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Superpower Responsibility, China, the South China Sea and the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Abstract

Since the coming into power of President Xi Jinping in China in 2012, an important objective of Beijing's foreign policy has been to modify the international order to correspond with China's rising power and to fulfill the Chinese Dream of national rejuvenation and becoming a superpower. As a superpower, China is expected to bear the responsibilities of providing public goods, maintaining stability, and upholding the norms and values that are respected by other states. This paper examines the Chinese attempt to emerge as a key player in international affairs and use two case studies of China's policy towards the South China Sea and its international responses to the Covid-19 pandemic to argue that Beijing has, to some extent, fallen short of the duties of a superpower.

Keywords: *world order, superpower, China, responsibility, South China Sea*

1. Introduction

At the 18th National Congress of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in 2012, China revealed its ambition to have greater influence on the construction of a new world order. The Political Report of the Congress emphasized that China needed to adjust its policy towards multilateral organizations in order to promote the development of the international order and system in a way more suitable to China's interests. Following this line, the Political Report of CCP's 19th National Congress in 2017 reaffirmed that China would continue to play its role as a responsible power, actively participating in reforming and building a global governance system.

In reality, Beijing has sought to assert a greater role in international affairs. During his unofficial visit to the US in 2013, Chinese President Xi Jinping proposed a New Model of Great Power Relations between the two

countries. China also made efforts to influence existing international and regional regimes, such as offering its own interpretation of international laws, gaining better influence on the operation of the United Nations (UN), International Monetary Fund (IMF), East Asia Summit (EAS) and ASEAN Regional Security Forum (ARF), and actively introduced new initiatives and established and expanded its influence in multilateral cooperation mechanisms through China-led frameworks, such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), the Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia (CICA) and the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

On the other hand, Beijing's reputation in many parts of the world is not always positive. Sino-US strategic competition has intensified. China's relations are at odds with its neighbours, including India, Japan and some Southeast Asian countries, largely because of Beijing's unilateral actions to gain advantage in territorial and maritime disputes.

This paper contains four main sections. The first part is a theoretical discussion on a superpower and its expected responsibilities. It is followed by an analysis of China's strengths and its foreign relations strategy. The third and fourth sections analyze two cases of China's South China Sea policy and its Covid-19 diplomacy. The South China Sea is selected because it involves a wide range of social, political and legal issues and is considered by Beijing as China's core national interests. Meanwhile, China's Covid-19 diplomacy is an interesting case given that the pandemic has dominated world politics since early 2020 and China was the first country suffering from it. The overarching argument in this article is that China has met the criteria to assume the position of a superpower. However, the case of China's South China Sea policy reveals that it has not yet fully conformed with its Goliath's responsibilities.

2. Superpowers and Responsibilities

For many schools of thought, human history is defined by superpowers. In the absence of a central government in world politics, superpowers play vital roles in both waging major wars and managing international politics (Miller, 2002: 9). The concept of a superpower has different definitions. The traditional, realist account of a superpower emphasizes military capability, believing that a state can only be seen as a superpower if it acquires sufficient military might to fight a conventional war against other powerful states (Mearsheimer, 2001: 5; Wight, 2004). This approach, however, bears significant shortcomings, given that over-focusing on military capability fails to take into consideration the role of other actors, including second-tier states. It has little to offer in explaining alliances in which most superpowers have engaged in the course of history (Hurrell, 2006).

As international politics becomes increasingly complex and interconnected, a state's power, and thus the notion of a superpower, is more generally understood in a broader approach. A state's power is measured through a number of indicators, including military capability, economic size and quality, national resilience, future resources, population size, and manufacturing capabilities (Lowy Institute, 2020; Beckley, 2018; Organski, 1968). Researchers on this matter still disagree on the portion each criterion contributes to the overall strength of a superpower. They, however, agree that a superpower must acquire significantly huge resources and at the same time be big and efficient enough to perform its power projection at the world level (Beckley, 2018).

Even extensive statistics are not enough to define the rise to the status of a superpower. It must come with a strategy and the ability to translate national capability into preferred outcomes in international relations. This constitutes an outstanding character of a superpower. Japan for many decades after World War II enjoyed the position of the second largest and highly developed economy in the world. It also contributed a lot to international development through its foreign aid program worldwide. But it was not considered as a superpower largely because it voluntarily relieved itself off critical international security issues. So how much does measurable material strength of a state contribute to its overall position in the world, and how much does foreign strategy count? The Asia Power Index Project run by Australia's Lowy Institute construes a state's power as comprising 55 per cent of material weight and 45 per cent of external influence. In turn, influence is measured through economic, defence, diplomatic and cultural indicators (Lowy Institute, 2020).

"With great power comes great responsibility". This Peter Parker Principle and the more philosophical linkage between ability and responsibility have long been widely discussed, from philosophers to comic book texts (Copp, 2008; Dahl, 1974; Fischer, 2003; Howard-Snyder, 2006). Simply put, the more powerful an actor is, the greater responsibility it must take. In foreign affairs, the responsibility of a superpower is the willingness to provide public goods for the international community. Undoubtfully, the provision of public goods often entails costs that most states do not want to pay. Superpowers differ from others in that they make investment and bear the costs. But they do not provide public goods out of altruism. In return for the wealth that superpowers contribute, they are able to shape the system, through peaceful measures, for their own interests. The US pursues its national interests through providing and protecting global public goods, defined as, *inter alia*, an open economic system and international stability (Nye, 2002). As superpowers have different preferences and interests, they prioritize public goods differently, both in areas and in implementation. In official development aid (ODA) alone, China and the US differ greatly in their definition, sectoral

distribution, targeted recipients and institutional mechanisms for delivery (Regilme and Hodzi, 2021).

Regardless of the differences among superpowers in pursuit of their national interests, public goods that a responsible superpower provides or protects must breed greater security and stability. At the same time, superpowers, especially rising ones, may face a strenuous choice in providing either global public goods for a wider group of states or devote these goods to a smaller club in which they assume the leadership (Narlikar, 2011: 1609).

A responsible superpower also constructs or conforms to non-material international norms and regimes in a way that promotes international security and stability. These criteria may not consume huge resources but require superpowers to exercise self-restraint, to be benign, and to show their commitment to the international system and community. In the years leading to the end of World War II, the US, Britain, and the Soviet Union abandoned the "peace by dictation" approach and collaborated to establish the United Nations, a collective security model relying on the belief in an international system in which states have rights and responsibilities to preserve peace and security (Morris, 2013). Voluntary cooperation, together with the provision of public goods, in turn, provide superpowers the respect from other members. This respect is vital for the functioning of international mechanisms.

3. China as a Superpower

China is a world superpower by any means of material calculation. Its enormous population and economic size, together with Beijing's first detonation of a nuclear bomb in October 1964, even put China on the path towards the position of a superpower as early as in the mid-1960s (Roy, 1997; Clubb, 1964). As the second decade of the 21st century unfolds, after decades of sustained high economic growth rate, China has gained the comprehensive strength of a superpower. Since 2009, China has become the world's second largest economy. By 2019, before the Covid-19 global pandemic, its GDP was roughly 14.3 trillion dollars, accounting for over 16 per cent of global GDP and 2.8 times as much as that of Japan, the third largest economy in the world (World Bank, 2021a). It is currently the world's top exporting country and the largest trading nation (World Bank, 2021b). Economic advancement spreads into military capability. China is the world's second highest military spending country, more than the next four countries (India, Russia, Saudi Arabia, and France) combined (IISS, 2021). The country has acquired the most advanced military weapons and technology, including aircraft carriers, nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarines, advanced combat and long-range strategic bomber aircraft, and global positioning satellite systems for

military purposes (IISS, 2021: Chapter 6: Asia). Beijing ranks fifth in the line-up of the world's largest arms exporting countries (Wezeman, Kuimova, and Wezeman, 2021).

The defining moment in China's superpower ambition, lies in President Xi Jinping's abandonment of China's long-standing low profile foreign policy doctrine of "hide your strength and bide your time". At the CCP's 19th National Congress in October 2017, Xi Jinping delivered a lengthy speech, stressed China's great dream and underscored a new era in China's foreign policy, in which Beijing would no longer shy away from world leadership. He said:

> It will be an era for all of us … to strive … to realize the Chinese Dream of national rejuvenation. It will be an era that sees China moving closer to center stage and making greater contributions to mankind…. The [CCP] has united and led all the Chinese people in a tireless struggle, propelling China into a leading position in terms of economic and technological strength, defense capabilities, and composite national strength. China's international standing has risen as never before…. We must put national interests first …. The Chinese nation, with an entirely new posture, now stands tall and firm in the East. (Xi, 2017)

Well before this official statement, China had gradually put forth a strategy to gain influence and gradually build a rules-based order with China's characteristics from the existing pax-Americana order (Foot, 2006). Malcolm Jorgensen (2018) describes Beijing's strategy as promoting a "geo-legal order" in East Asia, in which the "rules" are designed by China and different from the existing global legal order. From a legal perspective, in June 2016, China and Russia issued a joint statement: "Promote international law", expressing their voice and political position to influence principles and activities of current international law institutions.

Politically, China's world order strategy is reflected mainly in its relations with the US and in multilateral mechanisms. President Xi Jinping proposed with then US President Barak Obama a new model of major power relations between China and the US during his unofficial visit to the US in 2012. This was a way to seek the US, and thus the world, recognition of China as a new superpower in the existing order (Zhao, 2015, 2018a; Kerr, 2013, Cheng, 2016). Washington, however, kept itself distant from China's idea, given that the proposal lacked clarity and required the US to respect China's "core interests" as the precondition (Zhao, 2017). Unable to persuade the US on a new model of relations, Beijing started to criticize the US and the West for their approach to today's world order. Chinese experts argue that the rules-based order is not neutral. The post-World War II rules-based order was built and influenced by the United States so that it enables Washington's expansion of power and influence in the world. As the global balance of power has

evolved into a state very different from that in the post-World War II era, the global order needs to be adjusted (Xue, 2019, 2020).

In respect of multilateral mechanisms, overall, China's attempts to develop a rules-based order in its favour has been implemented in three major directions (Tuan, 2018; Mazarr, Heath and Cevallos, 2018). First, Beijing has sought to gradually assert its role and influence in multilateral mechanisms where it has membership. This approach is evident in Beijing's strategy in a number of mechanisms, such as the World Trade Organization (WTO), Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) and East Asia Summit (EAS) (Scott and Wilkinson, 2013; Bisley, 2017; Kolmas, 2016; Wong and Ho, 2011). Shortly after its accession to the earth's largest trading organization in 2001, Beijing put pressure on the WTO to downgrade Taiwan's membership status and took a firm stance over the review mechanism established to supervise its accession agreement. Upon gaining membership in the core negotiating group in 2008, China took a decisive turn, exhibiting a bold position in WTO negotiations, in approving newly acceded members, and settling disputes through WTO's dispute settlement mechanism. These moves both reflect and fortify China's elevation from a rule taker to rule maker within WTO and other mechanisms (Scott and Wilkinson, 2013).

Second, China actively participates in existing multilateral mechanisms and seeks to reform them from within. Benefiting the most from the current economic order, China has no interest in overthrowing this order overnight (Zhao, 2018b; Breslin, 2013). Beijing has gradually expanded and strengthened its position and got ready for any possible heightened disputes with the US (Foot, 2006). One very good example is China's successful effort to put the Yuan, the Chinese currency, in the IMF's monetary basket of reserve currencies in 2016.

Third, Beijing has created China-led institutions and asserted influence through providing certain public goods to these exclusive groups. The gigantic Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) put forth in 2013 is backed by financial institutions, including the Asian Infrastructure Development Investment Bank (AIIB) and the Silk Road Fund, which are major steps to break the Western monopoly in terms of finance and currency (Raine, 2013; Johnston, 2018). Countries participating in the BRI are offered favourable and low interest rate loans to build their infrastructure. The BRI and the subsequent establishment of financial institutions also establish a higher position for Beijing as a player in global economic governance (Liu, 2021). On the security and political front, Beijing has also invested in regional initiatives, such as the Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia (CICA) and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). These exclusive mechanisms allow Beijing to deny US involvement in the region (Scott-Smith, 2019; Rogers, 2007).

4. China's Behaviour in the South China Sea

The influence of China's rise on world politics has long been debated (Ding, 2008; Pavlićević, 2018; Shah, 2021; Mearsheimer, 2014; Callahan, 2005; Allison, 2017). China's "peaceful rise" theory contends that China's development is beneficial for all other states and does not undermine international security (Zhang, 2015; Buzan, 2014). The political rhetoric of Chinese top leaders also seeks to persuade the world that Beijing will neither seek hegemony nor challenge the security and interests of other states (Xi, 2017). On the other hand, adherents of the "China threat" thesis, such as Friedberg (2011), Roy (1994), Shambaugh (2004), Christensen (2015), Mearsheimer (2001) and Allison (2017) argue that, during the course of its growth, China would naturally move from a status-quo power to a revisionist state, challenging international order in its favour.

Being revisionist does not necessarily imply being irresponsible. However, the question of whether China is a responsible superpower is closely associated with the "peaceful rise" versus "China threat" debates. This is because to determine whether China is a responsible superpower requires an analysis of China's performance either as a rules-taker or a rules-challenger and whether the challenges are for the sake of international security and stability.

To label China as a responsible superpower compels a comprehensive analysis of a host of developments. However, we can modify the argument made by Parello-Plesner (2011) and contend that a responsible superpower is identified by events as much as by grand strategy. In other words, the policy choice of a superpower in specific events, especially in situations where its national interests and the interests of the international community are not reciprocal, is a defining factor of a responsible superpower. Unfortunately, China's behaviour in the South China Sea seems not to support the view that China is an emerging, responsible actor in this specific area.

Observers of the South China Sea have well noted the strategic values of the South China Sea and detailed Beijing's strategy and activities in this region (Fravel, 2011; Raine, 2013; Tuan, 2018; Guilfoyle, 2019; Zhang, 2017; Zhao, 2018a; Turcsányi, 2018; Hayton, 2014; Storey and Lin, 2016). Overall, Beijing's South China Sea policy fails to portray China as a benign and responsible power in the South China Sea in three ways.

First, China fails to protect and preserve the common heritage of mankind. The 2016 Award of the special South China Sea Arbitration between the Philippines and China concluded that China's artificial island building in the Spratlys in the period from 2013–2016 has breached Articles 192, 194(1), 194(5), 197, and 206 of the UNCLOS (Permanent Court of Arbitration, 2016: 397). These articles require states to take all measures necessary to protect the maritime environment, including rare or fragile ecosystems and habitats

of depleted, threatened or endangered species. For the activities that deem polluting and harmful to the maritime environment, states need to assess the potential effects of such activities and communicate reports to competent international organizations (Nordquist, Nandan and Kraska, 2011).

Second, China's behaviour violates the sovereign rights of smaller claimants and challenges the legitimate rights of other states, fuelling tension in the South China Sea. The 2016 Award made authoritative conclusions that China has "breached article 77 of the [UNCLOS] with respect to the Philippines' sovereign rights over the non-living resources of its continental shelf in the area of Reed Bank" and "breached Article 56 of the Convention with respect to the Philippines' sovereign rights over the living resources of its exclusive economic zone" (Permanent Court of Arbitration, 2016: 286). Other littoral states also voice concern that China's excessive claim and unilateral actions in the South China Sea would undermine regional and international security and stability.

Third, China's legal interpretation of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) concerning the situation in the South China Sea is disruptive to the international legal regime on the sea (Mastro, 2021). As early as 2003, the CCP introduced the concept of "three warfares", comprising psychological warfare, information warfare, and legal warfare, in its guiding documents for the activities of the Chinese military (Lee, 2014; Scobell, Lai and Kamphausen, 2011). The legal warfare branch, or lawfare, is designed to frame the legal environment to justify Chinese actions and promote Chinese political agenda in foreign policy. This lawfare has become an offensive weapon capable of hindering opponents and realizing China's political objectives (Cheng, 2012). Beijing's lawfare in the South China Sea came into the spotlight after the release of the Award of the special South China Sea Arbitration between the Philippines and China in July 2016. Beijing is a signatory of the UNCLOS and, therefore, is bound by the Award. Whilst repeatedly affirming its respect for international laws and the UNCLOS, China wholly rejected the Award and continued its disruptive activities in the South China Sea, including harassing foreign fishery and petroleum exploration vessels and deploying advance weapon systems on artificial islands in the Spratlys.

To justify its non-compliance, China has thrown a cat among the pigeons, offering an uncommon interpretation of the UNCLOS. In 2016 alone, Beijing sent two diplomatic notes to the UN and issued a Declaration of the Chinese Government and a White Paper on China's position in the South China Sea. Three years later, in another round of lawfare from December 2019 to late 2020, Beijing sent at least five diplomatic notes and one official letter to the UN (Thao, 2020). Chinese Society of International Law, a *de facto* Chinese

government-related agency, in 2018 published a lengthy "critical study" of the South China Sea Award (Chinese Society of International Law, 2018). In 2020, a Chinese research institution published another lengthy research criticizing the Award of the Arbitral Tribunal (National Institute for South China Sea Studies, 2020). These studies mainly repeat China's position in the South China Sea and are seen as an attempt to "rewrite international law in the South China Sea" (Darmawan, 2021). Moreover, all these documents are to claim, *inter alia*, its historic rights and sovereign rights over the bodies of water around the structures in the South China Sea, which are either alien or run contrast to the recognized principles of the UNCLOS (Dupuy and Dupuy, 2017; Kopela, 2017).

Why does China fail to rise as a responsible superpower concerning the disputes in the South China Sea? Beijing has long recognized the long-term and strategic position of the South China Sea for its security and development (Hayton, 2014; Fravel, 2011; Cáceres, 2014). Since the end of World War II, Beijing has employed military tactics, including resorting to armed force to seize the Paracels and parts of the Spratlys. However, since 2009, Beijing has adopted an increasingly comprehensive and openly assertive approach to the South China Sea.

To begin with, the growing power gives China the capability and confidence to take unilateral action and challenge other states. Chinese use of force to take from Vietnam the Paracels in 1974 and some structures in the Spratlys in 1988 is best explained through the window of opportunity thesis, taking into account that Vietnam in these periods was faced with grave domestic concerns and international challenges. China's 1995 occupation of the Mischief Reef was a silent move, being a *fait accompli* when discovered by Manila. On the other hand, Beijing's purposive stand-off with the Philippines leading to the seizure of the Scarborough Shoal in 2012 is distinctive because it openly challenged a US non-NATO close ally when no remarkable window of opportunity was found. Following that event, Beijing conducted artificial island building in all seven features it occupied in the Spratlys; other claimants, the US and the international community only managed to voice concerns. These incidents best exemplify China's confidence and capabilities in pursuing its agenda in the South China Sea (Chang, 2012).

In addition, China's employment of a number of tactics collectively named as salami-slicing, hybrid warfare or grey zone, is hard to fight against. Simply put, these tactics aim to disrupt an opponent's actions using measures below the threshold of war, such as dominating the opponent piece by piece, to avoid engaging in open hostilities. This approach takes advantage of a grey area in politics and international law to gain political goals (Erickson and Martinson, 2019; Skingsley, 2020; Baruah, 2015; Patalano, 2018). The

US and regional countries have recognized the emergence of this tactic and a number of proposals have been made to respond, such as treating China's coast guard and maritime militia vessels the same as naval vessels and strengthening international cooperation to preserve international legal order (Holmes and Yoshihara, 2017; Sevastopulo and Hille, 2019). These measures, however, have not yet been sufficient to halt Beijing's advancement in the South China Sea.

Last but not least, history counts. Beijing's current inclination to unilaterally advance its objectives in the South China Sea stems from the low and bearable costs for its past actions in the South China Sea. Beijing had to pay very modest costs, if any, for its first steps towards the South China Sea after World War II. As recently as 2012, China's seizure of Scarborough only generated a moderate response. The 2016 Award of the arbitration in the South China Sea is a land-slide victory for the Philippines. However, it was followed by a conciliatory approach by the Duterte Administration. This approach may give advantage to the hawkish views within the Chinese policy-making circle concerning the South China Sea.

5. China's International Role in the Covid-19 Global Pandemic

China's international role during the Covid-19 pandemic is another compelling, although controversial, case study on the role of China as a superpower. As this pandemic is still evolving, it may require more time to produce completed judgement on Beijing's performance. However, this issue has already invited a number of initial assessments (Dorman, 2020; Wen, 2021; Esteves and Van Staden, 2020; Khalil, 2020; Karásková and Blablová, 2021). Overall, China's Covid-19 diplomacy has gone through two stages. The first stage is characterized by Chinese government's attempt to control information concerning the outbreak of the disease. When the pandemic became a global one, China moved to the second stage, offering support to other countries through "mask diplomacy", and then "vaccine diplomacy" in the "new normal" (Wen, 2021). In general, Beijing has given priority to national interests and paid attention to domestic audience. Its Covid-19 diplomacy is a mix between geopolitical calculations and humanitarian responsibility, in which the former has greater weight than the latter (Dorman, 2020).

To begin with, when the first Covid-19 cases were detected in Wuhan City in 2019, China tightened information control of the nature of the pandemic, punished doctors who raised this phenomenon in the media (Khalil, 2020). Only by the end of December 2019 did Beijing alert the World Health Organization (WHO) about the disease, but with a reassurance that the disease is "preventable and controllable" (Wu et al., 2020). When WHO's auspice team of international doctors came to Wuhan to study on the origin

of the Covid-19 virus in 2021, they reported to WHO Director General that they encountered difficulties in accessing raw data from China (Ghebreyesus, 2021). While China's information censorship of the Covid-19 origin may intend to protect its internal social order and save its face in international arena, it represents China's failure to fully comply with rapid data sharing responsibility as guided by the WHO's 2016 Guidance for Managing Ethical Issues in Infectious Disease Outbreaks (WHO, 2016: 38).

When Covid-19 started to spread out and became a global pandemic, devastating the US and many European countries in around March 2020, China had already managed to control the disease by imposing bold lock-down and quarantine measures in many of its main cities. Beijing started the second phase, termed Covid-19 diplomacy. This phase is both to redeem China's own image as a responsible superpower and to assert China's influence. In his remark at the G20 Virtual Summit in March 2020, Chinese President Xi Jinping elaborated a vision of a China-centred global response to the pandemic with an expanded role of the G20 (Xi, 2020). This reflects China's long-term strategy to transform the international environment to make it "compatible with China's governance model and emergence as a global leader" (Tobin, 2018). Xi's speech was later commentated in Chinese media as a promotion of China's concept of a community of common destiny for mankind (Xinhua, 2020; Zhang, 2020). In an intensified Sino-US strategic competition, Beijing's move also implies its growth and governance model is better, thus more appealing, than that of the US (Sheng and Geng, 2020; Verma, 2020: 205).

Operationally, China has offered financial and medical aids to heavily-hit countries, including those in Southeast Asia, Europe, Latin-America, the Pacific island states, and Africa (Dorman, 2020; Verma, 2020; Xinhua, 2020). Mask diplomacy, and later vaccine diplomacy are claimed as a successful example validating China's international responsibility in combating the pandemic. Beijing's assistance bears humanitarian value in this emergency situation. This move is, however, not unconditional. Countries receiving Chinese assistance are selective and they are under pressure to accept China's political goals and international visions, such as entering some form of relations with China, reducing cooperation with Taiwan, and acknowledging the concept of community of common destiny (Zhang, 2020; Eto, 2020; Kolmas, 2016; Rudolf, 2021). Beijing also plans to issue vaccine passport for people who get Beijing-approved jabs. This puts pressure on those frequently travelling to China to use Chinese vaccines (Huang, 2021). The mixture between gaining hearts and minds by proving its responsibility and at the same time taking opportunity during the pandemic to advance its strategic influence is the outstanding feature of China's Covid-19 diplomacy.

6. Conclusion

Power always comes with responsibilities. By most, if not all, criteria, China has emerged as a fully-fledged superpower in world politics. It is, therefore, expected to bear the responsibilities of a superpower. Beijing has been actively searching to modify the international system and world order corresponding with the shift in balance of power. It has also provided certain public goods to the international community. However, case studies of China's behaviour in specific issues reveal different levels of responsibility that Beijing commits. China falls short of the test of being a responsible Goliath in the South China Sea, where China considers of its "core interest". Its policy and actions in the region fail to protect the Common Heritage, violate the legitimate interests of smaller claimants, and disrupt the international legal regime of the ocean notably represented by the UNCLOS. Beijing's confidence in challenging not only smaller claimants but also other stakeholders stems from the shift of power in its favor, the wise exploitation of the gap in international legal regimes, and the lessons from past events. When it comes to handling the Covid-19 pandemic, China has made more obvious contribution to global effort to halt the pandemic. However, from another perspective, China has taken the opportunity brought about by the pandemic to fulfill its own strategic goal of asserting its role and influence over the world. Afterall, it is natural for every countries to pursue their self-interests in international relations. But as an emerging superpower, China must do more to prove itself as a responsible one.

Note

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