Chapter 7

CONCLUSION

The study focused on China’s adaptation to global regimes in the post-Cold War period based on a detailed examination of its role and participation in three specific regimes namely the UN, the WTO, and the arms control regimes. Since adopting the policy of ‘opening up’ to the outside world in late 1978 under the leadership of Deng Xiaoping, China consistently pursued the strategy of seeking greater and effective adaptation to the system of global governance through active participation in various global regimes and multilateral institutions. China’s efforts intensified in the post-Cold War period, as the world moved towards greater interdependence and institutionalized forms of collective decision-making. The change in the world order after the collapse of Soviet Union, the current phase of globalization as the most overarching phenomenon, and the mushrooming of multilateral arrangements and regimes to solve the common problems, all these factors compelled China to significantly alter its foreign policy so that it could suitably adapt itself to the new context. China not only joined various global regimes pertaining to issues such as trade, environment, human rights, nonproliferation but also embraced global norms, conventions, and practices as dictated by such regimes. By the end of Cold War, China had realized that accepting the constraints that come with working in multilateral settings was preferable to the risk of isolation and could help create a reputation for responsible international behaviour. Apart from this realization, the aspiration to attain the status of a ‘big’ power in the world made China to push for greater engagement with the global regimes and institutions, even if that involved bearing some major political costs and making important changes in its ideological positions. Moreover, as economic modernization became the primary task, it was no longer possible for China to remain at the margins of the system of global governance and thereby hamper its burgeoning economic relations with the developed countries of the West.
China quickly understood the dynamics of post-Cold War world politics and changed its rhetoric accordingly. It denounced any kind of alliance politics and emphasized the establishment of multipolar world order based on the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence. China's vision of new world order reflected its keenness to promote a multipolar world order, in which it could play an influential role commensurate with its rising power. Apart from fostering good relations with the neighbouring countries and major powers, China sought an intensified level of involvement and engagement with the multilateral institutions and regimes. While in the 1980s, the emphasis was on economic reconstruction and self-development under the leadership of Deng Xiaoping, in the post-Cold War period, the focus shifted to cooperation with the international community, accelerating its integration into the system of global governance that functions through multilateral regimes and international organizations. There are certain distinct features of China's new diplomatic strategy. Having downplayed its ideological stance, China has become more willing to improve communication and exchange with Western countries and international regimes and organizations on various issues including human rights and democracy; it has devised a new ideological formulation of "being common and diverse" and has reiterated that it will continue to develop peacefully; it has actively taken part in setting the global agenda at the multilateral forums and institutions. Thus, in the post-Cold War period, China made suitable changes in both its rhetoric as well as behavioural patterns that paved the way for its institutional engagement with the global regimes and organizations. China's new stance of openness, peace, and cooperation helped in the formal accommodation of the country within the system of global governance. Moreover, during this period, China's diplomacy was mostly guided by the economic considerations. Instead of military and security related factors, economic factors became the most important component of China's foreign policy agenda.

From the point of view of history, there have been dramatic shifts in China's approach towards the global regimes since its establishment as an independent country. During the Maoist era, China's participation in the global regimes was perhaps at the lowest level as it denounced all the international organizations and
treaties created by the ‘imperialist’ countries of the West. Considering the intense rivalry between the Eastern and Western Camps and China’s own semi-colonial experiences, it is not difficult to understand its refusal to seek engagement with the global regimes. Mao’s insistence on China maintaining its distinct identity as a socialist country in opposition to imperialist powers ensured it stayed outside the system of global governance. Only after the UN recognized China’s legal status in 1971, it started participating, albeit in a very cautious and limited manner, in the global regimes and multilateral institutions. The core strategy of Mao towards the global regimes was seeking for more international recognition and getting away from the isolation China had faced under the precondition of alignment with the Soviet Union. In the post-Mao phase under the leadership of Deng Xiaoping, there was a radical shift in the Chinese approach towards Global regimes. Deng emphasized China could prosper only through better cooperation and coordination with the world community; even if regimes were unfair and partisan, China must join them for securing its own benefits. Deng ensured that China became an active participant in the global regimes and multilateral institutions so as to create favourable international environment for the country to achieve the ultimate goal of economic modernization. It was Deng who induced the qualitative change in the relations between China and global regimes in a direction favourable to China. The post-Deng leadership represented by Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao has vigorously promoted the deepening of the relations between China and the global regimes.

Thus, the post-Mao leadership has made an essential distinction from Mao in viewing the role of international regimes and institutions and the global politics in broad terms. The leaders have considered regimes as a positive factor, which helps in maintaining a favourable international environment and an important condition conducive to Chinese reforms and economic modernization. However, there have been remarkable differences between the leaders of the second and third generation. During Deng Xiaoping’s tenure, China was in the initial stage of economic reconstruction. His main concern was how to take advantage of international environment (including regimes and organizations) to make China develop and prosper, while issues such as China’s commitment to global norms and practices,
and responsibilities as a major power were not on the agenda yet. The third and fourth generation leaders, apart from upholding the guiding principle of ‘economic modernization as the primary task’, have paid special attention to China’s international status and influences and how it could play an influential role in system of governance at the global level. To carry on the process of economic modernization smoothly and efficiently, China needed to maintain stable, peaceful and cordial international environment around the country. It also required to vigorously pursue the process of adaptation to various global regimes and multilateral organizations so that it could exert influence in all matters of global importance. Considering the complicated nature of the process of China’s adaptation to global regimes, if we compare the worldview of Chinese leaders of three generations, we not only see the historical changes of domestic political guidelines from ‘ideological hostility’ to ‘constructive engagement’ and finally to ‘unavoidable responsibilities’ (towards the international environment as well as global regimes and multilateral institutions), but also feel the transformations of external environment from Cold War confrontations to post-Cold War patterns.

Since the mid-1990s, China has attached great importance to develop a positive image of a responsible cooperative power and an influential stakeholder in the international system. In fact, there has been immense international pressure as well as expectation that China must play a more constructive role in global affairs and perform the responsibilities corresponding to its status as a ‘big’ power. The economic, political, and security imperatives coupled with the changing dynamics of world politics have in a way pushed China towards deepening its engagement with the international community. The notion of responsibility, the commitment to institutional involvement, the desire for international legitimacy and the aspiration to be recognized as a ‘great’ power are prominently manifested in China’s international strategy in the post-Cold War period.

China’s journey towards adaptation to various global regimes and multilateral institutions effectively began in 1971, when it rejoined the UN as a permanent member of the Security Council. After rejoining the UN, China entered various other organizations working under the auspices of the UN like UNESCO.
and FAO. However, initially China was very reluctant to participate in the UN initiated peacekeeping operations in (domestic) conflict ridden regions of the world, as it regarded ‘peacekeeping’ as an instrument in the hands of dominant powers to infringe upon the sovereignty of the weak countries and unduly interfere in their domestic affairs. In fact, China’s experiences during the 1950-53 Korean War greatly influenced its attitude towards the peacekeeping operations in the later years. So, for almost a decade after its entry into the UN, China stayed away from all kinds of peacekeeping operations as it portrayed them as great-power interventions violating the basic tenets of the UN Charter. It disapproved UN peacekeeping operations through its abstention in over 21 Security Council resolutions. In 1981, for the first time, China voted in favour of granting an extension to UN Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP), indicating a change in its attitude towards such operations. Subsequently, China not only joined UN special committee for peacekeeping operations, it participated in these operations by contributing personnel and not opposing the UN resolutions that sanctioned these kinds of operations.

Even if China did not openly support peacekeeping operations, it never vetoed Security Council resolutions thereby signaling its implicit approval while maintaining its ideological opposition to such operations. This allowed the authorization and implementation of peacekeeping missions, yet ensured that Beijing was not seen to condone these efforts. Thus, China maintained a pragmatic level of cooperation with the UN, even while maintaining safe distance from the actual peacekeeping operations in different trouble-infested countries. In the post-Cold War period, however, China shedding its ideological reluctance became proactively involved in such peacekeeping missions, which were mandated to intervene in civil wars, communal conflicts, and humanitarian crises, in addition to performing the task of maintaining peace. It reflected a paradigmatic shift in China’s approach as it distanced itself from its supposedly orthodox view of sovereignty and embraced a more liberal definition of sovereignty similar to that called for by UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros Ghali in his 1992 “Agenda for Peace” report. More particularly, China’s active support to UN operations in places like Cambodia, Somalia, and East Timor demonstrated further flexibility in its stand on the principle
of sovereignty. The previously rigid adherence to the notion of inviolability of state sovereignty was given up in support of a more pragmatic response that led to better adaptation to universally accepted norms and conventions.

Moreover, apart from actively supporting and participating in UN peacekeeping missions, China in the post-Cold War period has certainly moved forward in accepting global prescriptions on how to ensure better protection of human rights in the country. Especially in the aftermath of the Tiananmen incident in 1989, which had greatly eroded its reputation, and the subsequent Western attacks on China’s human rights record, human rights remains the most sensitive area where China remains most apprehensive about outside interventions. In a significant shift from its earlier stand, China no longer regards that human rights are a pretext for interfering in the internal affairs of other states, by agreeing that human rights should be subject to international discussion and deliberation. In fact, Beijing has shown willingness to cooperate with other countries in devising common principles for upholding basic human rights. The “Bangkok Declaration” signed by China and other Asian countries in 1993, is a classic example of China’s increasing involvement in human rights discourse at the global level. While the declaration affirmed qualified support for universal human rights, it also argued that the context for them should consider the significance of national and regional differences and various historical, cultural, and religious backgrounds (Hempson-Jones 2005:712-13). By 1997, the PRC had signed the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) at the UN and accepted the principle of universality of human rights in general. As we have discussed in detail in the second chapter, China has ratified UN multilateral human rights treaties on subjects as diverse as women, racial discrimination, refugees, apartheid, and genocide. It has enacted new laws, modified several of its rules and regulations to guarantee proper implementation of these treaties at the ground level. These enactments constitute a certain level of acceptance of external interference in a state’s internal affairs and demonstrate a cooperative strain in its foreign policy. Moreover, these changes have created favourable conditions for adaptation to global norms, conventions, and practices in the political realm under the overarching structure of the UN.
In the economic realm, China's adaptation to the WTO since its entry in 2001 is the most remarkable example of the shift in its approach towards the global regimes in the post-Cold War period. It was also one of the most difficult negotiations between China and other member countries that dragged on for fifteen long years before China could enter into WTO on terms mutually acceptable to both China and other countries. At the end of the process, China had to concede most of the demands of other members and make significant (trade) concessions in order to get membership, as it did not want to hamper the economic modernization programme by staying out of the global trade regime for long. As has been discussed in the fifth chapter, these included the granting of trading rights to foreign companies and ensuring that the PRC's economic structure conformed to the WTO's central operating principles: non-discrimination through the unconditional most-favoured nation (MFN) clause; a preference for the use of price-based measures, such as tariffs; and avoidance of unfair trade practices such as export subsidization or dumping. To fulfill its obligations to the WTO and to ensure the proper implementation of various WTO requirements at the domestic level, China had to make a number of changes in its legal system so that it could match international standards as per the WTO agreement. There is gradual yet steady progress towards the establishment of a 'rule of law' regime in China in order to inspire confidence among the foreign investors regarding the effectiveness and fairness of dispute settlement mechanisms in the country. As per its commitments to the WTO, China in recent years has introduced laws on trademarks, patent, copyrights, and unfair competition, as well as customs regulations designed to protect intellectual property rights. Many new departments and bureaus have been set up at the government level to make sure that the WTO related laws and regulations are uniformly implemented in all the provinces of China.

There is no denying the fact that China's accession to the WTO has substantially undermined the autonomy of the state at least in matters of trade and commerce. Now, China cannot unilaterally prevent any foreign company from doing business in the country nor can it stop importing goods from any foreign country under the pretext of exercising sovereign rights to do so. China being a member of
the WTO has to adhere to universally accepted norms of free and fair trade and ensure unhindered flow of goods and services across the countries. The dispute settlement mechanism of WTO provides the means for judicial redress if a member state does not comply with either the WTO Charter or any subsequent agreements. In case of any complaint of violation of the WTO obligations, a Dispute Settlement Body and an Appellate Body consisting of independent panelists and experts adjudicate disputes, the decisions of which have to be unconditionally accepted. Thus, the loss of sovereignty involved when a state attaches itself to the WTO dispute settlement mechanism- in essence, surrendering the authority to take its own decisions- has been quite contentious for many states. Yet, China made entering into the WTO and accepting its provisions one of its highest national priorities. China’s willingness to adapt all the rules and its commitments to fulfill all the obligations of the WTO despite severe domestic constraints signal a definite push towards a more liberal direction.

After attaining the status of a nuclear power and fulfilling all its strategic requirements in terms of nuclear capability, China became a very active player in the field of arms control and non-proliferation. However, during the Cold War years China chose to remain outside the institutional framework of arms control regimes for the fear of losing its bargaining power vis-à-vis other dominant powers. It often derided the regimes for being partisan and acting at the behest of Western powers. After the Cold War came to an end, with the collapse of the Soviet Union, in the light of changed international scenario, Chinese government made a timely adjustment in its policy toward international arms control and non-proliferation regimes from one of ‘indifference’ to that of ‘active participation’. In 1992, China ratified the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) besides committing itself to the obligations set by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) for exports of nuclear reactors and other major facilities covered under the NPT/IAEA system. In subsequent years, China joined almost all major arms control regimes like the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC), Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR). In 1995, China supported the efforts to make the NPT permanent. In 1996, China announced a moratorium on its nuclear tests and signed the Comprehensive
Test Ban Treaty (CTBT). CTBT was the first multilateral arms control regime in which China took an active part in its negotiations on its own initiative.

Despite China’s wide participation in all the major arms control regimes, China’s adaptation to these regimes is neither full nor effective. The main criticism against China is that it is supplying sensitive nuclear materials and technologies to some of the friendly countries at a lucrative price violating the rules and norms of arms control regimes. China seems to have been engaged in selective proliferation with some friendly states by exporting them nuclear reactors and other necessary equipment and assisting in developing their nuclear capabilities. Even after committing itself to seek IAEA approval and safeguards on any exports of nuclear reactors and any other major facilities covered under the NPT/IAEA system, China has allegedly supplied missiles, nuclear equipment, and technology to Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Syria, and Iran. China strongly refutes all these allegations and insists that it strictly abides by all the relevant rules and regulations while engaging in any kind of nuclear commerce with other countries. However, as has been analyzed in the sixth chapter, even if the reports of some transactions of nuclear materials and technology by China create doubts about its real intentions and actual behaviour, it has largely complied with the norms and conventions of the arms control regimes. Even at the expense of limiting its strategic options and capabilities, China has remained committed to all its obligations dictated by the regimes. The Chinese leaders have realized that the country should not be perceived as an unscrupulous arms merchant flouting the established norms and conventions as that would severely affect its reputation and status as a great power. They do not want to invite the wrath of the international community at a crucial juncture of China’s progress as an economic superpower even if that meant losing out on the lucrative arms trade.

After examining China’s adaptation to the UN, the WTO, and the arms control regimes in detail the question arises as to whether China’s adaptation to these regimes is full or partial. In other words, can we say that China has sincerely complied with the norms and conventions of these regimes? The findings suggest that as a member of these regimes, China has neither defied any norm or principle nor has it displayed obstructive behaviour, except where issues related to Taiwan or
state territory are involved. Even though China was at the receiving end of some bitter controversies in the global arms control and human rights regimes in the early 1990s, it has yet to withdraw from any global regime that it has joined since 1971, quite unlike the United States. Once China began adapting to global regimes, China has remained for the most part as a system-maintainer, not a system-reformer or system reforming revolutionary; it has tried to secure as much as benefits as possible by following the rules rather than by attempting to replace or repudiate them (Kim 2004:51). The intense political socialization at the international level and the commitment to maintaining a good image have resulted in China slowly and gradually accepting the international norms and governing principles of multilateral global regimes.

Adaptation to global regimes is a complex process that entails recognition, learning, accommodation, and incorporation of global rules, norms, and conventions into local practices by making relevant changes in legal, administrative, and political structures as well as processes. China’s entry into global regimes necessitated increased interaction between long established regulatory norms and practices with global norms that signify completely different assumptions and expectations. In case of China, the process of adaptation to global rules and norms could best be characterized as ‘selective’ considering the extent of their influence on domestic practices and the way they are received and assimilated into local conditions. China has been engaged in selective adaptation as a coping strategy for balancing local regulatory imperatives with global norms for requirements of compliance with the norms and conventions dictated by the regimes. Whether complying with the WTO, the NPT, or the UN human rights conventions, China attempts to preserve the core principles (like sovereignty, nonintervention on Taiwan and Tibet issues) of its foreign policy even while acceding, where necessary, to global norms and regulations. Thus, the dynamic of selective adaptation is the most useful tool to explain China’s efforts to reconcile global norms with local norms in the fields of political, economic, and strategic regulation. It must be emphasized that China has tried to join the regimes on its own terms so as to balance international norms with domestic concerns over political stability, strategic choices and balanced
development. While unable to openly reject the global norms, institutions, and processes for economic and political reasons, the Chinese leaders and policymakers remain wary about the impact of adaptation into regimes on domestic governance. Yet, China's economic and military capabilities and importance in global politics provided it the flexibility and the choice to limit the influence of global regimes on the domestic system. Selective adaptation allows China to comply with the international norms while remaining contextualized to local conditions and pursuing the domestic imperatives.

The case studies in this thesis make it amply clear that Beijing has made a paradigmatic shift in terms of accepting and adapting to global regimes and complying with their norms, principles and conventions. China's cooperative behaviour is often deemed to be compatible with the fulfillment of its national goals and aspirations. While pursuing its national interest, China has willingly accepted the constraints on its own behaviour by adapting to major global regimes. This shift is inextricably linked to China's keenness to achieve the status of a great power and maintain the image of a responsible power. The level of liberal interactions in the economic realm (WTO) is certainly far more advanced than in the political and security realms (UN and Arms Control Regimes). However, with China's ever-increasing engagement with the international regimes and multilateral institutions even in sensitive fields such as human rights, refugee protection, arms control, and religious freedom, the level of liberal interactions within regimes of the political and security realm are bound to follow a similar trajectory to those in the economic realm. China could not afford to stay away from those global norms and conventions, which restrain its independent decision-making power in certain areas and it would be compelled to comply fully with the global regimes to achieve the primary goal of economic modernization.

The importance of the relations between China and the global regimes cannot be over emphasized. China has made effective use of post-Cold War world order, including the regimes to attain greater power in the international system and advance its national interests. This growing engagement between China and the global regimes has ensured China seeking better cooperation and greater adaptation with
the international system. Moreover, China and the global regimes will continue to mutually influence each other in the institutional frameworks of global governance. But the pertinent question that the international community will be grappling with in the foreseeable future is, particularly as China continues on the present path of development, will China continue its current policy towards global regimes. The answer to this will be found both in China’s ongoing domestic reform policies and in the expansion of its foreign policy interests at the international level. However, one certainty is that the international system can no longer afford to ignore the emergence of China, and international regimes will be the most important arena for further examination to understand the rise and evolution of Chinese power.