

China and the UN Climate Regime: Climate Responsibility from an English School Perspective

Sanna Kopra

This paper analyzes how states have negotiated, distributed, and contested responsibilities within the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). It applies the English School (ES) theory and argues that climate responsibility constitutes an emerging primary institution of international society. Due to its rising great power status, China plays an increasingly important role in social processes in which international society defines and distributes states' responsibilities, especially those of the great powers, now and in the future. Therefore, this paper pays particular attention to China's contribution to the UNFCCC. Ultimately, the paper offers ES empirical observations about the relationship between primary and secondary institutions as well as the role of agency in institutional change.

Introduction

In this paper, I examine how states have negotiated, distributed, and contested responsibilities within the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). Based on my analysis of the generation and evolution of international practices of climate responsibility within the UNFCCC, I argue that climate responsibility is an emerging primary institution of international society. Ultimately, I aim to contribute to the English School (ES) via empirical observations about the relationship between primary and secondary institutions as well as the role of agency in institutional change.

Hence, I set two objectives for this paper: First, I aim to provide the ES with empirical observations, which are needed “if an institutional project *à la* ES is to get off the ground” (Wilson 2012, 577) by examining the emergence of a new primary institution of international society, namely, climate responsibility. Second, I develop Tonny Brems Knudsen's (2013) “pre-theory of fundamental institutional change” by bringing agency back to the discussions of institutions of international society within the ES. However, I deliberately focus on state agency, because states—and especially great powers—pursue definitions of international rules in a way that serves their (domestic) interests and values. In empirical terms, I focus on the role of China in international climate politics, because its role is crucial for the future of international society in general and for climate responsibility in particular. China is the largest carbon emitter in the world. Due to its rising power status and the failure of the U.S. to shoulder its own share of climate responsibility under the Trump administration, China is also in a position to dictate how climate responsibility is defined, allocated, and implemented in the future. China's rise has generated so-called China threat theories that speculate on the negative impacts of its growing global outreach. Although this article does not touch upon questions about whether or not China is a status quo power, it may provide useful suggestions about the ways in which it might transform practices of international society.

The paper proceeds as follows: I begin with a brief introduction to debate over primary and secondary institutions within the ES and discuss the relevance of this distinction in state

responsibility. Because the UNFCCC is the key secondary institution that bridges the gap between primary institutions and real life experience, I analyzed how states have debated and distributed responsibilities within it. I introduce the key events and tensions that have shaped the formation of climate responsibilities globally. Thus, I study international climate agreements in order to find out how responsibility is defined and distributed within the UNFCCC: Who is appointed to be responsible for what, when, and how? In this way, I offer a narrative of the evolution of the emerging primary institution of climate responsibility and analyze China's contribution to the process.

Institutions and Agency

The basic premise of the ES is that states form an international society that is organized and sustained by common (primary) institutions (Bull 2002). According to Barry Buzan's (2004, 181) definition, these primary institutions are "durable and recognized patterns of shared practices rooted in values held commonly by the members of interstate societies, and [sic] embodying a mix of norms, rules and principles." Buzan's definition is somewhat similar to Chris Reus-Smit's (1999) fundamental institutions and Kal Holsti's (2004) foundational institutions. Given the centrality of the notions of institutions within the ES, as Peter Wilson (2012, 568) pointed out, it is indeed very surprising how premature its agreement on the definitions, identity, and role of institutions remains. Many ES theorists have focused on the nature of international society and debated what institutions are constitutive for its maintenance (see, for example, Buzan 2004, 2014a; Holsti 2004; Schouenborg 2013, 2014; Wight 1999; Wilson 2012). Most of these lists, however, do not provide any explicit criteria to define what makes something a primary institution. Nor do they pay attention to how those institutions transform. In fact, not even Hedley Bull has explained how he defined his five common institutions (balance of power, diplomacy, international law, great power management, and war) or why he excluded other institutions from his list (but see Buzan 2014a, 97–98; Schouenborg 2014, 80–81). Wilson's own solution to the debate on what counts as a primary institution is empiricism: "Until we [ES scholars] have data about what institutions exist internationally, our speculations about them will remain just that, speculations, and our taxonomies and theories about them will remain rootless, subjective and abstract" (Wilson 2012, 577). Wilson himself (2016, 114) suggested that ES scholars should analyze the "social assumptions, standards and expectations" of people, especially those of the political elites and study how they socially construct institutions.

I propose that the literature of practices may illuminate what constitutes an institution in ES terms and shed light on how to recognize and study them empirically via historic materials. In fact, Cornelia Navari (2011, 620) noted that Bull's concept of institution is identical to Theodore R. Schatzki's concept of integrative practice, which refers to the "more complex practices found in and constitutive of particular domains of social life" (Schatzki 1996, 98). In addition to practical understandings, they include "explicit rules, principles, precepts, and instructions," and "teleoaffective structures comprising hierarchies of ends, tasks, projects, beliefs, emotions, moods, and the like" (Ibid., 99). These understandings, rules, and teleoaffective structures organize practices normatively (Ibid., 101–102). In addition, Charlotta Friedner Parrat's (2014, 10) checklist is a very useful tool for an assessment of whether an international (climate) practice is so constitutive of international society that it comprises a new primary institution:

- Is the institution truly international, or can the same institution exist within a state?
- Is it a routinized practice based on ideas and does it include norms, rules, and etiquette?
- Is it consciously upheld by actors?
- Is it quite stable over time and does a critical mass of states endorse it?
- Is it co-constitutive of actors?

If the definition of the concept of a primary institution is not clear within the ES, neither is the concept of a secondary institution. Buzan (2004, 2014a) and Holsti (2004) emphasized the

regulative nature of secondary institutions and see them merely as empirical materializations of primary institutions. It would be tempting to define secondary institutions as concrete international organizations that are intentionally established pragmatic solutions to “real-world” problems. However, that definition would ignore international treaties and informal multilateral institutions. For example, international climate governance is largely coordinated by the UNFCCC, a political framework treaty or a regime. Killian Spandler (2015, 607–08) noted that secondary institutions “include international organizations and regimes” and “specific rules” as well as “*sets of discursively formulated expectations, but they are more specific [than primary institutions] in that they refer to temporally and spatially discrete sections of international reality and apply to a clearly defined set of actors*” (Ibid., 613 emphasis in original). Friedner Parrat (2014, 10) developed Spandler’s conceptualization and defined secondary institutions as “specific rules, which, in principle, are institutionalized by states, within international organizations.” Her example of such a rule is the UN Security Council’s permanent members’ veto power. In the context of international climate politics, Common But Differentiated Responsibilities (CBDR) could be a plausible candidate for such a rule.

I define secondary institutions as “stable, goal-oriented bodies that are intentionally designed by international actors to manage and regulate common problems in specific pragmatic issue areas and to govern cooperation through collectively settled norms and rules, whether legally codified or not” (Kopra 2018). They include regimes, international organizations, and international rules that have become established practices over time (cf. Keohane 1989, 3–4). They not only provide material evidence of the existence of primary institutions but also play a genuine role in institutional change (Knudsen 2013, 2016; Navari 2016; Spandler 2015; Friedner Parrat 2014). In particular, Knudsen (2013, 18) pointed out that international organizations are central to the “reproduction and working [of primary institutions], and therefore also to changes in their working.” His approach differs profoundly from that of Buzan (2004, 186), who contended that clashes amongst primary institutions are the “key driving force” for institutional change in international society. This means that despite the terminology, the relationship between primary and secondary institutions is not a one-way hierarchical relationship, because they both shape each other. Indeed, Knudsen (2013, 34) concludes that secondary institutions are the “most important frameworks for the reproduction and change of fundamental institutions, and thus for the maintenance and development of international order and justice.” Consequently, I assert that secondary institutions (and their constitutive documents in particular) are the most important venues for gathering empirical data on the institutions of modern international society, as well as for studying the role of agency in the history of international society (Kopra 2018).

Despite its merits, Knudsen’s model cannot thoroughly understand and explain the evolution of international practices, because it does not pay explicit attention to the role of agency in institutional change. What makes secondary institutions special is that they create a social and political space in which individual actors can shape the workings of international society. Normally, the establishment of secondary institutions cannot be traced back to one single primary institution, but they reflect and operationalize many primary institutions simultaneously. As I have argued elsewhere, climate responsibility makes no exception; it cannot be located in one single secondary institution, but there are many international forums in which the participants can discuss climate responsibility or at least some aspects of it. Yet there is a special secondary institution, namely the UNFCCC, that gathers state and non-state actors together and coordinates climate practices and makes them possible. Like other secondary institutions, the UNFCCC functions as a bridge between an emerging primary institution of climate responsibility and everyday politics at the national level. On the one hand, it embeds primary institutions in the quotidian workings of international relations; on the other hand, it embodies changes in the workings of the day-to-day international relations in primary institutions. Power shifts in international relations, as well as domestic happenings—such as the inauguration

of a head of state—that take place in powerful states may gradually shape the constitutive principles of primary institutions via secondary institutions. For example, if President Trump ignored the climate policies made by the Obama administration, it would probably not only transform the workings of the UNFCCC but also generate more profound change in international society. However, the UNFCCC has no intrinsic value as such. Instead, it provides states and non-state actors with a platform to negotiate the content, scope, and allocation of issue-specific general and special responsibilities and to monitor the fulfillment of international rights and responsibilities. In this way, it functions as a link between international society and world society. It offers non-state actors a forum to influence existing primary institutions, such as sovereignty, or to forward the emergence of new ones, as the cases of international environmental and human rights practices demonstrate. Again, these negotiations are shaped by primary institutions (Kopra 2018).

Climate Change and Practices of International Society

When it comes to economics, the ES theory remains undeveloped, and there is “hardly any discussion” about potential economic primary institutions (Buzan 2014a, 136). For the purposes of this paper, it is adequate to examine how international practices that focus on economic growth have dictated international climate practices. I treat the market as a primary institution and view economic growth as one of the international practices it comprises. This is not to say that there were no economic practices before the emergence of free markets and capitalism, which brought with them the “growth fetish” of the late eighteenth century (cf. Holsti 2004, 211–18). Although the market did not gain “something like fully global status as an institution of international society” before the end of the Cold War (Buzan 2014a, 138), it has undoubtedly been the most influential economic practice since the emergence of international climate practices (Newell and Paterson 2010, 11–35). Moreover, it has affected China’s climate practices from a very early stage, as China started to take steps toward red capitalism in 1978. No doubt, modern capitalism is “with increasingly few exceptions” and will continue to be the “operating system of the world economy” now and in the foreseeable future (Speth 2008, 7). Since Truman’s inauguration speech in 1949, development has been the key word of the capitalist era (Sachs 1993, 4). In particular, development has been largely understood as a synonym for economic growth, and its qualitative aspects are often dismissed. The well-being of humankind is usually measured in economic terms, such as gross domestic product (GDP), and governments tend to take economic growth as their ultimate responsibility. This approach clearly emphasizes material conditions over the social, environmental, and spiritual factors of well-being (Speth 2008, 147). It has also legitimized highly technocratic ideas of nature and promoted policies based on cost-benefit calculations rather than on genuine value consideration.

The Emergence of Climate Responsibility

When the UN was founded, environmental issues were not a major concern of international society. The UN Charter, for example, did not address the environment at all. The UN discussed environmental issues for the first time in 1968, and four years later, the UN Conference on the Human Environment (UNCHE) was held in Stockholm, Sweden. Although the UNCHE did not focus on climate change as such, it created most of the principles and rules of international environmental practices, which framed how climate change was later defined, what kind of responses were seen as appropriate, and how global responsibilities were allocated. Prior to the UNCHE, environmentalists began to express their concern over the clash between the system of sovereign nation-states and global environmental problems. However, governments were not eager to compromise on their sovereignty and national interests for the sake of environmental protection. Particularly, many developing countries had gained their independence just shortly before the UNCHE, and for them, sovereignty was nonnegotiable. As a result, sovereignty served as a cornerstone of the definition of state environmental responsibil-

ity. Principle 21 of the Stockholm Declaration declares that “States have, in accordance with the Charter of the UN and the principles of international law, the sovereign right to exploit their own resources pursuant to their own environmental policies.” This right, however, is constrained by a state-centric no harm principle—the latter part of principle 21 declares that states have “the responsibility to ensure that activities within their jurisdiction or control do not cause damage to the environment of other States or of areas beyond the limits of national jurisdiction” (UN 1972).

Maoist China played quite an important role at the UNCHE, which was the first ever UN conference it participated in. It made key contributions to paragraphs two, four, and five of the Stockholm Declaration (see Greenfield 1979; Sohn 1973). In particular, China made a substantial contribution to the establishment of the link between the environment and economic development (with emphasis on the latter) and promulgated all governments’ general legal obligation to protect the environment. It also became a voluntary leader of developing countries by promoting the interests of all developing countries. Despite China’s active participation in the debate at the UNCHE, it did not sign the final agreement since it did not contain strong socialist statements.

When it comes to climate responsibility, scientists have been important “norm entrepreneurs” (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998, 896), and scientific consensus on climate change emerged during the 1970s and the 1980s (see Paterson 1996). The first World Climate Conference, to which China did not send a representative, was held in Geneva in 1979. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, a series of non- and intergovernmental conferences focusing on the scientific and political dimensions of climate change were organized. Of these conferences, the Villach Conference in October 1985 is often applauded as the most influential, not because it would have represented a “significant change in scientific conclusions” about climate change but rather because these scientific conclusions started to translate into concerted demands for political actions (Franz 1997, 2–3). Consequently, climate change transformed from being a scientific phenomenon to a political problem during the 1980s. This changed the framing of climate change—it became an object of hard political struggles over the significance of the problem, potential resolutions, and distribution of responsibility, etc. The debate was, and continues to be, an important factor for defining and allocating climate responsibilities amongst states: Do we categorize climate change as an economic, environmental, human security, or ethical problem? Do we focus on historical or contemporary greenhouse gas emissions? And do we place the responsibility on those who produce the most greenhouse gas emissions or to those whose consumption patterns cause the most emissions?

The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and its Kyoto Protocol

The UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) took place in Rio de Janeiro between 3rd and 14th of June 1992. As it was a massive, unprecedented event with representatives from 172 states (of which 108 were state leaders), about 2,400 NGO representatives (plus 17,000 participants in the parallel NGO forum) and about 10,000 on-site journalists, it is probably fair to say that the outcomes of the conference—Agenda 21, the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, the Statement of Forest Principles, the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, and the UN Convention on Biological Diversity—represented universal agreement of all the states in the world. All the outcomes were characterized by the concept of sustainable development. The NGOs’ unusually extensive access to international negotiations resulted in their greater participation in other international forums as well (Porter, Brown, and Chasek 2000, 69).

From the perspective of climate responsibility, the most central outcome of the UNCED was the UNFCCC. The purpose of the UNFCCC was to establish a legal framework that holds certain parties liable for climate-related harm and hence formulates effective solutions to tackle climate change. The ultimate objective of the UNFCCC is to achieve the “stabilization

of greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere at a level that would prevent dangerous anthropogenic interference with the climate system” (UN 1992). What dangerous anthropogenic interference means is inevitably a scientific, ethical, and political question, which was left unresolved at the Rio Conference. The UNFCCC acknowledged that “change in the Earth’s climate and its adverse effects are a common concern of humankind.” Although developing countries were not very comfortable about accepting “common responsibility” (Porras 1993, 28), the UNFCCC assigned general responsibilities to all the parties of the convention. First, all of the parties have a solidarist, intergenerational responsibility to “protect the climate system for the benefit of present and future generations of humankind.” They also have a responsibility to cooperate, because “the global nature of climate change calls for the widest possible cooperation by all countries and their participation in an effective and appropriate international response.” Moreover, all states have a general responsibility to “take precautionary measures to anticipate, prevent or minimize the causes of climate change and mitigate its adverse effects.” This general responsibility is, however, limited by and puts flesh on the bones of the principle of CBDR. States must also provide information. For instance, they have to compile and publish national inventories of anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions (GHG) by sources and removals of sinks. In addition, they must develop national climate programs and cooperate in the fields of science, education, training, etc. in order to improve capacities to mitigate and adapt to climate change around the world. The UNFCCC views sustainable development as both a right and responsibility of states and declared that states “have a right to, and should, promote sustainable development,” which links climate responsibility with development goals. As binding emission reduction caps would restrict developing countries’ development objectives, this article did not only underline developed countries’ historic responsibility, but also indicated that developing countries have a right to increase their GHG emissions via industrialization that raises the living standards of the poor. Finally, the UNFCCC also affirmed the right to sovereignty as an important principle in climate politics (UN 1992).

Although states in general agree that the distribution of responsibilities is a matter of fairness and that some of them have special responsibilities, there is a heated political dispute about the ethical underpinnings of how to define and distribute responsibilities in an equitable manner. Historically, special responsibilities have predominantly been attached to great powers, which have “fundamental global capabilities and responsibilities that minor or medium powers do not have” (Jackson 2000, 21). The UN Security Council has indeed addressed climate change several times but has failed to define climate change as an international security threat due to resistance from China and Russia. The UNFCCC defined states’ climate responsibility in accordance with the Rio principles 2 and 7. In other words, the UNFCCC underlined sovereignty and the CBDR principle. Both were prerequisites to reach an international agreement with developing countries. CBDR acknowledged that developed (Annex I countries) and developing countries (non-Annex I countries) cannot be subjected to the same standards, but states’ responsibility has to be tied to their national circumstances and capacities.

International negotiations over the special responsibilities of developed countries have been characterized by two tensions: The first is concerned with the scope of the emission reduction commitments of the U.S. and other industrialized countries. The second disputes how much (financial) assistance (to meet the costs of climate change) developed countries should provide to developing countries. Due to the refusal of the U.S. to accept a legally binding emission reduction target, the UNFCCC failed to set up quantitative emission reduction targets to any party. In accordance with the CBDR, it declared that developed countries must take the “lead in combating climate change and the adverse effects thereof” but it did not set any binding requirements for them (UN 1992). The Kyoto Protocol, however, operationalized the CBDR—whereas the UNFCCC encourages developed country parties to reduce emissions, the Kyoto Protocol commits them to doing so. Developed countries’ special responsibility to support developing countries’ capacities to meet climate change has also been a heated debate in

international politics for decades. The CBDR noted that developed countries have a special responsibility to assist developing countries to mitigate and adapt to climate change. As this formulation did not describe the assistance as aid but as a responsibility, it made a “significant step in the development of normative international relations,” based on the “fact that everyone, including developed countries, will benefit from such transfers which cannot therefore be regarded as charity” (Jackson 1996, 185–86). States have created diverse institutional arrangements to coordinate and implement developed countries’ special responsibility to assist developing countries’ climate policies and actions. For example, the UNFCCC established a Financial Mechanism to offer funds to developing countries, and the Adaptation Fund was established in 2001.

Like environmental practices in general, climate responsibility is linked closely to the practices of economic growth. China and other developing countries played a central role in making economic development a key objective of climate responsibility. According to their Beijing Declaration in June 1991:

Environmental problems cannot be dealt with separately; they must be linked to the development processes, bringing the environmental concerns in line with the imperatives of economic growth and development. In this context, the right to development for the developing countries must be fully recognized. (Quoted in Sachs 1993, 7)

Consequently, the Rio Declaration highlights the importance of development whenever possible, and the UNFCCC underlines sustainable development and the right developing countries have for development.

At the UNCED, China took a very reluctant attitude to international climate negotiations. For it, the UNFCCC was a great diplomatic success—its stances on sovereignty, opposition to interference in internal affairs, the responsibility of developed countries, development rights, foreign aid, and technology transfer were incorporated within the convention. By participating in the UNFCCC, China fulfilled its responsibility to cooperate. In other words, the participation per se was China’s contribution. Furthermore, China refused to commit to any kind of emission reductions but demanded that developed countries must shoulder all the responsibility for climate change mitigation for historical reasons. As a non-annex state, China was not ordered to cut greenhouse gas emissions under the UNFCCC, but it was obligated to prepare national inventories of greenhouse gas emissions caused by human activities, to develop a national climate program to mitigate and adapt to climate change, and to conduct research on climate change. In 1992, the then Chinese Premier, Li Peng, ratified the UNFCCC.

The UNFCCC entered into force in 1994. At the first Conference of Parties (COP) in Berlin in 1995, the parties agreed that developed countries should set quantified emission reduction targets within specified timeframes, such as 2005, 2010, and 2020, and that these commitments should be written into a protocol. The Berlin Mandate hence launched the negotiation process leading to the adoption of the Kyoto Protocol in 1998. Negotiations culminated in two issues: What kind of emission reductions should developed countries undertake? Whether and, if so, what kind of mechanisms should be established to help developed countries to achieve their emission reduction targets in a flexible manner (Bodansky 2001)? The Kyoto Protocol defines that each Annex I country should agree on a legally binding, specific, and differentiated emission reduction target. Only Australia, Norway, and Iceland obtained targets that allowed them to increase their emissions above 1990 levels, and other developed countries were asked to cut their emissions up to 8 percent. In accordance with the CBDR, no quantitative targets were included for developing countries. To facilitate and monitor emission reductions, the Kyoto Protocol also established reporting and verification procedures, as well as three market-based mechanisms, Clean Development Management, emission trade, and joint implementation (so-called Kyoto mechanisms).

The U.S. ratified the UNFCCC in 1992 and hence, at least in principle, accepted the CBDR principle. Then U.S. President Bill Clinton signed the Kyoto Protocol in 1998, but his

successor President George W. Bush refused to ratify it. Bush (2001, 2002) found the protocol unfair, as it did not assign special responsibilities for major developing emitters, such as China and India. Naturally, the U.S. withdrawal from the Kyoto process diluted the scope of climate responsibility. Nonetheless, the Kyoto Protocol entered into force in 2005 after its ratification by Russia in 2004.

The Road to Paris and Beyond

The first Meeting of the Parties to the Kyoto Protocol in Montreal was in 2005 and established an ad hoc working group to organize negotiations of the second phase of the Kyoto Protocol (2012–20). Then, in 2007, the Bali Conference raised high, perhaps over-optimistic, expectations of the achievements of post-Kyoto climate negotiations. Notably, China and other developing countries committed to implementing nationally appropriate mitigation actions (NAMAs) of sustainable development supported and enabled by “measurable, reportable and verifiable” (MRV) technology, financing, and capacity building. Although NAMAs were not legally binding emission reduction targets but voluntary national policies, this was an important step in the negotiation process, as it was becoming more and more clear that major developing countries had become major emitters and that without their participation, climate change mitigation would be difficult. Many developing countries submitted their NAMAs by 2012, and many of them indeed pledged to undertake actions comparable to, or even more ambitious than, those of developed countries (see, for example, Held, Roger, and Nag 2013).

At the Copenhagen Conference in 2009, however, China and other developing countries argued that MRV standards only be applied to internationally supported climate actions but not voluntary, independently financed national actions. China, in particular, emphasized its sovereignty and declared that since its climate measures would not be supported internationally, they could not be externally reviewed (Bukovansky, Clark, Eckersley, Price, Reus-Smit, and Wheeler 2012, 149). China was pleased with the Copenhagen Accord, as it respected China’s sovereignty and short-term national interests. However, other states blamed China for being irresponsible and for blocking progress, because it opposed not only binding the emission reductions for developing countries but also reducing the global greenhouse gas emissions by 50 percent by the middle of the century (Christoff 2010).

At the Durban Conference in 2011, the parties agreed to launch a new round of negotiations to compile a new climate treaty by 2015, to come in to force in 2020, and to include all the major emitters. The distinction between Annex I and non-Annex I was no longer mentioned, but the proactive climate policies of developing countries were considered increasingly important to tackling climate change. The EU also committed to the second commitment period under the Kyoto Protocol. Before Durban, the Chinese government determinedly refused to agree to any binding climate obligation and offered voluntary national objectives instead. Since the Durban Conference, however, China has taken a more constructive role in international climate negotiations. To some extent, the attitude change was driven by the desire to improve China’s seriously damaged international image following the Copenhagen Conference. The government did not want to be viewed as the spoiler, because such an image would prevent the Chinese from expanding their businesses and political influence—both being important elements of the party-state’s legitimacy on the domestic front. In addition, Chinese citizens started to complain more vociferously about air pollution and other environmental problems caused by economic growth. The government was forced to take these worries more seriously, again for legitimacy reasons. Finally, we should not ignore the role of great power management yielding change in China’s attitude toward international climate politics. Sino-American climate cooperation was successful, and a shared understanding of the climate responsibility of great powers began to evolve between the two countries in the early 2010s. This gradually changed China’s position vis-à-vis international climate negotiations (Kopra 2018).

The 2014 Lima Accord (COP20) asked all parties to develop their intended nationally determined contributions (INDC) well in advance of the COP21 in Paris. As a result, 187 sovereign states submitted their INDC to the UNFCCC. Even some very poor and conflicted areas, such as Afghanistan, issued a national climate change plan, and all together the INDCs represented about 95 percent of the world's greenhouse gas emissions (see UNFCCC 2016). The very inclusive—nearly universal—participation of states indicated a fundamental paradigm shift in climate responsibility. Although the CBDR was not abandoned, even developing countries were now required, and willing, to contribute to climate change mitigation. In other words, all states are now urged to “undertake and communicate ambitious efforts” to combat climate change (UNFCCC 2015). Again, the INDCs were not ambitious enough to limit the rise of global temperatures to 2°C.

At COP21, in 2015, a new international climate agreement entitled the Paris Agreement was adopted. China played a very influential role in the conference. Notably, the Paris Agreement decided to limit “the increase in the global average temperature to well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels and to pursue efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels,” recognizing that this would significantly reduce the risks and impacts of climate change. Although the goal of 1.5°C was appreciated, many analysts and NGOs did not deem it as realistic, since the agreement did not require measures ambitious enough to achieve it or the 2°C target. The COP21 also acknowledged the gap between states' emissions reduction commitments and the emission reduction actions needed to achieve the goal. It obligated states to submit an updated INDC by 2020 and, thereafter, every five years. It also asked the IPCC to produce a report in 2018 to describe a roadmap outlining how global temperature increase could be limited to 1.5°C above preindustrial levels. Furthermore, the Paris Agreement declared that states “aim to reach global peaking of greenhouse gas emissions as soon as possible . . . and to undertake rapid reductions thereafter in accordance with best available science, so as to achieve a balance between anthropogenic emissions by sources and removals by sinks of greenhouse gases in the second half of this century” (Ibid.). This means that states pursue measures to achieve a carbon-neutral world.

Although the Paris Agreement does not distinguish between Annex I and non-Annex I countries, it is guided by CBDR. It stated that developed countries “should continue taking the lead by undertaking economy-wide absolute emission reduction targets.” Nevertheless, it created a common framework for all countries' climate responsibilities. It noted that developing countries “should continue enhancing their mitigation efforts, and *are encouraged* to move over time toward economy-wide emission reduction or limitation targets in the light of different national circumstances” (Ibid., emphasis added). Moreover, the Paris Agreement established a transparency framework with a common binding commitment for all states involved. Each state is required to submit a “national inventory report of anthropogenic emissions by sources and removals by sinks of greenhouse gases” and to provide information “necessary to track progress made in implementing and achieving” their nationally determined mitigation and adaptation goals. This required a compromise from China, which previously viewed reporting obligations as a violation of its sovereignty. In addition, developed countries had to report on the financial, technology transfer, and capacity-building support they have provided to developing countries, and developing countries have to report on the support received, respectively (Ibid.).

The Paris Agreement noted that developing countries need assistance to implement their national climate action plans and that the peak in their GHG emissions may be realized later than that in developed countries (Ibid.). China was a strong advocate of this formulation, together with the BASIC countries (Brazil, South Africa, India, and China) and Like-Minded Developing Countries on Climate Change (LMDC) (including Argentina, Bolivia, China, Cuba, El Salvador, Ecuador, Iran, Nicaragua, Venezuela, Malaysia, Vietnam, Saudi Arabia, and India), which all resist legally binding GHG emission reduction targets for developing countries. These groups see no subcategories between developed and developing countries,

because such categories would apparently impede their position in international climate negotiations. Nevertheless, China no longer focuses exclusively on the historic responsibility of developed countries, since—in his speech to COP21—Xi Jinping (2015) called for all states to “assume more shared responsibilities for win-win outcomes.”

The Warsaw International Mechanism for Loss and Damage associated with Climate Change Impacts (Loss and Damage Mechanism) was established in 2013. After long and heated debates, Loss and Damage gained its own article in the Paris Agreement. In particular, the COP21 not only asked that the Loss and Damage Mechanism “establish a clearinghouse for risk transfer that serves as a repository for information on insurance and risk transfer” but also that it “develop recommendations for integrated approaches to avert, minimize and address displacement related to the adverse impacts of climate change.” The COP21 hence acknowledged a special responsibility that is especially critical to international justice: Developed countries have to help poor countries cope with, for example, flood damages because it is the right thing to do even if they themselves do not benefit from the assistance. Essentially, loss and damage assistance is very different from mitigation and adaptation assistance, which also serves developed countries’ interests through, for example, global emission reduction and the creation of business opportunities. At the insistence of the U.S., however, the COP21 noted that the ratification of the agreement does not “involve or provide a basis for any liability or compensation” (UNFCCC 2015). For the time being, a no-harm principle constituted the most important rule in the context of climate change damage. It applies to all the states, but in accordance with the CBDR, it is largely recognized that developed countries have better capacities to prevent environmental harm (Voigt 2008, 17).

Despite some shortcomings, the Paris Agreement is widely applauded as a historic landmark of climate responsibility. Although it does not include quantitative, binding emission reduction targets for any state—nor does it level sanctions if states fail to implement their climate action plans—there are strong hopes that states will fulfill their climate action pledges. It seems that one of the biggest strengths of the Paris Agreement is that although it does not set a top-down obligation, states have committed to voluntary, domestically appropriated mitigation plans. In particular, this style appealed to China, which prefers moderate voluntary commitments over legal international obligations, as there is no risk of failure and losing face. In contrast, China can easily exceed global expectations and gain international respect in this way. The bottom-up approach attracted the nearly universal participation of states, because it demonstrates both a strong global concern for climate change and the determined political will to combat it.

The Paris Agreement went into effect on 4 November 2016. Since it established an international framework of what parties were expected to do but did not specify how they should limit global temperature rise, the parties decided to negotiate and adopt a Paris rulebook by 2018. Those negotiations suddenly became more complicated as Donald Trump, who has called climate change a Chinese hoax, was elected U.S. president. As Trump had repeatedly threatened to vitiate the U.S. climate policy, his election immediately raised China’s position as a new climate leader—whether or not it wanted this distinction or was ready for it (Kopra 2018). In June 2017, Trump did indeed withdraw the U.S. from the Paris Agreement, which opened a whole new chapter in international climate politics. The Chinese government has explicitly described itself as taking a driving seat in international climate negotiations (Xi 2017, 4). It remains unclear which direction China will lead the world: Toward more ambitious actions to mitigate climate change or toward a deeper bifurcation between developed and developing countries that will not be helpful for achieving the ultimate goals of the UNFCCC.

Climate Responsibility’s Potential for a New Standard of Civilization

According to Holsti (2004, 144–45), a practice becomes institutionalized when “most states most of the time is consistent with its rules,” “there is a reasonable consensus on the interpretation

of norms, rules, and rights,” and it has “some authority independent of the particular interests of particular states at a given time.” It seems that climate responsibility has now passed all three of these stages and now constitutes an institutionalized international practice. However, it is not clear whether it has proceeded to the stage of assimilation, where a new practice becomes the new normal and its rules become so widely accepted that they are taken for granted and embedded in other social practices. At the stage of assimilation, participants perceive the rules of practice to be legitimate and worthy of being obeyed. In the words of Hurd (1999, 387), when an “actor believes a rule is legitimate, compliance is no longer motivated by the simple fear of retribution, or by a calculation of self-interest, but instead by an internal sense of moral obligation: control is legitimate to the extent that it is approved or regarded as ‘right.’” Although it is not crystal clear that climate responsibility has proceeded to this stage, this section investigates the potential of climate responsibility to achieve a status of a standard of civilization in the future.

By 1905, the standard of civilization emerged as a practice that was used by many societies, both Western and non-Western, to differentiate between the civilized and non-civilized or barbarian (see Gong 1984; Buzan 2014b). The differentiation was made by quite racist rankings, and the rules of practice defined what kind of requirements states must meet in order to become accepted, or civilized, members of international society. As the international society of that time was very European, the standard of civilization was firmly rooted in European norms and values, especially Christianity. After World War II, “the right of independence and sovereign equality” became fundamental international principles, and requirements for states’ entry to international society were abolished (Buzan 2014b, 585). Although the standard of civilization was no longer used as an explicit legal idea after decolonialization, the practice did not disappear. Today, it continues to live on in practices of international law. As David Fidler (2001) pointed out, states and international organizations promote universal ideas such as human rights, rule of law, and good governance in order to “impose liberal, globalized civilization on the world.” Yet, it can be argued that human rights is a (Western) practice that started to evolve after the horrors of World War II and has now somewhat achieved the status of a new standard of civilization.

Despite its Western origin, the concept of a standard of civilization could provide food for thought to environmental ethics. I believe that climate responsibility has great potential to become a new standard of civilization. This is not, however, an entirely novel idea. The possession of an environmental policy already became a status symbol during the years preceding the Stockholm Conference. It became a piece of “evidence that a nation belonged among the more advanced or advancing states of the world and not among the backward nations” (Caldwell 1990, 46, 49). Today, environmental protection is a routine aspect of any civilized state’s practices, without a doubt. Though it is also now clear that climate change is happening, it has not yet caused significant changes in states’ practices or the general public’s life. In contrast to previous standards of civilization, such as human rights and democracy, climate responsibility is not a Western concept. Climate practices are a pragmatic attempt to respond to a physical problem pointed out by the natural sciences, and it is not about a colonial pursuit to expand Western (philosophical) practices. This does not mean the evolution of climate practices would not include the use of power, at least in discursive means. In contrast to the traditional West-rest framing of the concept, however, climate responsibility does not aim to spread racist views or Western ideas but to construct a genuinely global standard of conduct. Though there is a wide north-south gap, the placing of blame is the reverse of previous standards of civilizations. In climate responsibility, it is usually non-Western states attempting to advance principles and ask industrialized countries to shoulder their responsibility. Hence, it is more or less the developed countries seen as failing to live up to the standard of civilization in the sense of climate responsibility.

For China, this is obviously a desirable development. For years, it had been criticized for being an irresponsible member of international society, because it did not conform to the new standard of civilization. This criticism prevented it from taking its place as a full member of the

great power club and caused international suspicion and fears about its rising status (Suzuki 2008). At present, however, China is increasingly in a position to define what it means to be a responsible great power in today's world. Clearly, it is not reasonable to assume that China will promote human rights and democracy as the new standard of civilization or attributes of great power responsibility. As climate responsibility does not collide with China's national interests, it is a plausible candidate for a new standard of civilization in a China-led international society.

Conclusions and Discussion

In this article, I demonstrated that climate responsibility fulfills all three requirements of Schatzki's (1996, 98–110) integrative practice: 1) There is a practical understanding of the causes and effects of climate change, and, at least to some extent, a shared understanding of how to identify those who bear the biggest responsibility to take the required actions against climate change and what would count as a responsible response to climate change. 2) There are collectively agreed-upon rules on how states should distribute and act out climate responsibilities, and some of these rules are formalized in international (soft) law. 3) It has a teleoaffective structure—it is a goal-oriented practice holding its “ends, purposes, projects, and tasks” to avoid the adverse effects of climate change. Climate change mitigation (and reporting on materialized climate actions) is now perceived as a general responsibility held by all states. Hence, climate responsibility is evidently an established international practice, which even the most powerful states must take part in if they wish to be and to be seen as good international citizens. That is why all the participants have continued to take part in the negotiations even if they did not accept or later withdrew from the Kyoto Protocol. None of the participants have simply walked away from the UN climate negotiations, despite the widespread discord and pointed criticism of each other's contributions. The fact that the UNFCCC was negotiated very quickly, in about two years, indicates two points: On the one hand, it demonstrates universal concern over and willingness to tackle climate change. On the other hand, it illustrates that the UNFCCC was not seen as a powerful institution that would somehow hamper states' national interests. In this sense, it is not a big surprise that while the UNFCCC enjoys the near universal participation of international society, later international negotiations on the Kyoto protocol—and especially on the post-Kyoto protocol—were much more difficult and slower processes. As the negotiations aimed to set up legally binding emission reduction targets for individual states, they challenged the established institutions of international society and put states' sovereignty and national interests at risk. At the same time, the difficulties of the post-Kyoto negotiations prove that UNFCCC has gained and is likely to gain more strength in the future. If it was an unimportant and weak practice, why would it be so contested?

As the emergence of climate responsibility indicates a profound normative change in international society, it invites a question: Can climate responsibility be identified as a primary institution of international society? In the light of this paper, climate responsibility indeed seems to fulfill the qualifications of a primary institution as defined by Friedner Parrat (2014): It is a truly international, routinized practice with norms and rules. It is consciously upheld and endorsed by a critical mass of states. And it has remained quite stable over time. It is also embodied in and shapes many global and domestic practices simultaneously. Clearly, climate responsibility remains only an emerging primary institution, as there are still wide disputes about its rules and it clashes with established institutions. It has not managed to construct a thick international society, and many central issues, such as finance and compensation, remain unsolved (see also Palmujoki 2013). From the ES perspective, however, the disputes do not make it weaker, but indicate that climate responsibility is gradually becoming a weightier international practice.

Another critical question is whether or not climate responsibility will develop as a standard of civilization that defines and validates the practices of civilized members of international society as well as of world society in the future. Unfortunately, as James Speth (2008, 211) noted, the “surest path to widespread cultural change is a cataclysmic

event that profoundly affects shared values and delegitimizes the status quo and existing leadership.” A fundamental paradigm shift creating the new ecological consciousness and solidarist morals in international society would hence require a disastrous and abrupt climate crisis, as pictured by a Hollywood movie entitled the *Day After Tomorrow*. On the one hand, the securitization of climate change is not necessarily a desirable trend, as it could lead to a more pluralist international society in which more powerful states could use environmental threats as an excuse to interfere in other states’ internal affairs. On the other hand, securitization could promote a global we-feeling among political leaders and citizens and gives impetus to global efforts against climate change. If, or when, climate crisis becomes more tangible, and its adverse effects harm people (and nature) around the world, it would not be very difficult to imagine that those who reduce their emissions would be seen as civilized and that those who continue polluting in the business-as-usual style would be seen as uncivilized, respectively (see also Buzan 2014b, 590–91). If climate responsibility acquires a higher normative standing in the world, practices of other international organizations are likely to change as well. For example, the mandate of the UN Security Council could be redefined.

Due to the state-centric features of international society, state agency and that of great powers is an essential force of change in international society. Therefore, the leadership of China and the U.S. will be especially crucial in building the political will needed to strengthen climate responsibility. For a long time, China’s conception of climate responsibility was retrospective. It focused exclusively on examining historic responsibility. This view naturally emphasized the historic responsibility of developed countries and assigned less—and even no—responsibility to developing countries, including China. Compared to its standpoints at the UNCHE and the UNCED, China’s role within contemporary international climate politics has changed radically. After the Copenhagen Conference, China learned that it is in its interest to respond to climate change and that taking on a more constructive role in international climate negotiations might improve its damaged international image. In particular, severe air pollution has started to cause increasing social discontent in China, and in order to legitimize its position, the Chinese government has had no choice but to take climate change seriously. Moreover, Sino-American climate cooperation provided China with a chance to represent itself as a great power on the international stage. In particular, Barack Obama’s climate diplomacy convinced China that great powers have great responsibilities in addressing the problems related to climate change. As a result, China has begun to advocate climate responsibility as an attribute of a great power’s responsibility (Kopra 2018). Again, Donald Trump’s harshly criticized decision to withdraw the U.S. from the Paris Agreement has had the effect of raising China to a new kind of leadership role in international climate politics. This transformation is likely to elevate China’s role in other fields of international society as well. Although China continues to underline its developing country status and holds fast to the CBDR principle, the country increasingly defines itself as a great power in international climate negotiations. It has great potential for acting as a role model when it comes to climate responsibility if it manages to modernize without recklessly increasing GHG emissions. In any event, China plays an increasingly important role in the potential evolution of climate responsibility as a standard of civilization.

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