

Mapping China's Influence at the United Nations

Shing-hon Lam* Courtney J. Fung†

September 30, 2021

Abstract

China exerts influence at the United Nations over leadership personnel appointments. When countries have higher UN General Assembly voting affinity with China, these China-friendly states secure greater increase in UN leadership positions. These posts generate two pay-offs for China: in turn, moving China-friendly nationals into other UN leadership positions and aligning liberal discourse with PRC discourse by using PRC-specific terms and PRC-reinterpreted words. Using text analysis methods, we show that China-friendly leadership positively correlates with the use and frequency of PRC-specific terms in its reports. Also, China-friendly leadership tends more to use PRC-reinterpreted words in line with PRC meanings. Our project speaks to a limited literature on emerging power's attempts to advance influence in multilateral institutions.

Keywords: China, United Nations, Influence, International Bureaucrats, Leadership Positions, Semantic Change

Submission to Call for Papers: 14th Annual Conference on the Political Economy of International Organization

*Corresponding author; Department of Political Science, University of California, Los Angeles; shinghon@ucla.edu

†Department of Politics and Public Administration, The University of Hong Kong; cjfung@hku.hk

1 Introduction

China’s emergence at the United Nations is making headlines, with an array of writing pointing to the UN as a key venue to exhibit China’s ‘globalist’ aspirations (Foot 2014, 1087). Reporting notes that China exerts ‘influence’ through a variety of pathways, including budget control; headships of four of the fifteen UN specialized agencies and the Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA); key bureaucratic appointments to oversight committees (UN Watch 2020); use of the UN Security Council veto (Wainer 2019); rule-setting regarding nascent governance structures on emerging issues (Sherman and Raymond 2019); and use of agenda-setting in key UN forums to tie PRC-specific policies to the UN agenda (e.g. Nichols 2020b; UN Secretary-General 2019; UN Peace and Development Trust Fund 2019). Such reference to China’s multilateral influence is used for a rhetorical frame of a ‘China-centric’ United Nations, whose leaders were “bought by the Chinese government” (Yorke, Rayner, and Nuki 2020). Coinciding with hardening US policy, U.S. officials are renegotiating and halting commitments to a number of UN institutions out of stated concerns of China exploiting outdated terms of agreements.¹ Observers note the self-fulfilling prophecy in that U.S. withdrawal from ‘China-centric’ multilateral institutions creates “a shortfall in global governance generating rising demand for China to step up” (Hart and Johnson 2019, 4).

Such writing indicates concerns about whether China is reforming international institutions, like the United Nations, to reflect China’s more conservative, anti-liberal positions (for a discussion, see Johnston 2019; Weiss and Wallace 2020). One of the oft-overlooked means for China to exert influence is through the international civil servants that do the work as agents of these international institutions. Although these international civil servants should “not seek or receive instructions from any government or from any other authority external to the Organization” (UN N.d., Article 100), this idealistic treatment as epitomized in Hammarskjöld’s (1963) assessment of UN bureaucracy does not hold to empirical assessment

¹ US Congress (2019); Brice and Pamuk (2020). For example, US activities at the Universal Postal Union, see The Guardian (2019); the World Trade Organization, see Swanson (2019) and the World Health Organization, see Fabian and Du (2020) and Rogers and Mandavilli (2020).

(O'Malley 2020). Indeed, international civil servants “are frequently not loyal to the United Nations, but to their respective governments, upon which they depend for further reward or punishment” (Finger and Hanan 1980; see also Johns 2007; Kaja and Werker 2010; Novosad and Werker 2019; for the example of China, see Fung and Lam 2021). More recently, the loyalty of PRC international bureaucrats has come under scrutiny.² Analysts and diplomats worry that they promote China’s national interests in their UN institutions rather than espouse liberal values like multilateralism, accountability and transparency (Lynch and Gramer 2019; Chadwick 2019).

Such views appear to be supported by statements by PRC officials. Former DESA undersecretary general Wu Hongbo stated “as a [Peoples Republic of China] international civil servant, when it comes to Chinese national sovereignty and security, we will undoubtedly defend our country’s interests.” (China Central Television 2018). Before the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) headship election, the PRC candidate Qu Dongyu was charged with avoiding the question on the PRC government’s control on Qu’s decision-making with his reply that he must “...follow the UN charter and FAO regulations and rules... I am a scientist, I always do express my own judgement...” (Food and Agriculture Organization 2019). Zhao Houlin, head of the International Telecommunication Union from PRC, “regularly celebrates China’s growing presence in the telecoms and internet industries” (Kynge and Liu 2020). Following the arrest of former Interpol chief Meng Hongwei, the PRC Public Security Ministry said “It is absolutely not allowed to make decisions without authorization, to do or say as you wish” (Reuters 2019).

This manuscript applies insights from the literature on IO agent discretion to test whether and how China exerts influence across multiple UN institutions, advancing a rich literature that predominantly studies how the United States and other powerful democracies control international organizations through informal influence.³ We build on Clark and Dolan

²This is not to say that only China receives such criticism. For example, Paul Wolfowitz’s World Bank was criticized “as no more than an instrument of U.S. power” (Cassidy 2007).

³ For an overall review, see Vreeland (2019); Hawkins et al. (2006). For US influence in the IMF, see Stone (2008; 2011); Dreher and Jensen (2007). For US influence in the World Bank, see Kilby (2009; 2013);

(2020) that relatively autonomous IO staff develop and implement policies that ‘please the principal’—reflecting the worldview of the institution’s lead financial backer and favoring the backer’s strategically preferred countries (see also [Stone 2002; 2004; 2008; 2011; Thacker 1999; Barro and Lee 2005; Dreher and Jensen 2007; Andersen, Harr, and Tarp 2006; Andersen, Hansen, and Markussen 2006; Kersting and Kilby 2016](#)). We conceptualise the informal influence as a ‘discourse power’ that can exert authority over the ideas and formulations underpinning the international order ([Rolland 2020, 2](#)). With China’s growing activism in the UN, the multilateral agency is increasingly reliant on China’s budgetary contribution and receptive to China’s ideas in global governance ([Foot 2020](#)). It creates demand from China and the states ideologically close to China to have more UN leadership positions held by nationals from China and China-friendly countries. The UN agencies led by these individuals adopt more discourses aligning with China’s interests and ideas.

We base our argument on several observations. First, states gain support for their favored candidates by convincing the UN Secretary-General in direct appointments, the governing council in rotations or elections, and the relevant member states in elections. Their success in persuading the relevant selectorate reflects their influence in that setting (see [Manulak 2017](#)). Second, states unable to secure their first preference of their own national in a leadership post will pursue a second preference of an aligned country national in that post instead: i.e. if China cannot secure a PRC national in a leadership post, it will support a national from a state that shares voting affinity with China ([Navarro 2020; Nyabiage 2020a;b](#)). Third, international bureaucrats are opportunistic actors as they conduct “frontline diplomacy” through the UN system ([Cornut 2015; Pouliot and Cornut 2015](#))—and these international bureaucrats can and do promote their national interests ([Johns 2007; Novosad and Werker 2019; Finger and Hanan 1980; Fung and Lam 2021](#)) or interests of their perceived principals ([Lim and Vreeland 2013; Stone 2011; Dreher and Jensen 2007](#)).

Our empirical strategy is to couple UN voting affinity data with under-utilized data [Dreher, Sturm, and Vreeland \(2009\); Malik and Stone \(2018\)](#).

on the nationality of bureaucratic leadership positions from the departments and agencies under the six principal organs of the UN.⁴ We use this data to investigate a well-documented observation that states intervene to ensure the scarce leadership positions of a UN department or agency are taken by their favored candidate (Woods et al. 2015; Simons 2013; Lynch and Gramer 2020). We find that candidates favored by China can secure more UN leadership positions. Specifically, when countries vote more similarly with China in the UN General Assembly, they in turn secure greater increase in UN leadership positions. We term these UN institutions headed by a PRC national or national from a state that shares voting affinity with China as *China-friendly leaderships*.

We further investigate why securing these bureaucratic leadership positions matters. Amongst other interests, China seeks to utilize its ‘speaking rights’ (*huayuquan*) to enable China to speak and shape international discourse along its preferences. These speaking rights are essential to a state’s power and status as PRC officials see “whoever rules the words rules the world” (Rolland 2020, 7). A China-friendly leadership facilitates a significant PRC goal of challenging and modifying ontologically-secure liberal discourse to align with PRC discourse by using PRC-specific terms—those terms created by and originating from the state (e.g. ‘Belt and Road Initiative’) *and* PRC-reinterpreted words that have specific meanings as promoted by the state (e.g. ‘cooperation’) (Foot 2020, Chapter 1; Rolland 2020; Lams 2018, Wen 2016).

We compare the annual reports of 54 UN departments or agencies against a similar set of PRC-produced documentation. We use text scraping to analyze use of words, and principal component analysis to visualize lexical semantic difference. We find that the UN department’s level of China-friendly leadership (1) positively correlates with the use and frequency of PRC-specific terms used in its reports; and, (2) a China-friendly leadership tends more to use PRC-reinterpreted words in line with PRC meanings.

Our findings illustrate that emerging powers can also exert informal influence at IOs

⁴ The data contain all leadership positions including chairs, presidents, secretary-generals, experts, judges, rapporteurs, commanders and the UN Secretary-General representatives.

even though it is well established that only powerful states like the United States and its allies have such privilege. The leadership and semantic influence we propose shares the same intuition that the worldview of the international bureaucrats converges with their perceived principal, but different in that the emerging power actively takes bureaucratic efforts to transform the IO from within. This paper first situates the literature on IO leadership influence onto the broader discussion of how states control the United Nations. The paper then explores China’s priorities to produce more equitable international relations discourse through international institutions like those under the UN umbrella. We then turn to the statistical treatment methods and data.

2 Influence at the United Nations

The literature on state influence at the UN offers two predictions as to how China exerts influence in the UN system. [Graham and Serdaru \(2020\)](#) and [Lipsy \(2017\)](#) find that dominant states like the United States may shift resources elsewhere if it cannot asymmetrically control the UN. When the United States retrenches, observers note that China will step up the control ([Lee 2019](#); [Lynch and Groll 2017](#)). But some important UN institutions are sticky enough that outside options are not attractive, prompting dominant states to double down on seeking control. U.S. WIPO’s former deputy director general James [Pooley \(2020\)](#) defends WIPO’s unique value that its leader “will exercise plenary authority over thousands of confidential patent applications, in effect the world’s most concentrated collection of cutting-edge technology.” Other UN agencies determine best practices and set standards ([Lynch and Gramer 2019](#)). Because these institutions have a global reach, the United States cannot credibly threaten outside options or forum shopping, even when these UN agencies promote domestic standards of certain countries to help their local industries obtain first-mover advantage ([McCaul 2019](#)).

Alternatively, the UN literature shows that China can exert influence at the UN system through exploiting its flexibility. [Lipsy \(2017\)](#) compares the rigid one-country-one vote rules

of the UN Development Programme against the flexible weighted voting of the International Fund for Agricultural Development. The latter attracts more resources and is under wealthy states' control, with voting share commensurate with the underlying economic capabilities of the member states. [Graham and Serdaru \(2020\)](#) find that UN climate finance institutions with voluntary funding rules enable the control of wealthy donor states—even when they are outside the governing body. Because voluntary donors can stop contributing without legal consequences, secretariats need to continuously negotiate and let them earmark their contributions. [Manulak \(2017\)](#) also notes that powerful states can weigh in on the choice of staff or appointee' reappointment prospects ([Desai 2010](#)), and control their staff seconded to the UN whose career prospects are tied to their own national government ([Cortell and Peterson 2006](#)).

China's influence in the FAO and the World Health Organization (WHO) reveals a more nuanced pathway. The PRC FAO headship candidate, Qu Dongyu, and its preferred WHO candidate, Tedros Ghebreyesus (see [Huang 2017](#)) were both elected under the rigid one-country-one-vote rules—even though we would theoretically expect the second largest UN regular budget contributor ([The Strait Times 2018](#)) to thrive under weighted voting rules. Moreover, China contributed relatively little to the two UN agencies' voluntary funding (see [Food and Agriculture Organization n.d.; 2018](#); [World Health Organization n.d.b;n](#)). Rather, China leverages WHO secretariat's dependence on resources, as China has a 'bumper crop' of global health engagement including a number of MOU, partnership, conference and high-level forum ([Huang 2017](#)). China also leverages WHO dependence on the ability to collect crucial data about COVID-19 ([Kelland and Nebhay 2020](#); [The Associated Press 2020](#)).

Moreover, in contrast to what [Desai \(2010\)](#) and [Manulak \(2017\)](#) predict that China can influence leadership elections in IOs with small selectorates, China has allegedly affected the choice of IO leaders with large selectorates as shown in its success in securing its preferred candidates into headships at the FAO and WHO ([Lynch and Gramer 2019](#); [Huang 2017](#)). Observers allege that China leveraged its massive investments in the Belt and Road Initiative

in exchange for FAO election votes for Qu ([Nature editorial 2019](#)). Others report that China went as far as to cancel US\$ 78 million debt for Cameroon to withdraw its FAO candidate; threatened to block key exports from Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay for not voting Qu, and instructed supporters to take a photo of their ballots showing their vote for Qu ([Lynch and Gramer 2019](#)). China's support of its preferred candidate from another country is also crucial as it garners voting coalitions ([Godement 2020](#)). Its reputation to fight for these elections is well-known. A campaign staffer for former WHO head said "Money talks, wealth whispers and Chinese whispers voted en masse for Tedros, as did central and South America. Pakistan, a distraction swiftly fell in line and western countries complied. A WHO election was not worth a fight with China they said" ([Subramaniam 2020](#)). Within a month before Tedros's election, China offered free cataract surgery programmes to African countries and pledged extra \$100 billion funding in Belt and Road Initiatives Often praising the Chinese leadership ([Calvert and Arbuthnott 2021](#)), Tedros spoke at China's prestigious Peking University and used PRC rhetoric like multipolar world and 'One China' policy in his election campaign ([Institute of South-South Cooperation and Development 2017](#); [Huang 2017](#)).

3 The Argument

Leadership posts matter as these individuals provide specific functions to facilitate the daily-running of international institution and set the institution's strategic direction. Leaders exert agenda control in order to prevent shifting or overcrowded agendas, or issue-cycling ([Tallberg 2006; 2010; Chesterman 2007; Ivanova 2010; Harman 2011; Park and Weaver 2012](#)). States can share their tactical, privileged information with leaders, empowering that leader to generate an agenda or a text that reflects true individual and collective negotiating preferences ([Tallberg 2006; 2010](#)). Leaders can help overcome representation problems, engaging with prospective members and non-members outside the process, serving as an inter-institutional coordination mechanism ([Meunier 2000](#)), while also garnering coalitions of member states to implement or block changes ([Hall and Woods 2018](#)). Leaders can change the operational

culture of their IOs by reducing the information asymmetry between the IO leaders and IO staff — through a clear operational plan, measurable career incentives, hiring new staff and conducting trainings (Nielson, Tierney, and Weaver 2006). Through these processes, leaders accrue resources that enable them to steer outcomes. With privileged information about state preferences, and supported by the technical skills of the bureaucracy, these leaders can set terms of practice (i.e. decisions on negotiation timing, frequency, format and method) to pursue outcomes of their interest. As “structuring of the agenda is not a neutral exercise, since it involves prioritizing some issues at the expense of others” (Tallberg 2010, 246), privileged information may be used to promote certain negotiation distributions over the others.

It is therefore well-recognized how states intervene to ensure the scarce leadership positions of a UN department or agency are their favored pick (Woods et al. 2015; Manulak 2017; Xu and Weller 2018; Simons 2013; Lynch and Gramer 2020), and China has stepped up doing similarly with its Security Council permanent member privilege (Feltman 2020). In some elections of UN leadership positions, UN Secretary-General has the formal authority to recommend a candidate to the electorate while powerful donor states have the informal influence on UN Secretary-General’s decision-making (Woods et al. 2015). In other elections that are openly-contested, competitions heavily involve vote-trading, deal-making and bartering, and are thus prone to various financial and geopolitical factors other than the candidate’s qualifications. (Xu and Weller 2018, 72–3; Huang 2017; Patnaik 2017; Heinzl 2021). Powerful states have major influence to favor their preferred candidates with their stronger non-technical bargaining chips—including giving their verbal support (Guerrero 2020), providing more aid to other voting countries and trading for support in seats in UN Security Council or other IOs (Xu and Weller 2018, 72–3).

Figure 1 summarises the theoretical expectation of our argument. Given the influence of UN leadership positions and China’s control of their international bureaucrats, *China can exert influence at the UN when a PRC national leads a UN institution*. However, UN

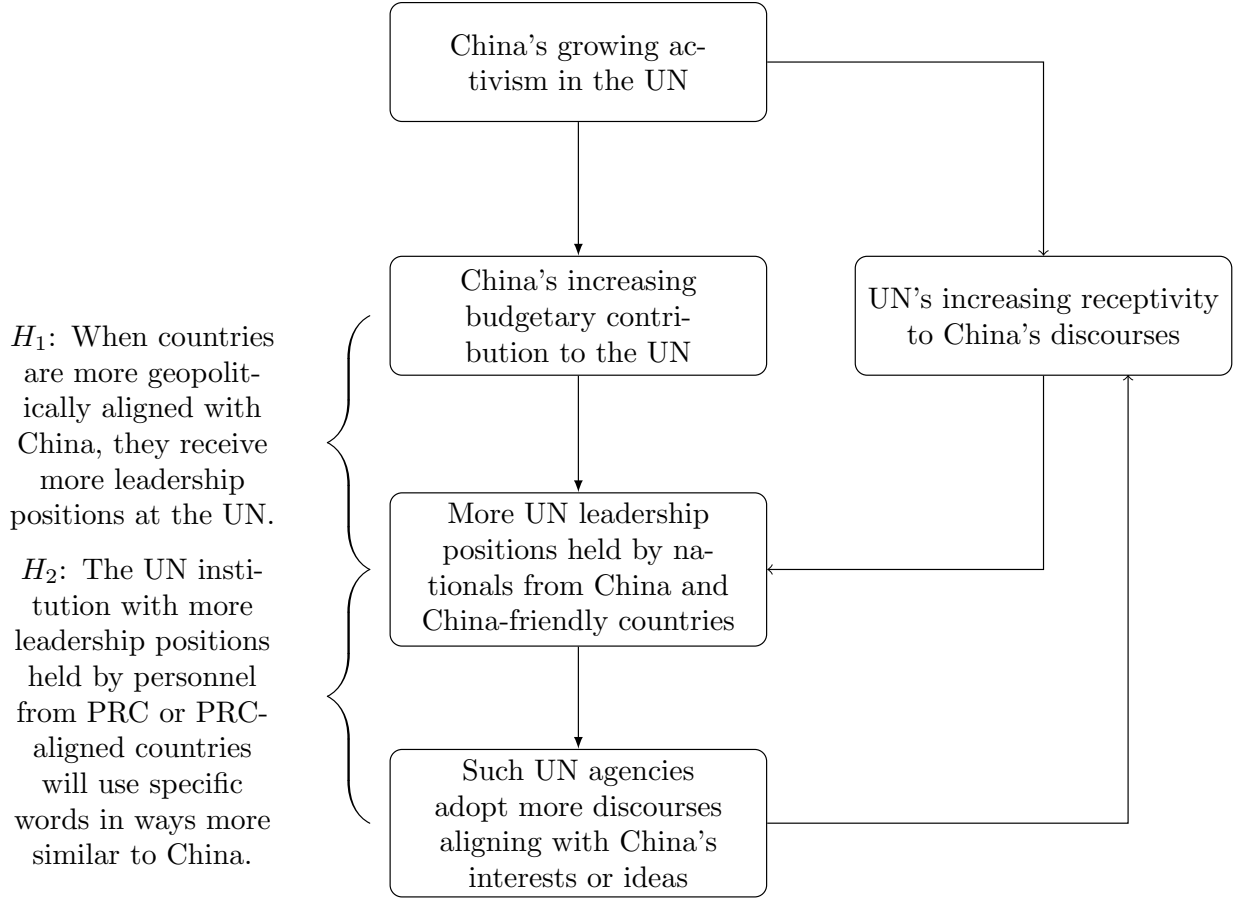


Figure 1: Theoretical expectations of China's influence at the UN

leadership positions are under equitable geographic distribution. China's headships of four out of fifteen UN specialized agencies are already criticized as having excessive influence (Schaefer 2019; Lee and Sullivan 2019; The Economist 2020). We expect that if China cannot secure a PRC national in a leadership post, it will support a country national from a state that shares similar geopolitical preferences with China.

We argue that *China can exert influence at the UN also when more UN institution is headed by nationals coming from countries geopolitically aligned with China—or, what we call China-friendly countries*. Countries traditionally aligning with China seek UN leadership positions. They increasingly push for geographical rotation of UN leaders (Xu and Weller 2018, 76) so as to gain status and prestige with their candidates' achievements (Lipsy 2017, 4; Byass 2017; Kupferschmidt 2017), and set standards and control the priorities for

the world to follow (UN News 2017). Moreover, countries exercise informal influence over their UN leaders insofar as they are inside the national policy network. The UN leaders return favour to their national governments for promoting their candidacy, and their next job opportunities rely on national governments (Heinzel 2021; Hall and Woods 2018). To increase their odds of winning, these states solicit China’s support (Huang 2017; Guerrero 2020).

UN leaders from countries more geopolitically aligning with China are also more susceptible to becoming China’s lever of influence. There is a selection effect that China carefully supports the candidate that conforms with its agenda and whose country has deep relation with China due to investment ties (Nyabiage 2020a;b). These candidates rose through the rank in a government that heavily speaks in tandem with China’s discourse (Kato 2017; Institute of South-South Cooperation and Development 2017; Embassy of PRC in the Hellenic Republic 2014); they may also face implicit or explicit pressure by their national governments to be levied by China to ensure China’s geopolitical presence and investment deals (see Stone, Wang, and Yu 2021). In addition, these countries are embedded in China’s carefully-engineered dense network of connections, *guanxi*, through which exchanges of skills and knowledge took place between Chinese and every stakeholder in those countries—by means of training, relationship-building, official visits, public diplomacy with African journalists, scholarships to study in China, and exchange trips on every level (Benabdallah 2020; Weiss 2021). Through communicating the legitimacy of the Chinese systems, their candidates’ worldview is more likely to converge with China’s and they face additional cost of disrupting these social networks if they resist being levers of China’s influence.

We also observe a path dependency with China and its geopolitically-aligned countries getting more UN leadership positions. On one hand, the UN recruitment system *per se* has a network effect. FAO Director Qu Dongyu, a PRC national, is authorized to sign off on all high-level staff appointments at the FAO and will decide, alongside UN Secretary-General, the World Food Program’s next leader (Lynch and Gramer 2019). This allows PRC’s UN

head to pick its fellow nationals or nationals from China’s geopolitically aligned country,⁵ or to trade these positions for another UN leadership election. On the other hand, the policy influence generated by a UN leadership position can attract other UN institutions to recruit based on his/her potentials to promote the policy agenda. The UN Association of China observes that as China’s influence grows, IOs perceive that many things could not be solved quickly without China’s participation, which could be increased by hiring more PRC nationals ([China Radio International 2013](#)). In this paper, we test one observable implication:

H_1 : When countries are more geopolitically aligned with China, they receive more leadership positions at the UN.

In addition to testing China’s leadership influence, we explore whether it has payoff for China. Whereas the outcomes of the IMF and the World Bank can be measured by the probability ([Thacker 1999](#)) and size ([Stone 2011](#)) of receiving a loan, the number of prior actions ([Nelson 2017](#)), or favorable country forecasts ([Dreher, Marchesi, and Vreeland 2008](#)), the policy goals of UN institutions are more intangible and heterogeneous. As such, we measure whether UN institutions carry out one of China’s foreign policy goals: reforming the international system from within by inserting China’s preferred terms and meanings into UN discourse, challenging ontologically-secure liberal discourse to align with PRC official language.

PRC elites disaggregate a ‘world order’ led by the United States, and an ‘international order’ as “the UN and its institutions, including the principles of international law” ([Fu 2016a](#)). The latter is supported by China, as China is “one of its founders and a beneficiary, a contributor, as well as part of its reform efforts,” but the former is a source of friction for China, as the “U.S. World Order is a suit that no longer fits” ([Fu 2016b](#)). PRC elites allege failures of the “global promotion of Western values,” citing chaos, disorder, and regime

⁵DESA’s head, its Development Policy and Analysis Division and the Division of Sustainable Development Goals are all headed by PRC nationals ([Okano-Heijmans and van der Putten 2018](#)). A European diplomat claims that “DESA is a Chinese enterprise” ([Lynch 2018](#)).

change (Fung 2020; Foot 2020). PRC officials identify “deficits in global governance” (Pang 2016), which should be overcome by China on behalf of the Global South. Xi Jinping has since called the ‘two guides’ (*liangge yindao*) for global governance reform, with China making efforts to “jointly shape a more just and reasonable new international order” (Sina News Center 2017).

The United Nations is a prime venue for China’s goals to reform world order given the legitimizing UN imprimatur as a focal point for global governance, and China’s ability to harness other liberal skeptical states in one-country-one-vote forums. One important foreign policy implication is to share ‘China’s wisdom’ through these international institutions. Observers view that China is no longer in a defensive position (see Glaser and Medeiros 2007), but is now working offensively to challenge the PRC elite perception of a “West strong, China weak” (*xiqiang woruo*) international discourse (Zhang 2016; Goldstein 2020). Scholars note that in order to wield discourse power, China needs to strengthen its presence at international institutions, innovate diplomatic practices and develop cogent narratives (Zhang 2016), through “a persuasive, causal, and internally consistent discourse system that can make others understand why China is on the right path and is developing better,” (Ding 2017).

Simply put, China seeks to “fundamentally change the conversation at the global level so as to defend China’s interests abroad and reinforce ideological consensus at home” (Ohlberg 2016, 3). Part of this discourse power is the use of “ritualized language” (Link 2013), the canonical phrases “used by the Party, its propaganda organs, the media and educators to shape (and circumscribe) the way people express themselves” as part of daily life in China (Barmé 2012), with language as “political signals or signposts” (Qian 2012). In short, for China: “[words] are not simply instruments of communication used to facilitate exchanges and discussions; they convey concepts, ideals, and values that are the foundational basis for the norms on which the international architecture is built and command how the world order is run” (Rolland 2020, 7). These “incantatory phrases” (Rolland 2020, 5) like

‘joint contribution,’ ‘mutual benefit,’ ‘win-win cooperation,’ ‘sincerity,’ ‘shared future,’ and ‘community’ are purposely chosen for their implicit positivity, or rather “extracted from a thesaurus of synonyms for ‘nice’ that have been randomly stitched together, and their exact applicability to the reform of the world is unclear at best” (Rolland 2020, 17).

Scholarship suggests that China employs a dual strategy in amplifying its ‘voice’ through multilateral institutions, whether by inserting PRC-specific terms or PRC-reinterpreted words for vocabulary frequently used in international diplomacy into official output. PRC diplomats push to include PRC-specific terms e.g. “community of common destiny” or “Belt and Road” appears in UN Security Council (e.g. 2017), UN General Assembly (e.g. 2019) and UN Human Rights Council Resolutions. A second part of the strategy is to insert PRC-reinterpreted terms into international diplomacy (e.g. ‘international cooperation’). Gradually, the United States and its allies recognize such tactics and reject the resolutions containing PRC-specific or PRC-reinterpreted terms (Sirohi 2017; UN Human Rights Council 2020; International Service for Human Rights 2020; Nichols 2020a). A U.S. diplomat noted that “[the] ‘feel good’ language about mutually beneficial cooperation is intended to benefit autocratic states at the expense of people whose human rights and fundamental freedoms we are all obligated as states to respect” (Nebhay 2018). By understanding semantic change in UN documents, we can see how same words take on new meaning across different UN institutions. Based on these arguments, we test:

H_2 : The UN institution with more leadership positions held by personnel from PRC or PRC-aligned countries will use specific words in ways more similar to China.

4 Method and Data

Our study first examines UN leadership positions. We draw from the publicly-available official UN Handbook from 2010 to 2019,⁶ which contains all leadership positions including

⁶ Except for year 2011 which is only available in hardcopy.

chairs, vice-chairs, presidents, vice-presidents, experts, judges, rapporteurs, commanders or special representatives of the UN Secretary-General from the departments and agencies within or under the six principal organs of the UN, with the unit of analysis as country-year. Each entry specifies the number of UN leadership positions that a country has in a given year.

Our dependent variable is `leader`: the count of UN leadership positions that a country has in a given year. We measure this using R on the available UN Handbooks. To capture the count data correctly, only those positions with the names of the officers are counted. For example, “Ban Ki-moon, ROK” is detected by counting the “, ROK” pattern. Patterns of all “city, country” (such as “Incheon, ROK”) and all “country A, country B” (such as “China, ROK”) are removed to ensure the validity of named positions. All named positions in the section ‘Sessions and Presidents of the General Assembly since 1946’ are also removed to avoid duplication. We then tokenise the texts, scrape the two words before the ‘, country’ pattern, and delete any common words that are not used in names. Altogether, we obtain the unique names and nationalities of around 1,247 personnels in the UN leadership positions on average every year with a standard deviation of 77.1 positions (see Figure A1 in Appendix). The small variance suggests that the UN Handbooks consistently capture the roughly equivalent positions across all years.

Our key explanatory variable is China’s support to other countries at the UN. Since support is a scarce resource, we assume that China is more willing to support those countries geopolitically aligned with it; or those countries geopolitically aligned with China are more willing to solicit China’s support. Hence, we measure China’s support by its geopolitical alignment, which is captured by `Lag UNGA voting affinity with China` using [Bailey, Strezhnev, and Voeten \(2017\)](#). Research shows that UNGA voting affinity correlates with a number of geopolitical alignment measures in China’s case, including African and Latin American economies’ trade relationship with China ([Flores-Macías and Kreps 2013](#)), receipt of China’s highly concessional flows ([Dreher et al. 2018](#)) and Chinese overseas investments

(Stone, Wang, and Yu 2021). We add two interaction terms: `non-US ally`⁷ as China is less likely to leverage its finite support to US allies and `logged UN budget contribution` as it will be easier for China to push through a candidacy with stronger UN presence. To estimate the relationship between a country’s voting affinity with China and its UN leadership positions, we use a first-differences year-fixed-effects poisson model and a difference-in-difference poisson model. This ensures that we capture the number of *additional* positions that a country can change after voting more similarly with China, and avoid conflating appointing a new leadership position and someone continuing serving on said position. For robustness checks, we cluster the standard errors by country, since the unit of randomisation is country.

We further control for several conditions that Novosad and Werker (2019) has considered. They are: `population share` (using World Bank data); `civil war onset` (with 1000+ battle deaths); `tertiary education` which is required for UN employment; `corruption estimate` as home country corruption level predicts a UN diplomat’s compliance with New York law (Fisman and Miguel 2007); `military spending share` which measures coercive power; `GDP per capita` as it proxies wealth which can purchase control at the UN (Zakaria 1999); `diplomatic contacts` to measure the number of diplomatic missions and thus investment for foreign influence; `VDem polyarchy score` which proxies membership in a dominant democratic alliance (Lai and Reiter 2000).⁸ We impute missing data in control variables through a classification and regression trees method. Except for loggd variables, we standardize all independent variables for comparing the coefficients more easily and for converging the negative binomial model.

5 Empirical Analysis

Table 1 Models 1 and 4 are simple bivariate estimates, Models 2 and 5 include interaction terms, and Models 3 and 6 include interaction terms with full controls. In all models, affinity

⁷ Using `defence` variable in Alliance Treaty Obligations and Provisions 4.0.1 dataset.

⁸All control variables rely on World Bank data, except for `diplomatic contacts` (using Lowy Global Diplomacy Index from Lowy Institute), `VDem polyarchy score` and `civil war` using UCDP PRIO data.

Dependent Variable: Model:	No. of UN leadership positions					
	(1) <i>First diff.</i> <i>Bivariate</i>	(2) <i>First diff.</i> <i>Interaction</i> <i>terms</i>	(3) <i>First diff.</i> <i>Interaction</i> <i>with control</i>	(4) <i>DiD</i> <i>Bivariate</i>	(5) <i>DiD</i> <i>Interaction</i> <i>terms</i>	(6) <i>DiD</i> <i>Interaction</i> <i>with control</i>
<i>Variables</i>						
Log lag DV	1.120*** (0.012)	1.092*** (0.018)	1.049*** (0.025)			
Affinity w/ China (scaled)	0.015** (0.007)	0.004 (0.006)	0.011 (0.008)	0.055** (0.028)	0.051** (0.025)	0.052** (0.025)
Log UN budget		0.012* (0.007)	-0.000 (0.011)		0.009 (0.023)	0.015 (0.023)
Non-US ally		0.009 (0.019)	0.011 (0.029)			
Affinity w/ China (scaled) × Log UN budget		0.009*** (0.002)	0.011*** (0.003)		-0.001 (0.007)	0.001 (0.007)
Affinity w/ China (scaled) × Non-US ally		-0.008 (0.016)	-0.011 (0.022)			
Log UN budget × Non-US ally		0.017* (0.009)	0.017 (0.011)			
Affinity w/ China (scaled) × Log UN budget × Non-US ally		-0.037*** (0.008)	-0.038*** (0.008)			
Log population			0.051*** (0.015)			-0.155*** (0.038)
Log diplomatic contacts			-0.018*** (0.007)			
VDem score (scaled)			0.044** (0.019)			0.021 (0.058)
Civil war			-0.030 (0.043)			0.039 (0.097)
Corruption (scaled)			0.025* (0.014)			-0.020 (0.073)
Log tertiary education			0.023 (0.017)			0.017 (0.027)
Log military spending			0.023 (0.023)			-0.096 (0.093)
<i>Fixed-effects</i>						
Year	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Country				Yes	Yes	Yes
<i>Fit statistics</i>						
Observations	1,569	1,569	1,569	1,605	1,605	1,605
Squared Correlation	0.95581	0.95620	0.95654	0.96634	0.96644	0.96680
Pseudo R ²	0.73628	0.73762	0.73864	0.72997	0.72998	0.73016
BIC	6,159.1	6,172.3	6,200.3	7,609.9	7,624.4	7,664.7

One-way (Country) standard-errors in parentheses

Chair positions are double counted

*Signif. Codes: ***: 0.01, **: 0.05, *: 0.1*

Table 1: Log count of UN leadership positions for a country in a given year

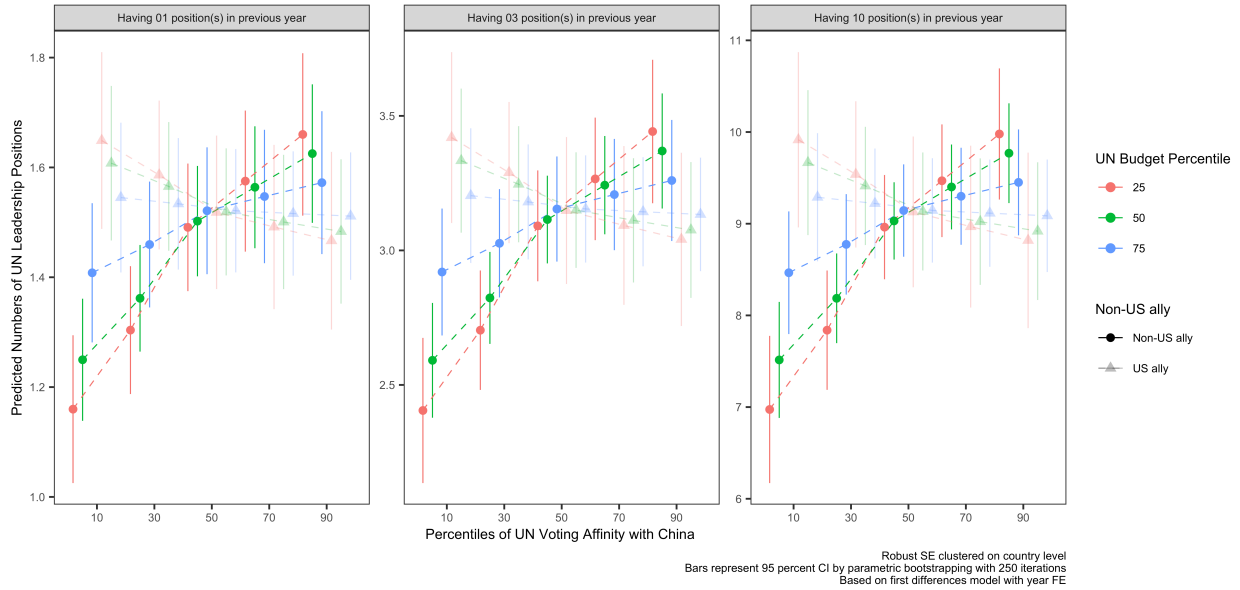


Figure 2: Predicted numbers of UN leadership positions from Table 1 Model 3

with China is a statistically significant predictor of UN leadership positions. In model 6 for example, when a country increases its voting affinity with China by 3SD, its number of UN leadership positions will increase by 16.9%. Figure 2 substantively interprets the interaction terms in Table 1 Model 3. Only if the country is a non-US ally, will voting more similarly with China results in more UN leadership positions. Contrary to expectation, the relationship between voting affinity and leadership positions is stronger if the country contributes less to the UN budget. This might be because most US allies are wealthy and contribute much to the UN. Figure 3 shows that for example, a non-US ally country with 25th percentile UN budget contribution and eight leadership positions in the previous year will have 1.75 more positions if it votes with 75th percentile similarity with China compared to a similar country that votes 25th percentile similarly with China.

6 Robustness checks

To further allay the concern of endogeneity, we use the instrumental variable `percentage of China's investment cumulative sum in country GDP`. As Dreher et al. (2018) have shown, UN voting affinity with China highly correlates with the receipt of China's highly

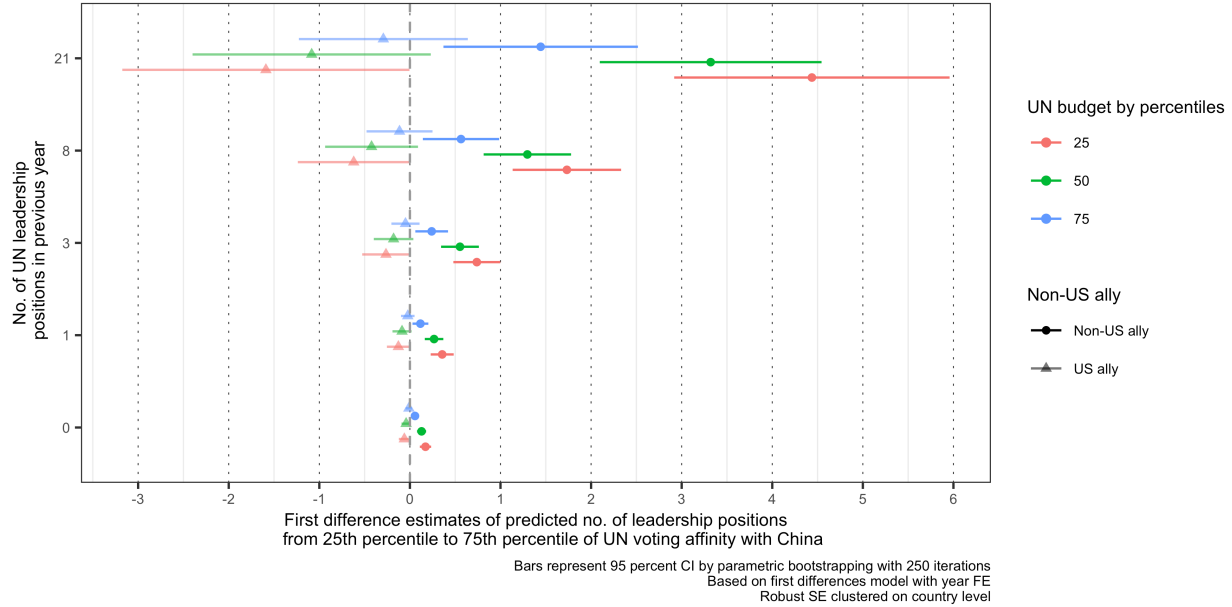


Figure 3: Predicted numbers of UN leadership positions from 25th percentile to 75th percentile of UN voting affinity with China (Table 1 Model 3)

concessional flows. It is also theoretically intuitive that the recipient country returns favour by supporting China at the UN either for gratitude or for future benefits. Having more investment may raise the country profile at the UN, so that their candidates may more likely be selected. However, the full investment portfolios from various countries should be looked at, and the powerful countries ultimately frame the candidate and country characteristics. Hence, we have confidence that investment from China will not directly affect the change in number of UN leadership positions. We rely on the China Global Investment Tracker from American Economic Institute.⁹ It is a comprehensive dataset starting from 2005 that tracks China’s global investment and construction on a project level. We construct the instrumental variable by aggregating the projects in a given country in a given year and compute its percentage of lagged cumulative sum in a country’s GDP. In Table 2, we show that increasing voting affinity with China by 3SD increases the change in the country’s leadership positions by 30.2%.

Another concern is that other countries may also be exerting influence on staffing at the

⁹<https://www.aei.org/china-global-investment-tracker/>

Dependent Variables: Model:	Affinity w/ China (scaled) (1)	No. of positions (2)	No. of positions (3)
	<i>First stage</i> OLS	<i>Reduced form</i> Poisson	<i>IV</i> Poisson
<i>Variables</i>			
Log lag DV	0.030 (0.065)	1.038*** (0.023)	1.051*** (0.024)
China's investment cumsum in GDP (%)	0.360** (0.149)	0.031** (0.015)	
Log UN budget	-0.113** (0.057)	-0.004 (0.009)	-0.006 (0.010)
Non-US ally	-0.176 (0.152)	-0.007 (0.022)	-0.000 (0.021)
Log population	0.060 (0.059)	0.045*** (0.013)	0.045*** (0.015)
VDem score (scaled)	-0.325*** (0.085)	0.028* (0.015)	0.051*** (0.017)
Civil war	-0.094 (0.143)	-0.013 (0.029)	-0.015 (0.034)
Corruption (scaled)	-0.082 (0.111)	0.015 (0.013)	0.027** (0.013)
Log tertiary education	-0.147** (0.059)	0.037** (0.016)	0.031* (0.018)
Log military spending	-0.119 (0.139)	-0.010 (0.026)	0.008 (0.021)
China's investment cumsum in GDP (%) × Log UN budget	0.053** (0.025)	-0.002 (0.003)	
Fitted values			0.088** (0.040)
Fitted values × Log UN budget			0.009 (0.007)
<i>Fixed-effects</i>			
Year	Yes	Yes	Yes
<i>Fit statistics</i>			
Observations	1,569	1,569	1,569
Squared Correlation	0.41259	0.95627	0.95618
Pseudo R ²	0.18752	0.73749	0.73727
BIC	3,756.7	6,197.4	6,202.5

One-way (country) standard-errors in parentheses
*Signif. Codes: ***: 0.01, **: 0.05, *: 0.1*

Table 2: Two-stage estimates of a country's UN leadership positions

UN, which will have ramifications on how the strategic dynamic affects PRC's influence. China is also voting in a cluster with G77 comprising mostly of well-populated developing countries. Since population share is one of the two important determinant of country's representation in the UN leadership, PRC's influence on staffing through voting affinity may just be confounding. Developing countries theoretically voting similarly with their peers (and China) get more positions because of their population size. We rerun Table 1 Model 6 by replacing affinity scores with China with affinity scores of all other UN member states. As Figure 4 shows, very few countries' affinity scores will have statistically significant effects on the number of UN leadership positions. For those who do, except China, when a country

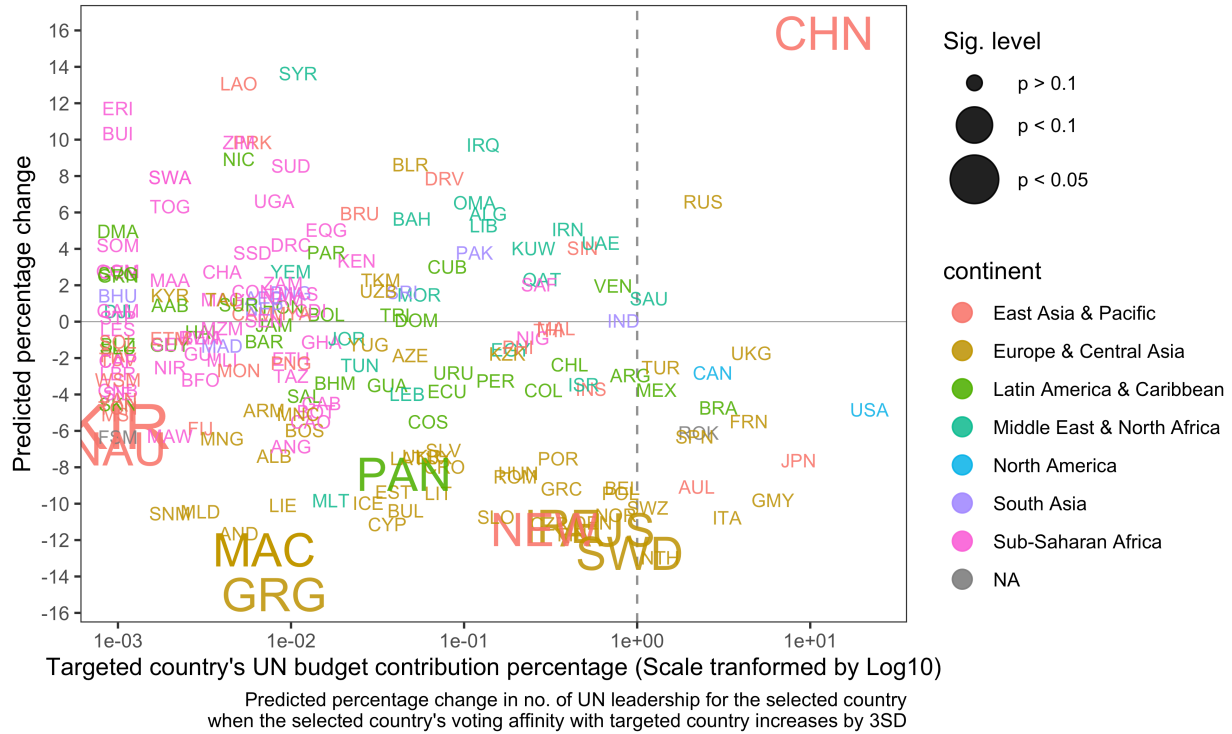


Figure 4: Predicted percentage change in no. of UN leadership for the selected country when the selected country’s voting affinity with targeted country increases by 3SD

votes more similarly with, say Sweden, its number of UN leadership positions will actually decrease.

7 Text analysis

The preceding section corroborates a China-capture view of UN leadership. The more aligned a country is with China, the more UN leadership positions the country can get. But how can a UN department with more leadership personnel from China-friendly countries exert China’s influence at the UN? We propose that China’s leadership influence at the UN pays off semantically. A UN department with more China-friendly leadership writes reports in ways more similar to PRC. To support this claim, we look at two sets of evidence: frequency of PRC-specific term and use of PRC-reinterpreted words.

We draw on annual reports of UN departments or agencies (see Table A3 in appendix) and compare them with a similar set of PRC-produced documentation. We focus on 54

(Rolland 2020, 50). Again, we leverage the scores of lagged voting affinity with China of UN departments to examine payoffs for having more China-friendly leadership. Figure 6 (see full regression table in Appendix Figure A1) shows the bivariate Poisson model. When the UN department has a more China-friendly leadership, the number of unique appearance of each PRC-specific term or each PRC-reinterpreted word will not change. When the average voting affinity of the UN department’s leadership increases by one SD, the cumulative frequency of using PRC-specific terms and PRC-reinterpreted words will increase by 23.0% and 24.4% respectively.

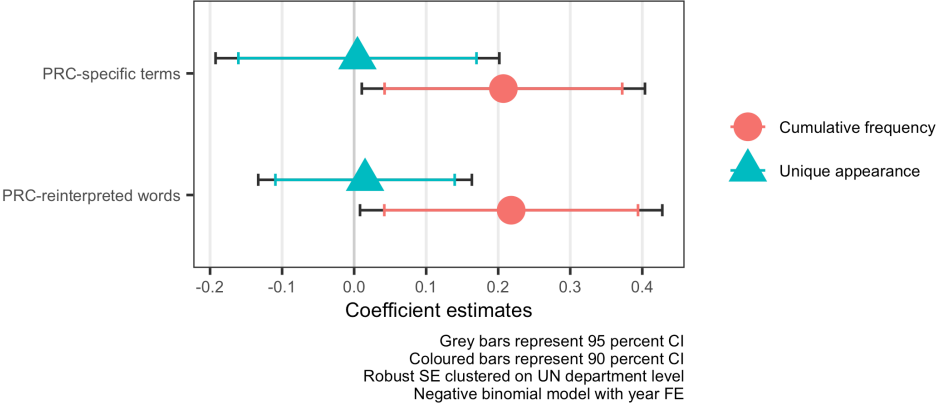


Figure 6: Coefficient plot of frequency of appearance in UN department reports

8 Word embedding

We further investigate the semantic influence by examining the words that China has re-interpreted their meanings. We use word embedding model. It allows for identifying similarities between words in a large corpus through some types of model to predict word co-occurrence within small chunk of text. Firstly, a word string before and after a focal word defines the ‘context window’ of eight words to train the word embedding model. Secondly, a vector of numbers represent each focal word and context words, which describe the frequency of unique words within the dataset. Thirdly, we calculate the Skipgram probabilities (i.e. how often each word is next to every other word within the context window) and normalise

Table 3: List of PRC-specific terms and PRC-reinterpreted words
(Selected from the table ‘China Foreign Policy Lexicon Tracker’ in [Rolland \(2020\)](#))

	PRC-specific terms	Google Ngram Usage in 2009	PRC-reinterpreted words
1	“good neighborliness”	0.0000014702	“neighbor”
2	“mutual trust”	0.0000503235	“mutual”, “trust”
3	“discourse power”	0.0000005437	“discourse”, “power”
4	“people-to-people”	0.0000086013	“people”
5	“win-win”	0.0000785362	“win”
6	“mutually beneficial cooperation”	0.0000020641	“mutual”, “beneficial”, “cooperation”
7	“shared wins”	0.0000000342	“shared”, “win”
8	“common interests”	0.0000598259	“common”, “interests”
9	“harmonious world”	0.0000027087	“harmonious”, “world”
10	“peaceful development”	0.0000046883	“peaceful”, “development”
11	“amity”	0.0000449885	“amity”
12	“sincerity”	0.0004659798	“sincerity”
13	“mutual benefit”	0.0000379608	“mutual”, “benefit”
14	“inclusiveness”	0.0000716207	“inclusiveness”
15	“community of common destiny”	0.0000010625	“community”, “common”, “destiny”
16	“community of shared future for mankind”	0.0000000000	“community”, “shared”, “future”, “mankind”
17	“common destiny”	0.0000080331	“common”, “destiny”
18	“shared future”	0.0000061141	“shared”, “future”
19	“speak in good faith”	0.0000000587	“faith”
20	“value comradeship”	0.0000000039	“comradeship”
21	“raise justice”	0.0000000389	“justice”
22	“cultivate righteousness”	0.0000000552	“righteousness”
23	“wide consultation”	0.0000012483	“wide”, “consultation”
24	“joint contribution”	0.0000013920	“joint”, “contribution”
25	“shared benefits”	0.0000016173	“shared”, “benefits”
26	“joint discussion”	0.0000013129	“joint”, “discussion”
27	“joint consultations”	0.0000003718	“joint”, “consultations”
28	“belt and road”	0.0000609022	“belt”, “road”
29	“common security”	0.0000089094	“common”, “security”
30	“comprehensive security”	0.0000034148	“comprehensive”, “security”
31	“cooperative security”	0.0000025340	“cooperative”, “security”
32	“sustainable security”	0.0000005428	“sustainable”, “security”
33	“innovation” ^	0.0029098498	“innovation”
34	“coordination” ^	0.0012015980	“coordination”
35	“green development”	0.0000058896	“green”, “development”
36	“openness”	0.0005900926	“openness”
37	“sharing” ^	0.0030763093	“sharing”
38	“builder of world peace”	0.0000000000	“builder”, “world”, “peace”
39	“contributor to global development”	0.0000000000	“contributor”, “global”, “development”
40	“protector of international order”	0.0000000000	“protector”, “international”, “order”
41	“equality” ^	0.0020898206	“equality”
42	“mutual understanding”	0.0000732167	“mutual”, “understanding”
43	“dialogue” ^	0.0018774520	“dialogue”
44	“tolerance” ^	0.0013164174	“tolerance”
45	“mutual reflection”	0.0000006076	“mutual”, “reflection”
46	“common development”	0.0000046374	“common”, “development”
47	“frank consultation”	0.0000000329	“frank”, “consultation”
48	“sincere communication”	0.0000002922	“sincere”, “communication”
49	“in-depth exchange”	0.0000001179	“in-depth”, “exchange”
50	“mutual learning”	0.0000126152	“mutual”, “learning”

Terms too common in English may obscure the true assessment of UN departments using PRC-specific terms. We use Google Ngram usage of 0.001 as a threshold and we delete the PRC-specific terms below the threshold.

them with the unigram probabilities (within the whole corpus). Fourthly, we compute the probability of a specific word to occur within the context window of another word. And finally, we use simple singular value decomposition to make a matrix of 246 dimensions. As

documentations of UN department and PRC. Preliminarily, it shows that when the UN department’s home affinity with China increases, the distance is smaller, suggesting that it will use the PRC-reinterpreted words in way more similar to PRC. We then look into each department–word-dyad, and estimate the relationship between (1) department leadership’s voting affinity and (2) distance in usage of words between that department and PRC. We include word fixed effects to control for any differences between PRC-reinterpreted words and year fixed effects. To take into account how much China uses the PRC-reinterpreted words, we weigh the model by the frequency that they appear in China’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs speeches. Table 4 shows that when the average voting affinity of the UN department’s leadership increases by three SD, the distance in word usage between that UN department and PRC will decline by 6.56%.

Dependent Variable:	Distance in usage of words	
Model:	(1)	(2)
<i>Variables</i>		
UN dept affinity w/ China	-0.0102** (0.0051)	-0.0226** (0.0105)
UN dept affinity w/ USA		-0.0135 (0.0118)
<i>Fixed-effects</i>		
Word	Yes	Yes
Year	Yes	Yes
<i>Fit statistics</i>		
Observations	1,832,800	1,832,800
Squared Correlation	0.09842	0.09841
Pseudo R ²	0.74293	0.74293
BIC	80,869.4	80,883.7

*Two-way (dept & term) standard-errors in parentheses
 Reweighed by the frequency of MFA usage
 Signif. Codes: ***: 0.01, **: 0.05, *: 0.1*

Table 4: Distance in word-embedded meanings (Poisson)

9 Conclusion

A growing commentary on China’s foreign policy ‘influence’ points to various activities and outcomes as indicative of said influence, with reporting noting that the United Nations is one important venue for China to assert itself. Our paper offers a treatment of what China’s influence is at the United Nations. We find that states with UN General Assembly voting affinity with China secure more UN leadership positions, suggesting that China’s support is

influential in winning these posts. Doing so matters for China to adjust the terms that are quite literally used in diplomacy towards language favored by China. On all three measures used to investigate China’s semantic influence, we find that UN departments with more China-friendly leadership produce documentation with greater similarity to PRC official documents, using PRC-specific terms and PRC-reinterpreted words with greater frequency as compared to those UN departments with less China-friendly leadership.

The findings sharpen the discussion about how China is transforming international institutions from within. Evidence here suggests that China is literally engaging the agents of international diplomacy—international civil servants that lead United Nations units—to shape the literal components of multilateral diplomacy, i.e. the words and documents that articulate and form multilateral engagement. In doing so, we can demonstrate that emerging powers can also exert informal influence at IOs even when we traditionally expect only powerful states like the United States and its allies would have such privilege.

While publishing such bureaucratic output is unlikely to be a high salience event, these words and writings have high effect: the documents themselves are stepping stones for the IO’s activities. By shaping how international diplomacy is conceived of and communicated China is using discourse and documentation to not only better serve its own interests, but also induce its vision of the future. Our findings speak to recent popular analyses on PRC initiatives to boost China’s bureaucratic footprint at the United Nations are worth investigating further (Lynch 2020). Contrasting earlier accounts of China’s socialization to Western values and norms in international institutions (Johnston 2008; Fung 2019), we join an emerging scholarship accepting “a return of ideological control and political loyalty” for PRC diplomats (Loh 2019, 9; Martin 2006) that may very well see fealty to serving the IO come under strain.

References

Andersen, Thomas Barnebeck, Henrik Hansen, and Thomas Markussen. 2006. “US politics and World Bank IDA-lending.” *The Journal of Development Studies* 42(5): 772–794.

- Andersen, Thomas Barnebeck, Thomas Harr, and Finn Tarp. 2006. “On US politics and IMF lending.” *European Economic Review* 50(7): 1843–1862.
- Bailey, Michael A, Anton Strezhnev, and Erik Voeten. 2017. “Estimating dynamic state preferences from United Nations voting data.” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 61(2): 430–456.
- Barmé, Geremie R. 2012. “New China Newspeak Xinhua Wenti.” *China Heritage Quarterly* 29.
- Barro, Robert J, and Jong-Wha Lee. 2005. “IMF programs: Who is chosen and what are the effects?” *Journal of Monetary Economics* 52(7): 1245–1269.
- Benabdallah, Lina. 2020. *Shaping the Future of Power: Knowledge Production and Network-Building in China-Africa Relations*. University of Michigan Press.
- Brice, Makini, and Humeyra Pamuk. 2020. “U.S. tasks official to counter China’s ‘malign influence’ at U.N.” *Reuters*, January 24.
- Byass, Peter. 2017. “Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus is the best candidate for WHO DG.” *The Lancet* 389(10084): e6–e7.
- Calvert, Jonathan, and George Arbutnott. 2021. “China, the WHO and the power grab that fuelled a pandemic.” *The Times*, August 15.
- Cassidy, John. 2007. “The Next Crusade: Paul Wolfowitz at the World Bank.” *The New Yorker*, April 9.
- Chadwick, Vince. 2019. “Chinese candidate takes FAO top job amid US concerns.” *DeveX*, June 24.
- Chesterman, Simon, ed. 2007. *Secretary or General? The UN Secretary-General in World Politics*. Cambridge University Press.
- China Central Television. 2018. ““Kaijiang la” wo de shidai dajuan· qian Lianheguo fu mishu zhang Wu Hongbo: Youxiu de waijiao guan yao you qianglie de aiguo xin he jinqu jingshen.” , December 22. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pmrI2n6d6VU&t=24m56s>.
- China Radio International. 2013. “Guoji zuzhi gaoguan pin xian Zhongguo miankong .” , November 14. <http://news.sina.com.cn/o/2013-11-14/183328711605.shtml>.
- Clark, Richard, and Lindsay R Dolan. 2020. “Pleasing the Principal: US Influence in World Bank Policymaking.” *American Journal of Political Science* 10.1111/ajps.12531.
- Cornut, Jérémie. 2015. “To be a diplomat abroad: Diplomatic practice at embassies.” *Cooperation and Conflict* 50(3): 385–401.
- Cortell, Andrew P, and Susan Peterson. 2006. “Dutiful agents, rogue actors, or both? Staffing, voting rules, and slack in the WHO and WTO.” In *Delegation and agency in international organizations*, eds. Darren G Hawkins, David A Lake, Daniel L Nielson, and Michael J Tierney. Cambridge University Press , 255–280.

- Desai, Bharat H. 2010. *Multilateral environmental agreements: Legal status of the secretariats*. Cambridge University Press.
- Ding, Yifan. 2017. “Qieshi gaibian guoji huayuquan ‘xiqiang woruo’ geju.” *Guancha*, December 27. https://www.guancha.cn/DingYiFan/2017_12_27_440745_6.shtml.
- Dreher, Axel, and Nathan M Jensen. 2007. “Independent actor or agent? An empirical analysis of the impact of US interests on International Monetary Fund conditions.” *The Journal of Law and Economics* 50(1): 105–124.
- Dreher, Axel, Andreas Fuchs, Brad Parks, Austin M Strange, and Michael J Tierney. 2018. “Apples and dragon fruits: The determinants of aid and other forms of state financing from China to Africa.” *International Studies Quarterly* 62(1): 182–194.
- Dreher, Axel, Jan-Egbert Sturm, and James Raymond Vreeland. 2009. “Development aid and international politics: Does membership on the UN Security Council influence World Bank decisions?” *Journal of Development Economics* 88(1): 1–18.
- Dreher, Axel, Silvia Marchesi, and James Raymond Vreeland. 2008. “The political economy of IMF forecasts.” *Public Choice* 137(1-2): 145–171.
- Embassy of PRC in the Hellenic Republic . 2014. “Wang Yi Holds Talks with Foreign Minister Tedros Adhanom of Ethiopia.” , January 7.
- Fabian, Jordan, and Lisa Du. 2020. “Trump Halts U.S. Payments to WHO, Citing Reliance on China.” *Bloomberg*, April 15.
- Feltman, Jeffrey. 2020. “China’s expanding influence at the United Nations.” Brookings.
- Finger, Seymour, and Nina Hanan. 1980. “The UN Secretariat Revisited.” *UN Secretariat News* 16: 9–12.
- Fisman, Raymond, and Edward Miguel. 2007. “Corruption, norms, and legal enforcement: Evidence from diplomatic parking tickets.” *Journal of Political economy* 115(6): 1020–1048.
- Flores-Macías, Gustavo A, and Sarah E Kreps. 2013. “The foreign policy consequences of trade: China’s commercial relations with Africa and Latin America, 1992–2006.” *The Journal of Politics* 75(2): 357–371.
- Food and Agriculture Organization. 2018. “FAO + China – Partnering for sustainable food security.” United Nations University - Centre for Policy Research.
- Food and Agriculture Organization. 2019. “Hundred and Sixty-first Session.” , April 11.
- Food and Agriculture Organization. n.d. “Strategic planning.”. <http://www.fao.org/about/strategic-planning/en/>.
- Foot, Rosemary. 2014. “‘Doing some things’ in the Xi Jinping era: the United Nations as China’s venue of choice.” *International Affairs* 90(5): 1085–1100.

- Foot, Rosemary. 2020. *China, the United Nations, and Human Protection: Beliefs, Power, Image*. Oxford University Press.
- Fu, Ying. 2016a. “Disorder or the Reconstruction of Order?” *China Daily*, July 8.
- Fu, Ying. 2016b. “The US world order is a suit that no longer fits.” *Financial Times*, January 7.
- Fung, Courtney J. 2019. *China and Intervention at the UN Security Council: Reconciling Status*. Oxford University Press.
- Fung, Courtney J. 2020. “Rhetorical adaptation, normative resistance and international order-making: China’s advancement of the responsibility to protect.” *Cooperation and Conflict* 55(2): 193–215.
- Fung, Courtney J., and Shing-hon Lam. 2021. “Staffing the United Nations: China’s motivations and prospects.” *International Affairs* 97(4): 1–19.
- Glaser, Bonnie S, and Evan S Medeiros. 2007. “The changing ecology of foreign policy-making in China: the ascension and demise of the theory of “peaceful rise”.” *The China Quarterly* 190: 291–310.
- Godement, Francois. 2020. “Fighting the Coronavirus Pandemic: China’s Influence at the World Health Organization.” Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.
- Goldstein, Avery. 2020. “China’s Grand Strategy under Xi Jinping: Reassurance, Reform, and Resistance.” *International Security* 45(1): 164–201.
- Graham, Erin R, and Alexandria Serdaru. 2020. “Power, Control, and the Logic of Substitution in Institutional Design: The Case of International Climate Finance.” *International Organization* 10.1017/S0020818320000181.
- Guerrero, Maurizio. 2020. “As Kenya and Djibouti Fight Over a UN Security Council Seat, China Pops Up.” *PassBlue*, January 2020.
- Hall, Nina, and Ngaire Woods. 2018. “Theorizing the role of executive heads in international organizations.” *European Journal of International Relations* 24(4): 865–886.
- Hammaraskjold, Dag. 1963. “The Servant of Peace.”.
- Harman, Sophie. 2011. “Searching for an Executive Head? Leadership and UNAIDS.” *Global Governance* 17(4): 429–446.
- Hart, Melanie, and Blaine Johnson. 2019. “Mapping China’s Global Governance Ambitions.” Center for American Progress.
- Hawkins, Darren G, David A Lake, Daniel L Nielson, and Michael J Tierney, eds. 2006. *Delegation and agency in international organizations*. Cambridge University Press.

- Heinzel, Mirko. 2021. “Mediating power? Delegation, pooling and leadership selection at international organisations.”
- Huang, Yanzhong. 2017. “Tedros, Taiwan, and Trump: What They Tell Us About China’s Growing Clout in Global Health.” *Council on Foreign Relations*, June 7.
- Institute of South-South Cooperation and Development. 2017. “Dr. Tedros Visits ISSCAD, Shares His Vision for WHO.” *Peking University*, March 22.
- International Service for Human Rights. 2020. “Vote on ‘mutually beneficial cooperation’ resolution highlights divisive nature of Chinese initiative.” , June 22.
- Ivanova, Maria. 2010. “UNEP in global environmental governance: design, leadership, location.” *Global Environmental Politics* 10(1): 30–59.
- Johns, Leslie. 2007. “A servant of two masters: communication and the selection of international bureaucrats.” *International Organization* 61(2): 245–275.
- Johnston, Alastair I. 2008. *Social states: China in international institutions, 1980-2000*. Princeton University Press.
- Johnston, Alastair Iain. 2019. “China in a World of Orders: Rethinking Compliance and Challenge in Beijing’s International Relations.” *International Security* 44(2): 9–60.
- Kaja, Ashwin, and Eric Werker. 2010. “Corporate governance at the World Bank and the dilemma of global governance.” *The World Bank Economic Review* 24(2): 171–198.
- Kato, Ronald. 2017. “African leaders praise Belt and Road initiative.” *New Vision*, May 16.
- Kelland, Kate, and Stephanie Nebehay. 2020. “Caught in Trump-China feud, WHO’s leader is under siege.” *Reuters*, May 15.
- Kersting, Erasmus K, and Christopher Kilby. 2016. “With a little help from my friends: Global electioneering and World Bank lending.” *Journal of Development Economics* 121: 153–165.
- Kilby, Christopher. 2009. “The political economy of conditionality: An empirical analysis of World Bank loan disbursements.” *Journal of Development Economics* 89(1): 51–61.
- Kilby, Christopher. 2013. “An empirical assessment of informal influence in the World Bank.” *Economic Development and Cultural Change* 61(2): 431–464.
- Kupferschmidt, Kai. 2017. “Former Ethiopian health minister becomes first African head of the World Health Organization.” *Science Magazine*, May 23.
- Kynge, James, and Nian Liu. 2020. “From AI to facial recognition: how China is setting the rules in new tech.” *Financial Times*, October 7.
- Lai, Brian, and Dan Reiter. 2000. “Democracy, political similarity, and international alliances, 1816-1992.” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 44(2): 203–227.

- Lams, Lutgard. 2018. "Examining Strategic Narratives in Chinese Official Discourse under Xi Jinping." *Journal of Chinese Political Science* 23(3): 387–411.
- Lee, Kristine. 2019. "Coming Soon to the United Nations: Chinese Leadership and Authoritarian Values." *Foreign Affairs*, September 16.
- Lee, Kristine, and Alexander Sullivan. 2019. "People's Republic of the United Nations: China's Emerging Revisionism in International Organizations." Center for a New American Security.
- Lim, Daniel Yew Mao, and James Raymond Vreeland. 2013. "Regional organizations and international politics: Japanese influence over the Asian Development Bank and the UN Security Council." *World Politics* 65(1): 34.
- Link, Perry. 2013. *An Anatomy of Chinese: Rhythm, Metaphors, Politics*. Harvard University Press.
- Lipsky, Phillip Y. 2017. *Renegotiating the world order: Institutional change in international relations*. Cambridge University Press.
- Loh, Dylan MH. 2019. "Institutional Habitus, State identity, and China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs." *International Studies Review* 10.1093/isr/viz051.
- Lowy Institute. N.d. "Lowy Institute Global Diplomacy Index." .
- Lynch, Colum. 2018. "China Enlists U.N. to Promote Its Belt and Road Project." *Foreign Policy*, May 10.
- Lynch, Colum. 2020. "China's Soft-Power Grab." *Foreign Policy*, August 14.
- Lynch, Colum, and Elias Groll. 2017. "As U.S. Retreats From World Organizations, China Steps in to Fill the Void." *Foreign Policy*, October 6.
- Lynch, Colum, and Robbie Gramer. 2019. "Outfoxed and Outgunned: How China Routed the U.S. in a U.N. Agency." *Foreign Policy*, October 23.
- Lynch, Colum, and Robbie Gramer. 2020. "Big-Power Rivalries Hamstring Top U.N. Missions." *Foreign Policy*, July 22.
- Malik, Rabia, and Randall W Stone. 2018. "Corporate influence in World Bank lending." *The Journal of Politics* 80(1): 103–118.
- Manulak, Michael W. 2017. "Leading by design: Informal influence and international secretariats." *The Review of International Organizations* 12(4): 497–522.
- Martin, Lisa. 2006. "Distribution, information, and delegation to international organizations: The case of IMF conditionality." *Delegation and agency in international organizations* 1: 140–164.

- McCaul, Michael. 2019. "The United States Can't Cede the U.N. to China." *Foreign Policy*, September 24.
- Meunier, Sophie. 2000. "What single voice? European institutions and EU-US trade negotiations." *International organization* 54(1): 103–135.
- Nature editorial. 2019. "Pick a leader with vision for the Food and Agriculture Organization." *Nature* 570: 275.
- Navarro, Peter. 2020. "US: don't give China control of intellectual property group." *Financial Times*, February 23.
- Nebehay, Stephanie. 2018. "U.S. and China clash at U.N. rights forum on Beijing text." *Reuters*, March 23.
- Nelson, Stephen C. 2017. *The currency of confidence: How economic beliefs shape the IMF's relationship with its borrowers*. Cornell University Press.
- Nichols, Michelle. 2020a. "Pandemic sharpens 'battle for the soul' of United Nations between U.S. and China." *Reuters*, September 16.
- Nichols, Michelle. 2020b. "U.S. and China fight at United Nations over Hong Kong." *Reuters*, May 27.
- Nielson, Daniel L, Michael J Tierney, and Catherine E Weaver. 2006. "Bridging the rationalist–constructivist divide: re-engineering the culture of the World Bank." *Journal of International Relations and Development* 9(2): 107–139.
- Novosad, Paul, and Eric Werker. 2019. "Who runs the international system? Power and the staffing of the United Nations Secretariat." *Review of International Organization* 14: 1–31.
- Nyabiage, Jevans. 2020a. "China's Wang Yi makes detour to praise Kenya after Djibouti claims advantage in quest for UN seat." *South China Morning Post*, January 15.
- Nyabiage, Jevans. 2020b. "Will an African candidate be China's choice for WTO chief?" *South China Morning Post*, July 14.
- Ohlberg, Mareike. 2016. "Boosting the Party's Voice: China's Quest for Ideological Dominance." MERICS China Monitor.
- Okano-Heijmans, Maaïke, and Frans-Paul van der Putten. 2018. "A United Nations with Chinese characteristics?" Clingendael Report.
- O'Malley, Alanna. 2020. "Turning Points: Defining Moments for the International Civil Service at the United Nations." Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation.
- Pang, Zhongying. 2016. "What Is China's Role in Global Governance?" *China Daily*, December 21.

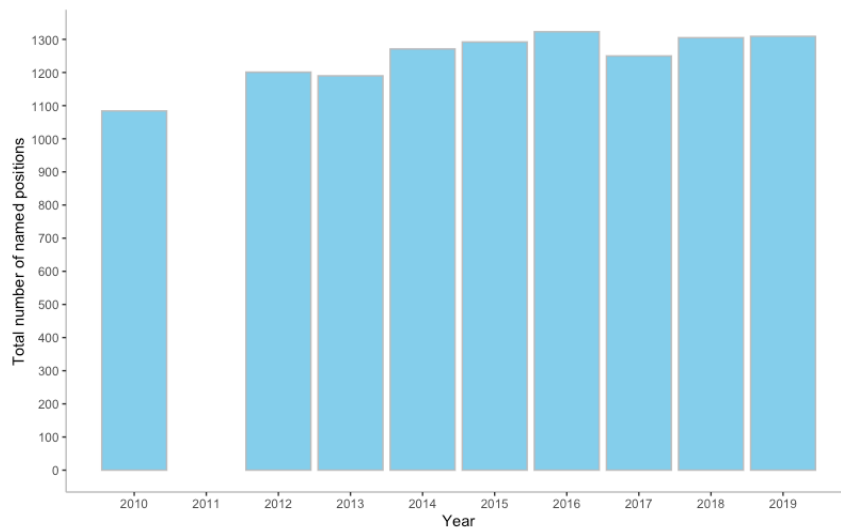
- Park, Susan, and Catherine Weaver. 2012. "The anatomy of autonomy." In *International Organizations as Self-Directed Actors*, ed. Joel E. Oestreich. Routledge , 91–117.
- Patnaik, Priti. 2017. "WHO is Electing a New Leader. Here's What's at Stake." *The Wire*, March 24.
- Pooley, James. 2020. "Don't Let China Oversee the World's Patents." *Bloomberg*, February 27.
- Pouliot, Vincent, and Jérémie Cornut. 2015. "Practice theory and the study of diplomacy: A research agenda." *Cooperation and conflict* 50(3): 297–315.
- Qian, Gang. 2012. "Watchwords: The Life of the Party." *China Media Project*, September 10.
- Reuters. 2019. "China says probing more people after former Interpol chief's fall." , March 28.
- Rogers, Katie, and Apoorva Mandavilli. 2020. "Trump Administration Signals Formal Withdrawal From W.H.O." *New York Times*, July 7.
- Rolland, Nadege. 2020. "China's Vision for a New World Order." The National Bureau of Asian Research Special Report No. 83.
- Schaefer, Brett D. 2019. "How the U.S. Should Address Rising Chinese Influence at the United Nations." The Heritage Foundation, Backgrounder No. 3431.
- Sherman, Justin, and Mark Raymond. 2019. "The U.N. passed a Russia-backed cybercrime resolution. That's not good news for Internet freedom." *The Washington Post*, December 4.
- Simons, Marlise. 2013. "To Ousted Boss, Arms Watchdog Was Seen as an Obstacle in Iraq." *New York Times*, October 13.
- Sina News Center. 2017. "Xi Jinping shou ti 'liang ge yindao' you shenyi." , February 20. <http://news.sina.com.cn/china/xlxw/2017-02-20/doc-ifyarrcf5036533.shtml>.
- Sirohi, Seema. 2017. "China Faces Pushback in the UN on Belt-Road Initiative, Retreats Quietly." *The Wire*, December 17.
- Stone, Randall W. 2002. *Lending credibility: The International Monetary Fund and the post-communist transition*. Princeton University Press.
- Stone, Randall W. 2004. "The political economy of IMF lending in Africa." *American Political Science Review* 98(4): 577–591.
- Stone, Randall W. 2008. "The scope of IMF conditionality." *International Organization* 62(4): 589–620.

- Stone, Randall W. 2011. *Controlling institutions: International organizations and the global economy*. Cambridge University Press.
- Stone, Randall W, Yu Wang, and Shu Yu. 2021. “Chinese Power and the State-Owned Enterprise.” *International Organization* First view: 1–22.
- Subramaniam, Chitra. 2020. “#Covid19: China colonizing public health with WHO’s help?” *Observer Research Foundation*, March 31.
- Swanson, Ana. 2019. “Trump Presses World Trade Organization on China.” *New York Times*, July 26.
- Tallberg, Jonas. 2006. *Leadership and negotiation in the European Union*. Cambridge University Press.
- Tallberg, Jonas. 2010. “The power of the chair: Formal leadership in international cooperation.” *International Studies Quarterly* 54(1): 241–265.
- Thacker, Strom C. 1999. “The high politics of IMF lending.” *World politics* 52(1): 38–75.
- The Associated Press. 2020. “China delayed releasing coronavirus info, frustrating WHO.” , June 3.
- The Economist. 2020. “Who runs the world? As America gets tired, China gets busy.” , June 18.
- The Guardian. 2019. “Global postal union reaches deal to prevent ‘nightmare’ of US exit.” , September 25.
- The Strait Times. 2018. “China rises to second largest contributor to United Nations budget.” , December 24.
- UN. N.d. “Charter of the United Nations.”. Article 100.
- UN General Assembly. 2019. “Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 12 December 2019. A/RES/74/33.” , December 18.
- UN Human Rights Council. 2020. “The role of technical assistance and capacity-building in fostering mutually beneficial cooperation in promoting and protecting human rights A/HRC/43/31.” , January 17.
- UN News. 2017. “‘All roads should lead to universal healthcare,’ says new WHO chief.” , May 24.
- UN Peace and Development Trust Fund. 2019. “2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Sub-Fund.”. <https://www.un.org/en/unpdf/2030asd.shtml>.
- UN Secretary-General. 2019. “Secretary-General’s remarks at the opening ceremony of the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation.”.

- UN Security Council. 2017. “Resolution 2344 (2017): Adopted by the Security Council at its 7902nd meeting, on 17 March 2017. S/RES/2344.” , March 17.
- UN Watch. 2020. “China joins U.N. human rights panel, will help pick experts on free speech, health, arbitrary detention.” , April 3.
- US Congress. 2019. “S. 2528 - A bill to require the Director of National Intelligence to submit to Congress a report on the purpose, scope, and means of expanded Chinese influence in international organizations, and for other purposes.” , September 19.
- Vreeland, James Raymond. 2019. “Corrupting International Organizations.” *Annual Review of Political Science* 22: 205–222.
- Wainer, David. 2019. “Russia, China Veto UN Resolution Seeking Venezuela Elections.” *Bloomberg*, February 28.
- Weiss, Jessica Chen. 2021. “Does China actively promote its way of governing — and do other countries listen?” *The Washington Post Monkey Cage*, July 14.
- Weiss, Jessica Chen, and Jeremy Wallace. 2020. “Domestic Politics, China’s Rise, and the Future of the Liberal International Order.”.
- Wen, Jian. 2016. “Bawo guoji huayu quan youxiao chuanbo Zhongguo shengyin—Xi Jinping wai xuan gongzuo silu linian tanxi.” *Xinhua*, April 6. http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2016-04/06/c_1118542256.htm.
- Woods, Ngaire, Shubhra Saxena Kabra, Nina Hall, Yulia Taranova, Miles Kellermann, and Hugo Batten. 2015. “Effective leadership in international organizations.” WEF.
- World Health Organization. n.d.a. “Core voluntary contributions.”. <https://open.who.int/2018-19/contributors/overview/cvc>.
- World Health Organization. n.d.b. “Voluntary contributions specified.”. <https://open.who.int/2018-19/contributors/overview/vcs>.
- Xu, Yi-Chong, and Patrick Moray Weller. 2018. *The Working World of International Organizations: Authority, Capacity, Legitimacy*. Oxford University Press.
- Yorke, Harry, Gordon Rayner, and Paul Nuki. 2020. “Mike Pompeo claims China ‘bought’ WHO chief.” *The Telegraph*, July 21.
- Zakaria, Fareed. 1999. *From wealth to power: The unusual origins of America’s world role*. Princeton University Press.
- Zhang, Zhizhou. 2016. “Qieshi gaibian guoji huayuquan ‘xiqiang woruo’ geju.” *People’s Daily*, September 20. <http://theory.people.com.cn/n1/2016/0920/c40531-28725837.html>.

10 Online Appendix

Figure A1: Total number of named positions in UN Handbook, 2010-19



Dependent Variables:	Unique appearance (1)	Cumulative frequency (2)	Unique appearance (3)	Cumulative frequency (4)
Model:	PRC-specific terms	PRC-reinterpreted words	PRC-specific terms	PRC-reinterpreted words
<i>Variables</i>				
Affinity w/ China (scaled)	0.0046 (0.1005)	0.2072** (0.1003)	0.0152 (0.0757)	0.2180** (0.1071)
<i>Fixed-effects</i>				
Year	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
<i>Fit statistics</i>				
Observations	401	401	401	401
Squared Correlation	0.02798	0.06946	0.04160	0.04403
Pseudo R ²	0.01820	0.00764	0.03521	0.01726
BIC	3,815.9	5,820.0	2,280.6	3,780.1
Over-dispersion	0.57695	0.31808	1.1427	0.42666

One-way (dept) standard-errors in parentheses

*Signif. Codes: ***: 0.01, **: 0.05, *: 0.1*

Table A1: Frequency of appearance in UN department reports (Poisson)

Table A3: List of UN documentation

Dataframe/ UN institution	Description	Years included	Word count
undp	Annual reports & human development reports (flagship)	2011–2020	1219475
unep	Annual reports	2012–2020	162965
unfpa	Annual reports	2012–2020	126386
unhabitat	Annual reports	2014, 2015, 2017–2020	415161
unhcr	Global reports	2012–2020	1043426
unicef	Annual reports	2012–2020	187630
unodc	Annual reports	2015–2019	241883
unrwa	Annual operational reports/harmony report	2012–2020	430453
unwomen	Annual reports	2013–2020	125968
wfp	Annual evaluation reports/ annual performance reports	2012–2020	702970
unidir	Annual reports	2011–2018	74705
unitar	Results reports	2015–2019	47762
unssc	Annual reports	2012–2015, 2017–2019	58480
unu	Annual reports	2012–2019	133649
unctad	Annual reports	2012–2020	171153
unisdr	Annual reports	2012–2019	228595
unops	Annual reports	2011–2017, 2019, 2020	76656
fao	Annual reports	2011–2020	2174927
icao	Annual reports	2012–2018	177973
ifad	Annual reports	2012–2019	479635
ilo	Annual evaluation reports	2011–2019	128914
imf	Annual reports	2011–2019	397705
imo	Financial statements	2013, 2015–2019	157656
itu	Annual reports	2015–2020	199857
unesco	Annual reports	2012–2019	316038
unido	Annual reports	2012–2020	371052
unwto	Annual reports	2012–2018	159014
upu	Annual reports & Report on activities/Postal Development Report	2012–2014, 2016, 2018, 2019	47121
who	Programme budget & report & results	2011, 2012, 2014–2016, 2018–2020	541431
wipo	Reports	2011, 2013, 2016, 2017, 2020	359973
wmo	Annual reports	2017–2019	42525
wb (World Bank)	Annual reports	2011–2019	261262
eca	Annual reports	2013–2019	461964
ece	Annual reports	2012–2015, 2019, 2020	189075
eclac	Annual reports	2011, 2013–2015, 2017–2019	557386
escap	Annual reports	2013, 2015–2020	213319
escwa	Annual reports	2012–2019	136463
unaids	Flagship Global AIDS Update/Progress report	2011–2020	607879
unicri	Annual reports	2017–2019	20773
unrisd	Progress reports/annual reports	2012–2019	327337
desa	World Social Report/World Youth Report/SWIP	2010–2012, 2014, 2016–2020	973754
dgc	Report of the Secretary-General to UNGA	2014–2017, 2019, 2020	88986
dppa	Annual reports	2017–2020	60583
ocha	Annual reports	2011–2020	274353
undrr	Annual reports	2011–2020	267515
ohchr	Reports	2012–2020	853128
oios	Report on the activities to UNGA	2010–2020	297511
osrsg-caac	Reports/annual reports to UNGA	2010–2020	378608
osrsg-svc	Annual reports/reports	2010, 2012–2019	146275
osrsg-vac	Report to GA/HRC	2010–2019	264043
unoda	Review	2010, 2012, 2014–2018	60550
unog	Annual reports	2010, 2012–2020	289786
un_ohrlls	State of the least developed countries	2013, 2014, 2016, 2017, 2019	288631
unop	Report of the Secretary-General to UNGA	2010–2018	85516

Note: The corpus and the details in this table are contained in the R object `un_docs_list.rds` or in the spreadsheet `corpus_infotable.csv` from the replication files.

Table A4: List of PRC-produced documentation

Dataframe	Descriptions	Years included	Word count	Retrieved from
xjp.governance1	XJP: The Governance of China	2014	139870	https://www.bannedthought.net
xjp.report	XJP's 19th CPC National Congress report	2017	24316	https://www.chinadaily.com.cn
xjp.speech	President Xi's speeches/remarks/signed articles	2015, 2017-2020	91886	http://www.chinadaily.com.cn
chinas.c.document	Ministry documents on State Council website	2013-2019	196396	http://english.www.gov.cn
chinas.policybrief	Full transcripts/excerpts of State Council policy briefing	2015-2020	314229	http://english.www.gov.cn
chinas.speech	Premier Li Keqiang's speech	2013-2020	243432	http://english.www.gov.cn
chinas.whitepaper	White Paper	2011-2020	492647	http://english.www.gov.cn
mfa.speech	Speeches/remarks/messages by President Xi/Premier Li/diplomats	2015-2010	513443	https://www.fmprc.gov.cn
moe.report	Reports by the Ministry of Education	2017-2019	16885	http://en.moe.gov.cn
mofcom.remark	Remarks by the spokesman of the Ministry of Commerce	2013-2020	221284	http://english.mofcom.gov.cn
ndrc.news	News release by the National Development and Reform Commission	2009, 2011-2017, 2020	82660	https://en.ndrc.gov.cn
ndrc.plan	The 13th Five-year Plan	2016	64387	https://en.ndrc.gov.cn

Note: The corpus and the details in this table are contained in the R object china_docs_list.rds or in the spreadsheet corpus_infotable.csv from the replication files.

XJP: Xi Jinping