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Development-Based Human Rights?

The Normative Endeavors of China in the United Nations Human Rights Council

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In recent years, China has ramped up its actions in multilateral international organizations such as the United Nations. Through these organizations, it has a chance to use its normative power to diffuse, alter, and finally institutionalize its preferred norms.

This research focuses on China's actions in the United Nations Human Rights Council (HRC). It aims to uncover the ways in which China is altering global human rights norms through the HRC resolutions it is a main sponsor of, focusing on the development-related resolutions entitled "Contribution of Development to the Enjoyment of All Human Rights". Through these resolutions, China promotes its view of the connection between development and human rights.

The research is conducted through a qualitative thematic analysis focusing on the four HRC resolutions adopted between 2017 and 2023. The dataset consists of all four resolutions with their draft versions, more extended reports related to the resolutions, and speeches from both China's and the co-sponsor countries' delegations given during the resolutions' voting situations.

The key findings include four themes identified from the dataset: Development-based approach to human rights, Common development, Global prosperity, and People-centred development. These four themes reflect both the normative changes China is promoting and the issues that co-sponsors of the resolutions decided to support. The key findings conclude that China is using a broadening strategy to broaden the widely accepted right to development norm and stress the priority of development over other human rights. The broadening of the norm can, in turn, weaken other norms, such as individual rights and the indivisibility and universality of all human rights.

The research provides an in-depth analysis of the processes surrounding the development related HRC resolutions China is the main sponsor of while contributing to the overall research field that considers China a global normative leader.

Key words: China, human rights, development, norms, normative power, United Nations Human Rights Council, multilateral organizations

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1 Introduction

“As the eternal theme of human society, development is the basis for and key to resolving all problems, and creates conditions for the realization of all human rights,” stated Chinese Ambassador Chen Xu at the United Nations Human Rights Council’s inter-sessional seminar on the Contribution of Development to the Enjoyment of All Human Rights on 28 May 2021 (United Nations, 28.5.2021). In the last decade, China has stepped up its normative influence as an acting United Nations Human Rights Council member.

The foundational argument of my thesis is that China is seeking normative leadership in different multilateral organizations by highlighting its commitment to developmental norms and its own development initiatives. China is actively a visible actor in development-related topics in the UN; some examples of this include the resolutions around development that China has championed inside the United Nations Human Rights Council (HRC), which are the main focus of this thesis. In addition, recently, China has raised discussions on the importance to “Promote Sustaining Peace through Common Development” in the United Nations Security Council (Permanent Mission of the People’s Republic of China to the UN [PMPRC], 2023a). Regarding the development initiatives, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is a well-known global infrastructure project initiated by China. With BRI, China aims to better connect itself with Europe and Africa by developing overland routes to Europe and sea routes to Africa. The Belt and Road Initiative and China’s motivations behind it have received considerable attention from scholars and international media over the past few years. The Initiative has been seen as a part of Beijing’s global expansion master plan, at times for spreading economic and military resources and at times for spreading ideas, norms, or mere propaganda (See, e.g., Callahan, 2016). Though the Belt and Road Initiative is foremost a fragmented developmental and financial initiative, it is clear that through the Initiative, China has been yielding credibility as an international actor and possible normative leader while challenging the current international normative setting.

In 2021, Xi Jinping introduced the Global Development Initiative, which can be seen as another initiative through which China tries to further expand its normative influence, especially over developing countries. China’s normative intentions seem to be paying off as (according to China) 68 countries joined the Group of Friends of the Global Development Initiative without hesitation right after the Initiative was launched, with 20 heads of UN agencies joining the virtual launch meeting of the group. (PMPRC, 2023b) Secretary-General of the United Nations,

António Guterres, has also expressed support for these global initiatives of China ever since the launch of BRI in 2015. (See, e.g., Guterres, 2023, as cited in United Nations Secretary-General, 2023)

In order to yield normative power, China has been employing the Belt and Road Initiative (and the more recent Global Development Initiative) as its organizational platforms for the diffusion of norms, while the United Nations (and in this case, the Human Rights Council) is an organization where these norms can become institutionalized and deployed into the international human rights framework. By promoting its notion of development in HRC, China can gain credibility as a normative power from developing countries while cultivating a favorable image for its developmental initiatives and investments, both abroad and at home. Organizational platforms enable having an influence on state actors, which is essential for effective norm diffusion. Often, such organizations also have some kind of leverage over other actors and norm takers, be it financial resources or dominance over weak or developing states. (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998).

The theoretical framework of my thesis consists of concepts such as normative power, norm diffusion, norm makers, and norm takers. The concept of normative power has been widely used in the field of European Union research. Most notably, Ian Manners developed the concept in a series of his studies focusing on Normative Power Europe (Manners, 2002, 2006 & 2013). As a normative power, the European Union is seen as capable of influencing the ideas perceived as ‘normal’ by the international society. Normative power has been initially defined to fit the European Union’s context, and research around Normative Power Europe has assumed that the EU is normatively distinctive when compared to other great powers. Countering the normative superiority generally attached to the EU, several China scholars have developed the concept to accommodate the normative agendas of rising China (see, e.g., Kavalski, 2013; Peng & Tok, 2016; Song, 2020; Garlick & Qin, 2023). For example, Jakimów (2019) examined China’s normative influence in Central-Eastern European countries, concluding that China is perceived as an alternative option against the European Union, not just from a financial point of view but political and normative as well.

1.1 Research questions

The goal of this research is to examine China’s use of normative power in the United Nations Human Rights Council (HRC) through its resolutions entitled *Contribution of Development for the Enjoyment of All Human Rights*. This study aims at uncovering the strategies China is

employing to alter the currently prevalent development-related norms through these resolutions. In addition, the motivations behind the support of the co-sponsors of these resolutions are explored. Through these aims, the research will more broadly consider China's actions as a norm entrepreneur and the implications of its favored norms to the understanding of development in the global human rights regime.

This research goal and the aims of this research will be achieved by answering the following research questions:

1. How is China trying to alter the norms around development through its own resolutions in the United Nations Human Rights Council?
2. Why the co-sponsors of the resolutions decide to support the norms negotiated by China?
3. What are the implications of these norms for the global human rights regime?

The first research question will be answered by providing an in-depth exploration of the four HRC resolutions titled *Contribution of Development to the Enjoyment of All Human Rights* adopted between 2017 and 2023. Though some studies have looked into these resolutions and China's overall normative impact on the Council, there is a need for more in-depth research that looks at the resolutions and the processes around them as a whole. The resolutions largely reflect different internationally accepted human rights documents, such as *the Declaration on the Right to Development*, *the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action*, and *the Agenda 2030*. The analysis takes a closer look into the role of these documents in the resolutions to see what is highlighted and what might be left out.

The second research question explores more closely the reasons behind member countries' support for these resolutions and certain norms promoted by China. The question will be answered by including the co-sponsors' statements from each resolution's voting situations and other discussion sessions in the analysis. In addition, some absentee countries' statements are also included in the analysis to reflect on why certain countries (some of which have been co-sponsors in earlier resolutions) decided to step down from supporting the latest resolution.

As the analysis revolves around development-related norms and the ways in which China is trying to alter the current norms, the third research question looks at the broader implications that the changes to these norms would have in the human rights field.

This research provides an in-depth account of the four resolutions titled *Contribution of Development to the Enjoyment of All Human Rights*, of which China is the main sponsor. The resolutions' content shows what kind of developmental and human rights China is trying to advance internationally. The resolutions are examined from both China's and the co-sponsors' view to understand the appeal of China's preferred development-related norms.

The following sub-chapter will provide an overview of the contents of this thesis.

1.2 Thesis structure

In the next chapter, I will introduce the main theoretical framework of this thesis. First, different theories around softer understandings of power are introduced, moving on to the definition of normative power, which is the foundational theory of this thesis. Then, norms and the strategies of diffusion, as well as altering norms, are looked at more closely. In the end, some critiques of the definitions of normative power and lastly, previous research around China as a normative power are introduced.

The third chapter looks at the historical background and context relevant to the whole research, especially the thematic analysis introduced in the fifth chapter. First, I will introduce the history of development as a human right, moving on to understanding the human rights-based approach to development. After the background of development is introduced, we will look at China's views on human rights issues. Lastly, a brief look onto the United Nations Human Rights Council and its processes will be provided.

The fourth chapter looks at the research design of this thesis. I will first introduce the methodological approach of this thesis by introducing the qualitative thematic analysis method I am following. After the method of this study is introduced, the whole dataset, including the data collection process and the actual data analysis process, is reported. The chapter also looks into the limitations of the research design.

The fifth chapter includes the main findings of the thesis. Firstly, the four identified themes are introduced: Development-based approach to human rights, Common development, Global prosperity, and People-centred development. Each theme is first defined and then looked at

more closely with a rich selection of excerpts from the dataset. Themes are not merely descriptive, but I am taking the analysis further to look at the contradictions in each theme and the interesting aspects behind the themes. The last sub-chapter contains a discussion of the overall findings. In the discussion, I will look at the themes wholly and reflect on the theoretical framework of this thesis. Some limitations and suggestions for future research are also provided.

The sixth and last chapter concludes the whole thesis. I will provide an overview of the main goals and findings of the thesis, while reflecting on the contributions to the broader research field. Lastly, some practical recommendations are given.

2 Theoretical Framework

In this chapter, the main theoretical framework of this thesis is introduced. The chapter starts with a brief introduction to soft power and different understandings around it, then moves on to normative power and defines the main idea behind the argument of this thesis. After normative power, an overview of norms and different understandings of how norms are diffused and changed is presented. Following a closer look at norms, challenges around the theoretical framework are introduced with some critique of the normative power theories. In the end, previous research that has focused on normative power, norms, and China are introduced.

2.1 Power

From the different definitions of civilian/soft/normative power, soft power is the most popular in China studies. Thus, it deserves a more profound investigation. Nye first introduced the term soft power in the late 1980s and defined soft power as shaping the public's preferences with the means of attraction. (Nye 2008). According to Nye (2008), a country can utilize soft power by using three primary resources: "its culture (in places where it is attractive to others), its political values (when it lives up to them at home and abroad), and its foreign policies (when they are seen as legitimate and having moral authority)."

Nye's original definition limits soft power solely to a favorable attraction with moral values. However, some academics have criticized Nye's definition of soft power, particularly in China's case. Kurlantzick (2007) argued that the definition of soft power has changed in the context of China and that the Chinese understanding of soft power can include anything outside military and security. Kurlantzick (2007) referred to Nye's example of carrots and sticks in China's context: "Beijing offers the charm of a lion, not of a mouse: it can threaten other nations with these sticks if they do not help China achieve its goals, but it can offer sizable carrots if they do." This approach broadens the idea that soft power can be used with malicious intentions in mind.

Since the debate over the definition of soft power started, Nye has further discussed its meaning and definition. Soft power has been seen as an alternative to raw power politics and ethically minded scholars have often praised it. However, soft power can be used for both good and bad purposes, just like any power. Authoritarian leaders can use a fair amount of soft power in their supporters' eyes, but that does not necessarily make it good. (Nye, 2011.) The debate also included the relationship between propaganda and soft power. According to Nye, it is essential

to recognize the emphasis on pull when using soft power rather than push. “The best propaganda is not propaganda” (Nye, 2011, p. 83).

Soft power has been used as a part of China’s Comprehensive National Power since the early 2000s. In Chinese strategic discourse, soft power can be seen in terms such as China’s ‘peaceful rise,’ ‘peaceful development,’ and pursuit to build a ‘harmonious world.’ (Wuthnow, 2008, p. 5.) According to Zhang (2012, p. 615), China is committed to a peaceful rise and will continue to use soft power, even though China’s growing hard power during its rise has concerned academics. China’s main reason for using soft power is to counter the ‘China threat theory’ used in Western dialogue (see e.g., Wuthnow, 2008; Callahan, 2015; Brady, 2015). However, Edney (2015, p. 269) argued that China’s interest in soft power is not just about countering the ‘China threat’ but a part of a larger-scale nation-building project. Callahan (2015) argued that in China, soft power is an issue of domestic politics and only a secondary issue of international politics. China’s focus on domestic issues reveals the difference between Western democracies and China’s soft power approach.

Zhang (2012) described China’s soft power usage through ‘inviting in’ and ‘going out’ strategies. The ‘inviting in’ includes international events such as the Olympic Games and World Expos, as well as inviting international students and exchange students to China. The ‘going out’ includes China’s global media outlets and Western media usage. China’s participation in global institutes such as the UN and IMF and the establishment of Confucius institutes can be seen as part of ‘going out’ activities. (Zhang 2012.)

According to Li (2009), China will need to use soft power for defensive purposes, even though Chinese leaders only portray soft power as a way to spread a positive image of China. Edney (2015) argued that academics might need to consider soft power in China’s context as a way for China to enhance its regime security. According to Wang & Lu (2008, p. 427), the Chinese understanding of soft power includes “the ability to generate compliance in a society by moral example and persuasion.” Barr (2012) added that China harms its soft power image by strictly controlling the internet and media outlets. The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) wants to promote a peaceful China with the help of soft power but, at the same time, does not let anyone question its authority. (Barr 2012, p. 83.)

Vangeli (2018) proposed the use of symbolic power in his research regarding China’s influence over Central-Eastern European countries and the 16+1 network. He stressed the importance of seeing China as a diffuser of norms, values, and rules in the international society. He

acknowledged that scholars do not have a consensus on how to approach this topic. Instead, multiple theories exist, such as the China model, Beijing consensus, and autocracy promotion. There is also division regarding different definitions of power, such as earlier mentioned soft power, sharp power, and normative power. (Vangeli 2018.) Vangeli (2018) did not disregard the several definitions of power but instead wanted to enrich the current understanding of China's ideational influence by adding symbolic power to the discussion.

Vangeli (2018) further argued in favor of symbolic power that the idea of soft power rests on the attractiveness of a country, while symbolic power "rests on the idea of influence through practice and rites in a variety of policy fields by setting the terms and conditions of relationships, providing the official terminology, and other key symbolic forms." China's symbolic power functions if the recipient countries act according to the norms and rules that China has set. (Vangeli 2018, p. 677.)

According to Vangeli (2018) China's symbolic power stems from the narrative of its 'financial miracle.' This narrative was not created by China but rather by other observers, such as international media. In CEE-countries case, the more they operate in China's terms, the more they support China's symbolic power and its regional approach in Europe. Vangeli (2018) argued that China's symbolic power would persuade more countries to act and think like China.

2.2 Normative Power

Normative power is a widely used theory in European Union studies, and most notably, Ian Manners (2002) has developed an understanding of normative power in several of his studies. The idea of normative power is not new, as scholars have proposed different definitions of civilian/normative-shaped power since the early 70s. Manner's understanding of normative power stems from several earlier theories illustrated with similar ideas. For example, Carr (1962) recognized three forms of power: military, economic, and the power of opinions. Similarly, Galtung (1973) used the term ideological power, while Duchêne (1973) identified it as *idée force*. (Manners, 2002.)

The discussion around Europe concentrated on civilian power after Duchêne (1973, p. 20) argued that the "European Community must be a force for the international diffusion of civilian and democratic standards." Later, scholars shifted to Europe's military aspects, identifying Europe as a military power. In his study, Manners (2002) argued that the European Union would be best described as a normative power. He defined normative power as having the "ability to

shape conceptions of ‘normal’ in international relations.” Manners pointed out that the earlier understandings of Europe as a civilian and military power are not irrelevant, but rather, Europe’s global normative influence should be given more attention. (Manners, 2002, p. 239.) He thought that the issue is essential since “the ability to define what passes for ‘normal’ in world politics is, ultimately, the greatest power of all” (Manners, 2002, p. 253). Manners argued that the European Union is a unique actor that possesses normative power, devoting itself to universal rights and principles. He recognized peace, liberty, democracy, the rule of law, and respect for human rights as the five central European Union norms. (Manners, 2002.) While Manners connected normative power to the European Union in his studies, several scholars have argued that the concept can also be applied to other actors and states. The debates over this matter are further examined in the *Critique around normative power* sub-chapter while different studies connecting the notion of normative power to China are reviewed in the *China as a normative power* sub-chapter.

2.2.1 Norms

So, what are norms? Krasner (1982, 2) described norms as “standards of behavior defined in terms of rights and obligations.” While Katzenstein (1996, 5) identified norms as “collective expectations for the proper behavior of actors with a given identity.” Furthermore, Finnemore and Sikkink (1998) identified three steps in formulating international norms. Firstly, the ‘norm entrepreneurs’ need to convince recipient states to accept the new norms. Secondly, the recipient states must start acting according to these new norms. Finnemore and Sikkink (1998) recognized three elements that may support the second step: “pressure for conformity, desire to enhance international legitimation, and the desire of state leaders to enhance their self-esteem.” Thirdly, norms are eventually internalized in the international system. At this point, no state is questioning these new norms. Finnemore and Sikkink (1998) provided the example of women’s voting rights as an international norm that is no longer challenged.

Norm makers are actors dedicated to advocating certain norms or a set of norms. They want to have a normative change in the social community they are acting in. Normative change is achieved with the use of normative power. Norm takers are actors in a social community who accept the norms advocated by norm makers. Norm acceptance usually requires some modification of the norms to fit into a specific social community. (Björkdahl, 2012.)

Björkdahl (2012) criticized the prevalent view on norm takers and norm makers that emphasized the role of norm makers while underestimating norm takers’ influence on the norm

selection process. The privileging role of norm makers can be seen in studies that revolve around Normative Power Europe and “European exceptionalism,” while other actors are seen as passive norm takers. Björkdahl (2012) argued that norm takers play an essential role in selecting and modifying the norms. However, norm takers that are recovering from crisis are more open to accepting the diffused norms. (Björkdahl, 2012.)

Norms carry the notion of certain rights and responsibilities and drive ‘proper behavior’ by defining what is appropriate. However, appropriateness is a flexible concept that differs between different social communities. (Björkdahl, 2012; March & Olsen, 1998; Axelrod 1986) Norms can also refer to collective expectations that are tied to certain social communities’ identities (Keck & Sikkink, 1998). If the norm maker and norm taker share a similar identity, norms are more likely to be adopted. Norm takers that are in the process of changing their identity and that want to be accepted into a certain community are likely willing to accept norms lightly and comply with the community’s normative context. This will lead to a shared identity between the community actors. (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998.)

The notion of norm makers and norm takers includes an understanding of transferring the norms through export or import. Norm export relates to norm makers and their ability to introduce new norms into the community in which they are operating. The activity by which norms are exported is called norm negotiation. Norm negotiation is heavily influenced by norm makers and can eventually lead to the adoption of norms that were introduced by the norm makers. (Björkdahl, 2012.) Norm import relates to norm takers and their ability to accept new norms. Björkdahl (2012) recognized that norm takers need recognition and legitimation, which can lead to voluntary borrowing of norms. Norm takers can use a “mimetic adoption” to accept external norms to better their chances of joining an external community. (Björkdahl, 2012.)

At the international level, all norm makers need some organizational platform for norm promotion. The organizations can be well-established international organizations or organizations purely built for norm promotion purposes. Finnemore and Sikkink (1998) compared well-established organizations such as the United Nations and World Bank to non-governmental organizations such as Greenpeace and Red Cross. Organizations can also influence other actors and export norms when providing their expertise and knowledge (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998).

Organizational platforms enable having influence towards state actors, which is essential for effective norm socialization. Often, organizations also have some leverage over other actors

and norm takers, be it financial resources or dominance over weak or developing states. (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998.)

For a new norm to get recognized and to be effective in an international setting, it has to become institutionalized. This can happen by having the norm in the rules of an organization such as the UN, in international laws, or in bilateral foreign policies. The norm is defined through institutionalization, and there are some rules for breaking the norm. With a clear definition of the norm, it is more easily diffused further. However, institutionalization is not a requirement for norm diffusion, and in some cases, institutionalization can occur after norm diffusion. (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998.)

Norm entrepreneurs are “actors who aim to change the international normative architecture and thereby the practices of the international community” (Björkdahl, 2013, p. 324). They are committed to certain norms and ready to promote them in an international setting. By promoting the norms, norm entrepreneurs want to impact other actors’ behavior and change the normative setting of a particular international organization.

Norm entrepreneurship can be used as a diplomatic strategy to shape the world order. Norm entrepreneurs’ values and identities influence the norm they want to commit to. “The norm is then framed to make it morally appealing, familiar and “good” in order to resonate with global audience” (Sikkink, 1991, p. 26, cited in Björkdahl, 2013). Norm entrepreneur then selects an organizational platform for the new norm to be institutionalized. Institutionalization is achieved through norm advocacy, which includes tools such as norm negotiation, agenda shaping, and coalition building. After the norm gathers strong support inside the organization, it can be used to shape the views of the resisting state. Norm entrepreneurs also need to support the institutionalization of the new norm. Through institutionalization, the norm gets diffused into the organization’s discourse, procedures, and structures. (Björkdahl, 2013.)

For recognition of norm diffusion in foreign policy, Tocci (2007) identified three dimensions of a normative foreign policy: 1. What an actor wants, 2. How it acts, and 3. What it achieves. The first dimension focuses on normative goals. Recognizing certain actors’ normative goals is not an easy task, as the distinction between normative and non-normative goals can be challenging to differentiate. In many cases, normative goals can be intertwined with strategic objectives. Tocci (2007) understood normative goals as a way to “shape the milieu by regulating it through international regimes, organisations and law.” International institutions, such as the UN, provide norm entrepreneurs a ‘normative framework’ in which norms can be

institutionalized. As norms are institutionalized, the rules regarding the norm bind all parties, including the norm entrepreneur. (Tocci, 2007.)

The second of Tocci's dimensions focuses on the normative means of an actor. In the academic literature, there is no consensus over what constitutes as normative means. The foreign policy instruments associated with normative means are usually economic, social, diplomatic, and cultural instruments. Tocci highlighted Holsti's (1995) classification of soft methods, moving from persuasion to granting or promising rewards, to threat of punishments, and lastly to hard methods of using force. In addition to Holsti's soft methods, some authors have classified joint ownership, engagement, persuasion, and cooperation as being normative. (Tocci, 2007.)

When differentiating between normative and coercive foreign policy means, the context in which these means are deployed is critical. Tocci emphasized that regarding normative means, it is more important "how rather than which policy instruments are used." Tocci defines normative means as "instruments (regardless of their nature) that are deployed within the confines of the law" (Tocci, 2007, pp. 5-6).

The third one of Tocci's dimensions focuses on the normative impact. Tocci criticized the fact that many academics tend to dismiss the impact of norm diffusion and rather focus on the reasons behind the diffusion. It is not enough that the actor has normative goals and is deploying normative means, but rather, there also needs to be a normative impact. An actor's normative actions or inaction should have a traceable path to the institutionalization of norms in an organizational setting. Tocci suggested that analyzing normative impact requires "a detailed analysis of the interaction between policy and the political opportunity structure underpinning the situation within a receiving party." (Tocci, 2007.)

Forsberg (2011) recognized four mechanisms of normative power: 1. Persuading others, 2. Invoking norms, 3. Shaping the discourse of what is normal, 4. The power of example. "In its most general form, normative power relies more on persuasion, argument and shaming than on illegitimate force to shape world politics" (Manners, 2008, p. 57). Persuasion can include tools such as rhetoric, the attraction of an actor or an institution, and providing relevant knowledge. Invoking norms relates to the activation of commitments. Shared norms include commitments from both the norm maker and the norm takers. Discourse can be seen as a vehicle of normative power. Compared to the first mechanism of persuasion, "the power to shape discourses is an indirect, but not therefore a lesser, form of power" (Forsberg, 2011, p. 1197). Forsberg wrote that the power of example is the most normative of all four mechanisms and relates especially

to Normative Power Europe. (Forsberg, 2011.) “The most important factor shaping the international role of the EU is not what it does or what it says, but what it is” (Manners, 2002, p. 252).

This research will be largely based on the more recent constructivist research, in which actors’ different strategies for norm-altering and weakening purposes were recognized. Grigorescu (2015), much like Björkdahl (2012), criticized the earlier research from the 1990s for merely recognizing norm takers as passive actors that either yield or deny a proposed norm under normative pressure. He recognized that if a normative actor is a member of an international organization, such as the United Nations in this study, they likely want to keep the organization’s legitimacy and would rather act strategically to alter or weaken the proposed norms than deny them. (Grigorescu, 2015)

From this stance, Grigorescu (2015) proposed two approaches actors could use to respond to normative pressure: either to alter the interpretation of the norm or its implementation or to try to weaken the norm’s strength. From these two approaches, three different strategies could be used to counter the normative pressure; the actor could challenge, narrow, or broaden the norm. The three different strategies result in six different possible actions: challenge the norm’s interpretation or its proposed implementation, narrow the interpretation of the norm or narrow its proposed actions, and broaden the interpretation of the norm or broaden its proposed actions.

When challenging a norm, the actor can counter the “appropriateness” of the norm or its proposed actions. When narrowing a norm, the actor can accept only some of the proposed interpretations of the norm or only some of the proposed actions resulting from the norm. When broadening a norm, the actor can promote other norms that fit under the same norm umbrella or promote new actions resulting from the proposed norm. (Grigorescu, 2015)

If a norm is strong, it is usually better to propose other norms and hope that as some norms arise, the others weaken. Grigorescu (2015) mentioned collective rights and individual rights as an example of the narrowing strategy – collective rights have been argued to be too loosely defined, while a more narrow definition of rights has been seen as appropriate. When applying the broadening strategy, the actor promotes a broad norm that does not clash with the other norm that is being promoted. Broadening implies that it is not enough to promote norm X, but the international community should also regard all the other norms that exist under the broader norm of Z. (Grigorescu, 2015)

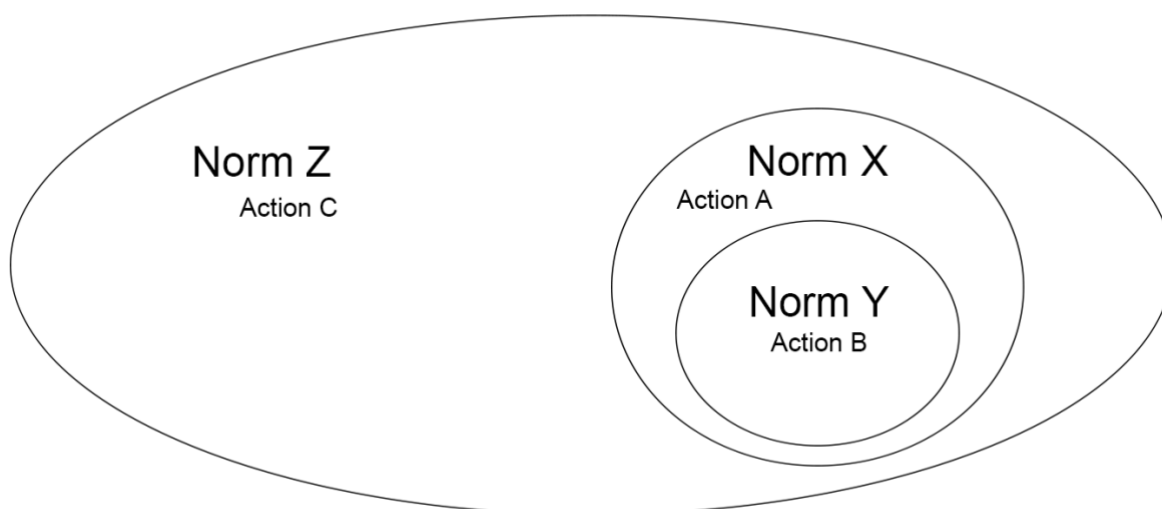


Figure 1. Model that Grigorescu (2015, 32) used to visualize the different strategies for altering norms. Actor can choose to narrow down the norm by only accepting the Norm Y, that only includes a part of the proposed norm X. Actor can also decide to broaden the norm by promoting Norm Z that fits under the normative umbrella of Norm X.

Grigorescu and Komp (2017) studied the usage of norm-altering strategies with the norms of the right to development and the right to democracy. As the indivisibility of rights norm is rarely countered in the United Nations context, connecting the right to development with individual rights was a working norm-broadening strategy. This allowed the right to development “piggyback” on the already strong individual rights. Broadening norms is a popular strategy because of institutional factors. In a normative setting, norm negotiation is more likely to land on an outcome with multiple sets of norms. (Grigorescu & Komp 2017.)

2.2.2 Critique around normative power

One of the central debates regarding normative power is whether normative power can be used together with other kinds of power. Manners (2009) mainly argued that normative power strictly focuses on changing the current norms and does not try to use military or economic incentives. However, he also stated that, realistically, normative power is often used together with hard power capacities (Manners, 2009).

Zupančić & Hribernik (2013) argued that having hard power capacities is necessary for countries that want to modify international norms. Hard power in the means of military and

economic capacities can help in diffusing new norms globally. Vangeli (2019) came to a similar conclusion when he argued that the ideas diffused through the Belt and Road Initiative “despite being normative in nature, are not driven through normative logic, but rather by the promise of economic development.”

Another issue that arises from the studies of normative power is what kind of norms are acceptable. Zupançiq & Hribernik (2013, pp. 126-127) considered normative power in Japan’s case as “spreading ‘the common good.’” They also argue that in order to be seen as credible normative actors, countries need to “stress the importance of ethical issues.” These kinds of definitions of normative power are problematic as they raise the question of who determines what is good or ethical in international relations.

Instead, the definition of acceptable norms lies in the hands of normative actors and receivers. If a normative power can justify the new norms and the receivers accept them, new international norms can be formed, no matter whether they are seen as ‘ethical’. Finnemore and Sikkink (1998, p. 892) seemed to support this view as they stated that “one logical corollary to the prescriptive quality of norms is that, by definition, there are no bad norms from the vantage point of those who promote the norm.”

Larsen (2014) examined the external perceptions of the European Union as a normative power. He noted that other international actors should see the EU as a unique normative actor that can define and change existing norms. Otherwise, the EU has no means to influence international norms through the use of normative power. As Larsen’s (2014) research indicates, having normative power can also differ between geographical contexts. Norms that are perceived as acceptable in some contexts can be seen as unwelcome in other contexts.

Larsen (2014) also identified several problems in the discussion of normative power in the European context. One of the issues he raised was the impact of Europe’s history on its normative power today. European countries’ past actions as colonial powers are especially shadowing the European Union’s normative aspirations. For example, African countries, Brazil and China perceive the EU’s norm diffusion as a sort of neo-colonialism. (Larsen, 2014.) Manners (2006, p. 174) acknowledged this problem as he stated that “the obvious post-colonial concern that civilian power Europe is read as a neo-colonial attempt to ‘civilize’ the world (again).”

Larsen (2014) criticized the identification of the European Union as a unique normative actor. The EU may have normative power in some contexts, but this does not make it anyhow unique. Other international actors, such as the US and China, can have the same capabilities of diffusing new norms. Thus, he noted that the normative power discussion should not concentrate solely on the European Union, but a comparative aspect is also essential. (Larsen, 2014.)

2.2.3 China as a normative power

Several scholars have also studied China's use of normative power, Kavalski (2013) being one of the first ones. He focused on both normative power Europe and normative power China. He noted that when China's growing global influence has been studied, the focus has most commonly been on soft power. At the time, the studies regarding normative power had focused on the European Union, and with his research, Kavalski (2013) criticized this focus on only one actor.

Kavalski (2013, p. 258) emphasized the importance of the legitimation of power and stated that normative powers' "agency depends on the validation by target actors (usually through different types of compliance or conformity)." Kavalski referred to Ringmar's (2012, p. 19) statement regarding the target actors: "Their reaction is far more important than the action itself, and their reaction is what the exercise of power ultimately seeks to influence." According to Kavalski (2013), the key to successful normative influence is the actor country's genuine interest in recipient countries' concerns and ideas. The best incentives are not necessarily economic or ideational but including recipient countries' own ideas as a part of the normative strategy.

Peng and Tok (2016) examined the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank's (AIIB) role in China's normative strategy. The study focused on three aspects of China's normative power: normative principles, diffusion of norms, and external perceptions of normative power in China. Peng and Tok (2016) argued that the AIIB is an important instrument in diffusing China's normative power as it is a Chinese-led initiative. China holds 30% of the capital of AIIB, which is a lot more than other member states' ownership, and thus, China has an advantage in proposing new norms to AIIB's protocols. (Peng & Tok, 2016.)

Peng and Tok (2016) concluded that the member states' acceptance of AIIB adds to China's normative influence. Additionally, some international organizations have modified their protocols to better align with China's norms. The AIIB and its cooperation with other financial institutes also enhances Western countries' reception of China's normative power. (Peng &

Tok, 2016.) However, some member countries are more skeptical of China's normative power and are a part of the AIIB mostly for their own benefit. Hence, they are not interested in implementing any promoted norms. Furthermore, developed countries are mostly skeptical of the AIIB and China's normative power. These countries are trying to change the procedures of the AIIB rather than accepting China's norms. (Peng & Tok, 2016)

Callahan (2016) studied the Belt and Road Initiative by examining the connectivity of norms and values, focusing on Asia. He argued that China is building a 'grand strategy' for promoting new norms, ideas, and values through different global institutions (AIIB) and projects (BRI). Callahan (2016) stated that China begins this strategy by creating a new regional order in Asia, then moving on to the rest of the world to change the whole global order. Jakimów (2019) also studied China's normative influence through the Belt & Road Initiative. His research concentrated on the Central-Eastern European (CEE) countries with a focus on the 16+1 platform. Jakimów (2019) stated that CEE countries object to interference with their sovereignty and see BRI as a helpful medium when opposing the EU's initiatives.

Song (2020) examined China's normative foreign policy by focusing on China's cooperation with Central Asian countries through the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. He regarded certain Chinese foreign policy concepts, such as the 'Community of common destiny' and the 'Five Principles of peaceful co-existence', as examples of China's normative objectives. (Song, 2020.) This view is supported by Callahan (2016), who suggested that Xi Jinping regards China as a normative power in the universal 'Community of shared destiny.' Song (2020) concluded that the norms that China is promoting are mostly relational, while the current Western-led international norms are predominantly universal.

The debates regarding normative power in China's context are quite similar to the soft power debates mentioned in the start of this chapter. According to Zhang (2011), international norms have traditionally been constructed by the Western world. This setting has formed a made-up reality that rising China has to navigate in, and it is going to affect China's relations with the international community. Pu (2012) has similar observations, arguing that international standards are mostly defined by great Western powers that have determined what is acceptable in the modern world. Western powers defined norms and political values as the only way for other states to become civilized. Song (2020) stated that Western powers have primarily conducted the current international norms and added that China has often been a target of these Western-led normative strategies.

Peng and Tok (2016) claimed that China is mostly seen as a negative normative power, and this setting exposes China's position in the current international normative structure. China is playing its own game with its own rules while being seen as an 'other' in the global normative system. Song (2020) pointed out that China's norms are seen as unfit for the Western world. China's normative power has been thus seen as mere propaganda. Song (2020, p. 231) argued that concepts such as 'sharp power' and 'authoritarian norms' point out China's place in the international order.

Pu (2012) argued that rising non-western powers would likely counter the current international norms and values, as they do not want to operate in a Western-constructed world. According to Pu (2012), China's development model offers an alternative to the current international norms. Similarly, Callahan (2016) noted that several Chinese intellectuals see changing Western-led international organizations' procedures as China's responsibility in order for international organizations to better fit non-western countries' needs. Callahan (2016) stated that in many Chinese scholars' views, the BRI is a project with the primary goal of countering the US-led world order.

Dukalskis (2023) studied China's norm diffusion in the UN Human Rights Council by focusing on both what China is trying to diffuse, through examining China's voting patterns and contents of the resolutions China is supporting, and by what means the diffusion is done, through examining what happens outside the actual votings. His study suggests that the main topics China is focusing on in the Council are keeping its own human rights record out of the discussions, opposing issues targeting a single country, working to advance its preferred norms related to multilateralism and development, and lastly by working against norms that relate to liberal democracy. Dukalskis (2023) described China's motive in the Human Rights Council as "a vision in which China is immune from criticism, individual rights protections do not trump sovereignty, the international order has a diminished role for liberal democratic powers and scrutiny of human rights conduct, and China's policies are seen as consistent with human rights law." He argued that even though the fact that China is keeping its own human rights records (and like-minded countries) out of the spotlight does not create new norms, it is essential to note in order to understand what kind of international human rights framework China is championing. (Dukalskis, 2023.)

Dukalskis's (2023) third topic of multilateralism and development reflects China's identity as a Global South leader. China's view of development highlights it as a state-led right and

underlines its collective qualities while diminishing the role of individual civil and political rights. This understanding has the potential of giving states the full ability to decide where the right is exercised and how. For multilateralism, Dukalskis pointed out the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) resolution that China has supported, titled "Promotion of a Democratic and Equitable International Order", that emphasizes the connection of economic and social rights to democratic rights while broadening the understanding of democracy from mere political concept to also including social and economic features. The resolution also calls for non-interference in states' internal affairs. Dukalskis argued that China's preference for "renewed multilateralism" includes emphasizing the role of states that are responsible for economic and social issues and the need for states to work together through multilateralism to encounter any threats to international peace. (Dukalskis, 2023.)

Dukalskis pointed out the other HRC resolution that China is the main sponsor of, titled "Promoting Mutually Beneficial Cooperation in the Field of Human Rights," which promotes China's view of the importance of dialogue instead of human rights standards. Dukalskis argued that it can certainly be seen as mutually beneficial if two states decide to ignore or downplay each others' human rights violations. The resolution promotes a world that sees nondemocratic political systems as legitimate and that has only a few binding human rights standards. A world where states can solve human rights issues by cooperating together and having an understanding of the relativity of human rights. (Dukalskis, 2023.)

Behind the formal scenes of the Council, China is advancing the norm diffusion by mobilizing like-minded states, real or implied coercion, tactical deception, and repression of critical voices. (Dukalskis, 2023.) As an example of mobilizing like-minded states, Dukalskis (2023) mentioned the joint letter in 2019 that China collected signatures for (A/HRC/41/G/17). The joint letter was created to oppose a joint statement left by European states, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, and Japan a few days earlier. The joint statement raised concern over the reported detentions, surveillance, and restrictions targeting Uyghurs and other minorities in Xinjiang (Joint Statement on Xinjiang, 2019). Overall, 37 states signed the opposing joint letter collected by China, and according to Dukalskis, China most likely applied pressure over some state's signatures. However, many of the states that signed the letter are rather nondemocratic, and thus, these states likely signed the letter without any further persuasion. The joint letter is one example of the ways in which China mobilizes other states for support, especially states that are members of the Like-Minded Group. (Dukalskis, 2023.)

China has used implied coercion related to HRC proceedings, for example, in 2019, when the United States planned a side event called “Protecting Fundamental Freedoms in Xinjiang, China.” China naturally opposed the event, and its representative sent a letter to ambassadors in Geneva, urging them to refrain from attending the event “in the interest of our bilateral relations and continued multilateral cooperation.” Human Rights Watch obtained a copy of the letter. (Permanent Mission of the PRC to the UN, 2019; UN: China Responds to Rights Review with Threats, 2019.) The side event was held normally on 13 March 2019, as the opposing voices were not enough to prevent the United States from going forward with the event (U.S. Mission Geneva, 2019.) Brazys and Dukalskis’s (2017) analysis of United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) votes between 1999-2009 indicated that states with closer economic and diplomatic relationships with China were more likely to align their votes at UNGA to match China’s votes over issues normatively important to China.

According to Dukalskis (2023), the mode of tactical deception is showcased, especially in China’s favored non-governmental organizations. The China Society for Human Rights Studies is one Chinese NGO that is often included in the HRC proceedings. However, the CSHRS is not practically non-governmental but part of China’s party-state’s external propaganda apparatus. The society’s website does not include critical content on the human rights situation in China but rather cites news from Chinese media outlets, such as Xinhua (China Human Rights). The website is copyrighted by China Intercontinental Communication Co., Ltd., which is owned by the Central Office of Foreign Propaganda (OFP), known better by its external name, State Council Information Office (SCIO). SCIO is in charge of China’s external propaganda as well as diluting any news that are forbidden in China but reported abroad. (Brady, 2015.) In the UN Human Rights Council, CSHRS fully supports the human rights views of promoted by China.

The last mode Dukalskis recognized, repression to silence the critics, can be seen in the attempts that China makes to prevent its critics from traveling to the HRC meetings and voicing their views on China’s human rights situation. China also tries to block the accreditation of NGOs critical over China, as NGOs need an accreditation to take part in the Council proceedings. In this sense, China is trying to mute critical individuals and organizations before they can even take part in the Council’s proceedings and events. (Dukalskis, 2023.)

Foot (2024) examined how the different international organizations and their structures enable China’s influence on human rights issues by focusing on two UN organizations, the Security

Council and the Human Rights Council, and in addition, one Beijing-initiated organization, the South-South Forum on Human Rights. Overall, the United Nations is an important organization for China, and its role as “the most universal international organization” is often emphasized by Chinese officials. China’s view is that the UN is an organization that should be used to solve worldwide threats and that sets international rules that instruct the world order. Foot (2024) emphasized that inside the UN, HRC would be the most beneficial forum for China to influence human rights issues, but the Council’s problem is having little mandatory power; the Security Council is more prominent in this regard. (Foot, 2024.)

In the Security Council and the Human Rights Council, China can act from its two different identities as a major power and a developing country. China can also be seen as a connecting actor working between these two identities. Foot (2024) recognized a few main norms that China is promoting in the Human Rights Council: the state as the guarantor of human rights, sovereign equality between states, development as a primary right, and a relativist position on human rights.

In the UN context, China is part of the Like-Minded Group (LMG), which includes states such as Cuba, Egypt, Pakistan, Russia, and Venezuela. The states in the Group share many common human rights views. According to Foot (2024), LMG is trying to change the role of the Human Rights Council into a technical body that supports states in promoting human rights while giving up the procedures for tracking states’ human rights records via tools such as the Universal Periodic Review (UPR).

3 Background and Context

This chapter focuses on the historical background and the overall context that is relevant to the research. Firstly, I will start with an overview of the history and understanding of human right to development and human rights-based development, including a closer look at the processes in the United Nations. Moving on to the views that China holds over human rights and lastly, looking into the international human rights regime, with a special focus on the UN Human Rights Council and its processes.

3.1 Human Right to Development

After the Second World War, human rights were lifted to the discussion of the international community and seen as a tool for transformation. Due to the decolonization process, development aid and human rights were both necessary in north-south relations. However, because of the Cold War, the connection between human rights and development could not be seen in the actual implementation of development work. (Broberg & Sano, 2018.)

Development as a human right came into discussion during the 1940s, in connection with Roosevelt's New Deal with "Freedom from want" as one of its main principles, which was introduced to the international community in the Atlantic Charter of 1941. Later, this principle was used in the World Bank and was soon connected to the notion of development. It was even included in the institution's new name, "The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development." (Helleiner, 2014)

When the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was drafted, Eleanor Roosevelt held a speech that argued for the right to development. (Sengupta, 2001) The discussion around the right to development was left on the back burner during the early years of the Cold War. During the Cold War, there was a split between Western and Soviet Bloc states that divided into camps between civil and political rights as well as economic and social rights. Because of the split, The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights were adopted separately in 1966. Many of the new states formed during the decolonization processes supported economic, social, and cultural rights, and thus, the non-aligned movement got larger. (Grigorescu & Komp, 2017.)

In the 1970s, developing countries started to form another view that focused on the obligations of the developed world towards the development of the third world countries. This obligation

was seen as having priority over the states' obligation to civil and political rights. The understanding of development as a human right started to spread further. (Grigorescu & Komp, 2017.)

The first proper debates over the matter were held in 1972 in the form of "the new international economic order" (Uvin, 2007). Five years later, the United Nations Commission for Human Rights recommended conducting a study of "the international dimensions of the right to development as a human right." (Grigorescu & Komp, 2017.) The Commission adopted a resolution on the human right to development in 1979 (RES 34/46).

In 1981, the United Nations General Assembly stated that the right to development was an inalienable human right (A/RES/36/133). In 1986, the Declaration on the Right to Development was adopted (A/RES/41/128). Eight Western states were marked absent during the vote, while the United States was the only one voting against it. After the declaration's adoption, another debate started over the indivisibility of rights -norm, which got its own resolution in 1985 (A/RES/40/114). The indivisibility of rights was especially backed up by developing states that wanted to raise economic, social, and cultural rights to the same level as the civil and political rights at the time. It also strengthened other "umbrella norms" such as the right to development. (Grigorescu & Komp, 2017.)

Towards the end of the Cold War, Western countries began to accommodate the indivisibility of rights, and eventually even the United States absented during a vote in 1989. Also, developing countries that did not see civil and political rights as important were ready to accept them together with economic, social, and cultural rights. This debate created foundations for the right to development. (Grigorescu & Komp, 2017.)

When the Cold War ended, the right to development was widely accepted as a norm. The Vienna Declaration, adopted in 1993, connected the right to democracy, human rights, and the right to development. Even the United States voted for the Vienna Declaration, mostly because of the mention of the right to democracy. The Vienna Declaration also stated, "Lack of development cannot be used to justify the violation of other human rights." (Grigorescu & Komp, 2017.)

In the United Nations context, arguments against the right to development usually criticize that the right is too wide and not clearly defined. Arguments for the right then try to define it more clearly and appeal to the indivisibility of rights norm. The indivisibility of rights is rarely argued

against in the United Nations, as states know they might need to appeal to the norm themselves in future debates. (Grigorescu & Komp, 2017.)

After the Declaration on the Right to Development and the Vienna Declaration were adopted, and human rights, the right to democracy, and the right to development were officially connected, this relation was later recognized in several UN bodies. That is when different human rights actors started implementing the human rights-based development approach. However, different actors had different perspectives on the concepts and their implementation. Different UN actors held a workshop on the matter in 2003, in which the perspectives on the concepts were discussed. From the workshop “The human rights-based approach to development coordination – towards a community understanding amongst the United Nations Agencies” report was born. (Broberg & Sano, 2018.)

In the report, six different human rights principles were recognized that should guide UN Agencies’ development work: universality and inalienability, indivisibility, interdependence and interrelatedness, accountability and rule of law, participation and inclusion, and equality and non-discrimination. The last three principles play a crucial role in implementing the approach. (Broberg & Sano, 2018.)

Broberg and Sano (2018) recognized six common characteristics that could be seen in the implementation of a human rights-based approach to development. The first aspect is the understanding of rights. This includes changing passive recipients into active rights-holders and supporting the rights-holders in demanding their rights. The second characteristic is that in order to have a right, there needs to be a connected obligation. Rights-holders need to have the possibility to set the right towards public authorities. In this approach, the duty-bearers are almost always states. (Broberg & Sano, 2018.)

The third characteristic includes supporting the duty-bearers, aka states, in providing the rights for their citizens. It also involves the need for citizens’ participation in the processes and their empowerment. The fourth aspect is that the main cause of poverty can usually be found in inequalities and discriminatory practices. Thus, in addition to poverty alleviation, the focus should be on tackling marginalization and discrimination. (Broberg & Sano, 2018.)

The fifth characteristic includes the notion of activism and advocacy. This includes supporting political, economic, cultural, and social processes and bettering living standards through these processes. The sixth aspect is that all development related aspects cannot be automatically

considered rights. Broberg and Sano (2018) criticized the 2003 report, saying that even though it connected different views over the rights-based approach well, these principles are rarely seen in the implementation stages, even in the actions of UN agencies. (Broberg & Sano, 2018.)

The Agenda 2030 pledge of the United Nations includes three ‘universal values’, the second one of which is called Leave No One Behind, which is also referred to in the resolutions analyzed in this study. Broberg and Sano (2018) criticized this value by claiming that different actors and even UN bodies have understood the term differently. While the value is meant to avoid marginalization and discrimination and recognize the most vulnerable groups of societies, many states have understood the value as only reaching the poorest people globally. According to Broberg & Sano (2018), the value has been left quite far from the Sustainable Development Goal 10 (reduced inequalities) and overall human rights. (Broberg & Sano, 2018.)

3.2 China’s View on Human Rights

The start of the international human rights regime can be pinned on to 1946, when the UN Commission on Human Rights was first established. Two years after the Commission was established, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted in 1948. (Inboden, 2021.)

China’s role in the United Nations human rights bodies has changed over the years. Before China was appointed as a member of the UN Commission for Human Rights, it used to be a passive actor that avoided the human rights issues in the United Nations’ context. Things started to turn in the early 1980s, when China started in the Commission, first as an observer and later as a proper member in 1982. During the 1980s, most likely because of the lack of experience in the human rights regime, China’s role was relatively low-profile. Prior to 1989, there was also a lack of scrutiny on China’s human rights violations, and this was reflected in China’s openness in the Council. (Inboden, 2021.) However, there were some signs of China’s normative values also during this time, as in the PRC statement given in 1988: “China has no objection to the United Nations expressing concern in a proper way over consistent and large-scale human rights violations in a given country, but it opposes the interference in other countries’ internal affairs under the pretext of defending human rights.” (Kent, 1999).

In 1989, after the Tiananmen Square crackdown, China came under scrutiny for its human rights violations. Tiananmen crackdown was condemned largely by the international community, and especially Western actors, namely the United States and the European Union, started to impose sanctions on China and froze bilateral aid and development programs. After 1989, China

suffered severe economic losses, including an estimated loss of \$11 billion in bilateral aid. This is when China's role in the Commission for Human Rights first shifted from an observer to a defensive stance. During the two years after the Tiananmen Square crackdown, China focused on diplomatic efforts by building its relations with non-western countries. Because of these diplomatic activities and, for example, lifting martial law, China's diplomatic relations were largely recovered by 1991. However, China's scrutiny in the international human rights forum continued onwards, despite the diplomatic efforts of China. (Inboden, 2021.) In the 1990s, China was faced with multiple resolutions in the Commission for Human Rights, raising concerns about human rights offenses in China. In the late 1990s, China started focusing its diplomatic efforts on courting non-Western countries by doubling down on the shared identity of developing countries. In addition, China relied on providing aid to these countries and emphasized its earlier support for development issues in the Commission. (Inboden, 2021) In 1991, China released a white paper on human rights, which essentially opened up the basis of China's normative stance on human rights. It was also the first time Chinese officials described human rights "with Chinese characteristics." The white paper reflects China's stance on human rights mainly to this day as "with respect to the central arguments, the People's Republic has not changed its position for more than two decades" (Kinzelbach, 2012).

The white paper on human rights was published in 1991 by the chief administrative authority of the People's Republic, the State Council, and specifically its Information Office (which meant it was formulated mainly by the propaganda department of the Chinese Communist Party). The paper was meant to counter the criticism China faced in the international human rights regime during the years after 1989. The paper also guided Chinese officials on how to deal with human rights issues in international settings. The white paper created an international debate on human rights norms ahead of the World Conference on Human Rights in 1993. (Kinzelbach, 2012).

The 1991 white paper was the first official document to address the issue of human rights in the People's Republic of China. During Mao Zedong's period, having rights was seen as a collective class issue, and individual rights were not recognized. Only when Deng Xiaoping came to power after Mao's death and the PRC's constitution was changed in 1982, did the understanding of rights change from collective, class-struggle understanding to more individual understanding, recognizing the rights of citizens as civil rights. An interesting part of the updated constitution, also related to this research, is the broader understanding of rights, duties, and relations between the state and citizens. It classifies the different duties of citizens and

recognizes rights as belonging to the state and citizens collectively rather than to individuals. (Kinzelbach, 2012.) Kinzelbach (2012) further notes that “the civil rights contained in the 1982 Chinese constitution depend on the behavior of citizens.” The same constitution is still in force in today’s China. However, it has seen later amendments. It should be noted that the white paper was published as a foreign policy document and thus does not reflect China’s internal affairs regarding human rights.

The preface of the white paper focuses on the “three big mountains” that are seen as the main obstacles to human rights - imperialism, feudalism, and bureaucrat-capitalism. According to the white paper, these obstacles were overthrown only when the PRC was established. Though the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is acknowledged in the paper, taking into account the differences in countries’ backgrounds and cultural settings in human rights situations are stressed, and the notion of “Chinese human rights” is described. The paper also underlines state sovereignty and classifies it as a basis for the enjoyment of human rights. (Human Rights in China, 1991.) “In contrast to the right to self-determination as contained in the Universal Declaration, the Chinese white paper emphasizes national independence rather than peoples’ self-determination as a requirement for human rights” (Kinzelbach, 2012). Kinzelbach (2012) recognized that this is due to the fact that self-determination is a sensitive issue in China, where citizens’ self-determination is seen as a threat to the stability of the party-state. Overall, the paper defines human rights as an internal affair of the state while refraining from international condemnation of human rights violations.

Kinzelbach (2012) recognized that the white paper does not only omit information (regarding, e.g., China’s human rights violations) but contains false information, as it, among other things, states that Chinese citizens have complete freedom of speech and that there is no censorship. As with the understanding of civil rights in the 1982 constitution, regarding the issue of freedom of speech in the white paper, the notion of citizens’ duties is firmly connected to their rights (Kinzelbach, 2012). The first chapter of the white paper is entirely devoted to the notion of the right to subsistence and states that “it is a simple truth that, for any country or nation, the right to subsistence is the most important of all human rights, without which the other rights are out of the question.” The right to subsistence is given as a reason for Chinese people to focus on maintaining national stability. Overall, the white paper highlights the importance of prioritizing right to subsistence and development. (Human Rights in China, 1991.)

In 2006, the United Nations Human Rights Council replaced the Commission for Human Rights. China was actively involved in the closing of the Commission. The most significant change in China's role can be pinned down to the years after 2013 when Xi Jinping came to power. China became more assertive in the human rights regime and started to actively promote its normative views on human rights by introducing its own resolutions and using presidential statements. (Inboden, 2021.)

One of the processes of the Human Rights Council that receives criticism from China, the Universal Periodic Review (UPR), enables the Council to investigate human rights issues in individual countries every four years. China has countered the UPR measures by relying on its allies to water down the reviews with positive or neutral commentary. (Inboden, 2021.) Inboden (2021) recognized six strategies of China in the UN human rights bodies: Employing political and economic clout, courting non-western countries and the developing world, promoting Chinese views and a counter-narrative, advancing "reform," cooperating with similarly minded countries, and creating a semblance of human rights cooperation.

Oud (2020) studied how China has deployed the right to development in order to promote its own human rights values. The right to development helps to further legitimize the views China is promoting, that go against the current understanding of human rights as universal, indivisible and as based on a rule of law. China also uses the right to justify its views on sovereignty and the importance of national conditions that it prioritizes over human rights standards. Its differential national and historical conditions are used as an explanation for the prioritization of stability and subsistence over other rights (civil and political as well as economic, social and cultural rights). The historical view of raising Chinese people from poverty, seen as the CCP's great achievement, means that only the party-state can guarantee rights for Chinese people. It is also worth noting that in China, "people" consists of the ones that support the party-state, and only inclusion in this group provides rights. Through China's understanding, individuals do not hold rights over the state, but rather, the state holds rights over other states. (Oud, 2020.)

Oud (2020) recognized two overall developments in the UN Human Rights Council that have benefited China in promoting its own human rights views. Firstly, the proliferation of human rights norms. Different HRC functions have increased since the establishment of the Council, especially the number of Special Procedures that included 46 thematic and 14 country mandates in 2023. The Special Procedures are independent human rights experts with either thematic or country-specific issues on which they report and advise. (Special Procedures of the Human

Rights Council). While the number of special procedures and other functions has been increasing, the resources of the HRC have not increased at a similar rate, which especially affects the human rights monitoring done by the Council. Secondly, Oud (2020) mentioned the “depoliticization” of human rights. As the Council understands human rights as universal, the flip side is that this understanding is attractive to authoritarian states that oppose the politicization of rights. The risk is that international human rights standards lose the important normative basis and are rather understood in different ways, depending on each state’s differing ideologies and values. (Oud, 2020.)

3.3 United Nations Human Rights Council

United Nations Human Rights Council (HRC) was established with UN General Assembly’s decision on 15 March 2006; the Council replaced the UN Commission on Human Rights. Council has 47 member states, and it is responsible for the global promotion and protection of human rights. A set of member states is selected each year through elections, and each member state’s term lasts for three years. The membership can be re-elected through a decision of UNGA; for example, the Russian Federation’s membership was suspended in April 2023 after Russia’s invasion of Ukraine (Chatterjee, 2023). The Council is widely supported by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). The resolutions and decisions of the Council can either raise a thematic human rights issue or an issue that concerns an individual state.

Three types of proposals are considered at the end of the Human Rights Council’s Sessions: resolutions, draft decisions, and draft president’s statements. Both member states and observance states can make proposals of draft resolutions for the sessions. Proposals are drafted by one state or a group of multiple states, called main sponsors. The first resolution draft, called “zero draft” is created after an extensive research and consultation process of the main sponsor(s). After a zero draft is created, the draft is negotiated further through informal consultations that the main sponsor(s) hold with other states, called “informals”. During the informals, other states have the possibility to affect the draft’s text to reflect their national position more. Through informals, main sponsor(s) also gather information of the resolution’s voting rate or possible amendments. When zero drafts are formulated into actual draft resolutions through revisions, they are formally tabled, registered by the secretariat, and sent for translations and editing. (Ramkaun & Durnescu, 2023.)

After the tabling, the draft resolutions can still be changed through revisions or amendments. Revisions are changes proposed by the main sponsor(s), while amendments are changes

proposed by other states but declined by the main sponsor(s). In the session, resolutions can be adopted by consensus, adopted by a recorded vote, or declined by a recorded vote. Only member states of the Council can take part in the voting. In the Council's sessions, draft resolutions are rarely declined – the first time this happened was in 2021. (Ramkaun & Durnescu, 2023.) In the case of this research, all of the four Contribution of Development to the Enjoyment of All Human Rights -resolutions were adopted by a recorded vote.

The United Nations resolutions include two main components: preambular paragraphs and operational paragraphs. The preambular paragraphs give background for the resolution and need to start with a verb or an adjective. The operational paragraphs present the actions that states accept by adopting the resolution. Operational paragraphs are numbered and need to start with an action verb. (Editing of resolutions at the United Nations.)

The Universal Periodic Review (UPR) process was initiated when the Human Rights Council was established in 2006. The UPR process includes a periodic review of all 193 UN member states' human rights records. It is based on equal treatment of all states, and it aims to improve the human rights situations in all states. During the process, states can bring forward what they have done to improve their country's human rights situation. The state's human rights record is assessed, and if human rights violations occur, they are addressed during the process. (Basic facts about UPR.)

The process is conducted by the UPR Working Group, which includes 47 member states of the Human Rights Council. All UN member states can take part in the discussions that are conducted with the reviewed state. During the process, information provided by the state, reports of Independent Human Rights Experts and groups, and information by other stakeholders such as human rights organizations are assessed. (Basic facts about UPR.)

4 Research Design

In this chapter, the overall research design of this study is defined. Firstly, by taking an overview of the methodological approach and discussing the selected method, thematic analysis, more in-depth. The limitations of the methodological approach are also taken into consideration. After the methodological premise is introduced, the dataset of this study is introduced by giving a detailed account of the data selection and the data analysis processes.

The premise of this study is that China is using its normative power inside the United Nations Human Rights Council (the organizational platform for norm cascade around human rights) to alter the current widely accepted norms around development by utilizing its resolutions focusing on the role of development in the field of human rights. The United Nations and the Human Rights Council can be considered as powerful organizations that are designed for setting international norms, while the United Nations has large resources and influence over its member states (and non-member states). By getting its resolutions passed in the Council, China can institutionalize its own views of the norms that can have profound implications in the wider understanding of the relationship between development and human rights. Through resolutions, Council members can also request funds and other resources to implement new norms.

4.1 Methodology

The research approach selected for the study is qualitative, and the method used is thematic analysis. A qualitative approach was selected in order to provide an in-depth overview of the whole resolution-setting process and to understand the norms promoted via the resolutions. Thematic analysis provides a useful tool for identifying overarching themes from the data while providing insights into the underlying norms and perceptions in the data. It focuses on comprehensive engagement with the data while reflecting on the researcher's own influence on the analysis process. As mentioned in the research questions chapter, there is a need for research that looks into the whole process around these four resolutions and the norms promoted through them, from both China's and the supporters' views, while looking at the implications these resolutions might have to the overall human rights field.

Thematic analysis is a qualitative research method and approach to analysis. Qualitative analysis methods can be divided into two camps, methods that are strongly based on a certain theoretical frameworks and methods that are more flexible to use with different theories and

epistemological approaches. Thematic analysis is firmly in the category of flexible methods, and it can be used to provide rich and detailed analysis of data. (Braun & Clarke, 2006.)

Braun and Clarke (2006) suggested that there has been a significant need for a framework for conducting thematic analysis. They aspired to provide a useful guide that provides information about what thematic analysis is and how it can be used without restricting the flexibility of the method too much. While conducting thematic analysis, the researcher is largely in charge of making decisions about the most useful ways to use the method in their research context. (Braun & Clarke, 2006.)

Thematic analysis is used to identify and analyze patterns from the dataset of a study. With it, the researcher can organize and describe their data – or go further and interpret it. Thematic analysis is a widely used method but according to Braun and Clarke (2006) there was not a consensus over what it consists of and how it should be conducted.

Braun and Clarke (2006) called for the researcher's transparency about how the analysis has been conducted. The researcher has an important role in deciding how the method is used and in identifying the actual themes. The researcher also selects which themes are important for the scope of the study and how the themes are reported.

The analysis process includes a few important selections regarding the usage of the method. The researcher should choose between using an inductive approach or a theoretical approach to the analysis. The inductive approach is largely data-driven, while the theoretical approach is driven by the theoretical background of the study. Another selection needs to be made between reporting semantic themes or latent themes. Semantic themes are more surface-level and are mostly interested in what is said or written in the data. Latent themes go a bit further in the analysis, trying to identify different ideas and assumptions behind the data. When reporting latent themes, it is not only descriptive but rather theorizing the data. (Braun & Clarke, 2006.)

In this research, I follow the six steps to conduct a thematic analysis provided by Braun and Clarke (2006). The first step includes identifying with the data by reading through it multiple times. After that, initial codes are created. The third step is to search for and identify themes, and in the fourth step, themes should be reviewed. During the fifth step, themes are defined and named. Lastly, the researcher produces the report of the results. (Braun & Clarke, 2006.) As this research looks into the actions of China in the Human Rights Council through the lens of normative power and norms, the analysis is based on a constructionist approach.

While providing a useful tool to reach the research goal and aims of this thesis, the qualitative approach and thematic analysis include some possible limitations. Though the analysis is thoroughly documented and a detailed coding scheme is used, the researcher is the one who identifies themes from the data, using the codes and frequent reading of the data. The researcher makes decisions such as what kind of themes are relevant to the research goals. Thus, there is a possibility for some amount of subjectivity involved, and interpretive differences might exist between researchers. With the qualitative and in-depth approach, the findings of this study are connected to the context of the selected resolutions and the UN Human Rights Council. Thus, more generalizable studies would be needed to provide a wider account of China's usage of normative power and engagement in norm entrepreneurship.

The dataset of this research comprises several original United Nations documents. As all of the meetings and passed resolutions of the United Nations Human Rights Council are documented clearly, studying all the different documents and reports around the passed resolutions is a great way to follow the paper trail to understand the Council's resolution-passing procedure and especially the implications of these resolutions inside the UN system.

4.2 Data Analysis

Since this research focuses on resolutions in United Nations Human Rights Council, the first step in finding suitable data was identifying the processes and incremental documents related to the Council's resolution setting proceedings. Firstly, I went through the Human Rights Council's website that contains information and documents related to all of the Council's meetings. During the initial data gathering, I went through all the meetings between 2017 and 2022. During this timeframe, *Contribution of development to the enjoyment of all human rights* titled resolutions were passed in three meetings: HRC/35, HRC/41, and HRC/47. Other matters related to these resolutions were included in other Council meetings, for example panel discussions or a consultation report conducted by Wang Xigen (2021). It was essential to take a look at all of the Council's meetings between 2017-2022 to consider all relevant documents. I did this by reading through all of the meeting minutes of the Human Rights Council from years 2017-2022. The meeting minutes contained clear structures of each meeting with a list of proposed draft resolutions, other submitted reports or studies, panel discussions, or other events held during the meeting days. The meeting minutes also contained United Nations document symbols for each document, making it easy to find the proper documents from the United Nations Digital Library System. In a later stage of my thesis work, during the initial readings

of my data, I also decided to add documents from HRC/53 and HRC/54 meetings in 2023 to my data. I made this decision, after realizing that I was still in such early stages of my analysis that adding these new documents to my data would still be timely possible and that the documents would complement the overall data well. This meant that my data was complemented by another draft resolution, passed resolution, speeches from the voting situation and the report by the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights of the regional seminars organised for the topic of the resolutions. During the timeframe of 2017-2023, documents related to the resolutions titled *Contribution of Development to the Enjoyment of All Human Rights* included: four draft resolutions, two revisions of draft resolutions, four passed resolutions and three longer reports requested from the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. The one report commissioned from the Human Rights Council Advisory Committee (A/HRC/41/50) was left out of the scope of this research. The official United Nation documents are usually available in several UN languages, for the purpose of this study the original versions in English language were used.

As all four draft resolutions were passed through a voting, United Nations WebTV included videos of these four voting situations. These videos were also included to the dataset of this study. The videos include an introductory speech to the draft resolution from the main sponsor country, in this case China, and commentary from co-sponsors of the resolutions and other voter countries. I decided to include the introductory speeches of China and statements of each resolutions co-sponsors to the dataset. It is good to keep in mind that only a handful of the resolutions co-sponsors give out statements during the voting situations, this means that the selection of co-sponsors in the data is somewhat limited. The 2023 voting situation also included four countries that decided to stay absent during the voting (India, Paraguay, Chile and Costa Rica). All four countries spoke about their decision to stay out of the voting. I decided to include these four speeches to the data as it was an excellent opportunity to get a glimpse into why countries that usually vote in favor of development related resolutions decided not to vote. India and Chile had also voted in favor of the previous resolutions and thus made an interesting addition to the data. India voted in favor of all previous votings of 2017, 2019 and 2021, Chile voted in favor 2019, while Paraguay did not cast a vote 2017. The speeches from these five videos available in the United Nations WebTV were transcribed into text format. The videos are available in multiple UN languages, for the purpose of this study the English language versions with live translators were used.

Overall the dataset of this study consists of 13 United Nations original documents: draft resolutions A/HRC/35/L.33, A/HRC/41/L.17, A/HRC/47/L.24, and A/HRC/53/L.26; revisions of draft resolutions A/HRC/35/L.33/Rev.1 and A/HRC/41/L.17/Rev.1; passed resolutions A/HRC/RES/35/21, A/HRC/RES/41/19, A/HRC/RES/47/11, and A/HRC/RES/53/28; and longer reports requested from the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights: Wang (2021), A/HRC/48/25, and A/HRC/54/43. In addition to these documents, the dataset was complemented with 5 videos, four videos of the voting situations, from which China's and the co-sponsors speeches were transcribed and one video of the 2021 panel discussion, from which also China's and the co-sponsors speeches were transcribed. All five videos included United Nations (14.7.2023), United Nations (12.7.2021), United Nations (28.5.2021), United Nations (12.7.2019) and United Nations (22.6.2017).

I decided to base my analysis process to the six step approach by Braun & Clarke (2006). After I had collected the resolutions and other documents from 2017-2022 *linked to the Contribution of Development for the Enjoyment of All Human Rights*, I started to transcribe the speeches from the voting situations of these three resolutions into text format. The transcribing process gave me a good initial understanding of the contents of the speeches and after the transcriptions were ready, I began the initial reading process. After initial readings of the speeches, I started reading through the different resolution drafts and passed resolutions and started to take more notes on what seemed interesting while trying to process what kind of codes would help me make sense of the overall data. This first step took quite a lot of time, trying to understand what in the data interests me and what would be relevant for this research. I also had to go back to reading and writing some theory during this process to make sense of the contents in the data, for example, the historical premises of the right to development.

During this initial reading process, I decided to include the fourth resolution and the regional seminar report from 2023 into my data, because I was still in early stages of my analysis when the HRC/53 and HRC/54 meetings of Human Rights Council were held. Now I had four resolutions to analyze in my research and I could understand better how the resolutions had evolved between 2017-2023. I took time to add the new documents from 2023 to my data and continued to transcribing the speeches from the 2023 voting situation. After transcribing, I returned to the initial reading of all the documents.

After the initial reading of my data, I moved on to the coding stage. The start of my coding process was inductive and the codes that I started with were already formed while I did the

initial reading of the data, so after the initial reading I started to test the coding scheme to the first document. I started with the introductory speeches to the draft resolutions (in yearly order) and moved on to co-sponsors' and absentees' speeches, draft resolutions, revised resolutions and passed resolutions. In the end of my coding process, I focused on the more extended reports.

My coding scheme was primarily created through inductive approach during my initial reading process. However, theoretical background had some affect as it helped me learn what kind of aspects would be useful to understand from the overall data. The coding scheme was eventually formed out of eight codes: 1. Descriptions of development, 2. descriptions of human rights, 3. connection of development and human rights, 4. duty-bearers (responsibles), 5. right-bearers (benefiters or victims), 6. Proposed actions, 7. References of UN declarations and policies, and 8. China as a normative actor.

The first code included all notions of what development is and what it entails, as an example *“sustainable development in all its three dimensions”* from draft resolution of 2017 and *“Development is the basis for combating poverty, strengthening social stability, security, improving prosperity, and facilitating prosperity, not just of society, but of each and every part”* from a speech by Russian Federation representative in 2021. The second code in turn contained all notions of what human rights are and what they entail, as an example *“Reaffirming that all human rights are universal, indivisible, interdependent and interrelated”* from adopted resolution of 2019. The third code included all references to the connection of development and human rights, and how these two affect each other, as an example *“Reaffirms the significant contribution of development to the enjoyment of all human rights by all”* from adopted resolution of 2023.

The fourth code consisted of mentions of duty-bearers or who is responsible for development, realization of human rights, poverty alleviation etc. For example, *“Calls upon all States to spare no effort to promote sustainable development”* from adopted resolution of 2017. The fifth code in turn included references to rights-holders, benefiters or victims, as an example *“Reaffirming that meeting the aspiration of the people for a better life...”* from adopted resolution of 2021. The sixth code included the actions proposed towards development or other issues, as an example *“Invites relevant United Nations human rights mechanisms and procedures to continue to take into account the role of development in promoting and protecting human rights when fulfilling their mandates”* from adopted resolution of 2023.

The seventh code included straight references or mentions of United Nations Declarations or other relevant documents, for example “*Recalling also the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, the 2005 World Summit Outcome, the Declaration on the Right to Development and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*” from draft resolution of 2019. The last code included mentions that described China as a normative actor (in this case as the main sponsor of the resolutions), as an example “*We are also grateful for China’s transparency and flexibility throughout the negotiations*” from a speech by Cuban representative in 2021.

The actual coding was done digitally, with the use of an app called “Highlights”. In the app, I was able to highlight parts of the text with different colors, similar to how one would highlight text by hand. As the coding scheme included eight codes, I was able to use a different color for each code. Inside Highlights, I was also able to write notes for myself. I included notes on a code if it was particularly interesting or if the coded part seemed different from a previous resolution. My coding process varied a bit between different types of documents. The speeches, draft resolutions, and passed resolutions were packed with relevant features for the research, and thus, they were all heavily coded. With the longer documents (including the seminar reports and the consultation report), I was more selective during the coding process and left out some parts that I recognized as not being relevant to this research. This quite simple coding scheme helped me to understand the contents of each document more in-depth.

After the coding process was fully done, I started to reformulate the codes by first collating all of the codings together and dividing each code into its own set. This helped me to see all of the data by codes and to see what kind of themes could be identified inside the codes. I considered the patterns in the data and tried to find out what would be relevant for this particular study and my research questions. I also compared different codes and started to learn how the different drafted themes were connected and if there were any overlaps between the different codes. This process took some time because of the amount of data and the complex connectivity of the first identified themes. I used different tools, for example mind maps, to understand the themes further and to see how they connected or if some of them should be collated together. After working with the first drafted themes, I decided to connect a few of them together and landed on the four identified themes: Development-based human rights, Common development, Global prosperity, and People-centred development. There would have been a possibility to also use sub-themes, but as these slightly wide themes are all connected, they are able to tell a story that was identifiable in the data. The names of the themes were selected from the data during

the writing process. In the findings, I am considering the identified themes through a latent approach.

5 Findings

In this chapter, I introduce the findings of the thematic analysis conducted for this thesis. During the analysis, I identified four main themes from the whole dataset: Development-based approach to human rights, Common development, Global prosperity, and People-centred development. Each theme is named either after a term that China has obtained for its foreign policy purposes or a term otherwise identified from the data.

All themes are introduced by providing a detailed description of the theme and by highlighting its importance and relevance for the focus of this research. After the introduction, each theme is illustrated further by providing rich evidence in the form of excerpts from the data. All excerpts are taken directly from the data without any edits or in the form they were transcribed from the videos. While describing each theme, I am also pointing out possible contradictions related to the theme and considering how the themes are reflected in different parts of the dataset (e.g., between resolutions and speeches). As the resolutions, speeches, and other documents largely reflect and justify the norms through internationally accepted human rights documents, namely the Declaration on the Right to Development, the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, the Agenda 2030 and its principles, these documents are used to analyze the themes further. If there have been notable changes between the different resolutions related to specific themes, these changes are also presented here. All of the themes are highly connected and presented in an order that illustrates the normative stories told throughout the resolutions.

As I am following Braun and Clarke's (2016) thematic analysis process, both illustrative and analytical reviews of each theme can be found in this chapter, while reflections on the findings as a whole can be found in the Discussion sub-chapter. The findings will also be tied to the theoretical framework of this thesis more thoroughly in the discussion chapter.

5.1 Development-based approach to human rights

The first identified theme concerns the dynamic between development and human rights, which can be seen as the cornerstone of all the resolutions. As the title of the resolutions suggests, the focus is on the role of development in the broader understanding of human rights, namely that of economic, social, cultural, political, and civil rights. While the notion of human rights-based development is largely adopted by different United Nations bodies, such as UNDP and UNICEF (Broberg & Sano, 2018), China and the co-sponsors are promoting an understanding in which development can be seen as a basis for all human rights, while undermining states' duty to

protect other human rights (especially political and civil rights) as development is seen as a priority right.

This theme is relevant for this study as it is an overarching theme throughout the whole dataset and represents the underlying principle of the resolutions, setting development as a priority right that deserves the full attention of the international community. The name of this theme comes from the consultation report published in 2021, in which the researcher Xigen Wang (2021) proposed a new concept for the international human rights regime: a development-based approach to human rights. This approach is discussed more in the following analysis.

[1] Recognizing that development and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms are interdependent and mutually reinforcing, [Draft resolution 2017] (A/HRC/35/L.33).

[2] Recognizing that development and the realization of human rights and fundamental freedoms are interdependent and mutually reinforcing, [Revision of the resolution 2017] (A/HRC/35/L.33/Rev.1).

The excerpts above are of a paragraph included in all four accepted resolutions. The paragraph is used in the eighth article of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action (VDPA), though the first part of the paragraph is left out. The VDPA states, “democracy, development, and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms are interdependent and mutually reinforcing.” It continues by defining democracy as people having free will to determine their own political, economic, social, and cultural systems. (Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, 1993.) As VDPA was created as a sort of compromise – connecting both the right to democracy and the right to development – it is not surprising the notion of democracy is left out of these resolutions.

In the first stages of these resolutions, the wording of this paragraph was changed from *respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms* (which is used in the VDPA) to the *realization of human rights and fundamental freedoms*. This change, from merely respect for human rights to actual realization of human rights, creates the basis for the main argument of the resolution, that development enables the enjoyment of human rights. The change raises a question of whether respect for human rights is then needed if development itself enables realization of human rights.

During the 2023 draft resolution voting, the representative of Chile, Ms. Claudia Fuentes Julio, expressed their concerns on the fact that mentions of democracy are missing from the resolution, stating that the international community agreed that all three (democracy,

development, and human rights) are interdependent and mutually-reinforcing. (United Nations, 14.7.2023)

The resolutions define the role of development as a factor that automatically improves all human rights: economic, social, cultural as well as civil and political rights.

[3] 3. Calls upon all States to promote sustainable development to enable better enjoyment of human rights, to achieve gender equality and to promote equality of opportunity for development; [Adopted resolution 2021] (A/HRC/RES/47/11).

The third example showcases a passage that was added to the resolutions starting from 2019. This passage has seen quite a few changes during the negotiation processes, including changing *promote sustainable development to enable enjoyment of human rights*, to *facilitate the enjoyment of human rights* and finally *enable better enjoyment of human rights*. In 2019, the passage stated that *sustainable development enables enjoyment of human rights and achievement of gender equality* and in 2021, *promoting equality of opportunity for development* was added. In the 2017 resolution, only a passage that encouraged states to promote sustainable development through 2030 Agenda was included. This passage remained in the further resolutions as well. States are encouraged to promote sustainable development and Agenda 2030, because of the impact it will have on the enjoyment of human rights. In addition, the resolutions assume that states will make an impact to gender equality and equality of opportunity for development, by simply promoting sustainable development.

[4] Egypt is one of the main co-sponsors of the draft resolution and will continue to support it in light of the importance Egypt attached to the realization of the right development as a human right and an important tool for the full realization and the promotion and protection of all human rights, including civil and political rights as well as economic, social and cultural rights [Egypt 2019] (United Nations, 12.7.2019).

[5] The right to development constitutes an essential component for realizing other economic, social, civil, and political rights and should be regarded as such. As clearly outlined in HRC's resolutions, development and the realization of human rights are interdependent and mutually reinforcing [Iran, panel, 2021] (United Nations, 28.5.2021).

Co-sponsors have also frequently stated their support for the understanding that development is needed to realize the enjoyment of human rights. As in the examples four and five, both Egypt's representative Mr. Alaa Youssef (in 2019 voting) and delegation of Iran (in the 2021 panel discussion) focus on the interdependence of development and human rights as well as the idea of development as an enabler for the realization of other rights.

In some of the speeches, the idea of development as the only possible enabler of human rights is discussed. This idea also emphasizes that the priority should foremost be on development, instead of other rights.

[6] As the eternal theme of human society, development is a basis for and key to resolving all problems and it creates conditions for the realization of all human rights. Only with greater development can human rights be better promoted and protected. [China, panel, 2021] (United Nations, 28.5.2021.)

[7] Development is a prerequisite for exercising human rights. At the heart of the human rights and sustainable development concepts is the idea of human dignity, which every day is solely tested [Russian Federation, panel, 2021] (United Nations, 28.5.2021).

[8] China regards the rights to subsistence and development as primary and fundamental human rights, and the right to development as the unity of collective and individual human rights (Wang, 2021, p. 22).

The sixth and seventh examples showcase the statements of the 2021 panel discussion, in which Chinese representative Mr. Chen Xu described that development can be used to resolve all problems and enable human rights, while the delegation of Russian Federation described that development is essentially needed for exercising human rights. Eighth example shows that in the consultation report China's view of both right to subsistence and development as the primary rights was highlighted. These kinds of statements combined with the underlying understanding of development as an enabler of human rights highlight the argument that enjoyment of human rights can be achieved only after development has taken place. This counters the notion of human rights-based development, in which while development creates conditions for protection of human rights, these rights need to be respected and protected during the development processes and lack of development may not be used to invoke human rights abridgments.

Declaration on the Right to Development states that "every human person and all peoples are entitled to ... enjoy economic, social, cultural and political development, in which all human rights and fundamental freedoms can be fully realized." (Declaration on the Right to Development) Thus, the notion of the resolutions that development betters all human rights is rather vague. As discussed further in the third theme, development is mostly understood in the resolutions as economic development, which limits the actual contribution to realization of human rights, for example, China's understanding of the right to subsistence.

The most controversial examples of the relationship of development and human rights, as understood in these resolutions, can be found from the 2021 published consultation report on the Contribution of Development to the Enjoyment of All Human Rights (Wang, 2021). In the consultation report a new theoretical understanding of development was put forward, titled development-based approach to human rights. In the study, development was positioned as a foundation for other human rights and seen as a primary right. Another interesting point in the consultation report was the idea that countries' development level should be taken into account in different human rights assessments, such as in the Human Rights Council's Universal Periodic Reviews (UPR). This kind of adjustment would lessen Council's authority to monitor human rights abridgments and state them publicly - which is already minimal. The consultation report is greatly in line with the strategic goals of China as an actor in the human rights regime: prioritizing development, promoting sovereign equality of states and weakening the monitoring processes of the international human rights bodies. The ideas brought forward in the consultation report were also discussed in the 2021 panel discussion, where Mr. Wang Xigen held the floor while introducing the results of the study.

[9] and also, we should truly realize the important significance of comprehensive, inclusive, coordinated sustainable development, which is important to development of human rights. That is development-based approach to human rights. Such an approach is very important. [Wang Xigen, panel, 2021] (United Nations, 28.5.2021.)

[10] The content of which can be summarized in the following aspect. Development is the basis of human rights, to improve human rights necessary to achieve development. All human rights mechanism, institutional funds, programs should be conducive to development. Sustainable development, the goals and the target should be the fundamental guide to the protection of human rights. The level of development of various countries should be included in the evaluation criteria and should take into account the level of development. [Wang Xigen, panel, 2021] (United Nations, 28.5.2021.)

[11] The basic conclusion is that the development is a means as well as the purpose of human rights, creating more material wealth, greater resources, benefits, provide a tangible material basis, social basis for the improvement of human rights, each and every member of humanity taking part in the process development, sharing development [Wang Xigen, panel, 2021] (United Nations, 28.5.2021).

In the examples 9, 10 and 11, Wang Xigen introduces the development-based approach to human rights in the 2021 panel discussion. The approach was one of the main focuses in the 2021 published consultation report (Wang, 2021). Wang summarized the development-based approach to human rights with illustrating that development acts as a foundation for human

rights and should be seen as a top priority in developing countries. Different human rights mechanisms *should be devoted to advance development*, while the Sustainable Development Goals and other development indicators should be used to guide the protection of human rights. And as mentioned above, the UPR process and other human rights assessments should take into account countries level of development. People-centred development, that is focused more in the fourth theme, is according to the consultation report a concept that human rights processes should be modeled on. (Wang, 2021, p. 30)

If reflected to the human rights-based approach to development and the principles that should guide development according to the concept, the development-based approach suggested in the report seems to dismiss principles such as accountability and rule of law, participation and inclusion, equality and non-discrimination. Or rather these principles are understood differently, through the lens of development cooperation, such as stressing the importance to tackle inequality between countries or accountability of the international community. In addition, the indivisibility of rights is used as an argument while making a case for importance of prioritizing development over other human rights.

One important question related to the theme is can development be invoked to justify bad human rights records or human rights abridgments? By looking at the resolutions, China's and co-sponsors' statements, shared view seems to be that human rights cannot be protected without development. This view is connected to the notion that came up in the consultation report (Wang, 2021) on how low development levels should be taken into account when assessing human rights records. As the premises of this theme is development as a right that lays the foundation for realizing other rights, developing countries' human rights abridgments and low human rights records should not be fully on these countries but the international community should take responsibility for imbalances in the international system. Responsibilities of the international community are examined more in-depth in the second theme *Common development*.

[12] Recognizing also the important role of development in facilitating the enjoyment of all human rights, while the lack of development may not be invoked to justify the abridgment of internationally recognized human rights, [Revision of the resolution 2017] (A/HRC/35/L.33/Rev.1).

[13] Reaffirming also that the existence of extreme poverty inhibits the full and effective enjoyment of human rights and that its immediate alleviation and eventual eradication must remain a high priority for the international community,

and that the efforts towards the achievement of this goal should be strengthened, [Adopted resolution 2017] (A/HRC/RES/35/21).

Above is one of the clearest examples of this topic that can be found in the 2017 resolution process. In the revision version of the resolution, a passage [12] from the Vienna Declaration was added that states that low levels of development cannot be used to justify human rights abridgment. However, the passage is not found in the accepted resolution and has not been added to the later resolutions either. What was added to the adopted resolution instead is a passage [13] regarding extreme poverty, which also comes from the Vienna Declaration, in which the passage states “the existence of *widespread* poverty inhibits the full and effective enjoyment of human rights...” (Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, 1993). After this addition to the 2017 adopted resolution, poverty alleviation was lifted as one of the central topics of the resolutions, starting from the draft resolution of 2019. One reason for this is likely the Chinese leadership’s growing focus on China’s poverty reduction efforts as Xi Jinping declared in 2021 that China has fully eradicated absolute poverty (Xi declares "complete victory" in eradicating absolute poverty in China 2021). The topics surrounding poverty and poverty alleviation are covered more in-depth in the third identified theme *Global prosperity*. This change is also connected to the second theme *Common development*, as the focus is moved to the importance of addressing poverty, which should be addressed commonly through international cooperation, the responsibility of states over their own human rights status is weakened.

[14] Venezuela is speaking here on behalf of the non-aligned movement and would like to express its conviction that the movement should and does reiterate its own conviction that without the right to development being fully observed, it is not possible to ensure that everyone can enjoy their other basic human rights [Venezuela 2017] (United Nations, 22.6.2017).

[15] Internationally... international community in the process of mainstreaming human rights in our program, we should reinforce the concept of development, contribution to development and also various levels of development of various countries should be introduced. Respect the common but differentiated principles and to put development in the perspective of the UPR [Wang Xigen, panel, 2021] (United Nations, 28.5.2021).

In the 14th example, Venezuela’s representative Mr. Jorge Valero stated during the 2017 voting non-aligned movement’s conviction that ensuring basic human rights for everyone is not possible without fully observing the right to development. In the 15th example, Wang Xigen opened up about the consultation report’s conclusions over the UPR process – in which the

levels of development should be taken into account. He also highlights the *common but differentiated principles* of states.

It is rather worrying that the resolutions do not address the issue that human rights violations could be justified by low development levels, but rather sets out that the international community (and HRC) should not assess the human rights issues but rather focus solely on advancing development of these countries. While at the same time development is seen as a foundation for bettering all other rights – with rather limited definitions of development and development processes.

The view that assessing human rights situations should be guided by countries' development levels seems like a counter argument towards the human rights-based approach to development that largely relies upon analysis of the actual status of human rights in the recipient countries. If the human rights-based approach stresses the importance of comprehensive data and analysis of the duty-bearers and rights-holders in order to recognize the status of human rights and possible vulnerable groups – focusing on accountability and transparency – the development-based approach proposes to weaken the human rights monitoring mechanisms while stressing the importance of development for guiding these processes.

During the 2023 draft resolution voting, Chile (as an absentee) criticized the fact that resolutions were missing the Vienna Declaration passage that was included in the 2017 revision resolution and then left out, stating that *lack of development can not be used as a justification to limit rights* (United Nations, 14.7.2023).

Co-sponsors', China's and researcher's speeches stress that UN declarations and other human rights agreements have established the view of the resolutions, of the contribution that development has on the enjoyment human rights. This theme is also justified by stating that the relationship between development and human rights, that the resolutions promote, is broadly agreed on by the international community.

[16] This draft simply re-emphasizes a cause effect link which has been broadly recognized and accepted by the international community to it, that development makes a significant contribution to the enjoyment of all human rights by all individuals, not recognizing that would be a demonstration of a lack of political will to promote and protect the human rights of millions of people worldwide. [Cuba 2017] (United Nations, 22.6.2017).

[17] This draft simply re-emphasizes a cause effect link which is largely recognized by the international community that development makes a significant

contribution to the realization of all human rights for all individuals. This is also in line with the principle established at the UN declaration on the right to development. [Pakistan 2019] (United Nations, 12.7.2019).

[18] 1986 The declaration on development, declare that in ... it is only within development, human rights and basic freedoms can be realized. [Wang Xigen, panel, 2021] (United Nations, 28.5.2021).

In the 16th example, Cuba's Representative Mr. Pedro Luis Pedroso Cuesta backs up the resolution by stating that the link between development and human rights set in the resolution is already broadly accepted by the international community. Pakistan's representative Mr. Tahir Hussain Andrabi shared a similar view in the 2019 voting and cited the Declaration on the Right to Development [17], while Wang Xigen stated in the 2021 panel discussion that the Declaration includes a view that human rights and basic freedoms can only be realized within development [18]. In the Declaration on the Right to Development, development is recognized as an inalienable right and the indivisibility of rights argument is stated. What is also stated is that in order to promote development, promotion and protection of other rights (civil and political, economic, social and cultural rights) needs to be taken into account and "the promotion of, respect for and enjoyment of certain human rights and fundamental freedoms cannot justify the denial of other human rights and fundamental freedoms". (Declaration on the Right to Development).

In addition to promoting the resolutions' view of development, international community and especially Global North is criticized for not supporting development and some state's critical views over the topic are seen as avoiding their responsibilities as international community members. This criticism is based on the wider historical debate over the right to development as a human right.

[19] And we regret that some countries who do not recognize, still do not recognize nor support the development as a human right and follow a pick and choose approach, supporting the group of rights that fit in their political agenda while ignoring other rights, hereby contradicting the principles of indivisibility of human rights and repealing their international commitments. [Egypt 2017] (United Nations, 22.6.2017).

[20] More than 70 years after the adoption of the UN Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, some countries still have a rather vague attitude towards how to understand the role of development in the promotion of human rights, although none of them explicitly oppose the right to development. The lack of political will thus is at the core of all the reasons that hinder progress. (Wang, 2021.)

In the 19th example, Egypt's representative Mr. Amr Ramadan is stating in the 2017 voting that there are certain countries that do not show support for the right to development and accuses them of being selective of rights due to political agenda. The 20th example is a passage from the 2021 consultation report that blames the lack of political will of certain countries for weak support for the right to development, though the report also states that these countries do not oppose the right to development per se.

All resolutions include some concrete action points related to this theme. Mostly the operational paragraphs request spreading out the understanding of the role of development to different mechanisms of United Nations human rights bodies.

[21] 11. Invites relevant United Nations human rights mechanisms and procedures to continue to take into account the role of development in promoting and protecting human rights when fulfilling their mandates, and to incorporate a development perspective into their work; [Draft resolution 2021] (A/HRC/47/L.24).

[22] ... and requests the Secretary-General to strengthen the Office's dedicated capacity to strengthen initiatives on the contribution of development to the enjoyment of all human rights, including at the regional level to provide such increased support; [Draft resolution 2023] (A/HRC/53/L.26).

In the 21st example from the 2021 draft resolution, United Nations human rights mechanisms and procedures are invited to take into account the role of development promoted in the resolution while working on their mandates and to include development aspect into their work. In the 22nd example from the 2023 draft resolution, The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights is requested to add to the capacity to strengthen its initiatives of the resolution's topic.

The absentees of the 2023 resolution voting brought up their concerns regarding this theme in their speeches. Though the countries recognized the interconnection of development and human rights, they criticized for example the weak references to the Vienna Declaration and the Agenda 2030.

[23] And even though the link between development and human rights exists, the text that is presented to us looks at the balance in human rights with very weak references to the multilateral system like the 2030 Agenda and the Vienna Programme of Action. This latest states that development supports the enjoyment of human rights, but the lack of development can not be used as an excuse not to guarantee human rights... [Paraguay 2023] (United Nations, 14.7.2023.)

[24] What is missing is the multiple references to democracy and also paragraph 10 of the VDPA on the fact that there is no justification to invoke the lack of development as a reason not to defend human rights. [Costa Rica 2023] (United Nations, 14.7.2023).

[25] Our country is fully conscience that development plays an important role in the promotion of human rights, nonetheless Chile believes that this resolution presents a text that is not in line with the language agreed in the VDPA 30 years ago. [Chile 2023] (United Nations, 14.7.2023).

In the 23rd example, Paraguay's representative Mr. Marcelo Eliseo Scappini Ricciardi is sharing concern over the weak references to the 2030 Agenda and the Vienna Declaration in the resolution. Paraguay is also recognizing the resolution is missing a viewpoint stated in the Vienna Declaration that reflects the understanding that countries cannot justify insufficiency of human rights with low development levels. Costa Rica's representative Ms. Shara Duncan Villalobos is also raising concerns over the missing references to the Vienna Declaration, related to the role of democracy and the usage of lack of development as a justification. [24] Chile's representative Ms. Claudia Fuentes Julio shares a similar view by mentioning the Vienna Declaration that was widely agreed upon in the international community. [25]

In conclusion, the first theme, titled *Development-based approach to human rights*, concentrates on the view shared in the resolutions of development as a priority right. While the resolutions include a notion of indivisibility of rights as one of the first passages, the overall argument of development as a foundational right that contributes to the realization of all human rights and especially the idea of development-based human rights, contradicts the indivisibility of rights norm. One of the central principles of this theme is the view that human rights can be realized only through development. Thus, countries' development levels should be considered when monitoring human rights. Resolutions also do not consider the worry that low development levels might be used as a justification for human rights violations. Overall, this theme and its arguments are visible in all parts of the data: resolutions, China's statements, and co-sponsors statements. While the main argument inside the theme is said to be grounded in internationally accepted declarations, the references to these documents in the resolutions are rather selective, one example of which is the missing references to democracy in citations from the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action.

5.2 Common development

The second theme identified reflects the understanding of development as a common aspiration that the whole international community shares. International community bears the

responsibility of upholding development standards and assisting developing countries through financial means. Inside this theme, the importance of sovereign equality between states is emphasized while the current international system is criticized and seen as uneven. This theme also contains the perceived obstacles for common development, including for example unilateral coercive measures. By stressing the importance of multilateralism, unity and international cooperation for development, this theme equips the usage of these resolutions on development for a wider criticism of the current international system and struggles between Global South and Global North. As the first theme discussed further the relationship between development and human rights – where development is seen as a foundational right that enables the realization of other human rights – through highlighting the common responsibility of the international community over development, this narrative also diminishes the individual states' responsibility over their own human rights records. Criticizing uneven global development levels can give states the opportunity to justify their possible human rights abridgments through the lack of political will of the whole international community.

This second theme is relevant for this study as it underlines one of China's key goals in the global governance while linking it to development: cooperation and dialogue over confrontation. It also highlights international community's responsibility to assist developing states, while undermining states' role as duty-bearers. The name of this theme comes from a catchphrase of China used throughout the resolutions and speeches: Common development. The term seems to link together international cooperation and global responsibility for development. It is often used with other terms coined by Xi Jinping such as win-win cooperation or global community of shared future.

[26] Reiterating that States should cooperate with each other in ensuring sustainable and inclusive development and eliminating obstacles to development, and that the international community should promote effective international cooperation in this regard, [Adopted resolution 2017] (A/HRC/RES/35/21).

[27] Affirming that international cooperation for sustainable development has an essential role in shaping our shared future, particularly in assisting developing countries in promoting sustainable development and eliminating obstacles to development, and emphasizing the importance of continued efforts to promote international development cooperation, [Draft resolution 2019] (A/HRC/41/L.17).

[28] ...reaffirming that the 2030 Agenda is of unprecedented scope and significance, accepted by all countries, taking into account different national realities, capacities and levels of development and respecting national policies and priorities; its goals and targets are universal, integrated and indivisible and

balance the three dimensions of sustainable development, [Draft resolution 2019] (A/HRC/41/L.17).

These excerpts illustrate how this theme can be identified in the first two resolutions. In the 26th example, the importance of states' cooperation is emphasized for both enabling sustainable development and removing obstacles to it. The important role of international community for the promotion of international cooperation is highlighted, which could be read as a hint towards the preferred role of the Council. The 27th example again highlights the role of international cooperation but now with the foreign policy concept of China: "shaping our shared future". The term first gathered attention during Xi Jinping's first overseas trip to Russia in 2013, where he addressed the Moscow State Institute of International Relations. The term includes a notion of global harmony and interconnection of the destiny of all mankind. (The State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China, 2023.) The resolution connects "our shared future" with giving assistance to developing countries, again for both promoting sustainable development and removing the obstacles to it. As in the 26th example, in this one the importance of international cooperation is illustrated twice. The 28th example reaffirms the significance of the United Nations Agenda 2030, including the Sustainable Development Goals. It is important, because it calls attention to the fact that the Agenda 2030 was accepted by all countries. The example also illustrates one contradiction related to this theme. Though sustainable development should be a common priority of the international community, it needs to take into account the different levels of development and respect different national realities and priorities.

International cooperation for providing developing countries with the means to facilitate comprehensive development of their countries is acknowledged as one of the important issues in the Declaration on the Right to Development. However, the Declaration states that while focusing on international cooperation, states should also "encourage the observance and realization of human rights" (Declaration on the Right to Development).

[29] The draft resolution also welcomes the fact that all countries further promote development initiatives, build partnerships and pursue win-win cooperation and the common development... [China 2017] (United Nations, 22.6.2017).

[30] ... and that states should cooperate with each other ensuring development and eliminating any obstacles to it. [Egypt 2017] (United Nations, 22.6.2017).

[31] States must cooperate with each other to ensure development and eliminate all obstacles to it. [Pakistan 2019] (United Nations, 12.7.2019).

[32] To achieve common development, to make joint efforts for human rights, to not let anyone lack behind. This is a common aspiration of all countries. [China 2019] (United Nations, 12.7.2019.)

These four examples showcase the manner in which China and the co-sponsors speak of development as a common effort. In the 29th example, the Chinese representative Mr. Ma Zhaoxu highlights the part of the 2017 revised resolution that illustrates the ways in which international cooperation could be realized, through development initiatives, partnerships and win-win cooperation, which is again a foreign policy concept of China. The term got some attention during the same Xi Jinping's visit to Russia in 2013, where Xi spoke of the need for win-win cooperation as a new kind of international relations. (The State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China, 2023.) Common development is also mentioned as a concept, though it is not explained further. In the 30th example, Egypt's representative Mr. Amr Ramadan mentioned the importance of states' cooperation in both supporting development and removing obstacles. Pakistan's representative Mr. Tahir Hussain Andrabi raised out the exact same issue in the 31st example. In the 32nd example, Chinese representative Mr. Chen Xu referred again to common development, while also referring to one of the three universal values connected to the Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals, "Leaving no one behind". This Agenda 2030 related universal value (or a catchphrase) is mostly used inside the United Nations in relation to individuals' or vulnerable groups' rights, it is meant to highlight "discrimination and inequalities (often multiple and intersecting) that undermine the agency of people as holders of rights" (Universal Values, Principle two: Leave No One Behind). Here are few examples of the usage of "Leave no one behind" in the Contribution of Development to the Enjoyment of All Human Rights resolutions:

[33] Emphasizing the important role of inclusive and sustainable development in promoting and protecting human rights, including economic, social and cultural rights, as well as civil and political rights, and stressing the importance of development cooperation and the promotion and protection of human rights in ensuring that no one is left behind, [Adopted resolution 2021] (A/HRC/RES/47/11).

[34] Affirming that international cooperation for sustainable development has an essential role in shaping our shared future, particularly in assisting developing and the least developed countries, by providing technical cooperation and capacity-building upon their request in promoting sustainable development and eliminating obstacles to development, and emphasizing the importance of continued efforts to promote international development cooperation based on unity, solidarity, multilateral cooperation and the principle of leaving no one behind, [Adopted resolution 2023] (A/HRC/RES/53/28).

[35] 6. Emphasizes the importance for the entire population of each State to benefit from inclusive and sustainable development and of addressing inequalities within and among States in the recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, and calls upon States to ensure that efforts to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development for all, by reaching all its Goals and targets, are strengthened and accelerated in this decade of action for building more sustainable, peaceful, just, equitable, inclusive and resilient societies where no one is left behind; [Adopted resolution 2023] (A/HRC/RES/53/28).

In the earlier resolutions of 2017, 2019 and 2021, *Leaving no one behind* was mentioned rather vaguely in a subordinate clause in which it was connected to both international cooperation and protection of human rights, as in the 33rd example from the adopted resolution 2021. In the 34th example from the adopted resolution of 2023, *leaving no one behind* is connected to the importance of international cooperation, technical cooperation and capacity building. Using the concept in this kind of setting tells a lot about how the value is actually understood in these recent resolutions. Though in the Agenda 2030 the universal value of Leaving no one behind is connected to reducing inequalities and ending discrimination, in the resolutions it is more closely connected to the focus on equality of states and international cooperation – the equality of human beings and different groups of people is largely left out. In the 35th example, that can be found from the 2023 resolutions operative points, *leaving no one behind* is connected to just and peaceful societies. Though the passage includes similar language as the universal value, it differs quite a lot from the overall meaning of the value, that is calling for actions in order to recognize vulnerable social groups and dismantling societies' mechanisms that add to inequality while highlighting both states' and international community's responsibility.

As one of the main topics in the resolutions is addressing poverty (as discussed in the third theme), "Leave no one behind" and inequality between countries is most likely seen as addressing solely economic inequality and extreme poverty, while dismissing the wider focus of the slogan as a pledge to address discriminatory practices and inequality inside societies that are often causes behind extreme poverty. Usage of the term in the resolutions also hints that the focus should be on the global level actions, while the value includes addressing all levels with a framework for all global, regional and country level actions.

Leave no one behind is also connected to the human rights-based approach to data, which means that the states' have a responsibility to act on this value and the actions are reported. This rights-based data concept means that data should be used in order to identify vulnerable groups from the societies that are in risk of exclusion or discrimination. The approach also calls for

participation, transparency and accountability. (Universal Values, Principle two: Leave No One Behind)

[36] Yes, states bear chief responsibility for creating conditions for effective exercise of the right to development, but the international community too must play a meaningful role [Russian Federation, panel, 2021] (United Nations, 28.5.2021).

In the 36th example, the delegation of Russian Federation describes the understanding of responsibility that is assumed inside this theme, in that states bear the responsibility over national conditions for the right to development, while the international community assists via cooperation and elimination of obstacles.

As international cooperation is important for both promoting sustainable development and eliminating obstacles to development, what then are perceived as obstacles? Next few examples of the co-sponsors statements focus on these major obstacles for development and human rights.

[37] Those unwilling to recognize this are usually the same people who deny the existence of the right to development to international solidarity and peace. It is also they who oppose the idea of this council discussing the need to promote a democratic and fair international order, the effects of external debt or unilateral coercive measures taken that have a negative impact on human rights. [Cuba 2017] (United Nations, 22.6.2017.)

[38] One such major obstacle to the right to development that has persisted for decades and been unfortunately normalized is unilateral coercive measures, in the form of sectoral and other economic, financial and banking restrictions and embargoes. Unilateral coercive measures are antithetical to the cause of human rights and the right to development is one of the immediate casualties of these unlawful and inhuman measures. [Iran, panel, 2021] (United Nations, 28.5.2021.)

[39] In that context, we must combat the imposition of illegal unilateral coercive measures, which hinder development and gravely affect enjoyment of human rights [Venezuela, panel, 2021] (United Nations, 28.5.2021).

As can be seen in the excerpts above, co-sponsors recognize unilateral coercive measures as one of the most important obstacles to development, and not only to development but also to other human rights. Venezuela was the only country to mention *illegal* coercive measures, while other countries' statements merely mentioned coercive measures as a whole. It is not a surprise that the topic is raised by these co-sponsor countries – that have been affected with either embargoes or multiple sanctions. What is also interesting, is that China does not raise this topic forward in its own statements, rather only the co-sponsors speak about these obstacles. This tells something about China as the norm entrepreneur, as it is important to keep the norms

attractive for the wider audience of Council's member countries. China has however supported resolutions that object unilateral coercive measures in the Council and bears the identity of a victim, from the sanctions after the Tiananmen Square crackdown and more recently, for example, due to the U.S. ban towards its agencies use of Huawei systems and the Uyghur Human Rights Policy of 2020. (U.S. Sanctions Tracker, 2024.)

In 2023, a mention of unilateral measures was added to the resolution.

[40] Recalling that States are strongly urged to refrain from promulgating and applying any unilateral economic, financial or trade measures not in accordance with international law and the Charter that impede the full achievement of economic and social development, particularly in developing countries, [Adopted Resolution 2023] (A/HRC/RES/53/28).

The passage was originally formulated in the Agenda 2030. In 2018, new resolution titled *Human rights and unilateral coercive measures* was adopted in the UN Human Rights Council. The resolution relies heavily on this passage and the fact that it was first formulated in the General Assembly. While in the Agenda 2030 document, the negative effects of unilateral measures not in accordance with international law are tied to the full achievement of development, in the resolutions *Human rights and unilateral coercive measures*, this issue is connected to a wider understanding of enjoyment of human rights. (A/HRC/RES/54/15)

While the passage focuses on unilateral measures not in accordance with international law, the measures that are in line with international law are understood being the measures that are set in the UN Security Council. There are some problems associated with setting these measures in the Security Council, such as the veto rights of the Security Council's P5 member states. For example, China used veto power against a Security Council resolution on Syria in 2020 and in the statement appealed that the unilateral coercive measures against Syria should be lifted (S/2020/661).

If we look at the Declaration on the Right to Development, the obstacles are defined quite differently, as the denial of civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights are mentioned as serious obstacles to development and states are encouraged to act against the denial of these rights. (Declaration on the Right to Development.)

One important aspect of this theme is the focus on equality of states, in which international community has a responsibility to resolve the development gap between developed and developing countries and to build an inclusive international community and systems.

[41] We needed to overcome the imbalances in the international system so that we can get all states equality so that they are on an equal footing and so that they can make an equal contribution to collective decisions taken [Venezuela 2017] (United Nations, 22.6.2017).

[42] It is our collective responsibility to align international development policies in ways that help in the realization of the right to development and overcome North-South development gap [Pakistan, panel, 2021] (United Nations, 28.5.2021).

In the 41st example from the 2017 voting, Venezuela's representative Mr. Jorge Valero is calling for equality in the international system, so that all states can make a contribution for the decisions taken inside the system. In the 2021 panel discussion, delegation of Pakistan is acknowledging the North-South development gap while calling for the responsibility of the whole international community and suggesting that development policies should be aligned to help bridge the gap [42].

As an absentee in the 2023 voting, Costa Rica's representative Ms. Shara Duncan Villalobos raised concerns over the fact that the important role of civil society and other actors towards sustainable development was not reflected in the text, while the states' responsibilities seemed weakened in the resolutions Programme Budget Implications (PBI). (United Nations, 14.7.2023.) Programme Budget Implications statements are used in the UN to make sure that the resolution's financial implications are considered before the adoption.

The second theme titled Common Development revolves around the notion of the international community's responsibilities regarding development and the importance of international cooperation. Through international cooperation, states should promote development and eliminate obstacles (such as unilateral coercive measures) to it. Overall, the importance of state-to-state cooperation is highlighted while countries' different developmental goals and the non-interference of states are underlined. The important role of civil society actors and other stakeholders are mostly left out of the equation.

5.3 Global prosperity

The third theme concentrates on how development is understood in the resolutions. The focus of the resolutions lies largely on economic development and poverty alleviation. It also emphasizes that state's priorities lie in supporting its citizens living standards and other basic welfare.

Since development is seen as a prioritized human right and as a right that acts as a basis for attaining other rights, the resolutions have the ability to dismiss other than economic rights (social, cultural, civil and political rights). The focus on economic development is also seen as a way to better all human rights, without explicitly defining what kind of development is beneficial – other than the selection of references to the Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals. Concentrating on poverty alleviation and economic development gives China an opportunity to act as an example for developing countries. The poverty alleviation inside China is seen as one of the greatest accomplishments of the Party and it is mentioned frequently in Chinese official's speeches to international audiences. In 2021, Xi Jinping announced that China has eradicated absolute poverty, calling it another “miracle” that China will “go down in history”. In Xinhua, the poverty eradication efforts were linked to Xi's leadership, during which the last 98.99 million rural residents living under the current poverty line had been lifted out of poverty and 832 counties and 128 000 villages were removed from the poverty list. (Xi declares "complete victory" in eradicating absolute poverty in China, 2021.)

Later in 2021, Xi stressed the importance of focusing on efforts to promote common prosperity in order to achieve high-quality development inside China. According to Xi, common prosperity is fundamentally linked to the people-centred development philosophy and “an essential requirement of socialism and a key feature of Chinese-style modernization”. (Xi stresses promoting common prosperity amid high-quality development, forestalling major financial risks, 2021.) The notion of common prosperity also encourages high-income people and businesses to give back to the common good and in late 2021, there were 14 crackdowns on different business sectors and individuals, which created uncertainty in China over the leadership's growing control over the economy and businesses (Hass, 2021.) Poverty alleviation was also mentioned in the latest UPR report of China as one of the main arguments and connected to the SDGs. “Through a targeted poverty alleviation strategy, China has lifted nearly 100 million rural poor out of poverty, and achieved the poverty reduction target of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development ten years ahead of schedule.” (A/HRC/WG.6/45/CHN/1*)

Though the right to development largely addresses economic rights, in widely accepted documents such as the Declaration on the Right to Development, all forms of economic, social, cultural and political development are recognized, while the Vienna Declaration connected the economic, social, and cultural rights with civil and political rights and reaffirmed the indivisibility of all rights. The third theme is relevant for this study as it underlines the ways in

which development is understood in the resolutions and by the supporters. The name of this theme comes from the wordings in the Consultation report published in 2021, which is a sort of global twist on the common prosperity concept mentioned above.

When the passage from the Vienna Declaration focused on extreme poverty was added to the 2017 adopted resolution, poverty and poverty alleviation were lifted as central topics in the resolutions of 2019-2023. Poverty is also a highly covered topic in the co-sponsors' speeches.

[43] 9. Welcomes and appreciates the efforts and investments made by States, international organizations and other stakeholders to eradicate poverty, as well as the remarkable progress made in this field, which is of significant importance for the enjoyment of human rights, [Adopted resolution 2019] (A/HRC/RES/41/19).

[44] Welcoming the tremendous efforts and achievements made by countries in promoting sustainable development and eradicating poverty, including extreme poverty, especially in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, reaffirming that each country faces specific challenges in its pursuit of sustainable development and the eradication of poverty, and recognizing the importance of supporting countries in their efforts to eradicate poverty in all its forms and dimensions, [Draft resolution 2021] (A/HRC/RES/47/11).

[45] Reaffirming that the existence of extreme poverty inhibits the full and effective enjoyment of human rights, emphasizing that eradicating poverty in all its forms and dimensions, including extreme poverty, is a great global challenge, an indispensable requirement and an overarching priority for sustainable development, and in this regard expressing deep concern that the COVID-19 pandemic has brought great challenges to global efforts in poverty reduction, [Draft resolution 2023] (A/HRC/RES/53/28).

Most of the passages that revolve around poverty were added to the resolutions starting from 2019. As in the examples 43 and 44, the resolutions showcase appreciation for states and countries that have made investments towards poverty alleviation and note the progress already done in the field. In some of the operational passages of the resolutions, such as the 50th example, also international organizations' and other stakeholders' efforts are mentioned. Acknowledging the efforts made by states seems to turn attention also to China's remarkable progress in poverty alleviation and gives China an opportunity to highlight its role as a model country for poverty reduction. Another aspect highlighted in the 44th example is the different circumstances of countries regarding to poverty eradication and again the relativity of development needs. In the 45th example, poverty eradication is identified as a requirement for sustainable development, while acknowledging the challenges related to COVID-19.

Poverty is identified as one of the most pressing challenges also in the co-sponsors' speeches.

[46] We agree with the conceptual framework in the text that evolves around people-centered approach, presenting extreme poverty as a great global challenge and reaffirming, that eventual eradication of extreme poverty must remain a high priority for the international community [Pakistan 2023] (United Nations, 14.7.2023).

[47] In this way, poverty, development and human rights are highly interconnected and interdependent [Maldives, panel, 2021] (United Nations, 28.5.2021).

[48] Mr. President, the resolution while welcoming the significant progress made in addressing poverty, points out that many people, in particular women and children still go to bed hungry, trapped in poverty [South Africa 2019] (United Nations, 12.7.2019).

Pakistan's representative Mr. Afaq Ahmad identified poverty as a high priority for the international community in the 2023 voting [46]. In the 2021 panel discussion, delegation of Maldives highlighted the connection of all three: poverty, development and human rights [47] and South Africa's representative Ms. Nozipho Joyce Mxakato-Diseko acknowledged the significant progress already made in poverty eradication while identifying women and children as likely victims of poverty in the 2019 voting [48].

In addition, the resolutions focused more on economic development through financial gains and partnerships between states.

[49] (6.) Emphasizes the importance for people of each State to benefit from sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth; [Draft resolution 2019] (A/HRC/41/L.17).

[50] Therefore, in our ground design for achieving human rights, we should see the necessity for fair distribution of resources and the interest, and also, we should provide more resources to create conditions for sustainable economic development opportunities for people to realize human rights (Wang, 2021).

[51] Development creates the most essential conditions necessary for improving the human rights situation by creating more material wealth, resources and benefits and strengthening the material and social foundations of human rights (Wang, 2021).

In the 2019 resolution, the importance of sustained economic growth was highlighted, from the viewpoint of the population of each state [49]. In the consultation report, providing resources towards sustainable development and fair distribution of those resources were underlined [50]. The report also defined the contribution of development to human rights as a tool for creating more material wealth and resources [51].

[52] (4.) Welcomes further efforts to promote development initiatives with the aim of promoting partnerships, win-win outcomes and common development; [Adopted resolution 2017] (A/HRC/RES/35/21).

[53] Welcoming international, regional and national development initiatives that facilitate the implementation of the 2030 Agenda by revitalizing the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development to promote and protect all human rights and fundamental freedoms, [Adopted resolution 2023] (A/HRC/RES/53/28).

Connected to the Common development theme, resolutions also welcome development initiatives and other partnerships between states and regionally. The 52nd example from the 2017 resolution includes mentions of partnerships, win-win outcomes and common development. From more recent resolutions, the term win-win outcomes has been missing, likely due to the negotiation process with sponsor countries – as the usage of China’s promoted terms has gotten lighter in every resolution. In the 2023 resolution, partnerships were brought up as welcoming the SDG of Global Partnership for Sustainable Development [53].

In addition to economic development and poverty alleviation, the resolutions focus on the state’s role as a provider of its populations welfare and living conditions.

[54] Recognizing that development is the basis for the improvement of living standards and the welfare of the population of each State, and hence contributes to the enjoyment of all human rights, [Draft resolution 2019] (A/HRC/41/L.17).

[55] Development facilitates the full enjoyment of human rights, as greater availability of resources enables greater accessibility to basic living conditions, which is essential for the realization of certain human rights and for the optimum enjoyment of others [Sri Lanka, panel, 2021] (United Nations, 28.5.2021).

[56] Development promotes all human rights in an all-around way. Development provides the most basic conditions for the realization of the primary fundamental human right, the right to subsistence and the right to development, which is of great significance to all human beings, especially the people of developing countries in general. Moreover, development contributes not only to the realization of economic, social and cultural rights, but also to the realization of civil and political rights. (Wang, 2021, p. 35.)

What development includes is quite rarely described in the resolutions or co-sponsors speeches. In the 54th example from the 2019 resolution, it is described as improving living standards and welfare of the people. Sri Lanka’s delegation described developments affect on human rights through a similar point of providing basic living conditions [55]. In the consultation report, development was also defined as providing basic conditions in order to fulfill fundamental human rights: right to subsistence and the right to development. This reflects China’s views of

the primary human rights. The 56th example is also highly connected to the first theme, as the report concludes that development (especially economic development) contributes to not only economic, social and cultural rights but also towards civil and political rights. Overall, civil and political rights are only mentioned in the resolutions as benefiting from development. The understanding of different types of development (economic, social, cultural and political) is also missing from the resolutions.

In conclusion, the third theme titled *Global prosperity* includes the resolutions and their supporters focus on economic rights and poverty alleviation. The resolutions and especially co-sponsors' speeches are highly concentrated around poverty and the need for poverty alleviation, while thanking countries for their efforts in addressing poverty. Another aspect highlighted is the need for states to provide basic welfare and living standards for their citizens. Through the notion of building partnerships and the need for international community to address poverty, this theme is also highly connected to the second theme, *Common development*.

5.4 People-centred development

The fourth theme identified focuses on the rights holders and beneficiaries of development and other rights. Development is largely described as a collective right and while individual human beings are mentioned at times, they are mostly seen as beneficiaries of development or victims of poverty. Actual rights holders or bearers are not described in the resolutions and thus the role of beneficiaries is left open to interpretation. The fourth theme is relevant for this study as it showcases how the rights-holders regarding the right to development and other rights are identified in the resolutions. The name of this theme comes from a foreign policy term used by China: People-centred development.

Development is largely seen as a collective right, in both the resolutions as well as China's and co-sponsors' speeches. People or population are described as passive benefiter of development, while their agency as rights-holders is not detailed.

[57] (2.) Calls upon all countries to realize people-centred development of the people, by the people and for the people; [Adopted resolution 2017] (A/HRC/RES/35/21).

[58] Reaffirming that meeting the aspiration of the people for a better life is the priority of each State, [Draft resolution 2019] (A/HRC/41/L.17).

The above excerpt is included in each resolution and contains a slogan that comes from China: people-centred development of the people, by the people and for the people. What exactly is

people-centred development? The idea of people being in the center of development was used in the United Nations context by the UNDP and came about in the Human Development Report of 1990, for example through the passage “people must be at the centre of all development” (UNDP, 1990). More recently, China has been using the term widely and it can be found, for example, in the 2019 white paper “Seeking Happiness for People: 70 Years of Progress on Human Rights in China”. The white paper considers people-centered approach to human rights while recognizing development and right to subsistence as primary rights – and poverty as the greatest obstacle to humankind. It also discusses integration of individual and collective rights and states that “individual rights can only be maximised in the context of collective rights”. (SCIO, 2019.) In the 2021 consultation report, people-centred development is connected to global justice, and it includes principles such as equality, non-discrimination and benefiting all, while underlining “conformity to the national conditions and respect for the right of each country to independently choose development paths and models”. (Wang, 2021, p. 29) Overall, the term seems to blur the line between individual and collective rights, while stressing differences between states.

[59] Development must be of the people, by the people and for the people, so as to better promote and protect human rights [Lao People’s Republic, panel, 2021] (United Nations, 28.5.2021).

[60] and that the aim of development is to improve the wellbeing of the people, it calls upon all states to realize people-centred development of the people, by the people and for the people [China 2021] (United Nations, 12.7.2021).

[61] We agree with the conceptual framework in the text that evolves around people-centred approach, presenting extreme poverty as a great global challenge... [Pakistan 2023] (United Nations, 14.7.2023).

In the speeches, both China and the co-sponsor states use the term people-centred quite frequently. Other than using the term people, in the resolutions the collective understanding of rights can be seen in passages such as “enjoyment of all human rights by all” (A/HRC/RES/35/21). Mentions of individuals or human beings are seen especially in the co-sponsors statements. In the resolutions, mostly collective language is used but there are a few instances where individuals or human beings are mentioned.

[62] Acknowledging that development is the basis for the improvement of living standards and the welfare of the population of each State, and hence contributes to the enjoyment of all human rights, [Adopted resolution 2019] (A/HRC/RES/41/19).

[63] Recognizing that the aim of development is to constantly improve the well-being of the entire population and of all individuals on the basis of their active, free and meaningful participation in development and in the fair distribution of benefits resulting therefrom, [Adopted resolution 2023] (A/HRC/RES/53/28).

Above examples showcase a way in which individuals are mentioned as beneficiaries of development in the resolutions. 62nd example is the first passage added to the 2019 resolution that described what development is – it improves living standards and the welfare of the population. In the 2021 resolution, this passage was changed to a new one that is borrowed from the Declaration on the Right to Development. The passage is included in the 2023 resolution, as in the example 63. However, the passage of the Declaration on the Right to Development is not borrowed fully but the first passage of the version in the Declaration was left out: “Recognizing that development is a comprehensive economic, social, cultural and political process...” Firstly, leaving out the 2019 passage that describes development merely as a basis for improving living standards and welfare seem to indicate that during the formulation of more recent resolutions, descriptions of development have gotten more in-line with the existing declarations – most likely due to other countries’ pressure. Secondly, though individuals are now mentioned for the first time, leaving out the first part of the Declaration passage reflects well the rather narrow understanding of development process that was discussed inside the third theme *Global prosperity*.

[64] Affirming the commitments to end poverty and hunger, in all their forms and dimensions, and to ensure that all human beings can fulfil their potential in dignity and equality and in a healthy environment, [Adopted resolution 2023] (A/HRC/RES/53/28).

[65] Deeply concerned about the loss of life and livelihoods and the disruption to economies and societies caused by the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic and its negative impact on the enjoyment of human rights around the world, in particular its disproportionately heavy impact on persons in vulnerable situations, including women, Indigenous Peoples, local communities, persons with disabilities, older persons, young people and children, [Adopted resolution 2023] (A/HRC/RES/53/28).

The 64th example includes a passage that has been included in the resolutions since 2019. It comes straight from the language of the Agenda 2030. In the 65th example is a passage from the 2023 adopted resolution that details persons in vulnerable situations in connection with the Covid-19 pandemic. Overall, the resolutions do not include any other reference to diversity of people or assessing discriminatory practices, other than the mentions of “Leave no one behind” value, discussed further in the second theme *Common development*.

[66] That development makes a significant contribution to the enjoyment of all human rights by all individuals, not recognizing that would be a demonstration of a lack of political will to promote and protect the human rights of millions of people worldwide [Cuba 2017] (United Nations, 22.6.2017).

[67] It has been established by various international instrument that the right to development is universal and inalienable right with the human person as its central subject being the main participant and beneficiary of development, and that the realization of the individual's right to development contributes to enjoyment of all human rights... [Egypt 2017] (United Nations, 22.6.2017).

[68] The right to development is a universal and inalienable right with the human person at the center of the benefits of development being the main participant and the beneficiary [Pakistan 2019] (United Nations, 12.7.2019).

In the 66th example from the 2017 voting, Cuba's representative Mr. Pedro Luis Pedroso Cuesta stated that development makes a contribution to human rights of all individuals, while in the resolutions only "human rights of all" is mentioned. Egypt's representative Mr. Amr Ramadan cited the Declaration on the Right to Development by mentioning that human person is the central subject of development [67]. Pakistan's representative Mr. Tahir Hussain Andrabi also recognized human person being at the center of development in the 2019 voting [68]. While the co-sponsors speak quite a lot about individuals and human beings in their statements, many times by citing the Declaration on the Right to Development or other documents, these notions seem to be largely missing from the resolutions that promote collective benefit of people or populations of states. From the above examples – the only ones mentioning individuals or human beings in the resolutions – the individuals are recognized as participants of development and victims of poverty, however, the mentions that co-sponsors use from the Declaration on the Right to Development of human beings as the central subjects of development is not used in the resolutions. The resolutions also mostly refer to collective rights (development) and individuals are seen as participants in these collective rights, while there is no mention of individuals in the context of overall human rights.

The absentees of the 2023 resolution voting criticized that the understanding of human beings as rights-holders of development was not fully reflected in the resolution.

[69] and also the Vienna declaration clearly states that human beings are the central subject of human rights and fundamental freedoms, something that is a crucial principle that is not clearly reflected in the text [Paraguay 2023] (United Nations, 14.7.2023).

[70] My country realizes the strong link that exists between the implementation of the SDGs and human rights, nevertheless it is crucial for this council to enshrine

and state clearly the primacy of the respect of human rights and the central nature of human beings as the bearers of human rights [Chile 2023] (United Nations, 14.7.2023).

In the 69th example, Paraguay's representative Mr. Marcelo Eliseo Scappini Ricciardi criticized the fact that the Vienna Declaration's definition of human beings as the central subject of human rights cannot be found in the text. (The Vienna Declaration describes human beings as the central subject of human rights, while citing to the Declaration on the Right to Development, which describes human beings as the central subject of development.) Chile's representative Ms. Claudia Fuentes Julio encouraged the Council to uphold both primacy for respect of human rights and human beings as the bearers of the rights, which is not well reflected in the resolutions [70].

This theme can also be seen reflected in the first theme and the proposed approach of development-based human rights. Whereas the theoretical view of the human rights-based approach to development includes supporting rights-holders in claiming their rights and empowering recipients of development assistance to take active participation in the process, the view shared in these resolutions is rather vague and paints a picture of the recipients as passive participants. One example of this is the paragraph included in all of the resolutions, formulated by China: *realize people-centred development of the people, by the people and for the people*. This might be seen as China's vague proposal of the rights-holders as "active participants". Overall, the notion of participation of citizens, decision-makers and non-governmental organizations is missing from the resolutions.

The fourth theme titled People-centred development concentrates on the resolutions' understanding of the rights-holders, or beneficiaries, of development and overall human rights. In the resolutions and China's statements, rights-holders are mostly described with collective terms. While co-sponsors more frequently mention individuals and human beings, these terms were not fully reflected in the resolutions. People are not described as active rights-holders but rather as passive actors in the development processes. The importance of participation and inclusion in development is not well reflected in the resolutions and inequality issues are mostly seen through the lens of poverty.

5.6 Discussion

The goal of this research was to examine China's use of normative power in the United Nations Human Rights Council (HRC) through its resolutions entitled *Contribution of Development for the Enjoyment of All Human Rights* and to uncover the strategies China is employing while trying to alter the currently prevalent development-related norms through these resolutions.

In this sub-chapter, I will look at the findings presented in the previous sub-chapters as a whole and connect them to the theoretical background and previous research. I will also consider the limitations of this research and suggest future research topics. There were three research questions guiding the overall findings of this research:

1. How is China trying to alter the norms around development through its own resolutions in the United Nations Human Rights Council?
2. Why the co-sponsors of the resolutions decide to support the norms negotiated by China?
3. What are the implications of these norms for the global human rights regime?

By reflecting the findings of the thematic analysis to Grigorescu's (2015) theory of strategies for norm altering, I am proposing that China is attempting to broaden the right to development norm through its resolutions in the United Nations Human Rights Council. Foremost, China does this through promoting the prioritization of development over other human rights and thus challenging the current understanding of the indivisibility of rights and the concept of human rights-based development adopted by multiple United Nations bodies and the European Union.

Through broadening the norm of the right to development with the argument that it acts as a basis for other human rights and contributes to the realization of economic, social, and cultural, as well as civil and political rights – China is trying to move the Council's focus more towards the advancement of global development while moving its focus away from assessing and monitoring countries' human rights situations. The development-based approach to human rights proposed in the 2021 Consultation Report on Contribution of Development for the Enjoyment of All Human Rights recommended that development levels should be taken into account when measuring human rights situations, such as in the Universal Periodic Review. At

the same time, as development is seen to contribute to the realization of all human rights, the importance of taking human rights into account during development processes is dismissed.

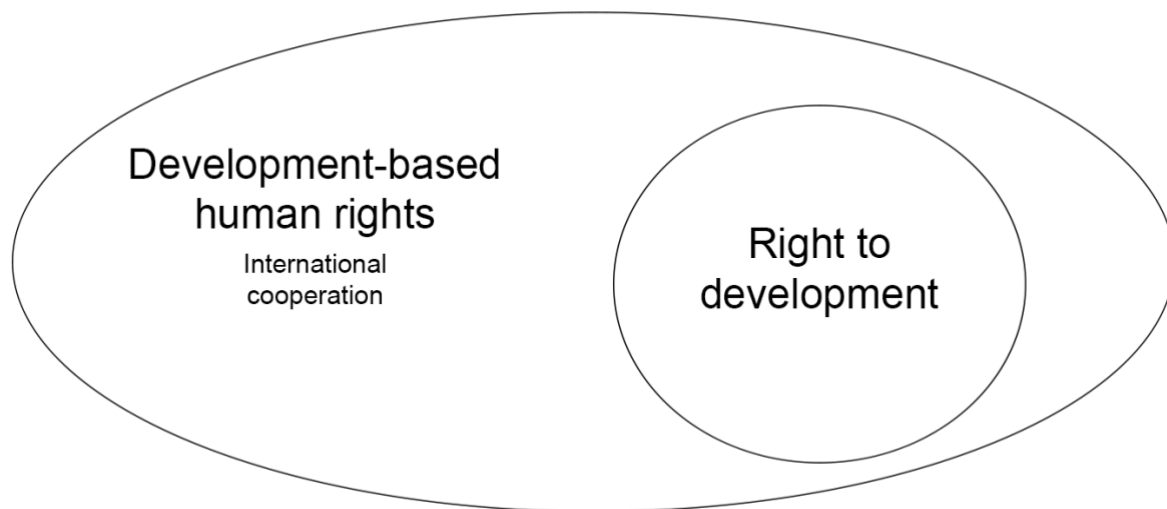


Figure 2. Visualization of China's attempt to broaden the norm of the right to development based on the norm broadening model of Grigorescu (2015).

The norm that China promotes does not counter the right to development norm but broadens it while weakening other human rights norms, such as the indivisibility of all rights. As the broadened norm prioritizes development, economic and collective rights are emphasized. The norm also stresses the importance of international cooperation to promote global development; it implies that the international community, states, and the Council should focus on development, which, in turn, contributes to the overall realization of human rights. Development is mainly seen through the lens of economic rights, and thus, other rights, especially civil and political rights, deserve less attention from the international community.

Several factors could explain this observation. Firstly, broadening the norm is a working strategy for China that sees the United Nations as the foremost multilateral organization for its foreign policy means and the Human Rights Council as a great body to have an effect on the international human rights field while boosting its own identity as a leader of developing countries. This means that China likely wants to play by the rules of the Council to support its legitimacy. Secondly, for China, it is better to broaden the largely accepted norm of the right to

development than to fully challenge the indivisibility of all human rights norm. Another norm that gets weakened due to the broadened norm is the universality of human rights, which in turn supports China's view of the different national conditions of each state and the importance of sovereignty.

A comparison of the findings with those of other studies confirms China's normative aspirations. These findings around the four HRC resolutions are consistent with that of Foot (2024), who identified four main norms that China is trying to advance in the Council: states as providers of human rights, development as a primary right, relativist view of human rights, and sovereign equality between states. Similarly, the second theme *Common development*, identified in this research, supports Dukalskis's (2023) findings that described China's interest in "renewed multilateralism" that emphasizes states' cooperation through multilateralism and emphasizes states' duty over economic and social rights.

Oud (2020) studied the ways in which China has used the right to development norm in the HRC to promote its views on sovereignty and the importance of national conditions and to counter the universality and indivisibility of rights. While the findings of this study support this view, they go further in suggesting that China tries to alter the right to development norm instead of promoting it as it is. This argument is supported by the overall themes identified during the analysis, by the development-based approach to human rights suggested by Wang Xigen (one of the leading development researchers of China), and by the ways in which the internationally accepted declarations can be seen reflected in the resolutions. Some of the most interesting findings of the analysis include the different omissions that can be seen in the references to the Declaration on Right to Development and the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action. The broadened view of the right to development that China promotes connects the resolutions to the historical debate around the right to development by taking a step towards collective, economic, social, and cultural rights while taking a step further from individual, civil, and political rights.

The norms China promotes are widely visible in all of the resolutions. However, the resolutions have evolved during the negotiation processes, and more references to the Agenda 2030 and the human rights declarations have been added. The co-sponsors have been mainly supportive of the priorities China has set out in the resolutions. However, some differences in the arguments between China's and the co-sponsors' statements were discovered. Issues that were most aligned with China's proposed norms and the co-sponsors' statements were the emphasis

on development and its positive effects on overall human rights, as well as the importance attached to poverty alleviation and international cooperation. As the co-sponsors are developing countries, these are clearly important reasons for these countries to support and be involved in setting up these resolutions with China.

Obstacles to development were another aspect that connected many of the co-sponsors' interests. Obstacles in the case of the resolutions meant unilateral coercive measures, of which a passage was added to the 2023 resolution. All the co-sponsors that spoke of these obstacles have been on the receiving end of either embargoes or financial sanctions, set mainly by the United States or the European Union.

While these issues were seen as reasons for supporting the resolutions, there were some notable differences in the views of China and the co-sponsors. Co-sponsors were more likely to cite the Declaration on the Right to Development and the Vienna Declaration while describing development with the term right to development. Co-sponsors also mentioned individuals as rights-holders more often and mentioned human beings as being at the center of development. Though the co-sponsors generally supported China's resolutions and norms, they seemed to be more likely to uphold the previously adopted norms around the right to development and base their arguments on the widely accepted Declarations around development.

The absentee voters' statements from the 2023 voting also tell a similar story. Though absentees were developing countries, and a few of them had supported some of the past resolutions, they decided not to vote because of the resolutions' weak references to the previously established Declarations and human rights norms.

China's normative intentions also include broader implications for the international human rights regime. The broadening of different human rights norms includes the risk of erosion of the widely accepted norms. Through different actors' usage of the broadening strategy, the main human rights norms are no longer explicit, get diffused, and might even contradict other norms. The obscurity of norms benefits authoritarian states, especially those that want to avoid the international community's scrutiny over their human rights records and be able to use the norms to reflect their own ideologies and priorities. This, in turn, can negatively affect the legitimacy of the central human rights norms and the overall trust in the international human rights regime.

The normative priorities China is trying to advance through its HRC resolutions include further implications. Whereas in the view of China, development is given priority over other human

rights, development itself, in the form that China defines it, might also do harm to the human rights field. In the resolutions, development is seen as a state-to-state process, which gives the state the ultimate power to decide how best development resources are used. This can leave out other stakeholders, such as non-governmental organizations, from the processes. At the same time, the role of individuals and citizens is dismissed as the rights-holders over the states, as stipulated in the right to development. In this case, the development policies follow (possibly authoritarian) state's priorities, leaving the most vulnerable groups that are prone to discrimination behind, such as ethnic minorities. As in the case of China, support for the party-state can determine the individual's ability to enforce rights.

Emphasizing the state's role over development and developmental rights while lessening the role of individuals and vulnerable groups as rights-holders can also have an effect on the use of development aid and funds. Suppose the development funds that are meant for poverty eradication and supporting citizens and vulnerable groups are used in line with authoritarian states' priorities. In that case, the funds can end up merely supporting the sustenance of authoritarian rulers and political parties. This kind of scenario can be seen in China, where the party-state's focus on the right to subsistence is used as a justification for upholding the national stability of China – which, in principle, supports the sustenance of the Chinese Communist Party. This could all happen while the United Nations bodies would not properly monitor states' human rights records due to moving the Council's primary focus on development efforts, which could result in more suffering for the individual citizens of these countries.

I acknowledge that there are some limitations related to this study. Understanding the reasons behind the member countries' voting decisions would require a more in-depth inquiry. One could assume that only the most vocal and aligned co-sponsors would give a statement in favor of the resolution. Thus, the data of this research represents only a part of the supporters of the resolutions. A more comprehensive view of the co-sponsors' motives for supporting the resolutions would have required further contextual understanding of the national interests of the co-sponsor states, which, unfortunately, was left out of the scope of this study.

Additional research is needed to better assess the impact of China's possible normative power on the UN Human Rights Council. A wider assessment of China's actions in the Council could be conducted for future research. The study could look into the two resolutions that China is a main sponsor of (Contribution of Development to the Enjoyment of All Human Rights and

Promoting Mutually Beneficial Cooperation in the Field of Human Rights) and look to the impacts inside the Council, including budgetary implications.

In future investigations, it might be insightful to examine further how the different roles of China in the United Nations bodies affect its normative power and norm advocacy. This could be done by comparing the processes of China's development-related resolutions and statements in both the Human Rights Council and the Security Council, in which China embodies different identities of a developing country in the Human Rights Council and a major power in the Security Council.

6 Conclusion

China has been an active member of the United Nations Human Rights Council for recent years, using its normative power to raise issues that align with its priorities. Inside the Human Rights Council, China is acting out of its developing country identity and can thus act as a normative leader for other developing countries.

Previous research in the field has examined the actions of China in the Human Rights Council, e.g., by looking into the resolutions China has supported or sponsored. However, most of the research focuses on a selection of different resolutions or actions related to China rather than having a concise look at the normative processes around specific resolution(s) during a more extended period. This study set out for an in-depth inquiry into China's normative intentions by focusing on its four HRC resolutions titled Contribution of Development to the Enjoyment of All Human Rights. The four resolutions adopted between 2017 and 2023, along with related documents such as the statements of China and co-sponsor countries and different reports, were analyzed qualitatively using thematic analysis. It has been one of the first attempts to thoroughly examine China's resolution-setting processes during all of the four HRC resolutions, not just by examining the norms that China is trying to set but by looking at the dynamic processes between each resolution, the more extended reports and the statements of both China and the co-sponsors.

The main results concluded that via the resolutions, China, together with the co-sponsors, is broadening the current understanding of development as a human right by emphasizing the role of development as a foundational right that enables the realization of other human rights. Inside this broadened norm, emphasis is given to international cooperation that should focus on promoting development and removing obstacles to it. China benefits from broadening the norm as it weakens other norms related to the right to development, such as the indivisibility of rights and universality of rights – that counter its strategic goals.

Continued efforts are needed to counter the adverse effects of the normative changes China is promoting in the field of human rights. States and human rights actors that want to uphold the human rights-based approach to development processes should make sure they are implementing the approach's principles in their operative development work while giving development aid or assistance – and step up their efforts to assist the least developed countries

in implementing development processes and setting national development policies that are in line with international human rights laws and principles.

Both Council member states, and different United Nations bodies working on development and human rights need to continue working closely with civil society actors and NGOs while ensuring that these actors can contribute to the Council's work in the future. While advancing development and addressing poverty are critical issues for the whole international community, the United Nations Human Rights Council should continue addressing human rights violations and monitoring countries' human rights situations.

“Global North” countries should step up their efforts towards assisting least developed countries in reaching their sustainable development goals while upholding the principles of the human rights-based approach to development. After 2030, unless there are visible improvements towards the Agenda 2030, there is a real risk that the international community will divide even more, which gives states such as China an excellent opportunity to spread their normative power across international multilateral organizations.

The findings reported here shed new light on the ways in which China tries to alter international norms and builds on the previous studies (e.g., Pu, 2012; Callahan, 2016) that recognized China as a normative actor that offers an attractive alternative for the Western-led global order and supports the understanding that China is changing the multilateral organizations to accommodate developing countries views. It lays a fruitful groundwork for future research further into China's growing impact on the global human rights regime and China's aspiration of becoming a normative leader for the developing world.

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