlands
10	Denmark	Switzerland	Germany	Netherlands	Denmark	Denmark	Saudi Arabia	Kuwait	Switzerland	Norway
11	Germany	Saudi Arabia	Denmark	Switzerland	Australia	Spain	Australia	Denmark	Denmark	Saudi Arabia
12	Ireland	Ireland	Italy	Denmark	Switzerland	Netherlands	Netherlands	Australia	Netherlands	Switzerland
13	Saudi Arabia	Denmark	Ireland	Australia	Netherlands	UAE	Belgium	Saudi Arabia	UAE	Kuwait
14	France	Spain	France	Spain	Saudi Arabia	Belgium	Denmark	Belgium	Kuwait	Denmark
15	Italy	Italy	Switzerland	Ireland	Belgium	Saudi Arabia	France	Netherlands	Australia	Belgium
16	Australia	Australia	Australia	Belgium	France	France	Finland	Finland	France	France
17	Finland	Finland	Spain	Saudi Arabia	Finland	Finland	Qatar	Qatar	Finland	Australia
18	Spain	France	Finland	Finland	UAE	Ireland	Ireland	Ireland	Qatar	Finland
19	Belgium	Belgium	UAE	France	Italy	China	Spain	UAE	Belgium	Ireland
20	UAE	UAE	Belgium	Italy	Ireland	Italy	Russia	France	Ireland	Italy
21	Luxembourg	Luxembourg	Kuwait	Luxembourg	Turkey	Turkey	Brazil	Spain	Italy	Qatar
22	Kuwait	South Korea	Luxembourg	Kuwait	Luxembourg	New Zealand	Italy	Italy	Luxembourg	Pakistan
23	Russia	New Zealand	Russia	Russia	Russia	Luxembourg	Luxembourg	Luxembourg	Spain	Spain
24	South Korea	Turkey	New Zealand	South Korea	China	Russia	UAE	Russia	China	South Korea
25	South Africa	Kuwait	South Korea	Pakistan	India	Nepal	China	South Korea	South Korea	Luxembourg
26	Turkey	Russia	Thailand	New Zealand	Austria	India	New Zealand	Oman	Russia	China
27	Austria	Austria	Greece	Austria	Brazil	Austria	Austria	Austria	New Zealand	Austria
28	Portugal	China	Nepal	India	Iran	South Korea	Oman	New Zealand	Oman	Russia
29	New Zealand	Greece	Austria	Qatar	New Zealand	Qatar	Kuwait	Turkey	Pakistan	New Zealand

* Turkey has been listed in the *Global Humanitarian Assistance Report 2016* as the second largest humanitarian donor in 2015 (\$3.2 billion). According to the GHA: ‘the humanitarian assistance [Turkey] voluntarily reports to the DAC is largely comprised of expenditure on hosting Syrian refugees within Turkey so is not strictly compatible with the international humanitarian assistance totals from other donors’. Source: UNOCHA FTS

and 26th on the list of global donors (see Table 2). China’s humanitarian spending is always below that of most DAC states, as well as Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and often other Middle Eastern countries. Overall, China contributed 0.18% of global humanitarian funding in 2015 and 0.23% in 2014. Humanitarian aid also accounts for only a small proportion of the country’s total overseas assistance. According to the government’s Foreign Aid White Paper, ‘emergency humanitarian aid’ – categorised as one of eight forms of overseas aid – comprised 1.7% of total aid funding (Information Office, 2014).

According to FTS, China mainly provides food, shelter and non-food items, health and coordination

and support services. FTS does not record Chinese funds contributed to other sectors, but China defines ‘humanitarian aid’ quite narrowly as cash assistance and the dispatch of medical and rescue teams, and other forms of assistance can feature as ‘goods and materials’ or ‘complete projects’, rather than ‘humanitarian aid’ as such. According to calculations based on UNDP data (2015), ‘humanitarian aid’ in the Chinese terminology totalled \$56.7m in 2010–12, but this rose to \$241m once ‘goods and materials’ are included. Sectoral allocations vary widely depending on the nature of the crisis; in 2015, for example, 62% of China’s total humanitarian funding went to shelter and non-food items, reflecting the large proportion of funding China channelled to the Nepal earthquake response.

4.2 Where has China provided assistance, and why?

As mentioned earlier, China contributes funding to a very limited number of crises a year. Table 3 shows the top recipients every year, alongside patterns of global humanitarian funding.

Although China does not have a policy document that defines the criteria on which the government decides where to send humanitarian assistance, four observations about the patterns of China's

humanitarian assistance can be made. The first is that China's humanitarian contributions do not follow global funding trends. Although there are occasions where China has contributed to a crisis that has also received significant global funding (South Sudan and Nepal in 2015; Ebola in 2014; Syria in 2013), this is not the general pattern. For example, China allocated 62% of its entire humanitarian spend in 2015 on Nepal, whereas the largest allocations of global funding that year went on the Syria crisis (Nepal came third). In 2014 China spent nothing on the Syrian refugee crisis, against a global contribution of \$3.5 billion, making it the second largest response after Ebola.

Table 3: China's top humanitarian spending and global humanitarian spending

<p>2015 China's humanitarian spending (total funding \$36.7m) 1. Nepal earthquake (\$22.6m to various recipients (details not provided); 61.5%) 2. Ethiopia food insecurity (\$8m bilaterally; 21.8%) 3. South Sudan (\$5m to WFP; 13.6%)</p> <p>Global humanitarian spending 1. Syria (\$4,008m)¹⁶ 2. South Sudan (\$1,089m) 3. Nepal (\$815m) 4. Sudan (\$589m) 5. Iraq (US\$519m)</p>	<p>2012 China's humanitarian spending (total funding \$27.4m) 1. Zimbabwe (\$14m bilaterally; 51.1%) 2. Syria (\$6.7m (\$2.4 m each to Lebanon and Jordan bilaterally and \$2m to the ICRC; 24.5%) 3. North Korea (\$2m to WFP; 9.8%)</p> <p>Global humanitarian spending 1. South Sudan (\$787m) 2. Somalia (\$612m) 3. Sudan (\$585m) 4. DRC (\$583m) 5. Kenya (\$544m)</p>
<p>2014 China's humanitarian spending (total funding \$55.2m) 1. Ebola in West Africa (\$47m to various recipients; 85.2%) 2. Typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines (\$1.8m; 3.3%)</p> <p>Global humanitarian spending 1. Ebola (\$3,618m) 2. Syria (\$3,505m) 3. South Sudan (\$1,947m) 4. Philippines Typhoon (\$865m)</p>	<p>2011 China's humanitarian spending (total funding \$86.9m) 1. Ethiopia (\$23.3m bilaterally; 26.8%) 2. Kenya (\$20.2m bilaterally; 23.2%) 3. Somalia (\$16m to WFP; 18.4%) 4. Djibouti (\$9.3m bilaterally; 10.7%) 5. Cambodia floods (\$7.9m bilaterally; 9.0%) 6. Japan (\$4.7m mostly bilaterally; 5.4%)</p> <p>Global humanitarian spending 1. Somalia (\$868m); Sudan (\$741m) 2. Japan (\$735m) 3. Kenya (\$530m) 4. DRC (\$487m) 5. Afghanistan (\$423m)</p>
<p>2013 China's humanitarian spending (total funding \$4.8m) 1. Syria Regional Refugee Response Plan (\$3.2m to Syria via WFP, Jordan via IOM and Turkey via UNHCR; 66.9%) 2. North Korea (\$1m; 20.9%)</p> <p>Global humanitarian spending 1. Syria (\$3,140m)¹⁷ 2. South Sudan (\$772m) 3. DRC (\$629m)</p>	

¹⁶ Comprising the Syria Response Plan (\$1,238,569,886) and the Syria Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan (\$2,769,403,155).

¹⁷ Comprising the Syria Humanitarian Assistance Response Plan (\$959,284,768) and the Syria Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan (\$2,180,971,363).

The second observation about patterns of China's humanitarian assistance is that, as mentioned above, its contributions mainly go to 'natural' disasters rather than to complex emergencies. 'Natural' disasters tend to be regarded as politically less controversial than complex emergencies involving conflicts, which often involve helping people in areas controlled by rebels fighting government forces. Such action can violate the principle of non-interference (Hirono, 2013). Further, China lacks experience in relation to many areas of conflict. The country's foreign policy concerns have focused on the US, Japan, Taiwan and the Asia-Pacific. Central Asia, Africa, the Middle East and Latin America traditionally featured only at the fringe of its foreign policy programme. China began to pay more attention to these regions only in the 2000s, in the context of the 'Going Out' strategy (see Chapter 2). The country also has a lot to learn about how best to contribute to complex emergencies, though the same could be said of donors with much longer experience in these regions. Finally, the Chinese people, like other East Asian societies, feel more empathy with victims of natural disaster than with, for example, victims of contemporary conflict in Africa, because of their experience of natural disasters in their own territories (O'Hagan and Hirono, 2014), notwithstanding the high level of empathy felt towards the victims of the Japanese conflict of 1931–45.

The third observation about China's humanitarian assistance is that the majority goes bilaterally to governments, rather than to multilateral agencies. In 2015, for example, 85% of China's humanitarian funds were provided bilaterally.¹⁸ This may be attractive to Chinese policy-makers because, unlike multilateral channels, it makes it easier for China to direct its funds independently of wider multilateral processes and global funding trends, giving it more direct control over where funding is allocated. It may also be seen as a way of ensuring that recipients know where the funding comes from. One Chinese government official interviewed for this study commented that, if any state provides a significant level of support, then it will do so bilaterally, but if the contribution is only small it will be channelled multilaterally.¹⁹

18 Data taken from OCHA Financial Tracking Service (FTS), <http://fts.unocha.org>.

19 Author interview with a Chinese government official, Beijing, June 2016.

The notable exception to China's practice of bilateral aid has been the Syrian refugee crisis. China's contribution to the Syria Regional Refugee Response Plan was routed through multilateral agencies, including the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the World Food Programme (WFP), UNHCR and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) (with the exception of bilateral aid to Lebanon (\$2.4m) and Jordan (\$2.4m) in 2012),²⁰ suggesting that, when it comes to refugee crises, which by definition are transnational and multinational, China seems to recognise the logic of channelling funds through multilateral organisations. At the UN Refugee Summit in September 2016, Premier Li Keqiang announced that China would provide an additional \$50m a year over three years to 'multilateral humanitarian organisations and relevant humanitarian initiatives', alongside equivalent funds through 'bilateral channels' (New China TV, 2016).

The fourth observation is that China tends to provide humanitarian aid to countries that fit within the diplomatic narratives that China wants to promote, such as South–South cooperation and Peripheral Diplomacy (see Chapter 2). In 2011, China allocated 79% of its humanitarian aid to four countries in East Africa: Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia and Djibouti. While these countries were suffering a severe drought, internationally global humanitarian assistance focused on Somalia, Sudan, Japan (the tsunami), Kenya, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Afghanistan (in that order). China's 'disproportionate' focus on these four countries arguably derived from its special diplomatic relations with them. Ethiopia and Kenya are major powers in Africa, and Ethiopia hosts the African Union, with which China is trying to strengthen relations as part of its strategy of South–South cooperation. With regard to Somalia, China's main concern has been piracy in the Gulf of Aden, which could disrupt oil supplies. For its part, Djibouti is strategically significant, as well as a growing trading partner for China. In 2010 Djibouti's trade with China was worth \$445m, a 50% increase over the previous year (EIU Views Wire, 2011). Establishing a Chinese military base in Djibouti was also under consideration in 2010 (Chan, 2017).

Looking at China's neighbourhood, its humanitarian aid to Nepal, Cambodia and North Korea stands out. China was the sixth largest donor to the earthquake response

20 Data taken from OCHA Financial Tracking Service (FTS), <http://fts.unocha.org>.

in Nepal in 2015; the largest donor in Cambodia in 2011; and the third largest donor in North Korea in 2011–13.²¹ China's 'disproportionate' attention to natural disasters in neighbouring countries suggests that its humanitarian assistance is related to Peripheral Diplomacy: a way of demonstrating to its neighbours that China is their indispensable partner. China is a potential alternative to Indian power in Nepal, and has been a major power in Cambodia and North Korea, particularly during the Cold War. Through Peripheral Diplomacy China can avoid 'a collective attempt by its neighbours, especially those more directly aligned with the West, to restrain or contain China's growing power in Asia' (Lanteigne, 2016: 156).

While there does appear to be a traceable link between sources of China's foreign policy and its decisions on humanitarian allocations, the extent to which foreign policy *directly* influences this process is less clear, and may be overstated in the literature. It is certainly the case that, when China provides humanitarian aid, it almost always says that it is doing so as a 'responsible state'. China also clearly provides humanitarian aid to conflict- and disaster-affected states as a means to deflect international criticism of its conduct elsewhere in international affairs, for instance in relation to Syria. Over Syria, both China and Russia received significant international criticism after vetoing draft UN resolutions on the conflict, and the concurrent timing of the first four vetoes (2011–14) with the years in which China provided humanitarian assistance to the Syrian refugee response (2012–14) is unlikely to be a coincidence. However, the fact that this assistance was so short-lived suggests that China is not trying to tie humanitarian assistance to its image strategy in any serious way. If the country really wanted to use humanitarian assistance to bolster its image, then the question arises why it does not provide more of it, particularly given the substantial increases in other international contributions, including overall overseas development aid and its engagement in UN peacekeeping.

The fifth observation is that, contrary to common assumptions, China's humanitarian aid does not necessarily go to resource-rich countries. As Table 3 shows, the only countries that fall under the 'resource-rich' category are South Sudan (the third largest humanitarian contribution China made in 2015), Sierra Leone and Liberia (the largest

humanitarian contribution in 2014, in relation to the Ebola outbreak).²² None of the other countries China provided the most aid to – Nepal, Ethiopia, the Philippines, Syria, North Korea and Zimbabwe – can be regarded as resource-rich. In 2013, the international community contributed funding to Mozambique (floods) and the Sahel (food insecurity), both areas rich in natural resources. China provided no humanitarian funding to either emergency, implying that its humanitarian provision is not necessarily determined by the extent of natural resources in destination countries.

4.3 Summary

China's humanitarian spending is ad hoc rather than systematic, without regard to any overarching criteria setting out where and when the country should provide assistance. Comparisons between China's humanitarian expenditure and global patterns are telling in this respect, and given China's economic strength and its potential to contribute more to humanitarian response, it is important for the Chinese government to establish guidelines on its assistance that take global trends into account.

China's provision of humanitarian aid between 2011 and 2015 has sought to advance three major foreign policy interests. The first is strengthening bilateral relations with countries in the Global South and in the Asia-Pacific region. In the Global South, China tends to give humanitarian aid to support its own diplomatic narratives (for example on South–South cooperation with Kenya, Ethiopia, Djibouti and Somalia). In countries in the Asia-Pacific, China's humanitarian aid is intended to help maintain good bilateral relations through Peripheral Diplomacy (for example with Cambodia, North Korea and Nepal).

The second foreign policy interest is to enhance the image of China as a 'responsible state' (*fuzeren de daguo*). However, the 'responsible great power' discourse that conventional studies tend to emphasise has been only marginally important in terms of the actual humanitarian assistance China has provided. While a desire to establish the image of a 'responsible state' in international affairs was the main motivating factor in China's early engagement in international humanitarian action at the turn of

21 Data from OCHA Financial Tracking Service (FTS), <http://fts.unocha.org>.

22 The categorisation of 'resource-rich countries' is drawn from Brautigam (2009: 278).

the millennium, the actual amount of humanitarian spending has not been reflective of this. While China has used the ‘responsible power’ discourse when delivering humanitarian aid, this does not amount to a state strategy on which to base policy decisions or determine levels of humanitarian aid.

The third foreign policy interest is commercial and economic. Again, while this is often regarded as the

sole reason for China’s engagement in humanitarian action, neither is the primary motivating factor. Commercial and economic interests are only *indirectly* relevant to China’s provision of international humanitarian aid, in the sense that good bilateral relations, which humanitarian aid is meant to contribute to, might be ultimately conducive to an environment where China can expand its economic activities in the future.

5 China's humanitarian assistance: decision-making and implementation structures

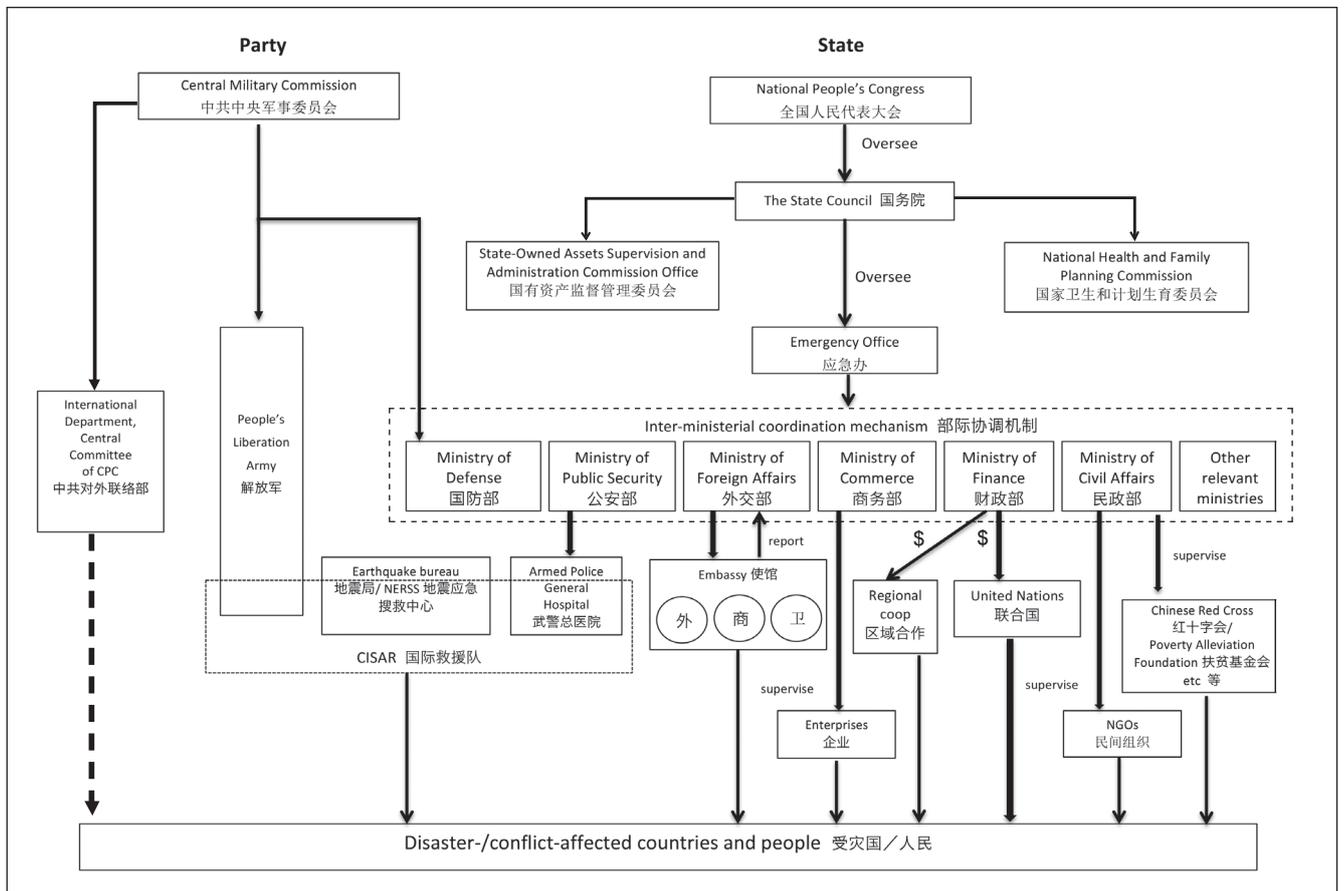
Who in China decides on the provision of humanitarian assistance, and what are the processes by which those decisions are made? What do they tell us about the links between foreign policy and humanitarian action? What are the strengths and weaknesses of current decision-making processes in relation to efficiency and impact on the ground? This section analyses the wide range of actors involved in decision-making and the delivery of international humanitarian aid, each with its own institutional interests.

5.1 Decision-making structure

5.1.1 The Chinese Communist Party (CCP)

In the Chinese system, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) sets general strategic policy direction, under which the state devises and implements policies specific to individual situations. The opaque nature of the Chinese political system makes it impossible to draw any concrete conclusions, but the available evidence suggests that most day-to-day administration on humanitarian action is made by the state rather

Figure 3: China's decision-making and implementing structure and coordination mechanism for humanitarian assistance



than by the party. In other words, while the CCP retains the ultimate power to make major decisions, it does not involve itself in the daily running of humanitarian policy. It is possible that the Party's Foreign Affairs Leading Small Group (*Zhonggong zhongyang waishi gongzuo lingdao xiaozu*) may play a role in coordinating policy between the various ministries involved if a natural disaster or conflict is of significant importance to China's foreign policy and security interests. The Leading Small Group, headed by President Xi Jinping, consists of the CCP Politburo Standing Committee members responsible for national security issues within the State Council, and various ministries that relate to national security. When 'serious issues' in the international situation arise, the 'Leading Small Group' conducts research and submits policy recommendations to the party.²³ However, available sources do not suggest that this group has worked on any major humanitarian crises. The International Department of the Central Committee of the CCP (*Zhonggong duiwai lianluobu*) also occasionally has an ad hoc involvement in China's international and domestic discussions on humanitarian aid (Li, 2015; Zhongguo Hongshizi Bao, 2015). To the best of this author's knowledge, neither the CCP nor the state has issued a policy framework on humanitarian aid. The rather abstract role of the party and the lack of a policy framework mean that a substantial part of the decision-making about details of humanitarian aid is the province of various ministries and organisations, as indicated in Figure 3. As far as international humanitarian action is concerned, the main state actors include the State Council and various ministries, particularly the Ministry of Commerce (MOFCOM) and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA).

5.1.2 The State Council

The State Council, overseen by the National People's Congress, plays a bureaucratic and administrative role in the Chinese government, and makes major policy decisions on aid (Lancaster, 2007: 3; Jakobson and Manuel, 2016: 103). The Council established an Emergency Office (*Guowu yuan yingji guangli bangongshi*, a.k.a *guowu yuan yingji ban*) in 2006, and designated it as the special section to deal with what the Office defines as 'emergencies'. Available data does not suggest any specific criteria for the involvement of the Emergency Office, but some media

²³ For a general discussion of the coordination roles of 'Leading Small Groups', see Miller (2008).

reports suggest that its creation was linked to the 2008 Beijing Olympics (Radio Free Asia, 2008). The majority of the cases that the Office is concerned with are domestic, including natural disasters, terrorism and urban accidents, and it is unclear how and to what extent it is involved in international disasters. The Office reports to the leaders of the State Council, at the top of which sits Premier Li Keqiang, and the Central Military Commission, headed by the Chairman, President Xi Jinping.

The State Council's involvement in international emergencies is likely to expand in line with the growing role of the State-owned Assets Supervision and Administration Commission (SASAC; *Guoyou zichan jiandu guanli weiyuanhui*) and the National Health and Family Planning Commission (NHFPC; *Guojia weisheng he jihua shengyu weiyuanhui*). The former encourages Chinese state-owned enterprises (SOEs) to participate in the Belt and Road Initiative by increasing their business activities in the Global South (Zhongguo Xinwen Wang, 2017), including in areas with humanitarian problems. It seems that the SASAC has yet to address the specific issue of how SOEs should deal with humanitarian issues, but the Commission does appear to be engaged in this area. For example, the 'central enterprises' page of the SASAC website has many examples of SOEs promoting humanitarian causes in areas where they operate (State-owned Assets Supervision and Administration Commission, 2017). The NHFPC's role in international humanitarian crises, derived from public health issues, is also likely to increase. The NHFPC was one of the central actors in China's assistance in the Ebola response in West Africa in 2014.

5.1.3 Ministries and departments

MOFCOM is responsible for putting the State Council's guidance into practice by directing and arranging humanitarian aid (Renminribao, 2010; Zhong, 2015). Its designated role is 'drawing out and organising the implementation of policies and programs of foreign aid, promoting the reform of foreign aid methods, organising foreign aid negotiation and signing agreements, dealing with the affairs of intergovernmental aid, compiling foreign aid planning and organising its implementation, and supervising and inspecting the implementation of foreign aid projects' (Shangwubu Duiwai Yuanzhushi, 2015a). MOFCOM's Department of Foreign Aid (*Duiwai yuanzhu si*) consists of 15 offices, including two in Asia, three in Africa and others in West Asia, North Africa and Europe, Latin America and the South

Pacific (Shangwubu Duiwai Yuanzhusi, 2015b). One informant in this study reported that the Department is severely overstretched, with about 70 staff dealing with China's entire aid programme.²⁴ Generally, much of China's bilateral humanitarian aid is implemented and paid for by the Department of Foreign Aid (Xiong, 2013: 75). Humanitarian aid through multilateral channels is implemented by MOFCOM's International Cooperation Agency (*guoji hezuo ju*).

The fact that humanitarian assistance is directed mainly by MOFCOM raises the question whether assistance is intended to support Chinese business activities. Several interviewees in China suggested that MOFCOM focuses on China's economic interests,²⁵ but the extent to which this applies to humanitarian aid is unclear. It is certainly true that the major part of China's foreign aid is implemented through 'investment lump-sum contracting' and a 'contract responsibility system', which means that contracted companies are engaged in the world of foreign assistance. However, where humanitarian emergencies are concerned, 'contract work' is impossible because the response must be very quick, suggesting that MOFCOM's ministerial interests may be less important. MOFCOM works on humanitarian aid, not because it seeks to extend China's business interests, but because it is the main ministry for foreign aid, including humanitarian assistance.

The MFA also has a role in humanitarian assistance, but unlike MOFCOM it does not have an agency specially assigned to foreign aid; instead, each regional department deals with humanitarian aid to its own region (for example, the Asia Department deals with humanitarian aid in Asia).²⁶ In general, Chinese embassies in disaster- or conflict-affected countries submit their aid proposals to the MFA, where they are discussed and approved. This process allows the Chinese government to reflect foreign policy aims in its humanitarian aid decision-making.

In terms of China's multilateral relationships, MOFCOM deals with entities such as the World Trade Organization and the United Nations Conference on

Trade and Development (UNCTAD), while the MFA handles China's relations with the UN development agencies. It also proposes the level of China's contribution to multilateral institutions and provides the funding (Xiong, 2013: 75). The MoF deals with the World Bank Group and regional development financial institutions such as the Asian Development Bank, and other ministries and committees including the Ministry of Science and Technology and the Ministry of Health deal with other relevant multilateral organisations. Each of these ministries consults on and decides the contributions that go to multilateral organisations, with the approval of the State Council through the MFA. Once proposals are approved (which they generally are (Xiong, 2013: 75)), allocations are made by the MoF. This management system determines core decisions by each ministry and commission, and ensures that decisions conform to China's overall foreign policy direction, and are economically sustainable.

The Ministry of Civil Affairs (MOCA; *Minzhengbu*) is an increasingly important component in China's approach to the provision of humanitarian aid. It represents China by participating in, and sometimes organising, meetings to promote international, regional and bilateral cooperation related to humanitarian aid and disaster relief. In 2015, for instance, MOCA hosted the Eighth Shanghai Cooperation Organisation Meeting of Heads of Emergency Prevention and Relief Agencies; co-hosted with Malaysia the Fourth ASEAN Regional Forum Disaster Relief Exercise; participated in the Third UN World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction; and was involved in consultations leading to the creation of the Sendai Framework. The Ministry participates in several international cooperation programmes, including with UNICEF, UNHCR, APEC, SCO, IMO, the EU, ASEAN, the World Bank and the ADB (Minzhengbu, 2015: 52–53). MOCA is also involved in activities such as international exchanges, consultation and cooperation in so far as they concern 'civil affairs' (Minzhengbu, 2015b: 53). Representing foreign policy interests is not MOCA's main remit, and it has no involvement in any cooperation programmes on complex emergencies. MOCA's involvement in international cooperation may demonstrate that, at least as far as China's participation in multilateral institutions relevant to disaster relief is concerned, the country's socialisation into the existing international humanitarian institutions has made substantial progress. In terms of Johnston's typology (discussed in Chapter 2),

24 Author interview with a former MFA official, Beijing, June 2016.

25 Author interview with a former MFA official, Beijing, June 2016; email correspondence with a former Chinese diplomat/scholar, June 2016.

26 Email correspondence with a former Chinese diplomat/scholar, June 2016.

MOCA's socialisation is now in the 'persuasion' stage – the highest level in the socialisation process, where cooperation is considered 'normal, given, and normatively correct' (Johnston, 2008: xxvi).

MOCA is also becoming more important in China's humanitarian aid as the number of Chinese NGOs working in humanitarian assistance overseas increases. Until the early 2010s, only a handful of major NGOs, such as the Chinese Red Cross and China Charity Foundation, were allowed to work overseas. According to Huang Haoming, the Vice-Chairman and Executive Director of the China Association for NGO Cooperation, by 2015 approximately 50 NGOs had delivered foreign aid abroad (Xinhua, 2015c), with the majority involved in disaster relief in Nepal. In 2015, MOCA published an official document entitled 'MOCA's instruction on [how to] support and guide social forces involved in disaster relief operations' (Minzhengbu, 2015a). Although this does not mention international relief operations per se, scholars claim that MOCA should explicitly include international activity in its policy (Zhang and Lu, 2015). MOCA, the International Department of the Central Committee of the CCP, MOFCOM and the MFA have reportedly drafted an instruction 'on [how] China's social organizations should go abroad' (Li, 2015). Developments such as this are indicative of the importance of domestic influences on policy-making in relation to how Chinese actors 'go abroad' to participate in humanitarian assistance.

5.1.4 The People's Liberation Army

The PLA plays a central role in Chinese humanitarian assistance.²⁷ It contributes to international disaster relief by assigning personnel to the CISAR team, and provides airlift capabilities. For example, the PLA Air Force deployed eight IL-76 aircraft and three helicopters carrying relief supplies and 190 pieces of engineering machinery to Nepal in the aftermath of the earthquake there in April 2015 (Fan, 2015; Xinhua, 2015). Personnel can be assigned directly to a disaster area; in the case of Nepal, for example, China dispatched over 1,000 military personnel and members of its armed police forces, 'the biggest group the PLA and armed police forces have sent overseas

27 The PLA performs emergency rescue and relief operations according to the Law of the People's Republic of China on Emergency Response, implemented on 1 December 2007; and the Regulations on the Participation of the Military in Disaster Relief Operations, issued by the State Council and Central Military Commission on 7 June 2005.

for [a] humanitarian aid mission' since the founding of communist China in 1949 (Fan, 2015).

The PLA's General Headquarters is responsible for coordinating the activities of Chinese actors providing humanitarian relief and goods to emergency-affected areas. The Emergency Response Leading Small Group (*Chuchi tufa shijian lingdao xiaozu*) and the Emergency Response Office (ERO; *yingji bangongshi*) were established in March 2005. Under the direction of the former, the ERO has dealt with domestic and international emergencies including snow disasters, train crashes and earthquakes, and provided security during the Beijing Olympic Games. The ERO is responsible for the command of troops, the management of relief operations within and outside China, and the coordination of activities involving other governments. An information-sharing mechanism has been established involving the ERO and more than 20 ministries and agencies, including the MOCA, the Earthquake Bureau and the Ministry of Water Conservation (Hirono and Xu, 2013).

The central role of the PLA in coordinating Chinese actors arguably has two important functions. First, this is a centralised party/state coordination system, which 'allows immediate delivery of humanitarian materials to disaster-affected areas; earnest manifestation of the high effectiveness of China's aid; and reduction of the process of authorisation request and approval' (Zhou, 2013: 37). Second, delivery of such goods requires not only the acquisition of the goods themselves, but also the mobilisation of China's civil aviation sector. This system helps Chinese aid reach disaster areas rapidly, enhancing effectiveness and efficiency in contributing to the overall humanitarian effort. China takes pride in the speed of its delivery – it supplied one of the earliest teams to arrive in Aceh after the 2004 tsunami and in Haiti after the 2010 earthquake there. This effectiveness is often linked to China's claim to being a 'responsible state' – one of its key foreign policy interests.

5.2 Implementation structure

5.2.1 Chinese embassies

China's embassies in disaster-affected countries have an important role to play in sharing information with concerned ministries and bureaus. Embassy staff usually include representatives of the major ministries, for example the MFA and MOFCOM,

which report directly to their respective ministry in Beijing. Embassies also act as information-sharing platforms on which various actors can draw. Non-state entities, such as companies and civil society groups, also coordinate formally and informally with various embassies, and share information about the humanitarian needs of a particular country.²⁸

5.2.2 The CISAR team

The CISAR team was established in April 2001. Its 222 personnel are drawn from the China Earthquake Administration, the PLA Engineering Unit and the Armed Police Force General Hospital (Ministry of National Defense of the People's Republic of China, 2011). In 2010, China's CISAR team was given the INSARAG External Classification's Heavy designation, recognising it as a first-class rescue team.²⁹ Teams can deploy very quickly, and in some cases – Aceh in 2004 and Haiti in 2010 are noted above – can be one of the earliest to arrive in a disaster area. When an earthquake strikes, the China Earthquake Administration establishes information support groups (Qu, 2011) to collect information from various sources, including the MFA and global disaster specialists, and decides how many and what kind of personnel are needed. It then makes a suggestion to the MFA, and possibly to the State Council, as to the composition of the CISAR team (State Council approval is needed if the damage caused by the earthquake is significant).³⁰ This means that the level and scale of assistance (e.g. how many personnel China sends; how much funding China provides) is not necessarily determined by foreign policy calculations, but derives from local need, as well as from the experience China has developed in this area.

5.2.3 NGOs

Until recently, the Red Cross Society of China and the China Charity Foundation were among the very few civil organisations (*minjian zuzhi*) delivering humanitarian aid in cooperation with the Chinese government (Hirono, 2011). However, the Nepal earthquake in April 2015 was a pivotal

moment in NGO involvement in humanitarian work outside China. A large number of Chinese organisations deployed to Nepal for rescue, relief and reconstruction work.³¹ Immediately after the earthquake, One Foundation and the Beijing Normal University jointly held the first coordination meeting between Chinese NGOs and international organisations in Beijing. This established the China NGO Consortium for Nepal Earthquake 2015, consisting of 12 major NGOs in China, including the One Foundation, the China Foundation for Poverty Alleviation (CFPA) and the Amity Foundation, and six international organisations and NGOs, among them the UNDP China Office, Save the Children, Oxfam Hong Kong, the Asia Foundation, Mercy Corps and Plan International, and Beijing Normal University (*Jijinhui Jiuzai Xietiaohui*, 2015; Bannister, 2015b). The consortium helped create 'a joint information platform [by social networking sites such as WeChat] sharing the latest progress in Nepal and the relief work done by Chinese NGOs' (Bannister, 2015a). This type of information-sharing and coordination among Chinese groups in the Chinese language is useful for many Chinese NGOs and volunteers given their general lack of English-language ability and local knowledge.

The consortium also helped to create a collaboration and cooperation mechanism with relevant ministries of the Chinese government in Nepal, as well as joining the UN's humanitarian coordination mechanism.³² Mercy Corps worked with CFPA to familiarise it with OCHA coordination meetings, and to deliver humanitarian goods to disaster victims.³³ Likewise, the Lutheran World Foundation worked with the Amity Foundation through the ACT Alliance, including in needs analysis and the delivery of assistance.³⁴ Partnerships such as these offer a promising model for future cooperation or collaboration.

The author's interactions with NGOs at international symposiums in 2015 and 2016, and interviews, suggest that Chinese NGOs are increasingly interested

28 Author interview with a Chinese scholar, Beijing, June 2016, and with Zhang Yong, Blue Sky Rescue Team Leader, Beijing, June 2016.

29 INSARAG is 'a global network of more than 80 countries and organisations under the UN umbrella'. It accredits national urban search and rescue teams across the world (INSARAG, n. d.).

30 Author interview with a Chinese government official, June 2016.

31 Author interview with a Chinese scholar, Beijing, June 2016.

32 Author interview with a Chinese scholar, Beijing, June 2016.

33 Author interviews with Peng Bin, Mercy Corps Beijing Representative, Beijing, January 2017; and with Prabin Manandhar, Country Director of the Lutheran World Foundation Nepal, Kathmandu, March 2017.

34 Author interview with Prabin Manandhar, Country Director of the Lutheran World Foundation Nepal, Kathmandu, March 2017.

in expanding their operations overseas.³⁵ For example, Blue Sky Rescue (*Lantian jiuyuandui*) has assisted disaster-affected people in the Philippines (2013), Myanmar (2014) and Nepal (2015), and is now seeking to expand its operations to other humanitarian contexts, including conflict areas such as South Sudan and Somalia. It has a designated group to collect information on humanitarian needs in these contexts, and assess whether BSR has the capacity to deploy and provide assistance.³⁶ At the time of writing in November 2017, BSR had not dispatched staff to conflict-affected regions, but as its capacity develops it may well do so in the future.

Many NGOs are off-shoots of businesses, and humanitarian assistance is seen as part of Chinese businesses' corporate social responsibilities. For example, members of the One Foundation's boards of directors are all well-known entrepreneurs from corporations including Alibaba, Tencent and China Merchants Bank (Yang and Huang, 2015). Company presidents are interested in philanthropy, and now have the financial resources to fund such activity. One company, Pearl Delta, has established an NGO called the PHR to send medical teams to areas facing humanitarian crises, reflecting the company director's personal interest in providing assistance. These organisations could not have been established without the success of their respective main companies.³⁷ Civil society engagement in disaster relief work outside China is also actively encouraged by the Chinese government, which regards it as a useful complement to its attempts to promote people-to-people diplomacy (*minjian waijiao* or *renmin waijiao*) (Sun, 2017).

5.2.4 Commercial companies

China's 'Going Out' strategy (*zouchuqu zhanlue*), promulgated in 1997, dramatically increased the number of Chinese companies investing in disaster- and conflict-prone regions. However, these commercial activities were not always without unintended consequences; in Sudan, for instance, Chinese

investment in oil fields in South Kordofan bolstered the Sudanese regime in its conflict with the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM), prompting international criticism of what was perceived as China's 'business is business' approach. Against this background, some Chinese companies, particularly those present in conflict-affected countries, are beginning to take a more conflict-sensitive approach. The Chinese government has also encouraged companies to be more community-minded; in the response to floods in Myanmar in 2015, for instance, the Chinese embassy 'called on Chinese enterprises, companies and institutions in Myanmar to actively follow up the flood rescue program and collect charity donations as well as goods to take part in the flood rescue action' (Xinhua, 2015).

5.3 Summary

This section raises three key points. First, Chinese embassies can ensure that various ministries' interests and directives are represented in China's humanitarian assistance in local areas in need. Second, the CISAR team's work is not determined by foreign policy calculation, but rather more by local need. NGOs and companies are further diversifying the links between foreign policy and humanitarian action. NGOs tend to increase people-to-people relations, so from the Chinese government's point of view NGO activity fits nicely with China's diplomatic interests in developing countries. At the same time, Chinese companies are at the forefront of the economic activity that underpins the legitimacy of the CCP, and their actions can damage China's reputation if they are not in line with a conflict-sensitive approach to aid.

This section also highlights the centralisation of decision-making and implementation processes. Decisions to act are made through coordination between the PLA, MOFCOM and the MFA. Such a centralised decision-making system enables Chinese humanitarian aid to be delivered extremely quickly, if only to natural disasters, not complex emergencies. The MFA's central role in decision-making allows China to link humanitarian aid to diplomatic narratives and discourses, such as South-South cooperation. Beyond the government, an increasing range of actors from civil society and the commercial sector are involved in humanitarian action overseas. The activities of these actors are heading in multiple directions, representing the increasing pluralisation of Chinese humanitarian action.

35 Author interviews with a Chinese scholar, Beijing, June 2016; two civil society actors, Beijing, June 2016; and a civil society actor, Beijing, January 2017. Discussions at HPG-CAG Symposiums, 21–23 October and 19–20 November 2015. The majority of NGO activities today focus on natural disasters, but some NGOs are considering expanding into conflict-related humanitarian crises.

36 Author interview with Zhang Yong, Blue Sky Rescue Team Leader, Beijing, June 2016.

37 Author interview with a civil society actor, Beijing, July 2016.

6 Conclusion

This paper began with a discussion of the sources and objectives of China's foreign policy. While there is much speculation about this, this study has argued that little of that speculation is correct, either singularly, or in and of itself. The way China engages in humanitarian aid derives from a very complex array of national interests and multiple processes, paths and actors in foreign policy-making. This concluding section summarises the paper's key findings, and advances four arguments about the links between the sources of China's foreign policy and its humanitarian action. It then discusses the obstacles and opportunities these links present for the delivery of humanitarian assistance to people in need. It concludes with a set of policy recommendations to key stakeholders, including the Chinese government, non-state actors and the donor states of the OECD-DAC.

6.1 Key findings

This paper has outlined key elements of Chinese foreign policy and its sources; the evolution of China's humanitarian assistance; current funding volumes and flows; and decision-making and implementation structures. In doing so, it has used a conceptual framework consisting of the four sources of China's foreign policy: multiple national interests, international integration, domestic influences and humanitarian values. The discussion in this section highlights key findings.

6.1.1 Multiple interests

China's multiple national interests lie at the heart of its provision of humanitarian aid. Reputation, bilateral relations, indirect economic and commercial interests and altruism are all aspects of China's humanitarian action. Of these, the most important national interest is strengthening bilateral relations by giving substance to China's diplomatic rhetoric in the Global South. In particular, China's foreign policy discourse, including South–South cooperation and China–Africa cooperation, provides the impetus for humanitarian aid to countries affected by natural disasters. This is evident in the way China has allocated its assistance; its preference for bilateral over multilateral aid; and

a decision-making structure that reflects China's diplomatic interests.

The foreign policy aim of gaining international reputation as a 'responsible state' is related to China's humanitarian action, but the former is not necessarily the key driving force for the latter. If China were genuinely serious about leveraging its assistance to bolster its image it would have increased the amount of humanitarian aid it provides beyond current levels, which account for less than 1% of global humanitarian funding.

Commercial and economic interests are often regarded as the sole reason for China's engagement in humanitarian action, but such interests are only indirectly relevant to decisions to participate in the provision of international humanitarian aid. The assumption in much of the literature – that China's behaviour in the Global South relates exclusively to energy resources – is too simplistic. Likewise, there is no evidence to suggest that China is attempting to use its humanitarian aid to pursue hegemonic intentions.

The relevance of multiple national interests to China's humanitarian aid means that, on each occasion humanitarian aid is provided, a different set of national interests can be at play, making China's provision of humanitarian aid ad hoc rather than systematic. China has no criteria or frameworks for humanitarian aid, nor does its humanitarian record match global trends in assistance. There is a consistent and strong emphasis on natural disasters over complex emergencies, presumably due to China's commitment to the principle of non-interference, and a preference for bilateral over multilateral funding channels.

6.1.2 Multiple processes

China's integration into the international humanitarian system has been a multifaceted process. On the one hand, it has been keen to be part of the international humanitarian system in relation to technical aspects of natural disasters and MOCA's cooperation with multilateral organisations on natural disasters: in other words, showing 'norm-taking' behaviour. On the other, in the context of complex emergencies and

other political and social aspects of assistance, the country remains uneasy about the norms of the current international humanitarian system, and at times shows nascent signs of becoming a ‘norm modifier’, focusing on the role of host governments and the importance of development. In so doing, China attempts to preserve historical and cultural principles, while developing a form of assistance ‘with Chinese characteristics’. The third contradictory process involves China’s offer of diplomatic mediation between conflicting parties in countries such as Myanmar, Afghanistan and South Sudan. In its provision of assistance, China may assume various identities: as a great power, it may assume the identity of ‘norm taker’; and as a rising developing country, it may assume the identity of ‘norm modifier’. These contradictory attitudes to international institutions and norms constitute one of the characteristic features of China’s approach to humanitarian action.

6.1.3 Multiple actors

The Chinese government’s humanitarian response is centralised and coordinated, with policy directives from the CCP given substantive form via key institutions of the state, including MOFCOM and the MFA, and with the central coordination of the PLA. Chinese companies and a wide range of civil society actors directly and indirectly contribute to humanitarian assistance, and each has different sets of interests in conflict- and disaster-affected countries. The involvement of an increasingly wide range of players in humanitarian action will be important in the future, because humanitarian action, including long-term programmes to enhance resilience as well as short-term relief operations, will depend on a wide range of specialised knowledge and expertise. Implementers, particularly the CISAR team, but also the PLA, civil society actors and the commercial sector, are gaining increasing experience, and there is an opportunity to further develop links between these actors and their international counterparts.

6.2 Obstacles and opportunities

The fact that national interests matter to the Chinese government’s provision of humanitarian aid does not in itself present an obstacle to meeting needs on the ground. Indeed, the fact that they matter enhances the quantity and quality of China’s humanitarian aid. But giving priority to improving diplomatic relations in the provision of humanitarian aid reveals the ad hoc nature of China’s humanitarian assistance. This means

that Chinese aid is preferential, and does not reflect levels of actual need.

China’s integration into the international humanitarian system, particularly in the context of natural disasters, is good news for people in need, and for traditional DAC donors, because integration can facilitate better coordination with other international humanitarian actors in disaster areas. As yet, China’s efforts at conflict mediation have not come to fruition, though as its power grows, its political and diplomatic role is also likely to increase.

One should also be mindful of China’s norm-modifying behaviour, particularly in the context of complex emergencies. China has no interest in integrating into a Western-centric humanitarian system. The lack of collaboration between DAC donors and China (and other non-DAC donors for that matter) could lead to a disproportionate focus on a small number of countries with which China happens to want to improve bilateral relations. Absence of collaboration can also lead to uncoordinated and wasted efforts within a response. More fundamentally, it could foster mistrust between DAC donors and China, which would not help effective humanitarian operations on the ground.

Finally, the increasing pluralisation of Chinese actors involved in or affecting humanitarian aid brings both obstacles and opportunities. Pluralisation presents an enormous opportunity as more civil society actors participate in operations with more resources, local knowledge and people-to-people contacts. At the same time, it is imperative that both state and non-state actors adopt a conflict-sensitive approach to the provision of humanitarian aid. Lack of expertise in and knowledge of rescue and relief operations could also complicate humanitarian operations, especially in the absence of coordination among all actors involved.

6.3 Policy recommendations to the Chinese humanitarian community and DAC donors

What do these findings mean for the Chinese humanitarian community and DAC donors? This paper concludes by offering policy recommendations to address the obstacles identified above.

First, the Chinese government and DAC donors should cooperate in sharing knowledge and information about how to create a policy framework or criteria for China's humanitarian action, in a way that addresses global humanitarian trends and needs, not just the humanitarian needs of the countries with which China seeks to improve its diplomatic relations.

Second, DAC donors should be discouraged from pushing China to accept international humanitarian norms particularly amid complex emergencies. Doing so might exacerbate existing anti-Western discourse in China. Instead, all parties must recognise diversity in humanitarianism without necessarily privileging established definitions of what constitutes legitimate humanitarianism, and enhance dialogue on different ways of approaching complex emergencies. There is a middle ground between pressuring China to join the DAC and accepting the status quo bilateralism that offers limited Chinese assistance to complex emergencies. China can be a more responsible and responsive multilateral humanitarian donor in some of the most pressing complex emergencies without necessarily joining the DAC – particularly through UN channels. Providing funding through UNHCR, WFP, UNICEF or the CERF, as well as, among others, with the ICRC and the other components of the Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement – both in the context of natural disasters and complex emergencies – could constitute a significant contribution to the global humanitarian effort.³⁸ China has begun making financial contributions to these organisations, and this should be encouraged. China and the DAC donors could also explore ways in which China can contribute to local resilience through the provision

of both humanitarian and development assistance, which accounts for the great majority of Chinese aid programmes. As discussed above, Chinese government officials believe that development provides a foundation for peace, and therefore addresses the root causes of humanitarian crises. DAC donors and China should jointly explore development paths that help enhance resilience.

Third, emerging actors such as Chinese companies and civil society are extremely keen to gain more training in the skills and knowledge relief and rescue operations call for. There are many opportunities for international cooperation between Chinese actors and DAC donors in this respect. For example, it is important to support China's humanitarian community by helping it to build individual and organisational capacities. China does not operate within the DAC framework, and Chinese actors – particularly civil society and businesses – lack experience of delivering humanitarian aid in the context of the current international humanitarian system. We are witnessing the early stages of China's civil society and business engagement in the humanitarian system, and at this early stage the international community and China should make efforts to exchange perspectives and experiences and learn from each other, without requiring China to conform to the Western paradigm of humanitarianism. More funding should be provided to support partnerships that enable international learning, training and capacity-building in China. Capacity-building is not just about practical issues such as how to deliver aid. It can also be about structural issues, such as how each organisation develops its decision-making structure and policy to facilitate the rapid and effective delivery of humanitarian aid in crises.

³⁸ I am grateful to an anonymous reviewer of an earlier version of this paper for this suggestion.

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