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## **GREAT POWERS' DOUBLE STANDARD PROJECTION AT EACH OTHER**

**A STUDY BASED ON CHINA-FOCUSED CASES**



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**ABSTRACT****Great Powers' Double Standard Projection at Each Other  
– A Study Based on China-focused Cases**

The term 'double standards' in the discipline of international relations can be used for many different kinds of conduct. In the case of great powers projecting double standards, it is generally the re-interpretation, partial ignorance or non-obedience of the rules and regulations of international law. This kind of behavior emerges most often in unequal conflict situations where the powerful state clearly has the advantage over a smaller, weaker one. In such cases, the great power in question tends to expect the lesser one to fully abide by the same rules they chose not to respect – and it usually gets away with that demeanor, coming out of the conflict victorious or at least creating a *status quo* that is beneficial to its status in the long run. But what happens when a great power uses double standards on another great power, expecting them to honor the same rules they actively do not (fully) take into consideration? In fact, such double standards are used at least as often as their unequal counterpart, and they are a lot less simple to resolve or even ignore. In my work I intend to exhibit some recent events where double standards have been used by one great power on another, discovering causes, consequences, and future implications. Observing recent cases with special focus on China, I will attempt to answer the question: how lawful it is and more importantly, how much is it worth for a great power to project double standards on another great power?

## ÖSSZEFOGLALÓ

### Nagyhatalmak kettős mérce-alkalmazása egymással szemben

#### – Esettanulmányok Kínával a fókuszban

A „kettős mérce” kifejezés a nemzetközi kapcsolatok tudományában sokféle magatartásra használható. A kettős mércét alkalmazó nagyhatalmak esetében általában a nemzetközi jog szabályainak és előírásainak átértelmezéséről, részleges figyelmen kívül hagyásáról vagy be nem tartásáról van szó. Ez a viselkedés leggyakrabban egyenlőtlen konfliktushelyzetekben jelentkezik, ahol a nagyhatalom egyértelműen előnyt élvez egy kisebb, gyengébb állammal szemben. Ilyenkor a szóban forgó nagyhatalom hajlamos elvárni a kisebbtől, hogy maradéktalanul betartsa ugyanazokat a szabályokat, amelyeket ő maga nem tart tiszteletben – és általában „megússza” ezt a magatartást, győztesen kerül ki a konfliktusból, vagy legalábbis egy olyan *status quo*-t teremt, mely hosszú távon előnyös a helyzete szempontjából. De mi történik, ha egy nagyhatalom kettős mércét alkalmaz egy másik nagyhatalommal szemben, és azt várja el tőle, hogy ugyanazokat a szabályokat tartsa tiszteletben, amelyeket ő maga aktívan nem (vagy nem teljes mértékben) vesz figyelembe? Valójában az ilyen kettős mérce legalább olyan gyakran előfordul, mint az egyenlőtlen megfelelője, ám sokkal kevésbé egyszerű megoldani vagy figyelmen kívül hagyni. Munkámban néhány olyan közelmúltbeli eseményt kívánok bemutatni, ahol az egyik nagyhatalom kettős mércét alkalmaz a másikkal szemben, feltárva az okokat, következményeket és a helyzet lehetséges hatásait a jövőre nézve. Munkámban Kína magatartását fókuszba helyezve megkísérlem megválaszolni a kérdést: mennyire jogszerű, és ami még fontosabb, mennyire éri meg egy nagyhatalom számára kettős mércét vetíteni egy másik nagyhatalomra?

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## **GREAT POWERS' DOUBLE STANDARD PROJECTION AT EACH OTHER – A STUDY BASED ON CHINA-FOCUSED CASES**

### **I. INTRODUCTION**

Double standards can take different interpretations according to the field of science they are mentioned in. Even within the discipline of international relations, it does not have just one meaning – depending on the situation, several aspects of one basic attitude can be placed into the category of double standards.

In this work, I am introducing three different types of double standard projections, all of which are connected to the same interests of the international actor projecting it. These are the following:<sup>1</sup>

- a. The actor (in an international conflict situation) fully or partially ignores the rules and regulations of international law (that are applicable to the conflict in question), yet expects other actors to wholly comply with the same rules and regulations.
- b. The actor (in an international conflict situation) re-interprets or freely interprets the rules and regulations of international law (that are applicable to the conflict in question) in a way that those rules and regulations serve the actor's interests or purposes within the conflict.
- c. The actor promotes or publicizes international norms, rules, regulations or values without generally (fully) complying with the same norms, rules, regulations or values.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> KALECK 2015: 33-35.

The types of behavior listed above are mainly characteristic of countries with higher status - regional or global powers. It is common for such powers to project double standards on smaller, less powerful states that are more often than not within their political or geostrategical sphere of influence. That sort of line-up makes the application of double standards easy and at times even indiscernible.

Beside the most evident example, it can also occur that a great power projects double standard behavior on another great power. These days with the international balance shifting more rapidly than ever and powerful states trying hard to maintain their regional or global potency, this has indeed become increasingly common. However, in such cases the application is considerably less easy and oftentimes quite easy to spot by other states as well as by international organizations.

Double standards are questionable from the point of view of international law. That is so not only because they go against the norm of „all states are equal and should be treated equally,” but because of the open and oftentimes obvious disrespect towards rules and regulations: re-interpretation, free interpretation or straight-up ignorance. Despite all that, double standard projection by great powers – be it on less powerful states or similarly powerful ones – is almost always without any legal consequence.<sup>2</sup>

In this essay, I intend to discover the logic behind great powers' double standard projection at other great powers and decide whether double standards have a right to exist in the structure of international relations. In order for my research to be as thorough as possible, I present some recent cases in which at least one accusation of using double standards has come to light. Is there always double standard used where there is an accusation? And, just as importantly, can multiple double standards be detected within one case? In my work I provide answers to those questions and more.

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<sup>2</sup> KIRKPATRICK 1982: 123-126.

## II. DOUBLE STANDARDS IN HUMAN RIGHTS

The first exemplary case is related to an outstandingly important section of international law: human rights. According to the international legal definition, human rights are rights inherent to all human beings, regardless of race, sex, nationality, ethnicity, language, religion, or any other status. Human rights include the right to life and liberty, freedom from slavery and torture, freedom of opinion and expression, the right to work and education, and many more. International human rights law lays down obligations which States are bound to respect. By becoming parties to international treaties, States assume obligations and duties under international law to respect, protect and fulfil human rights.

The issue in question is a recurring one. Over the last few years, China has repeatedly accused the United States of applying double standards against the East Asian country. According to Beijing's stance, the double standards lie in the fact that while the US and some of its Western allies do not treat their countries' human rights issues appropriately, they slander China with alleged violations of human rights.

The subject of the accusation is the Chinese government's treatment of Uyghurs and other Turkic Muslims living in the Northwest region of Xinjiang. The most recent Human Rights Watch report on the Xinjiang situation was released in April 2021. It is titled *Break Their Lineage, Break Their Roots: China's Crimes Against Humanity Targeting Uyghurs and other Muslims*, and it was authored with assistance from Stanford Law School's Human Rights & Conflict Resolution Clinic. The 53-page report states that the Chinese leadership is responsible for widespread and systematic policies of mass detention, torture, and cultural persecution, among other offenses. It adds that coordinated international action is needed to sanction those responsible, advance accountability, and press the Chinese government to reverse course.<sup>3</sup>

Crimes against humanity are considered among the gravest abuses of human rights under international law. The Chinese government's oppression of Turkic Muslims is not a new phenomenon at all, but in recent years it has reached unprecedented levels.

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<sup>3</sup> *China 2021 Human Rights Report.*

In addition to mass detention and restrictions on practicing their religion, there is increasing evidence of forced labor, broad surveillance, and unlawful separation of small children from their families.

Human Rights Watch has been monitoring the situation closely for many years now, and along with the most recent report, it urged concerned governments to impose coordinated visa bans, travel bans, and targeted individual sanctions on authorities responsible for criminal acts. According to Human Rights Watch, they should also pursue domestic criminal cases under the concept of “universal jurisdiction,” which allows the prosecution of grave crimes committed abroad. Governments were also encouraged to adopt trade restrictions and other measures to end the use of forced labor in China.<sup>4</sup>

There is not doubt about the human rights violations by the Chinese government in Xinjiang being true. Do double standards matter then? What exactly is Beijing's argument and is it something that should be taken into consideration related to this issue?

As a response to the recently released Human Rights Report, China states that the accusation against the country represents the use of hypocritical, arrogant double standards, given that the US itself does not fight with nearly enough force against the racism and systematic discrimination, and for the rights of the numerous different minorities within the country. Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Hua Chunying addressed the issue in the following way:

*„The United States keeps saying that it attaches importance to individual human rights and freedom. However, when the United States connived to spread racist speech, indulged police violence against people of color, watched people like George Floyd unable to breathe, and watched Asian Americans be discriminated against, attacked, or even killed, did they care about the individual human rights and freedom of these people who suffered from systemic racism and hate crimes? (...) Will the US conduct a thorough investigation to hold those involved accountable? Does the European side want to impose sanctions on the US for human*

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<sup>4</sup> ROGERS 2019: 56-57.

*rights violations?” (Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Hua Chunying's Regular Press Conference on May 13, 2021.)<sup>5</sup>*

China's attitude in this case – and as it will come to light in this essay shortly, in other cases as well – is peculiar. China does not at any point deny its culpability regarding the Xinjiang issue, but turns its focus entirely on the similar occurrences in the United States and the way they are treated differently. The double standard in China's accusation of the US is the event when an actor ignores some rules and regulations of international law while expecting others to fully comply with those same rules.<sup>6</sup>

China is indeed right in pointing out that human rights violations happen in the United States too. Recent human rights failings in the US include the increasing annual number of shooting crimes, political manipulation related to the COVID-19 pandemic, violent law enforcement against migrants and refugees and discrimination against minority groups. China brings some arguments to the table which do not in any sense absolve the country from the human rights violations committed within its borders, but can certainly shed light on the Chinese attitude in this case.

China is a vast multinational country, with discrimination against minorities fully integrated into its history. What is currently going on in Xinjiang has been there for long centuries not just against Uyghurs and Turkic Muslims but other minorities as well. This, of course, does not nullify the crimes or make them less grave – still, it has to be taken into consideration that according to the Chinese way of thinking, tradition and normalcy go hand in hand. Therefore, it is increasingly difficult to regard something that has been part of the way the nation had functioned for centuries as a crime or even as a thing that needs to be changed or eliminated. Human rights violations are in fact not the only unlawful element in Chinese society considered as „national tradition”: the presence of corruption and cyber crimes is very similar and just as hard to uproot.<sup>7</sup>

Another notable fact here is that China has never regarded international law as a principal guidance for the legal operation of the country. The set of rules that formulate

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<sup>5</sup> Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Hua Chunying's Regular Press Conference on May 13, 2021.

<sup>6</sup> CHEN 2015: 25-28.

<sup>7</sup> JIANG 2013: 103-109.



law in China is largely based on long-standing Confucianist and Legist tradition, thus it is completely different from „Western law”. The rules and regulations of international law count as useful tools for China that can be applied to strengthen the country’s argument in a given conflict situation between states.<sup>8</sup>

In this case of human rights violations, Beijing, without mentioning either China’s innocence or culpability, argues that the US is not being challenged for the same occurrences because of which it wants to discipline and sanction China. For China, the fact that both nations have committed grave crimes takes a backseat, while the focus shifts to the double standard element of the issue, more precisely, the way the two are treated differently: China is strictly accused, even harrassed, while the US is left alone. The double standard is most certainly there, with international law as a helping tool for China: it is clear that the US violates international regulations (just like China does, but China wants to keep that negligible here), so why is it not reprimanded?

The way Beijing uses the „double standard” card is remarkable. It turns the attention towards Washington’s culpability and, at the same time, at China’s unequal international judgment, inciting that it is not lawful and should be changed. This conduct provides China with some distance from persecution and makes the US rethink the need for sanctions.

### **III. DOUBLE STANDARDS CONCERNING REFUGEES**

In essence, the next case is not far from the previous one – however, it is not a recurring, but a very recent and therefore relevant issue: that of refugees. Once again, China acts as the accuser, the charge against the US being the double standard of unequal treatment of people fleeing from different regions of the world. According to Beijing, Washington applies obvious double standards by providing substantial aid to refugees coming from

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<sup>8</sup> LIU 2021: 55.

Ukraine, seeking asylum from the Russian invasion, while it ignores the basic rights and necessities of Middle Eastern, African and Latin American refugees.

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin has recently reiterated the charge in agreement with Palestinian president Mahmoud Abbas. The newly formulated statement focuses on the Middle East:

*“It is an unacceptable double standard to call acts of violence against the civilian population in Ukraine war crimes while allowing the damage to the civilian population in Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria to go unpunished.” (Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Wang Wenbin’s Regular Press Conference on February 22, 2022)<sup>9</sup>*

China appears to care a lot about the rights of refugees, especially those fleeing from the Middle East, but that care is not at all altruistic. In recent years, China has turned its attention towards the MENA (Middle East and North Africa) nations, with large-scale investments as well as intense trading cooperation in mind. Now, the Chinese economy is experiencing a considerable downturn and along with that, its influence is weakening in the Indo-Pacific region. Therefore, the need for building and solidifying new partnerships has moved upwards on China’s agenda, the MENA nations being among the targeted groups.<sup>10</sup>

An almost effortless and generally effective way to get closer to another country is to openly support them in a conflict or debate, and that is exactly what China has done in this case. The motive behind the statement is clear, but what about the accusation itself? Is the double standard element truly there?

Every fall, the US president sets a refugee ceiling – the maximum number of refugees who may enter the country in a fiscal year. That number has been declining since 2016. During Donald Trump’s presidency, the US lost its place as the world’s top country for refugee admissions. It had previously led the world in this respect for decades,

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<sup>9</sup> Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Wang Wenbin’s Regular Press Conference on February 22, 2022.

<sup>10</sup> MAHDAVI 2022: 34-40.

admitting more refugees each year than all other countries combined. Of course, among the main causes of the fluctuating numbers there are important global events as well as the United States' priorities as a leading economy. Probably the most evident example for the former is the fact that in 2002, the US largely suspended admissions following the terrorist attacks on 11 September. The number managed to rebound in the following five years.<sup>11</sup>

Of course, politics, security and economy have always influenced refugee policy not only for the United States but for every state of the world that has ever allowed in people fleeing from any sort of crisis. If the goal is proving – or disproving – the double standard in China's accusation, then what matters most in this case is the origin and, just as importantly, the religious affiliation of the groups of people that have entered the US as refugees in the last decades. Additionally, it is even more representative to take a look at the conditions those refugees are living in within the borders of the US.

Since the 1980s, more than 50% of the refugees have come to the United States from Asia (mainly Burma, Bhutan, Laos, Iraq and Afghanistan), about 30% from Europe (the former Soviet Union, Kosovo and now Ukraine), 13% from Africa (Somalia, Eritrea) and only 4% from Latin America (Cuba). Concerning religious affiliation, in recent years the US has admitted far more Christian refugees than Muslim ones or people connected to other smaller religious groups. In the last few years, Americans have been divided over whether the US should accept refugees at all, with large differences according to political party affiliation. According to recent surveys, around three-quarters of Democrats and Democratic-leaning independents think the US has this responsibility, compared with just one quarter of Republicans and Republican leaners.<sup>12</sup>

What US citizens appear to be far less divided on is the very recent inflow of Ukrainians fleeing from Russian invasion. Caused by unprecedented Western media coverage, feelings of solidarity were very swiftly followed by actions in the US immediately after the war broke out. Several elaborate programs have been launched in order to accommodate all the refugees arriving from Ukraine. One of the most notable and

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<sup>11</sup> HENRARD 2010: 44-46.

<sup>12</sup> THAKUR 2016: 77-82.

extensive of those programs is 'Uniting for Ukraine' – within its frameworks, Ukrainians who apply for the program get to have a private sponsor in the US who must also complete a background check and prove they have the financial means to support those granted refuge. The program is part of US President Joe Biden's promise to allow 100,000 Ukrainians to seek refuge in the United States. Other legal pathways have also been available through the State Department since the very beginning of the crisis.<sup>13</sup>

Governmental organization and the willingness of the society are two factors that can best represent the difference between the treatment of Ukrainian refugees and Middle Eastern, African or Latin American ones. In the case of the latter groups of people, despite the US' initial willingness to provide educational, medical and other resources, those efforts were never nearly as well-structured and comprehensive as with the Ukrainians. Another even larger difference is that for other refugees, there was never any sponsorship program and even less eagerness from civilians to host some of the people in need in their own homes. Consequently, a high percentage of non-European refugees in the US now live under less than ideal circumstances, in unsafe camps and extremely poor neighborhoods, most of them not being provided with the necessary services for a normal quality of living.<sup>14</sup>

The double standard with which China accuses the US is undoubtedly there – in fact, it is fairly easy to identify it even without thorough research. The primary causes of the double standard are also not hard to find – they have unfortunately been present in Western thinking for a long time now. Religion, culture and looks are the aspects that play a critical role in the overall American attitude towards refugees. Given that the Chinese statement highlights the unequal treatment of Middle Eastern refugees, it is logical to have them here as an example. According to the Western way of thinking, people fleeing from the Middle East, for instance Palestinians, are 'not civilized enough' and 'not white enough' to 'deserve' solidarity or even attention. Also, they are 'very foreign' – not just in their looks and culture, but in their religion as well, something that is frequently associated with crimes of terroristic nature. They are extraneous in every

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<sup>13</sup> HICKMAN 2022: 187-191.

<sup>14</sup> PURCELL 2019: 77-81.

possible sense, thus for a white American it is inherently difficult to sympathize with them. Ukrainian refugees provoke completely different sentiments: they are white, Christian, civilized, many of them even come from affluence – they are 'familiar', therefore sympathy for them comes almost naturally.<sup>15</sup>

China is right in its accusation – the United States, in fact, the entire Western world is very much culpable of this double standard, an element that has been deeply rooted in their cultures for a very long time. However, in this particular case, there is not just one double standard to be found, but two, and they mirror each other.

#### **IV. THE REVERSE DOUBLE STANDARD**

China is accusing the United States of unequal treatment of different nationalities within its borders, while it does a very similar thing with the ethnic minority population in Xinjiang. While it is true that in China's case the groups of people in question are not refugees, but the basis for the inadequate treatment is almost identical, and has been like that for centuries: different looks, culture and religion. Similarly to the Western world, discrimination based on nationality, culture and religion is also very characteristic of China. Plus, China currently has no refugee resettlement policy or national legislation on asylum and views the acceptance of those fleeing conflict as taking sides, something that China prefers to avoid. Taking all that into consideration, China has no right to accuse the United States of the very things that are also happening within its borders – the fact that it does so is a clear and obvious case of using double standards.<sup>16</sup>

To go even further, that is not the only double standard one can identify in China's attitude. China follows a 'policy of non-interference', which means that China abstains from meddling in the internal affairs of other states and expects those other states to act the same way towards China's internal issues. China likes to frequently emphasize the policy's existence, especially in cases where its own affairs are at the receiving end of

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<sup>15</sup> UNOKI 2022: 123.

<sup>16</sup> VANHULLEBUSCH 2018: 97-99.

strong criticism. The Xinjiang issue is exactly like that: whenever another state or international organization tries to hold China accountable for the human rights violations perpetrated against the Muslim minority, Beijing officially reiterates that Xinjiang is a solely internal issue, and as China does not meddle in other countries' internal issues, similarly, others should stay away from intervening in China's own matters.<sup>17</sup>

All that sounds logical and legitimate – if a state adopts such a policy, it can expect it to be respected and reciprocated by other actors. However, if it does not seem to serve its interests, China has a tendency to drop its own obligations of complying with the policy of non-interference. That is precisely what happened in the refugee issue: China, with its objective of forming a closer relationship with countries of the MENA region in mind, openly took the side of the Palestinian president. With that, it meddled in another country's internal affair: the United States' treatment of refugees within its borders.<sup>18</sup> This sort of conduct contains an unequivocal element of double standard, namely the one where the actor promotes or publicizes international norms, rules, regulations or values while itself generally does not (fully) comply with those same norms, rules, regulations or values. China expects other states to respect its internal matters by avoiding even the mere expression of criticism, yet when its interests dictate so, China 'forgets' to respect its own policy and meddles in other states' internal affairs.

## **V. FURTHER EXAMPLES OF DOUBLE STANDARD ACCUSATIONS BY CHINA**

Considering the previously detailed cases, it becomes evident that China often utilizes the accusation of double standards against another powerful state in order to endorse its own interests or to simply draw international attention away from its own highly criticizable steps. There are many further examples of that sort of behavior displayed by China, some of which deserve to be presented in this chapter. Through the following two points, China's true objectives will become even clearer.

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<sup>17</sup> WANG 2013: 54-55.

<sup>18</sup> REARDON-ANDERSON 2018: 34.

The two cases are in fact fairly similar, the only significant difference being the country accused with the application of double standards by China. In the first case, China accuses the United States and the entire Western world of „pretending to be blind” by treating the 2019 anti-government protests in Hong Kong differently than the riots at Capitol Hill following Joe Biden’s election in 2020. The Chinese Foreign Ministry has openly voiced its displeasure several times about the different treatment of the two events, stating that it is hypocritical ignorance to call the Hong Kong riots peaceful and pro-democratic, while declaring that the Capitol Hill events were chaotic, aggressive and anti-democratic.<sup>19</sup>

China points at Canada with a very similar charge, stating that the Freedom Convoy protests in January 2022 were not worse in any sense than the Hong Kong protests, yet they are portrayed in Canadian media as illegal and as a serious threat to democracy, while the Hong Kong events are widely regarded as highly commendable. According to the Chinese Foreign Ministry, when protesters in Hong Kong attacked police and seriously disrupted public order, the Canadian side labelled it as human rights movement, made irresponsible remarks, and slandered the Hong Kong police.<sup>20</sup>

Truth is, the three events described above – the 2019 Hong Kong protests, the 2020 storming of Capitol Hill and the 2022 Freedom Convoy – are similar in the sense that they were all acts with illegal elements conducted against the respective governments of China, the United States and Canada. The disregard of law showed itself in the acts of violence during those protests which threatened and in many cases breached the national security of the respective countries. The attitude of the leadership and the state media of each country towards the violations of law within their borders is very similar: they strongly condemn the events and highlight the necessity to avoid such things happening in the future, even if harsh measures are needed for that.

According to the Chinese view, just like the US and Canada, China also wants to restore public order and oppose violence after the riots – something that, by the standards of Beijing, should be an exclusively internal affair conducted without any kind

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<sup>19</sup> PUI-LAN, YIP 2021: 87-88.

<sup>20</sup> LAWTON 2022: 345-346.

of criticism from another state. The above presented cases show that for China, the most important thing here is not the legal or illegal, peaceful or threatening nature of the events, but their perception by other states, above all by those that hold international leadership positions. Law – a concept that China already regards as completely distinct from the Western norms – loses its importance in the cases in question, becoming nothing more than a tool for comparison, a means to demonstrate the existence of double standards.<sup>21</sup>

## VI. DO DOUBLE STANDARDS HAVE THE RIGHT TO EXIST?

In all the cases presented in this paper, at least one double standard was identifiable, at some points even two – one formulated in the accusation and one in „reverse”: an element applicable to the accuser, China in. Double standards definitely do exist – moreover, they are fairly common in international relations. However, some important questions arise here: do double standards have a right to exist and if not, is there a way to eradicate them?

Double standards in international relations, as explained in the introduction, are typically characteristic of great powers, global or at least regional leaders, and are aimed at similarly powerful states or smaller, weaker ones. In most cases, even if the accusation of using double standards is right, the accuser – a great power like China – does not charge another state because of its respect of the rules and regulations of international law, but out of self-interest. That self-serving reason can vary: it can be a desire to maintain good relations or forge closer ties with another state or other actor, a wish to appear in a better light in a certain conflict situation or even just to divert international attention away from the wrongful nature of its own actions. All these reasons were demonstrated in China's behavior through the cases explained in this paper.

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<sup>21</sup>Ho 2021: 111-113.



One point needs to be further emphasized in China's reasons for using the double standard accusation as a tool: the perspective of national image. China's basis for accusing others is often that its international perception is fundamentally more negative than that of others, above all that of the United States. Therefore, China cannot „get away” with the very same things as another state – the US – can. Improving the national image has been high up on China's agenda for decades now, and besides the use of soft power, calling attention to the use of double standards is another means utilized for that purpose. China highlights the fact that the other actor – in most cases, the US or even the entire Western world – is culpable of the same deeds China itself has committed and suggests that either all actors should be condemned equally – or absolved equally. Though in its own way, not based on any set laws or rules, China refers to a tenet or international law: sovereign equality, the idea that all sovereign states are equal and should be treated as such.<sup>22</sup>

It might appear that China, although for its own selfish reasons, is leading a noble fight against the eradication of double standards, but it becomes clear through the cases presented that there is almost always a „reverse” double standard– the accuser's own non-compliance or straight-up ignorance of international law. The existence of the reverse double standard shows that no great power fully respects all the rules of international law, so none of them actually has the right to accuse others with similar violations.

Considering all that, it can be ascertained that neither double standards themselves, nor the accusations of other actors of using double standards are legitimate – the former because it goes against the international norm of “all actors are equal”, the latter because of the reverse element, the fact that no international actor is without guilt in violating the same law they wish to protect when it comes to other actors' faulty acts.<sup>23</sup>

However, despite not being legitimate, double standards have a “tradition” that goes back to centuries – they, similarly to other characteristic behavioral patterns of great powers, are inherently part of the intricate structure of international relations. That is

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<sup>22</sup> JIANG 2013: 99.

<sup>23</sup> KALECK 2015: 199-202.

especially true for China, which has always had a distinct understanding of international law, as well as law and legislation in general, very different than what is the norm for Western states. One thing is certain: all cases where there is an accusation of double standards should be observed and treated individually, as a lot can be derived from the intentions of the accuser, from its nature as a great power or from its overall perception of international law. Also, even though double standard charges are not in any way part of international law, they can have significant influence or even a decisive quality in international decisionmaking, therefore their existence cannot be ignored.

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