China in Copenhagen: Reconciling the "Beijing Climate Revolution" and the "Copenhagen Climate Obstinacy"

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Abstract
The contradiction between the astonishing dynamic of China's domestic climate policy agenda and its seemingly tenacious position in international climate negotiations presents a puzzle that, on closer inspection, reveals much about a nation at the crossroads, undecided which way to turn. The alterations in China's political interests connected to the issue of climate change are clearly evident in the domestic policy changes China introduced during previous years. However, China's leadership thus far has remained hesitant to translate this new set of interests fully into a coherent position in the international arena. China's mounting difficulties in reconciling its rapidly changing role on the international stage with its altered domestic situation, as well as its traditional foreign policy interests and principles, undermine its ability to pursue a consistent and effective strategy in international climate negotiations. China's reluctance to redefine its role in the international arena has led to a number of inconsistencies that particularly plagued its position during the Copenhagen conference, adding to the overall non-constructive dynamic of the proceedings that ultimately left China, as everyone else, with empty hands. The Copenhagen negotiations demonstrated that China's leadership will have to address these inconsistencies resolutely if it wants to realize the benefits that international climate cooperation offers.

Keywords: climate change; UNFCCC; climate negotiations; Copenhagen; domestic climate agenda; international stance

A First Glance: Same Old, Same Old?

To the casual observer it might have looked as if the Chinese delegation brought last season's playbook to the Copenhagen climate negotiations of 2009. China's stance seemed hardly distinguishable from its position of previous decades. The undeviating recital of the "common but differentiated responsibilities" principle in combination with the moral shield of emission justice, comprising China's comparatively low per capita and historic emissions as well as the effect of

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emissions being outsourced from developed countries to China,[1] was once more firmly in place to deflect any notion of Chinese emission obligations. These distributional arguments certainly hold considerable validity, which is why they have been so successful in insulating China from emission reduction responsibilities in the past. However, realities have been changing quickly. In recent years, China has won one worrying title after another: global leader in annual CO_2 emissions in 2006, surpassing the global per capita emissions average in 2008 and world champion in energy use in 2009.[2] Considering the rapid increase and trajectory of China's CO_2 emissions,[3] insisting on its traditional "no obligations" position seems like an untenable starting point for a constructive negotiation process. Consequently, when the 15th session of the Conference of the Parties to the UNFCCC in Copenhagen (COP15) ended in failure and there was a large amount of blame to be distributed, China received a significant share.

At first sight, China's position in Copenhagen seems like a straightforward story: business as usual, nothing new to report. This, however, does not quite add up. A look at China's domestic climate politics makes clear that such a verdict on its role in Copenhagen will not stand scrutiny. Over just a few years, China's government has initiated a dramatic trend reversal of domestic climate policy, moving from widespread climate change scepticism to an ambitious agenda of climate policies. This change is driven by an interplay of motives ranging from considerations on energy security and international reputation to concerns about China's climate change vulnerability and, perhaps most importantly, efforts to transform fundamentally China's pattern of economic growth. The Eleventh Five-Year Plan (2006–11) with its 20 per cent energy intensity reduction target constituted an early hallmark of the changing tide. It was followed by the strategies laid out in the 2005 Renewable Energy Law and the 2007 National Climate Change Programme[4] as well as a number of specific policy targets, including the increase of non-fossil-fuel sources in China's energy mix to 10 per cent by 2010 and 15 per cent by 2020. In the run-up to Copenhagen, a 40–45 per cent carbon intensity reduction target by 2020 was announced. These goals have been accompanied by an avalanche of policy measures from

1 Christopher L. Weber *et al.*, "The contribution of Chinese exports to climate change," *Energy Policy*, Vol. 36. No. 9 (2008), pp. 3572–77; Boqiang Lin and Chuanwang Sun, "Evaluating carbon dioxide emissions in international trade of China," *Energy Policy*, Vol. 38, No. 1 (2010), pp. 613–21.

2 Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency (PBL), *Country Dossier China*; International Energy Agency (IEA), *China Overtakes the United States to Become World's Largest Energy Consumer* (20 July 2010); the IEA figures have been contested as "unreliable" by China's National Energy Administration (NEA), see "China dismisses IEA analysis of it being world's top energy user," Xinhua News Agency, 20 July 2010.

3 See for example IEA, *World Energy Outlook*, 2009; BP, *Statistical Review of World Energy*, 2010; EIA, Country Brief China, July 2009. For future emission developments see Maximilian Auffhammer and Richard T. Carson, "Forecasting the path of China's CO2 emissions using province level information," *Journal of Environmental Economics and Management*, No. 55 (2008), pp. 229–47; Kejun Jiang and Xiulian Hu, "Energy demand and emission in 2030 in China: scenarios and policy options," *Environment Economics and Policy Studies*, Vol. 7, No. 3 (2006), pp. 233–50.

4 China's National Climate Change Programme was "prepared under the auspices of the National Development and Reform Commission, People's Republic of China" and published in June 2007.

vehicle efficiency and energy labelling standards to the closing of inefficient power plants and steel mills,[5] and from the introduction of wind energy feed-in tariffs to increased investments in low-carbon technologies.[6] While the implementation of these measures might be a different story, the political dynamic pushing China's climate change agenda is undeniable.

Prior studies on China's role in international climate negotiations have not provided a comprehensive explanation for the disconnect between the changes in China's domestic approach to climate change and its rigid position in the international climate arena. This analysis of China's action in Copenhagen against the background of its domestic political environment attempts to find a solution to this puzzle. It illustrates that the alterations in interests that drive China's domestic climate agenda developed a tangible influence on China's position in Copenhagen, but ultimately fell short of initiating a fundamental adaptation of its role in global climate governance. Thus far, China's leadership has shied away from the decisive redefinition of its international approach that would be necessary to incorporate its changing set of climate-related interests coherently. Instead, Copenhagen exemplified China's attempt and failure to pursue conflicting interests simultaneously, inevitably leading to contradictions that constrained the effectiveness of its negotiating position.

The findings presented in this article are largely based on an extensive series of research interviews conducted in Beijing between February 2009 and July 2010, in the run-up and the aftermath of COP15. Interviewees included Chinese government officials from ministry departments involved with the formulation of China's domestic and international climate policy.[7] Several of these individuals served as important members of the Chinese delegation to COP15 and played a direct role in the preparations for as well as the actual negotiations during the Copenhagen conference. There were also a large number of Chinese climate policy experts including representatives of leading universities, government think tanks, and Chinese and international NGOs. In most cases, these experts were closely linked to the COP15 process through their functions as either observers or official expert advisers to the Chinese delegation.[8] With its focus on China's role in Copenhagen, the article neglects the role that other parties, including most developed countries, played in bringing about the negotiation's ultimately disappointing result. This is neither to imply that China bears sole responsibility

5 Lynn Price *et al.*, "China's top-1000 energy-consuming enterprises program: reducing energy consumption of the 1000 largest industrial enterprises in China," Ernest Orlando Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory, June 2008.

6 See China's 2008 Climate Change White Paper "China's Policies and Actions for Addressing Climate Change," issued by the Information Office of the State Council of the PR China.

7 Interviewees included government officials of the climate change departments at the National Development and Reform Commission, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Science and Technology, among others. In many cases interviewees chose to remain anonymous and requested not to be quoted directly.

8 The author would like to thank all interviewees who candidly shared their knowledge, insights, opinions and time without which this article would not have been possible.

for the negotiation's outcome nor that it had the power to alter the negotiation's results single-handedly. Instead, the failure of Copenhagen emerged from an unfortunate team effort.

Before Copenhagen: What were the Stakes for China?

The story of China in Copenhagen begins in Beijing. In order to square China's domestic and international climate policies, it is necessary to take a look at the traditional as well as newly emerging motives that drive China's climate policy.[9] First, ever since the rapid industrialization of the opening and reform period during the 1980s, concerns about the security of the energy supply has spurred significant efforts to increase the energy efficiency of China's industry. Energy security remains a main driver behind China's climate-related efforts. Secondly, with the emergence of international climate negotiations in the 1990s, the energy security motive was supplemented by China's desire to attain international acceptance as a foreign policy actor. Finally, the distinct transformation of China's domestic climate policy during the 2000s was facilitated by two newly emerging factors: an increased sense of vulnerability to the impacts of climate change, and the alignment of a low-carbon development path with China's efforts to fundamentally adjust its pattern of economic growth.

Climate vulnerability

As elsewhere, advances in climate science triggered the Chinese leadership's revaluation of their climate costs calculation. International climate impact research[10] consistently singled out China as one of the regions most vulnerable to catastrophic climate events, highlighting its susceptibility to flooding and droughts leading to human suffering and economic costs. Gradually, China's vulnerability to climate change and the direct implications for long-term economic growth and social stability entered the political debate.[11] Most importantly, China's first National Assessment Report on Climate Change in 2006,[12] informed by a number of international research initiatives, provided an overview of the potentially

9 For a more detailed analysis of these internal dynamics shaping China's climate policy see Björn Conrad, "Bureaucratic land rush – China's administrative battles in the arena of climate change policy," *Harvard Asia Quarterly*, Vol. 7, No. 2 (2010), pp. 52–64.

10 Most influentially the IPCC Third Assessment Report of 2001, the IPCC Fourth Assessment Report in 2007 as well as the Stern Review on the Economics of Climate Change, 2006. Most recently, the UNDP China Human Development Report 2009/2010 entitled *China and a Sustainable Future: Towards a Low Carbon Economy and Society* includes an extensive discussion of China's climate change vulnerability.

11 For a discussion of China's vulnerability to climate change see Zhang Haibin, *Qihou bianhua yu Zhongguo guojia anquan* (*Climate Change and China's National Security*) (Beijing: Shishi Publishing, 2010). See also Yang Zhang and Zheng Yongnian, *New Development in China's Climate Change Policy*, University of New South Wales Faculty of Law Research Series, paper no. 73 (2007) as well as Stephen Tsang and Ans Kolk, "The evolution of Chinese policies and governance structures on environment, energy and climate," *Environmental Policy and Governance*, No. 20 (2010), pp.180–96.

12 Commissioned by the Ministry of Science and Technology, the China Meteorological Administration and the Chinese Academy of Sciences.

devastating consequences of a temperature rise on China's agriculture, eco system, water resources, coastal zones and social and economic stability,[13] bringing "public concerns and awareness of climate change to a new height."[14]

Understanding climate change as a peril to China's long-term economic prospects connected the climate issue with the core concern of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP): legitimation of its political leadership. A threat to China's economic growth undermines the delicate balance of economic development and social stability that provides the political legitimacy of China's ruling party. The foundation of the CCP's claim to power is its ability to create steady improvements in living conditions for significant and relevant parts of the population. For decades, this improvement was one-dimensionally linked to economic growth and individual prosperity. Today, prosperity remains the dominating factor, but the improvement of living conditions has become a far more complicated package that includes a range of issues from social services to environmental conditions. With growing awareness of the impacts of global warming and its potential influence on the "package deal" between China's population and political leadership, climate change found its way up the list of political priorities.

The heightened sense of vulnerability has a significant effect on China's objectives in the international arena. Traditionally, the Chinese leadership's main objective was to deflect emission reduction obligations, putting China into a strong negotiating position since its assertion was not dependent on emission reductions by other countries. It could thus achieve its goal in the absence of any deal. The altered balance in China's cost assessment has changed this situation. Since climate impacts have turned into a concern for the leadership, global emission reductions have become an objective within the international framework. The implication for the dynamic of international negotiations is profound: China now has a stake in other countries' emission reductions. In theory, this makes China a participant in a bargaining game in which the achievement of its own interests is partly in the hands of others, meaning that it will have to be prepared to give in order to gain. Its hesitance to commit fully to this altered logic became apparent during the Copenhagen negotiations.

Economic transformation

The second and probably most important motive driving the change in China's climate agenda is the link between a low-carbon development path and the transformation of China's broader economic model. The pattern of economic growth China has successfully been following since the beginning of the opening and reform era "based on high-volume consumption of energy and raw materials,

13 Drafting Panel of the National Assessment Report on Climate Change, *China's National Assessment Report on Climate Change* (Beijing: Science Press, 2006).

14 Yang and Zheng, *New Development in China's Climate Change Policy*, p. 4.

causing heavy pollution, low output, and low efficiency"[15] is unsustainable in the light of China's available resources and progressing environmental degradation. The long-term viability of China's economic success will hinge upon moving its economy up the value chain, shifting from low-key manufacturing and export of resource and labour intensive goods to the production of technologically advanced and globally competitive goods, the expansion of the service sector and the development of domestic consumer markets. The "change of China's economic development pattern" (*zhuanbian jingji fazhan fangshi* 转变经济发展方式)[16] stands at the very top of China's political agenda.

The requirements for adapting China's economic model are in many respects synonymous with a move towards a low-carbon economy. Consequently, approaches to "green" economic development have been prominently discussed by China's leading economists like Lin Yifu 林毅夫, Hu Angang 胡鞍钢 and others.[17] As highlighted by a report published in 2009 by the Task Force on China's Pathway towards a Low Carbon Economy,[18] "central to the vision of a low carbon economy is the recognition of its potential economic, social and political benefits, rather than just the associated costs."[19] Building on this point, the UNDP China 2010 report states that "the [Chinese] Government's efforts to reduce carbon intensity reflect a recognition that by investing in a green economy and green growth underpinned by emerging green technologies, China has an opportunity to leapfrog over decades of traditional development based on high-polluting fuels."[20] Improvements in energy efficiency as well as energy mix diversification can alleviate some of the crucial limits to the sustainability of China's economic growth in terms of energy supply security, as well as China's dependence on foreign fossil fuels which is considered a major concern

15 Zang Dongsheng, "Green from above: climate change, new developmental strategy, and regulatory choice in China," *Texas International Law Journal*, Vol. 45 (2009), p. 209.

16 See e.g. "'Shier wu' qijian jiakuai zhanbian jingji fazhan fangshi de zhongyao zhaoli dian" ("The 12th Five-Year Plan accelerates the change of important aspects of the economic development pattern"), www.gov.cn/jrzg/2010-10/16/content_1723905.htm.

17 For an exploration of China's low-carbon development path see Zhuang Guiyang, *Ditan jingji: qihou bianhua Beijing xia Zhongguo de fazhan zhi lu* (*Low-carbon Economy – China's Development Path in the Face of Climate Change*) (Beijing: China Meteorological Press, 2007). On low-carbon development see among others Hu Angang, "How will China build a well-off society for all of its citizens?" *China Business Review*, No. 50 (2003), pp. 50–55; Lin Yifu, "Rebalancing equity and efficiency for sustained growth," in Song Ligang and Wing Thye Woo (eds.), *China's Dilemma: Economic Growth, the Environment and Climate Change* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2008), pp. 90–93; Wang Shaoguang *et al.*, "The social instability behind the economic prosperity," *Chinese Economy*, No. 5 (2003), pp. 5–10; Fang Gang (ed.), *Toward a Low Carbon Development: China and the World* (Beijing: China Economic Publishing House, 2010); Lin Boqiang, "Low carbon urbanization way forward for China," 30 November 2009, www.ccchina.gov.cn/en/NewsInfo.asp?NewsId=20848. On the issue of "green" GDP calculation see China State Environmental Protection Agency, *China Green National Accounting Study Report 2004*, 2006; Zheng Yongnian and Chen Minjia, *China Promotes Green GDP for More Balanced Development*, China Policy Institute, University of Nottingham, 2006.

18 China Council for International Cooperation on Environment and Development (CCICED) Task Force on China's Pathway Towards a Low Carbon Economy, *Research on China's Pathway Towards a Low Carbon Economy*, 2009.

19 UNDP China, *China and a Sustainable Future: Towards a Low Carbon Economy and Society*, Human Development Report 2009/2010, p. 16.

20 *Ibid*. p. 5.

across the political spectrum.[21] Simultaneously, investments in green technologies as one of the major global growth markets moves China's production base towards more technologically sophisticated and globally competitive products,[22] embracing green technology innovation as an instrument of accelerated economic advancement instead of trying to catch up with the developed world's decade-long head-start in traditional technologies.

The motive of domestic economic transformation also influences China's international objectives: being keenly aware that a low-carbon development path requires enormous efforts and investments, the Chinese leadership has strong incentives to use international climate cooperation to solicit the assistance of developed nations in achieving its domestic climate change goals, most prominently in the field of technology transfer. The acquisition of advanced green technology and know-how from developed countries could be of great value for turning China's low-carbon plans into reality. The issue of technology transfer therefore moved to the centre of China's objectives in international climate negotiations.

International responsibility

China's initial participation in the UNFCCC process in the early 1990s was largely driven by its desire to present itself as a responsible player on the international stage. The global condemnation of the 1989 Tiananmen crackdown had caused concerns about international isolation and the consequent negative effects on China's export-oriented economy. Hence China used its participation in processes like the UNFCCC to present itself as a constructive member of the international community, striving for recognition while trying to secure external circumstances not disruptive to its domestic growth path. From the beginning, "the country's wish to be seen as a respected member of the international community [has been] one important factor behind its climate change policy making."[23]

At the same time, however, China's objective in terms of emissions reductions was to avert externally imposed mitigation costs threatening its economic development. Balancing these two opposed objectives was a difficult walk on the international tightrope. China tried to master this challenge by putting forward the arguments of climate justice, citing the developing nations' entitlement to a path of economic development unhampered by the ecological responsibilities that developed nations have evaded in the past. The undeniable merits of these

21 The issue of China's energy security dilemma represents an important aspect of China's climate-related policy making, but can unfortunately not be presented in adequate depth within the confines of this article. For a comprehensive discussion of the matter see Erica Downs, "The Chinese energy security debate," *The China Quarterly*, No. 177 (2004), pp. 21–41.

22 For the central role of "green" technologies for China's strategy for global competitiveness see Zang Dongsheng, *Green from Above*, p. 211.

23 Yang and Zheng, *New Development in China's Climate Change Policy*, p. 8.

arguments served China well in insulating it from international obligations without losing too much reputation. This stance also turned China into the most important advocate of the developing world regarding climate justice and the champion of the "common but differentiated responsibilities" principle.

With the dramatic rise in China's CO_2 emissions in the context of its emergence as a major economy, it has become close to impossible for China to keep up this balancing act. On the one hand, mere participation while holding the "no obligations" line and otherwise keeping a low profile became exceedingly difficult to reconcile with the objectives of presenting itself as a responsible stakeholder. On the other hand, China's rising emissions also made it difficult to act credibly as advocate for the group of developing countries expected to suffer disproportionately from the effects of greenhouse gas emissions. China's traditional role as the guarantor as well as beneficiary of the developing world's unhampered right to develop was thus cast into doubt from both sides. The difficulty of reconciling its traditional role with changing realities and interests was prominently displayed during the Copenhagen negotiations.

In Copenhagen: How Did China Play Its Hand?

Coming to Copenhagen, the Chinese delegation did not bring last season's playbook. Instead, it arrived with a significantly altered set of interests: first, an interest to move towards an agreement facilitating global emission reductions without giving it obligations it was not prepared to commit to; second, a mandate to shape the international climate framework into a mechanism for gaining the developed world's assistance in achieving domestic climate targets; and third, the traditional objective of improving China's international reputation. With these interests, the Chinese delegation felt it had a good hand of cards to play. Following the announcement of an unconditional 40–45 per cent carbon intensity reduction target just before the summit, China had delivered what it considered to be a gesture of "initiative and good example."[24] In addition, it expected to display its significant domestic emission reduction efforts to a global public and to gain the acknowledgement of the international community. For this purpose, China for the first time set up a national press room to present its view on the negotiations directly to the world media. As it turned out, its new playbook proved less effective than the Chinese delegation had hoped.

Negotiating style

China's negotiating style during the final hours of Copenhagen captivated media observers around the world, weaving a soap-opera style narrative of who was in and who was out, who was invited or not invited to which last-minute meeting,

24 Pan Jiahua, "Gebenhagen qihou huiyi de zhengyi jiaodian yu fansi" ("Main points and assessment of the Copenhagen controversy"), *Renmin ribao*, 19 March 2010.

who felt snubbed and who was sulking. The media's preoccupation with style certainly blew its importance out of proportion. However, some of the characteristics of China's negotiating style carry explanatory significance for the negotiation's outcome. Therefore, before this analysis turns to the substance of China's positions, it provides an overview of the delegation's negotiating behaviour.

Generally speaking, the Chinese side is neither used to nor well-prepared for a negotiating dynamic featuring a circle of heads of states rolling up their sleeves and trying to hammer out a deal on the spot.[25] The approach of finding ad hoc compromises that work internationally and then selling the agreement at home goes against every rule of Chinese policy making. In the Chinese context, the formulation of quantifiable policy targets is one of the most central and most sensitive parts of the policy-making process. Targets are the yardsticks against which government performance is being measured. In the absence of other sources of legitimacy, achieving these targets is one of the pillars on which the CCP's power rests. Accordingly, China's leadership plays the domestic expectations game with caution, usually making sure that that there is a high level of certainty that publicly announced targets can be met. In short, the Chinese domestic system leaves virtually no scope for positions to be significantly adjusted on the spot during international negotiations. This is of course not an exclusively Chinese phenomenon. Every negotiator in international settings will have to keep an eye on the domestic sphere. But arguably the corset for China's negotiating teams is particularly tight.

This fact is also reflected in the set-up of China's delegations to past climate negotiations. The Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) acted as the main interface with foreign counterparts, but held limited decision-making authority. In climate change, ultimate authority lies with the National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC). Accordingly, the MFA was often restricted to presenting the positions decreed by the NDRC. The MFA negotiator had to manoeuvre within a narrow range of acceptable negotiation outcomes with limited capability to react to more complex proposals of multi-dimensional package deals. As long as China's international position was largely confined to averting commitments with little need for engaging in complex bargaining, this negotiation dynamic was unproblematic from a Chinese perspective. With the new and more complicated set of objectives, however, inflexibility in negotiation situations becomes a significant constraint. In the run-up to Copenhagen, the Chinese side tried to counteract this problem: the team sent to Copenhagen seemed more suited to the task than previous delegations, consisting of a well-balanced group of experienced officials from the relevant domestic players. Headed by Xie Zhenhua 解振华, vice-minister of the NDRC and former director of the State Environmental Protection Administration, with the support of Su

25 *Ibid*. See also Francois Godement, "Does China have a real climate change policy?" in *Climate Policies after Copenhagen*, ECFR China Analysis No. 27, June 2010.

Wei 苏伟, NDRC director general for climate change and one of China's most experienced climate negotiations veterans, and Yu Qingtai 于庆泰, MFA special representative for climate change talks, the Chinese team combined a high degree of climate expertise with relatively extensive decision-making authority and experience on the international stage. This negotiating team was supposed to reach an acceptable agreement with the other parties during the first part of the negotiations.

In clear contrast, Premier Wen Jiabao's role was envisaged to be purely ceremonial. In line with the objective of displaying China's domestic emission reduction efforts to a global public, Wen Jiabao's most important job was to deliver a speech on China's climate-related achievements and to sign the prepared international agreement. But when Premier Wen arrived in Copenhagen, accompanied by his own team of foreign policy advisers consisting of seasoned diplomats with limited specialized knowledge in matters of climate change, the negotiations were instead bogged down in controversy and far from any acceptable agreement. The state of negotiations posed an imminent risk of Wen Jiabao being associated with a political failure. His carefully crafted speech, meant as a grand display of China as a responsible player in the climate arena, was instead delivered amidst hectic emergency meetings and a frantic atmosphere that, frustratingly from a Chinese perspective, left very little attention on Wen's account of China's domestic climate achievements.

First-hand observers, both within and outside the Chinese delegation, widely agree that the last two days of the Copenhagen conference saw a significant reversal in the negotiation dynamics on the Chinese side. While the expert negotiations team under Xie Zhenhua might at this point still have been able to work on an international agreement, the team around Wen Jiabao was primarily concerned with limiting the damage and insulating the Prime Minister from the foreseeable failure of the summit. Consequently, Premier Wen's team took over operations from the original negotiating team, almost entirely side-lining the climate experts who could have adjusted to last-minute negotiation developments. Instead, China's approach fell back into its traditional mode of inflexibility and one-dimensional argumentation. Not to relinquish any ground became the simple and overriding goal during these last two days. Vice Foreign Minister He Yafei 何亚非, an experienced and high-ranking diplomat but no climate expert, became primary negotiator during this final phase. His main job was to ensure that China would not slide into any unfavourable last-minute deal, a job that he fulfilled with tenacity. At the point when US President Obama and the EU leaders supposedly thought it was the right time to push through and forge at least a fairly acceptable accord, the Chinese negotiators had already left the table.

During the infamous high-level meeting that followed – and that Premier Wen later insisted he was never formally invited to[26] – it fell to He Yafei to present an

26 "Premier Wen defends China's role at Copenhagen meeting," Xinhua News Agency, 15 March 2010.

unmoving Chinese position on any reduction targets, explicit or implicit. This caused great frustration especially for the EU leaders and contributed to the wild finger-pointing during the Copenhagen aftermath. That said, the popular accusation of China blocking even a unilateral commitment of the developed world just to be destructive is questionable. Observers on the Chinese side, both official and independent, agree that He Yafei reacted to an offer of a global long-term goal of a 50 per cent reduction in emissions by 2050 with the developed world reducing their emissions by 80 per cent in this time period. How conditional to each other these two aspects were during the meeting remains something of an open question, with available first-hand accounts remaining inconclusive on this point.[27] However, a more or less clearly defined level of global emissions was defined either through the 50-50 target or the 2 degrees Celsius target already agreed upon during the 2009 L'Aquila Major Economies Forum. The 80 per cent proportion assumed by the developed nations therefore automatically sets a proportion for the developing world as well, with China inevitably being responsible for a large part of this. In comparison to the Western media which easily dismissed China's rejection as a purely destructive move, several Chinese commentators provided detailed analyses of the actual implications of the offer, concluding that based on a traditional interpretation of per capita emission justice He Yafei was well within bounds to turn down the stipulation.[28] From this perspective, China's rejection of the offer represented a rejection of the implicit reduction obligation for the developing world and China, making the response tenacious, but not downright "illogical" as commentators called it.[29]

Reduction targets

Following its emerging sense of vulnerability, China's interest in limiting global GHG emissions has markedly increased. On the one hand, this translates into China's more vigorous demands towards the developed world to curb its emissions, evoking historic responsibility as well as the obligations under the Kyoto Protocol they have failed to live up to. On the other hand, it adds to China's motivation to define its own national reduction goals, in part to entice developed countries to take on larger commitments. China is most concerned with the mid-term reduction targets to be achieved by 2020. An emphasis especially by the United States on long-term 2050 targets is perceived by the Chinese as an unpredictable and meaningless goal at best and a stalling tactic with no intention to comply at worst. China's central demand towards the developed world is a mid-term target of a 40 per cent emission reduction below 1990 levels by 2020.[30]

27 See e.g. Ed Miliband, "The road from Copenhagen," *The Guardian*, 20 December 2010.
28 Pan Jiahua, "Gebenhagen zhi hou de qihou zouxiang" ("Climate change after Copenhagen"), *Foreign Affairs Review*, No. 6 (2009), pp. 2–3.
29 See e.g. Mark Lynas, "How do I know China wrecked the Copenhagen deal? I was in the room," *The Guardian*, 22 December 2009.
30 National Development and Reform Commission, *Position Paper*, 20 May 2009.

So far, all developed countries' pledges are well below this threshold. In the run-up to COP15 the United States put forward a very moderate pledge of a 17 per cent reduction below 2005 levels by 2020, which, as the recent failure to pass meaningful climate legislation reiterates, remains far from realization. The EU did not change its pledge of a 20 per cent reduction below 1990 levels which would be raised to 30 per cent under conditions of a comprehensive international climate deal. Partly to increase the chances for a larger commitment by developed nations, China's government, after long-winded internal bargaining, announced an unconditional national carbon intensity reduction target of 40–45 per cent on 2005 levels by 2020. This was the first time China publicized a quantifiable target directly referring to carbon emissions, but it is rather difficult to interpret in absolute numbers since it represents a relative reduction proportional to China's future economic development. The EU and US official reactions generally recognized the importance of the Chinese target,[31] but neither was willing to react with a change to their own position. Consequently, China's hope to spur the developed nations into putting forward more ambitious reduction goals in Copenhagen was not fulfilled. Chinese delegation members later voiced their frustration about what they described as developed countries' unwillingness to address the issue of mid-term targets during the negotiations.[32]

The effectiveness of China's attempts to extract increased reduction commitments from developed countries was weakened by the rationale behind its own reduction targets: in clear contrast to its demands towards the developed world, China's own carbon intensity target reflects a largely domestic calculation. From the domestic perspective of a desired economic transformation, the optimal emission reduction level for China equals the emission savings "automatically" achieved through the restructuring of China's economic model, including the related efforts towards increased energy efficiency which will account for a large portion of emission reductions in a low-carbon scenario.[33] Reductions that go beyond this level, however, might be harmful to the restructuring efforts by putting an additional strain on the economic system.[34] The reduction level compatible with China's overarching economic objectives, so-called "no regrets" reductions, represents the yardstick at which China's leadership orients its domestic targets.[35] China's

31 EU Observer, *China Pledges 40% Cut in CO2 Ahead of Summit*, 26 November 2009.

32 E.g. Zhang Shan, "Genbenhagen xieyi buneng qian" ("Copenhagen Accord should not be ratified"), Greenleaf Blog, 20 January 2010; Xin Benjian, "Ge hui bei fada guojia bi zhi shibai bianyuan" ("Developed countries bring Copenhagen negotiations to the brink of failure"), Renmin ribao, 20 December 2009.

33 Research Report by Chatham House, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, Energy Research Institute, Jilin University, E3G, *Low Carbon Development: Roadmap for Jilin City*, March 2010.

34 On concerns regarding negative economic effects of mitigation costs see e.g. Chen Wenying, Gao Pengfei and He Jiankun, "Impacts of future carbon emission reductions on the Chinese GDP growth," *Science and Technology Journal* (Tsinghua University) Vol. 44, No. 6 (2004).

35 See Andreas Oberheitmann and Eva Sternfeld, "Unser Land soll sauberer werden – China setzt für die Zukunft auf erneuerbare Energien," in *Internationale Politik* (2009), concluding "Klimaschutz ja, aber ohne negative Auswirkungen auf die Wirtschaft" ("Climate protection yes, but without negative economic effects").

government will, not always successfully,[36] try to avoid committing to emission reductions that go beyond the amount of "no regrets" reduction, both in the domestic and in the international arena. The alterations in China's domestic interests have without doubt significantly lifted the quantitative threshold for "no regrets" reductions following a growing awareness of the potential economic and political benefits of a low-carbon strategy. Nevertheless, the "no regrets" threshold still represents the line that China will not be pushed over. For the time being, China decided to draw this line at the 40–45 per cent intensity target.

In Copenhagen, the Chinese side argued that the principle of "common but differentiated responsibilities" still justifies measuring China's and the developed world's commitments by fundamentally different standards. The principle places the responsibility for emission reductions beyond the domestically desirable solely on the shoulders of the developed countries, while developing countries are liable to do what they can within the limits of their domestic economic development ("nationally appropriate mitigation actions"). In the past, this interpretation of "differentiated responsibilities" was justifiable by historic and per capita emission levels. However, in light of China's current emission levels and future trajectory, this line of argument is rapidly losing weight. An alternative argument frequently offered by China's representatives evokes China's traditional role as advocate for the interest of developing countries in international climate negotiations, obliging it to uphold the principle of the differentiation of responsibilities in the name of the developing world as a whole.[37] This interpretation of China's role, which as discussed above has lost much of its initial strength and consistency in the view of both the developed and the developing nations, practically deprives China of the flexibility it needs to pursue its own climate interests strategically within a dynamic bargaining process. COP15 clearly demonstrated that an uncompromising adherence to the traditional interpretation of China's role is rendering China's negotiations strategy largely ineffective. If China strives to realize the benefits it hopes to gain from an international climate framework, for example by credibly pushing developed countries towards increased reduction commitments, it will have to step out of its domestic emission reduction "comfort zone."

36 The fact that China might possibly have failed its energy intensity targets for 2010 highlights the fact that setting political targets, however careful, is not always a guarantee for meeting these goals. China's enormous efforts to achieve last-minute energy efficiency improvements despite significant economic costs shows that once a target is set, its achievement becomes a paramount task that overrides "no regrets" restrictions. These short-term fixes however do not constitute a sustained move across the "no regrets" emissions line.

37 On the issue of "G77 solidarity" see Joanna I. Lewis, "China's strategic priorities in international climate change negotiations," *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 31, No. 1 (2007), pp. 155–74; Wang Bo, "Understanding China's climate change policy – from both international and domestic perspectives," *American Journal of Chinese Studies*, Vol. 16, No. 2 (2009).

Bindingness of commitments

The interpretation of international agreements as an infringement of China's sovereignty reflects perceived historic experiences of foreign dominance as much as the CCP's awareness of the fragility of its claim to power and the correspondingly strong reflex to guard its control over domestic policy making fiercely. Flexibility is one of the CCP's most important assets. Its ability to react and adapt to changing circumstances, to plan ahead and find workable policy solutions to emerging challenges, has allowed China's ruling party to retain its claim to power through a period of unprecedented transformation. In climate change, adaptability is of especially crucial importance from a CCP perspective. The most powerful driver behind Beijing's domestic climate agenda is the broader transformation of its economic model. This transformation is a delicate and complex process that requires a multi-level balancing act between short-term economic needs and long-term trajectories, between particular interests of influential actors, between different regions, and so on. The CCP has upped the ante by putting this transition into the centre of its political agenda. Failure would be catastrophic from the perspective of the ruling elites. To keep this transition on its narrow track, the Chinese leadership will make sure that it retains its ability to adjust the process when needed and to counterbalance unforeseen developments. Strapping itself into the confines of an international climate framework including binding emission reductions therefore comes with great political costs and risks, in the view of the Chinese government. In the past, this translated into China's staunch refusal to agree to internationally binding climate commitments.

Nevertheless, regarding the bindingness of China's reduction targets, compromise in Copenhagen might have been closer than China's rejection of a binding agreement during the last phase of the summit would suggest. The fact that China put forward the 40–45 per cent carbon intensity goal on the domestic level is a sign of the government's confidence that this goal is compatible with its overarching objectives. Several Chinese observers have suggested that the translation of these national reduction targets into an international commitment might not have been entirely out of the question if China felt it could have received something adequate in return. In the end, it remains difficult to assess how far the Copenhagen negotiations team was willing to move on this point.

Technology transfer

Perhaps the most important objective of the Chinese delegation in Copenhagen was to promote an international mechanism for a drastically increased transfer of climate technology from developed to developing nations, specifically China. Technology transfer is a way for China to move some of the cost of putting its own economy on a low-carbon path to other countries. The acquisition of advanced climate technology would help China not only to decrease the energy

and carbon intensity of its economy, but also to develop its growing green technology sector as a way to move from low-level manufacturing to skilled labour production of high-tech goods.[38] In order to use the international climate regime to aid these efforts, China has spearheaded proposals for technology transfer mechanisms within the framework of the UNFCCC,[39] most notably the 2008 proposal by the G77 and China for a technology mechanism under the UNFCCC.

While China's position is based on the conviction that "technology transfer cannot be left to market forces,"[40] from the perspective of developed nations the transfer of advanced technologies, usually owned by private Western companies, raises a spectrum of complex questions ranging from legal issues of ownership to the protection of intellectual property rights (IPR) and potential distortions of markets and competition. These concerns are difficult to bridge, causing a great reluctance by developed nations to agree to a significant expansion of technology transfers to developing countries. This is especially true for China, which features a questionable record in terms of IPR protection and is at the same time at the verge of becoming a serious contender on the international green technology market. Thus far, China has failed to gain developed nations' trust over its willingness and capability to deal responsibly with intellectual property rights and the fair utilization of innovative technologies.

During the course of the negotiations it became clear that the debate on technology transfers would be treated as a sideshow at best. China's limited success in building an adequate system of IPR protection provided developed nations with a welcome excuse for staying clear of the issue. This caused considerable frustration to the Chinese delegation. From a Chinese point of view, developed nations, especially the US delegation, flatly refused to engage in any constructive discussion on the issue.[41] Thus, the Chinese team's game plan, which might or might not have included some Chinese concessions, was stifled from the outset. Any positive dynamic that the negotiations could have developed from a Chinese perspective was significantly dampened by the low attention given to technology transfer issues.

Financial support mechanisms

Instead of discussions on technology transfers, the Copenhagen negotiations took on the question of financial transfers to compensate poor countries for the costs of climate adaptation, supplementing but separate from the financial flows

38 See Oberheitmann and Sternfeld, "Unser Land soll sauberer werden."

39 For an overview of current proposals on climate technology transfer see Christiane Gerstetter and Dominic Marcellino, *The Current Proposals on the Transfer of Climate Technology in the International Climate Negotiations – An Assessment* (Washington, DC: Ecologic Institute, 2009).

40 G. Wacker, "China in den Klimaverhandlungen: zentrale Rolle zwischen den Stühlen," in Susanne Dröge (ed.), *Die Internationale Klimapolitik*, SWP Studie, December 2009, p. 56.

41 Xin Benjian, "Developed countries bring Copenhagen negotiations to the brink of failure."

generated through the Clean Development Mechanism.[42] Traditionally, China has been at the forefront of demanding an expansion of developed countries' financial contribution to climate adaptation in the G77 countries. It also took on this role during the Copenhagen negotiations, demanding a contribution by developed countries of between 0.5 and 1 per cent of their collective GDP.[43] Beyond its genuine sense of solidarity with developing countries, China used these efforts to further define its role as a leading nation among the G77.

In the past, China was also a direct beneficiary of financial support. This situation has now changed and it is far down the list of potential recipients of financial climate support. This fact had been articulated in advance of the Copenhagen summit, which did not stop Todd Stern, head of the US delegation, from reiterating during the conference that he "does not envision public funds, certainly not from the US, going to China."[44] The Chinese team displayed unusual media awareness by responding instantaneously with its own press conference featuring Yu Qingtai, special climate representative, with a statement that China has never seen itself as a "first candidate"[45] for climate support and that the first priority should be to provide the poorest countries with the means to protect themselves against climate impacts. This little exchange of statements highlighted the fact that China's days as a beneficiary of direct climate support are over, limiting its domestically motivated interest in pushing financial support mechanisms within the UNFCCC.

Regarding its role among the developing countries, however, China's continued advocacy for climate support remains of crucial importance: the Copenhagen negotiations illustrated China's increasing difficulties to justify its leading position among G77 countries in the climate arena and to maintain a united front with the developing world. During the first days of the conference, a group of particularly vulnerable developing countries led by the small island states (AOSIS) had put forward a proposal to legally bind the UNFCCC parties to attain and keep atmospheric CO_2 concentrations of 350 ppm and limit global temperature rise to 1.5 degrees. China initially responded with a rather harsh objection to these extreme demands,[46] and while it toned down its sharp criticism over the following days this episode illustrated a problematic trend for China: its newly attained status as a high emissions country puts it squarely into the camp of the climate culprits in the eyes of many developing countries.[47] This made it all

42 The Clean Development Mechanism represents the centrepiece of north-south climate finance and China's role in it is as important as it is complex. However, this article cannot adequately discuss such questions but instead focuses on direct climate adaptation funding, as this played a more crucial role for the Copenhagen negotiations.

43 Angel Hsu and Christopher Kieran, "China in Copenhagen day 3: Tuvalu raises the bar, China reacts," www.greenleapforward.com, "China in Copenhagen" series, 10 December 2009.

44 Julian L. Wong, "No money for China – no problem," www.climateprogress.com, Center for American Progress, 10 December 2009.

45 *Ibid.*

46 Hsu and Kieran, "China in Copenhagen day 3."

47 See also Zhuang Guiyang, "Gebenhagen qihou bo yi yu Zhongguo juese de zai renshi" ("Climate game in Copenhagen and China's role in re-definition"), *Foreign Affairs Review*, No. 6 (2009), pp. 13–21.

the more important for China to keep up its advocacy for financial redistribution from developed to developing countries even though the direct domestic benefit for China is virtually non-existent.

When the financing issue turned out to be a major bargaining chip during the final phase of the negotiations, with US foreign minister Hillary Clinton pledging the US contribution to a $100 billion annual climate fund by 2020, the Chinese delegation found itself in an ambiguous position. In terms of China's domestic calculations the offer of a climate fund, with one of the caveats being that emerging economies like China would be explicitly ruled out as beneficiaries, did not hold much advantage. It was therefore an offer against which the Chinese team would be hard pressed to trade any major concessions. But when announcing the US support of the climate fund, Clinton linked it to the prerequisite that "all major economies stand behind meaningful mitigation actions and provide full transparency as to their implementation."[48] This directly pointed to the US demand for improved transparency regarding the mitigation actions of emerging countries, especially China. As discussed below, the transparency issue is highly sensitive from China's point of view and not something the Chinese delegation would be willing to give in on in return for a climate fund from which China would not benefit. However, China could not flatly refuse the financial offer, potentially depriving the poorest and most vulnerable countries of much-needed finance for adaptation measures, without risking an irreparable erosion of its position within the G77. At this point, a negotiation that had not gone well from the Chinese perspective from the start seemed to be heading towards very dangerous waters. The Chinese delegation was suddenly caught in a difficult predicament with tangible losses looming. Such was the situation when the last of many three-letter acronyms of the Copenhagen summit came into full play: MRV.

Measuring, reporting and verification

Initially, US support for the proposed climate fund was conditional on increased transparency of major economies' mitigation actions. The United States demanded that developing nations, especially China, should be subject to independent international measuring, reporting and verification (MRV) regarding all aspects of their voluntary emission mitigation efforts. This claim was rejected vigorously by the Chinese side with Yu Qingtai coining the label of the "intrusiveness"[49] of international MRV. The prospect of an international agency probing the design and success of China's domestic policies clearly evokes all the images of external meddling that characterize China's generally guarded foreign policy making. International oversight of China's domestic mitigation actions would also constitute an infringement of China's desired control and flexibility

48 Hillary Clinton, *Remarks at the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change*, 17 December 2009.

49 Juliette Eilperin, "MRV-less in Copenhagen," *The Economist online*, 16 December 2010.

regarding every aspect of the broader economic transformation that emission reductions are inseparably woven into.

In addition, international MRV carries the threat of political embarrassment. First, the Beijing government is well aware of the implementation problems it has regarding the realization of nationally decreed climate policy guidelines at provincial and local levels. It does not currently possess a full-fledged system to monitor and enforce climate policy measures effectively. The level of compliance might be unsatisfactory in some regions, partly explaining Beijing's reluctance to agree to verification measures. Second, foreign interpretations of China's domestic actions in the past have been considered by Beijing to be highly biased, unfair and ill-informed. Hence the CCP would not expect international reporting to assess China's efforts in a balanced and favourable manner, or adequately acknowledge the successes of China's climate policies. The combination of these factors turns international MRV measures into a highly undesirable policy from a Chinese perspective. During the final hours of the Copenhagen conference, the direct linking of the climate fund with the MRV issue therefore put China into an uncomfortable position.

After Copenhagen: What Did China Walk Away With?

Most observers agree that the Copenhagen Accord, the final document of COP15, is a disappointing document. This is certainly true from the perspective of China's delegation. On the meagre plus side, China was not forced into any unwanted commitments and it also managed to diffuse the difficult situation around the financing mechanisms and the MRV issue at the end. On the down side, China was far from reaching its own objectives, namely increased reduction commitments from developed countries and a clear path and momentum towards a favourable mechanism of technology transfer.

In terms of reduction targets, China failed to produce the intended pressure on developed nations to move closer to its demand of a 40 per cent emission reduction below 1990 levels by 2020. None of the developed countries displayed much willingness to move beyond their pre-Copenhagen pledges. The developed world's offer of an aggregated 80 per cent reduction until 2050 within the framework of a 50 per cent global reduction was unacceptable to China because of its implicit obligation for emerging countries, as well as China's scepticism regarding long-term targets. Consequently, while non-binding pledges were noted in the Accord's appendix, the Copenhagen Accord features no binding numbers regarding emission reduction targets beyond the overarching "2 degree goal."[50] Even more disappointing from China's point of view, the issue of technology transfers never got off the ground in Copenhagen and at the end culminated in a vague decision "to establish a Technology Mechanism to accelerate technology

50 UNFCCC, Copenhagen Accord (Decision 2/CP.15), para. 1, 18 December 2009.

development and transfer"[51] without any further specifications on the design of the mechanism or concrete next step to establish it. This was certainly less than the Chinese negotiation team had hoped for.

Regarding the uncomfortable financing-MRV nexus, the parties found a formula that resolved China's double problem. The developed world's commitment "to a goal of mobilizing jointly US$100 billion a year by 2020 to address the needs of developing countries"[52] was included in the Copenhagen Accord. The corresponding formulation on MRV requirements was ultimately acceptable from a Chinese perspective. The MRV measures regarding voluntary domestic climate policies in developing countries remained generally under exclusive national authority with no international verification requirement beyond the reporting through national communications: "Mitigation actions taken by Non-Annex I Parties will be subject to their domestic measurement, reporting and verification, the result of which will be reported through their national communications every two years."[53] The concession China had to make was to allow international MRV for domestic policy measures that receive foreign assistance in the form of financial or technological support. "These supported nationally appropriate mitigation actions will be subject to international measurement, reporting and verification in accordance with guidelines adopted by the Conference of the Parties."[54] While this requirement opens a number of Chinese mitigation actions to international scrutiny, it also establishes a link between MRV and technology transfers that ultimately lies in the Chinese interest since it creates an incentive for developed countries to lend technological support to Chinese policy measures in order to increase the transparency of China's mitigation actions.

Regarding the issue of China's reputation, in the aftermath of COP15 much of the blame for the summit's failure was attributed to China's tenacious stance during the last phase of negotiations, adding up to a sizeable loss of international reputation. This unfavourable development was observed with much frustration and incomprehension on the Chinese side. Commentator Zhang Shan summed up the general sentiment by stating that "China made many compromises in Copenhagen and still got a scolding" ("*Zhongguo zai Gebenhagen rangbu zai duo ye yiding hui aima* 中国在哥本哈根让步再多也一定会挨骂").[55] In sum, the Chinese negotiation team left Copenhagen disappointed.

China, Copenhagen and the Future of Global Climate Governance

A great number of factors, many of them outside the control of China's political leadership, cumulated in the outcome of the Copenhagen conference. But when

51 UNFCCC, Copenhagen Accord (Decision 2/CP.15), para. 11, 18 December 2009.
52 UNFCCC, Copenhagen Accord (Decision 2/CP.15), para. 8, 18 December 2009.
53 UNFCCC, Copenhagen Accord (Decision 2/CP.15), para. 5, 18 December 2009.
54 *Ibid.*
55 Zhang Shan, "Copenhagen Accord should not be ratified."

exploring China's role in global climate governance, COP15 has to be seen as a watershed event clearly demonstrating that China's traditional interpretation of its role has become incompatible with its dual status as a developing country and a major emitter. There are thus expectations towards China from the side of the developed as well as the developing world, and contradictions within China's own set of climate-related interests in the international arena. China's hesitance to translate its altered objectives into a winning international position led to a number of clashes that undermined the effectiveness of China's negotiating position in Copenhagen.

Under the crumbling shield of its developing nation status, China made the attempt to achieve its new set of international objectives without relinquishing its traditional preferences. Its objectives were: first, to decrease the looming impacts of climate change by holding the developed world liable for reducing global emissions while at the same time orienting its own national targets at China's domestic plans for economic transformation; second, to draw other large emitters into an overall reduction agreement while at the same time not subjecting itself to an internationally binding regime of commitments and verification; third, to enlist the support of developed nations' expertise and technological know-how for its domestic low-carbon agenda without creating a corresponding system of fair market access and intellectual property protection; fourth to retain its leadership position among developing nations while increasingly being at odds with the interest of poor and vulnerable countries through its high emissions levels; and finally, to achieve an international reputation by displaying its truly notable domestic climate protection efforts while not integrating these efforts into an internationally cooperative framework. In hindsight it is easy to diagnose a lost cause.

COP15 has shown that China cannot have it all: trying to achieve new goals on the international stage while at the same time trying to retain its traditional role resulted in an incoherent position that lacked credibility as well as persuasive power. The case of climate change illustrates in the greatest clarity that Deng Xiaoping's external policy dictum of "maintaining a low profile and never claiming leadership" has ceased to be an option. In consequence, the most important step towards China's future success in the international arena of climate politics will be to acknowledge and address certain necessary trade-offs between international and domestic objectives. This means that the Chinese leadership will have to weigh its options, consider the altered cost-benefit calculation and then courageously and decisively define its new role in global climate governance that coherently reflects its domestic change of policy.

China has a lot to gain from an international climate arrangement. It will be worth moving outside the domestic zone of "no regrets" in exchange for realizing some of these gains. If it chooses to do so, China will have to make its national emission targets more concrete, for example by introducing a target year for an absolute emission peak. More importantly, China's ruling party will have to conquer its reluctance to integrate China into more comprehensive mechanisms of international cooperation. As illustrated, China's determination to follow its

way towards a carbon-reduced economic model on its own terms is deeply embedded in its domestic situation. Enhanced working-level cooperation, bilaterally as well as multilaterally, provides a promising way to facilitate a gradual transition. Collaboration on concrete issues in smaller arrangements of countries could potentially assuage China's fear of sovereignty infringements and external intrusion while at the same time alleviate developed countries' doubts regarding China's willingness and capability to comply with commitments. In any setting, participation in meaningful international cooperation requires China to move beyond the exclusive focus on its domestic policy agenda as the sole reference point for external engagements. The necessity for such a far-reaching change also translates into a responsibility for further academic research to accompany this delicate process, with political analysis that bridges the artificial divide between China's domestic and international policy making and is able to identify opportunities for facilitating China's difficult redefinition of its role in the international arena.

Once again, China finds itself at a crossroads: the ingredients of its previous economic accomplishments are quickly approaching their expiry date, requiring decisive course corrections to ensure long-term economic, political and social stability and success. At the same time, the dividing lines between China's domestic and international policy making are increasingly blurred, with every step China takes sending shock waves through the international sphere. Assuming ambiguous positions in order to keep all its options open will not be a viable strategy for China much longer. The complementarity and interdependent coexistence of opposing ideas represents one of the fundamental concepts in China's age-old history. But at critical junctures like the one China is facing today, moving forward necessarily means making clear decisions and sometimes difficult choices. For China's own sake, it needs to be bold in answering the question of which path it is going to take with regard to its international responsibilities. Preventing a devastating climate catastrophe seems like an excellent point to start.