

**A GENTLE GIANT: THE PARIS AGREEMENT AND CHINA'S NATIONAL
BRANDING STRATEGY**

by

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B.A., The University of Alberta, 2015

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS

in

THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE AND POSTDOCTORAL STUDIES
(Political Science)

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

(Vancouver)

June 2017

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Abstract

Prior to the 2015 Paris Agreement on climate change, China consistently obstructed multilateral climate change governance, and instead advocated for national regulation and flexibility for developing states. However, at the World Economic Forum in January 2017, President Xi Jinping expressed strong support for the Paris Climate Agreement. This thesis seeks to explain China's new approach to climate governance. In the first section, I evaluate the design of the Paris Agreement from a rationalist perspective to find that the Agreement compromises environmental outcomes to promote economic growth, trade liberalization, and national sovereignty. Further, I find that this design is consistent with China's previously climate policy objectives.

In the second section of this thesis, I argue that while the agreement is weak on environmental protection, the Paris Agreement represents a forum to signal responsible behavior, and therefore the Paris Agreement has instrumental value for China's economic and development objectives. Thus, the Paris Agreement has become part of a larger legitimation strategy used by Chinese leadership, to signal China's benevolent economic rise, particularly to the Global South. This thesis contributes to existing literature to suggest that, in the arena of climate change governance and economic development, China is largely a status quo power. Likewise, this thesis argues that the design of Paris Agreement is largely a continuation of previous agreements and negotiations, rather than a significantly different approach to climate governance.

Lay Summary

Prior to 2015, China consistently obstructed internationally regulated climate governance, and instead advocated for domestic climate reform. However, following American withdrawal from the Paris Agreement on climate change, China has suddenly become a vocal advocate of multilateralism, and the Paris Agreement in particular. This thesis argues that China's support for the agreement is, in part, due to the design of the Paris Agreement, which compromises environmental outcomes to promote economic growth and trade liberalization. However, Chinese leadership are also engaged in a broader campaign to signal moral and political authority, particularly towards developing countries. Vocal support for the Paris Agreement is therefore a branding opportunity for China to ingratiate itself towards the Global South.

Preface

This dissertation is original, unpublished, independent work by the author,
Michaela Celeste Pedersen-Macnab.

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Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I would like to thank my academic supervisor, Dr. Peter Dauvergne, for his unending enthusiasm and kindness. I would like to thank Dr. Yves Tiberghien for chairing my committee, and for pushing me in unexpected and interesting directions. I am grateful to have had the opportunity to work with Dr. Paul Evans and Dr. Brian Job, from whom I learned much about international diplomacy. I would also like to acknowledge all the staff, faculty, and friends at UBC who made my time here extraordinary.

Thank you to my mother, the ardent environmentalist, and my father, the joyful philosopher.

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to Al Gore. Thanks for fighting the good fight.

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Background

In December of 1997, The Kyoto Protocol on climate change was adopted by 192 states, and became the first multilateral climate agreement aimed at reducing global greenhouse gas emissions.¹ However, the protocol ultimately failed to significantly impact global emissions, or to mitigate and adapt to the effects of climate change.² The first commitment period of the Kyoto Protocol ended in 2012, after which the United Nations experienced several years of unsuccessful attempts to formulate another international climate agreement.³ In December 2015, the Paris Agreement on climate change was drafted, and was signed on April 22, 2016 by parties to the United Nations Framework on Climate Change (UNFCCC).⁴ The Paris Agreement has since been hailed as an innovative agreement that fundamentally shifted the architecture of climate change governance.⁵ Then UN Secretary-General Ban Ki Moon referred to the agreement as a “monumental triumph for people and our planet”.⁶ Likewise, European UN delegate Radoslav S. Dimitrov suggests that the success of the Paris Agreement represents a diplomatic shift towards more cooperative international climate discourse.⁷

While the United States was an original signatory to the Paris Agreement in 2015 under President Obama, newly elected President Trump and his administration made several

1 David G. Victor, *The Collapse of the Kyoto Protocol and the Struggle to Slow Global Warming* (Princeton University Press, 2001), 3.

2 Robert Falkner, "The Paris Agreement and the New Logic of International Climate Politics", *International Affairs* 92, no. 5 (2016): 1110.

3 Ibid, 1107.

4 United Nations, "The Paris Agreement", 25.

5 Thomas Hale, "'All Hands on Deck': The Paris Agreement and Nonstate Climate Action", *Global Environmental Politics* 16, no. 3 (August 2016): 12.

6 Robert Falkner, "The Paris Agreement and the New Logic of International Climate Politics", 1107.

7 Radoslav S. Dimitrov, "The Paris Agreement on Climate Change: Behind Closed Doors", *Global Environmental Politics* 16, no. 3 (August 2016): 2.

indications that the United States would soon withdraw from the Agreement.⁸ At the G7 Summit in May 2017, President Trump refused to endorse the Paris Agreement, despite significant pressure from the other G7 members.⁹ On June 1, 2017, President Trump officially announced America's withdrawal from the Paris Agreement.¹⁰

Given that the United States is the second largest global emitter of greenhouse gases, it seemed likely that a US withdrawal would significantly impact the commitments of other states, particularly China's commitment to the agreement.¹¹ As the largest greenhouse gas emitter and a developing state, China consistently has opposed internationally regulated climate change governance, and has advocated that the burden of emission reduction should be on states that have historically contributed to climate change.¹² In the past, Chinese leadership has argued that developed states from the Global North should be held accountable for emission reduction, while developing states in the Global South should not be legally required to significantly limit emissions.¹³ In more recent years, China has increasingly advocated for national and regional governance solutions, rather than international governance, and has pivoted toward 'shadow institutions', rather than existing multilateral structures.¹⁴ For these reasons, it seems likely that American withdrawal would cause China to defect from the Agreement. As China and the

8 BBC News, "Donald Trump Would 'Cancel' the Paris Climate Deal", May 27, 2016. Accessed March 27, 2017.

<http://www.bbc.com/news/election-us-2016-36401174>.

9 J. Weston Phippen, "Trump's Paris Climate Accord Indecision", The Atlantic, May 27, 2017. Accessed June 1, 2017.

<https://www.theatlantic.com/news/archive/2017/05/trumps-paris-climate-agreement/528411/>.

10 Michael D. Shear, "Trump Will Withdraw U.S. From Paris Climate Agreement", The New York Times (New York, NY), June 1, 2017.

11 Ibid.

12 David G. Victor, *The Collapse of the Kyoto Protocol and the Struggle to Slow Global Warming*, 32.

13 Ibid, 39.

14 Sebastian Heilmann, Moritz Huotari, and Johannes Buckow, "China's Shadow Foreign Policy: Parallel Structures Challenge the Established International Order", Report no. 18. Mercator Institute for China Studies, 2014. Accessed May 15, 2017.

http://www.merics.org/fileadmin/user_upload/downloads/China-Monitor/China_Monitor_No_18_en.pdf.

United States are the largest contributors to greenhouse gas emissions (respectively), withdrawal by both countries would likely cause the agreement to collapse.

However, on January 19, 2017 at the Davos Conference, President Xi Jinping stated, “The Paris Agreement is a milestone in the history of climate governance. We must ensure this endeavor is not derailed.”¹⁵ Further, the Chinese leadership has publically stated that changes in the foreign policy of the United States “won’t affect China’s commitment to support climate negotiations and also the implementation of the Paris Agreement”.¹⁶ Upon President Trump’s official withdrawal, Hua Chinying, a spokesperson for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, stated that China intends to implement the Paris Agreement “no matter what position other countries shall take”.¹⁷ These statements appear to contradict China’s historical opposition of internationally centralized climate regulation. Likewise, China’s commitment to the Paris Agreement appears inconsistent with China’s position that developed countries, such as the United States, should be held accountable for historical carbon emissions.¹⁸ This thesis seeks to explain China’s support for the Paris Agreement, and add to the literature that explores China’s increasing engagement with multilateralism.

I suggest two possible hypotheses to explain China’s foreign policy shift: first, the design of the Paris Agreement satisfies China’s foreign policy aims better than previous agreements. I will refer to this explanation as “endogenous change”. In the first section, I will outline China’s engagement in previous multilateral climate governance, as well as the evolution of liberal norms

15 China Daily, "Quotes from President's Speech", January 20, 2017. Accessed March 27, 2017. http://usa.chinadaily.com.cn/epaper/2017-01/20/content_28010820.htm.

16 Isabel Hilton, "With Trump, China Emerges As Global Leader on Climate", Climate Politics. Last modified November 21, 2016. Accessed March 27, 2017. http://e360.yale.edu/features/with_trump_china_stands_along_as_global_climate_leader.

17 Laura Smith-Spark, "Paris Climate Deal: World Leaders Condemn US Decision", *CNN*, June 3, 2017. Accessed June 22, 2017. <http://www.cnn.com/2017/06/02/world/us-climate-world-reacts/index.html>.

18 Ibid.

within the climate regime. I find two objectives that Chinese leadership has consistently required from previous international climate negotiations. Next, I will explicate the institutional design of the Paris Agreement to demonstrate that a high degree of institutional flexibility that compromises environmental outcomes. Institutionalized flexibility in the Paris Agreement further entrenches liberal economic norms, that is, economic interdependence and national sovereignty over resources, into international climate governance. I will then show that the Paris Agreement's voluntary emission reduction pledges will likely not be effective at constraining the behavior of individual states, and thus the agreement concedes environmental outcomes for economic growth. In this way, the design of the Paris Agreement represents a continuation of existing liberal economic norms, rather than an innovative approach to climate governance. This institutionalized flexibility satisfies China's previously articulated policy objectives.

However, this explanation is not sufficient to explain President Xi's support for the agreement: if the design of the agreement reinforces existing norms, it is not clear why China would support this agreement, but actively obstructed previous climate negotiations. The second explanation for China's support is that a changing political environment has caused a shift in China's foreign policy priorities. I refer to this hypothesis as "exogenous change". In Section Two, I will argue that a new strategic priority has emerged since President Xi's appointment in 2012: responsible international governance. China has become increasingly interested in portraying itself as a responsible power, that is, a legitimate source of moral or political authority, on the world stage.¹⁹ I argue that this strategic priority is partly ideational, to position China as a partner to the Global South, but also represents significant material gains for China, through projects such as the One Belt, One Road initiative and the Smart Grid. Therefore,

¹⁹ Joseph S. Nye, "Public Diplomacy and Soft Power", *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 616 (March 2008): 95.

China's support for the Paris Agreement is a branding tool to signal China's benevolent economic rise, particularly to the Global South.

1.2 Methodology

This thesis will make two complementary claims: first, that the Paris Agreement is not a significant departure from previous climate agreements, and represents a continuation of what Steven Bernstein calls "the compromise of liberal environmentalism". The agreement further institutionalizes existing liberal norms, and does not, as Dimitrov suggests, demonstrate a significant departure from previous negotiations. Therefore, China's support for this agreement is indication that China is satisfied with existing climate governance, which preserves and protects economic growth and national sovereignty.

Second, the findings of this thesis suggest that China is not a challenger of the existing liberal world order, but rather a tentative champion of it.²⁰ This is not to say that China has been passively socialized into the existing liberal economic world order, but rather that existing norms have instrumental value for China's economic and reputational interests. The Paris Agreement is an appropriate case study to gauge China's commitment to existing liberal multilateral institutions because climate change is a collective action problem: if China were truly uncommitted to multilateral liberal institutions and norms, President Trump's threat to withdraw from the agreement should have presented an opportunity for China to withdraw from the agreement without opprobrium. China's rhetorical support of the agreement would suggest that China's commitment to international governance structures is, at least somewhat, more robust, in the sense that China stands to gain significant soft power and economic growth, through projects

20 Alastair Iain Johnston, "How New and Assertive Is China's New Assertiveness?", *International Security* 37, no. 4 (Spring 2013): 31.

like the Smart Grid and the One Belt One Road Initiative, by maintaining multilateral governance.

Given that the Chinese government has a high degree of centralization and consistency, this thesis will focus on statements made by Ministers, Premiers and the President as evidence for the attitudes and perspectives of the Chinese government on climate change governance. This method does assume that the preferences of these officials are representative of the state as a single, unitary actor, but given that the Chinese bureaucracy remains relatively opaque to outsiders, this assumption seems justified. Likewise, for the purposes of this thesis, it will be assumed that support for signing the agreement indicates support for the implementation of the agreement. While there is significant difference between these concepts, there is not enough data on implementation since the signing of the Paris Agreement to indicate whether commitments will be fulfilled.

This thesis also assumes that the institutional design of agreements is the outcome of rationally self-interested actors in the pursuit of foreign policy goals. I acknowledge that the design of international agreements has an element of randomness, but I will assume that this randomness is, for the most part, negligible. As this thesis examines institutionalized flexibility in climate change agreements as a variable, I will primarily focus on negotiations that culminated in international agreements. However, it is important to note that many other bilateral, regional, and international negotiations that did not culminate in international agreements were instrumental to the formation and signing of the Paris Agreement. Finally, I will examine the effects of national ‘branding’ towards international state actors, as well as domestic constituents. However, I will not consider branding towards transnational actors, such as multinational NGOs,

global corporate elite, etc. This issue will require further research in the future, but is beyond the scope of this thesis.

Barbara Koremenos, Charles Lipton, and Duncan Snidal define international institutions as “explicit arrangements, negotiated among international actors, that prescribe, proscribe, and/or authorize behavior”, and these institutions are created as a rational response to the threat posed by an unregulated and unpredictable international system.²¹ This thesis will examine the design of two international climate agreements: the Kyoto Protocol and the Paris Agreement. There are five key dimensions of institutional design, as outlined by Koremenos et al.: membership rules, scope of issues, centralization of tasks, rules for controlling the institution, and flexibility.²² I will primarily examine the final dimension, flexibility, as a mechanism for the institutionalization of liberal norms.

²¹ Barbara Koremenos, Charles Lipson, and Duncan Snidal, "The Rational Design of International Institutions", 773.

²² Ibid, 763.

Chapter 2: Endogenous Change

This section will first explicate the evolution of liberal economic norms in climate governance to demonstrate that the Paris Agreement is not significantly different from previous agreements. Further, it will be argued that the Paris Agreement satisfies China's policy objectives articulated in previous negotiations, as the agreement embeds liberal economic norms into multilateral climate governance. A norm is "a standard of appropriate behavior for actors with a given identity".²³ The two norms I will consider are economic interdependence and sovereignty. Economic Interdependence is "the promotion of free trade and open markets".²⁴ Sovereignty is "the entitlement to rule over a bounded territory, and the recognition of that right by other actors".²⁵ The 'standard of behavior' that I will examine is the institutionalization of economic interdependence and sovereignty over natural resources and environmental policy.²⁶

2.1 The Evolution of Multilateral Climate Agreements

The first multilateral climate agreement was the 1992 United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, which was signed and adopted by 154 UN member states.²⁷ The convention established the Common But Differentiated Responsibilities principle (CBDR) intended to recognize historical and contemporary inequalities between developed and developing states.²⁸ The principle recognized that climate change mitigation and adaptation is primarily the responsibility of industrialized states that were the historical contributors of

23 Martha Finnemore and Kathryn Sikkink, "International Norm Dynamics and Political Change", *International Organization* 52, no. 4 (Autumn 1998), 891.

24 Steven Bernstein, "Liberal Environmentalism and Global Environmental Governance", *Global Environmental Politics* 2, no. 3 (August 2002), 4.

25 Ian Hurd, "Legitimacy and Authority in International Politics", *International Organization* 53, no. 2 (Spring 1999): 393.

26 Steven Bernstein, "Liberal Environmentalism and Global Environmental Governance", 1.

27 United Nations, "Kyoto Protocol to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change", 1998.

<http://unfccc.int/resource/docs/convkp/kpeng.pdf>.

28 Raymond Cléménçon, "The Two Sides of the Paris Climate Agreement: Dismal Failure or Historic Breakthrough?", *Journal of Environment and Development* 25, no. 1 (2016): 4.

greenhouse gas emissions.²⁹ Signatories of the UNFCCC are divided into three categories based on GDP, as well as capacity to develop and implement renewable energy technology and mitigation strategies.³⁰ Annex I parties are industrialized states, including economies in transition (EIT).³¹ Annex II parties are industrialized states with the capacity to assist developing states that are most vulnerable to the effects of climate change.³² EITs, such as the Baltic States, are excluded from Annex II.³³ Non-Annex I parties are developing states that are particularly vulnerable to the effects of climate change, and were not historical contributors of greenhouse gas emissions.³⁴ Non-Annex I parties include climate-vulnerable coastal states, such as Vietnam, countries that are particularly prone to desertification and drought, such as Zimbabwe, as well as countries that rely heavily on fossil fuel production and commerce, such as China.³⁵

The Kyoto Protocol (1997) amended the convention to impose binding emission reduction targets for Annex I/II states: developed states were required to reduce greenhouse gas emissions to 5% below 1990 levels by 2012.³⁶ Binding reduction targets are self-executing, meaning that signatories are legally required to fulfill treaty commitments, regardless of whether the signatories ratify the treaty.³⁷ Non-annex I parties were encouraged to reduce emissions, but received non-binding reduction targets, and therefore did not have legal obligations under the

29 David G. Victor, *The Collapse of the Kyoto Protocol and the Struggle to Slow Global Warming*, 33.

30 Elena Gladun and Dewan Ashan, "BRICs Countries' Political and Legal Participation in the Global Climate Change Agenda", 13.

31 Ibid, 13.

32 ZhongXiang, Zhang, "Are China's Climate Commitments in a Post-Paris Agreement Sufficiently Ambitious?", *Wiley Periodicals* 8 (March/April 2016): 2.

33 Elena Gladun and Dewan Ashan, "BRICs Countries' Political and Legal Participation in the Global Climate Change Agenda", 13.

34 ZhongXiang, Zhang. "Are China's Climate Commitments in a Post-Paris Agreement Sufficiently Ambitious?", 2.

35 Elena Gladun and Dewan Ashan, "BRICs Countries' Political and Legal Participation in the Global Climate Change Agenda", 14.

36 United Nations, "Kyoto Protocol to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change", 1998, 3.

<http://unfccc.int/resource/docs/convkp/kpeng.pdf>.

37 Daniel Bodansky, "The Legal Character of the Paris Agreement", *Review of European Community and International Environmental Law* 25, no. 2 (2016): 144.

treaty.³⁸ The Annex distinction allowed developing states greater flexibility to achieve climate change reduction, as well as lessen the impact of emission reduction on industrializing economies.

The Kyoto Protocol also established three further flexibility mechanisms: the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) is a carbon-offsetting program that allows Annex I/II states to pay into a centralized fund to assist emission abatement in developing states.³⁹ The Joint Implementation (JI) flexibility mechanism is similar to CDM, but allows developed states to bilaterally invest in approved climate change projects with developing states to achieve credit toward emission reduction targets.⁴⁰ Finally, the Green Investment Scheme (GIS) established a global emission trading system: a developed state would be allotted emission credits, which allow that state to emit greenhouse gases to the level equal to their number of credits.⁴¹ If a state with lower emission levels does not use all their credits, that state would be free to sell their credits to larger nations with higher emissions.⁴² In effect, it ‘costs’ to be a larger emitter, and ‘pays’ to be a small emitter. GIS, JI, and CDM allowed developed states greater flexibility to achieve their respective emission targets, and also increased the likelihood of developing states meeting their respective targets.

The Kyoto Protocol ultimately failed to reduce aggregate global emissions.⁴³ Several developed states failed to meet their binding emission reduction targets: when it became clear that Canada (2% of total emissions) would fail to meet its commitments at Kyoto, Prime Minister

38 Robert Falkner, "The Paris Agreement and the New Logic of International Climate Politics", 1110.

39 Daniel M. Bodansky, Seth A. Hoedl, Gilbert E. Metcalf, and Robert N. Stavins, "Facilitating Linkage of Climate Policies through the Paris Outcome", *Climate Policy* 16, no. 8 (2016): 959.

40 United Nations, "UNFCCC The Kyoto Protocol Mechanisms", 2007. http://unfccc.int/kyoto_protocol/mechanisms/items/1673.php.

41 David G. Victor, *The Collapse of the Kyoto Protocol and the Struggle to Slow Global Warming*, 39.

42 Ibid, 40.

43 Maria Ivanova, "Good COP, Bad COP: Climate Reality after Paris", *Global Policy* 7, no. 3 (September 2016): 412.

Stephen Harper withdrew from the Paris Agreement.⁴⁴ Likewise, the United States (17%) failed to ratify the Kyoto Protocol.⁴⁵ While both Japan (4%) and Russia (5%) met their binding targets, neither achieved significant nominal emission reductions, but achieved their targets through substantive investment in CDM and JI projects, as well as emission trading.⁴⁶ As non-Annex I parties, China (27%) and India (5%) substantially increased their respective emissions.⁴⁷ Flexibility mechanisms, combined with rampant non-compliance, led to a net greenhouse gas emissions increase.⁴⁸

2.2 The Paris Agreement

The Paris Agreement represents a departure from the Kyoto Protocol in several ways: unlike previous multilateral agreements, much of the architecture of the agreement was established in the 2014 bilateral climate joint announcement between China (President Xi Jinping) and the United States (President Barack Obama).⁴⁹ In particular, the US-China joint announcement renewed commitments to a Clean Energy Research Center to promote advancements in clean energy vehicles, advanced coal technology, as well as a public/private partnership to advance carbon capture and storage technology.⁵⁰ The joint announcement also encourages bilateral trade in sustainable goods and clean-energy technology investment.⁵¹ A second bilateral negotiation was held prior to Paris, the purpose of which was, in part, to

44 Robert Falkner, "The Paris Agreement and the New Logic of International Climate Politics", 1111.

45 Ibid, 1110.

46 David G. Victor, *The Collapse of the Kyoto Protocol and the Struggle to Slow Global Warming*, 30.

47 Energy Information Agency, "Each Country's Share of CO2 Emissions", USC: Independent Science, Practical Solutions. Last modified. November 18, 2014. Accessed June 22, 2017. http://www.ucsusa.org/global_warming/science_and_impacts/science/each-countrys-share-of-co2.html#.WUXAxcYZO8U.

48 Maria Ivanova, "Good COP, Bad COP: Climate Reality after Paris", 411.

49 Dimitrov, Radoslav S., "The Paris Agreement on Climate Change: Behind Closed Doors", 9.

50 The White House Office of the Press Secretary, "U.S. - China Joint Announcement on Climate Change", Statements and Releases. Last modified November 12, 2014. Accessed April 2, 2017. <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2014/11/11/us-china-joint-announcement-climate-change>.

51 Ibid.

negotiate an upper limit for China's future emissions in exchange for President Obama to cease his opposition of China's new investment mechanisms, including the AIIB. Unlike previous multilateral negotiations, much of the architecture of the Paris Agreement was decided in these bilateral negotiations between China and the United States.

Unlike the Kyoto Protocol, the Paris Agreement does not adhere to the binary Annex I/non-Annex I party distinction, nor does it include binding emission reduction targets for developed nations.⁵² Rather, the Paris Agreement requires all signatories to submit voluntary pledges for emission reduction. Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC) are nonbinding, such that signatories are not legally required to meet their pledges.⁵³ However, signatories do have a binding commitment to report progress every five years, beginning in 2023.⁵⁴ While the Paris Agreement does not include an enforcement mechanism or a binding commitment to ensure states meet their commitments, Article 4(17) does require that each reporting period will recommit signatories to commitments at least as strong as current commitments.⁵⁵ Therefore, this provision, colloquially named the "ratchet-up" mechanism, requires signatories to submit stronger pledges with each commitment period, or at minimum recommit to current pledges.⁵⁶ Currently, the aggregate NDCs will result in a net global warming of 2.9°C by 2100, which is significantly higher than the 1.5°C aspirational limit.⁵⁷ Compliance with the Paris Agreement requires only that states report emissions, not that they actually reduce emissions.

The binding reporting commitments track progress made towards individual NDCs: called the Transparency Mechanism, Article 13(4) requires states to measure, report, and verify

52 Robert Falkner, "The Paris Agreement and the New Logic of International Climate Politics", 1116.

53 Daniel Bodansky, "The Legal Character of the Paris Agreement", 150.

54 United Nations, "The Paris Agreement", 19.

55 Ibid, 6.

56 Raymond Cléménçon, "The Two Sides of the Paris Climate Agreement: Dismal Failure or Historic Breakthrough?", 9.

57 Ibid, 12.

all progress made towards emission reduction.⁵⁸ The purpose of the Transparency Mechanism is to measure collective progress, determine if states are increasing or ‘ratcheting up’ their national pledges, as well as ‘name and shame’ parties that have not made significant progress to achieve pledges.⁵⁹ While the Paris Agreement mandates reporting, it does not outline the significant capacity gap between states’ ability to produce accurate accounting and data on national carbon emissions.⁶⁰ Measurement and reporting under the Paris Agreement is decentralized: signatories conduct measurement and reporting progress toward implementing NDCs.⁶¹ The legal strength of the Transparency Mechanism relies on credible measurement, reporting, and verification of NDCs from all signatories, as well as a harmonized accounting method, which is not currently laid out in the agreement.⁶²

Article 7(1) of the Paris Agreement establishes adaption to, as well as mitigation of, the effects of greenhouse gas emissions as a ‘global goal’: Article 9(1) commits developed states to provide financial resources to assist developing countries with adaption and mitigation projects.⁶³ This has been interpreted in NDCs as a commitment to collectively invest \$100 billion in climate-related financing by 2020.⁶⁴ Article 9(4) specifies that signatories should “mobilize climate finance from a variety of sources, instruments and channels” to facilitate the participation

58 United Nations, “Paris Agreement”, 2015, 16.

http://unfccc.int/files/essential_background/convention/application/pdf/english_paris_agreement.pdf.

59 Robert O. Keohane, and Michael Oppenheimer, "Paris: Beyond the Climate Dead End through Pledge and Review?", 144.

60 Daniel M. Bodansky, Seth A. Hoedl, Gilbert E. Metcalf, and Robert N. Stavins, "Facilitating Linkage of Climate Policies through the Paris Outcome", *Climate Policy* 16, no. 8 (2016): 958.

61 Maria Ivanova, “Good COP, Bad COP: Climate Reality after Paris”, 412.

62 Daniel M. Bodansky, Seth A. Hoedl, Gilbert E. Metcalf, and Robert N. Stavins, "Facilitating Linkage of Climate Policies through the Paris Outcome", *Climate Policy* 16, no. 8 (2016): 958.

63 United Nations, “Paris Agreement”, 2015, 9.

http://unfccc.int/files/essential_background/convention/application/pdf/english_paris_agreement.pdf.

64 Ibid, 9.

of public and private partnership.⁶⁵ The Green Climate Fund was established in 2010 as a centralized fund, created as a joint private-public venture, to assist developing and vulnerable states mitigate and adapt to climate change.⁶⁶ Initial resource mobilization raised \$10 billion to fund public infrastructure projects, as well as private sector ventures, through grants, concessional loans, subordinated debt, equity and guarantees.⁶⁷ As of January 31, 2017, 50 public-and-private-sector Global South proposals have received funding for a total of \$2.5 billion.⁶⁸ \$815.8 billion went to projects located in Africa, while \$1.14 trillion was invested in projects in the Asia-Pacific.⁶⁹

Finally, the Paris Agreement represents a significant departure from the ‘top-down’ logic of previous international law: Thomas Hale argues, “Governments and international organizations actively sought to galvanize sub/non-state climate change action as a way to achieve their mitigation and adaptation goals”.⁷⁰ Article 11(2) of the Paris Agreement recognizes that capacity building should be country-driven, and developed at the national, subnational and local levels.⁷¹ UN government officials, transnational city and private sector networks, civil society groups, and researchers met prior to negotiations, to discuss key issues and the institutionalization of the agenda.⁷² As a result, the climate change regime has shifted from the strictly ‘regulatory’ framework of Kyoto, to a ‘catalytic and facilitative’ model of governance: transnational actors are not only included in the regime, but are now core elements of the internal

65 Ibid, 13.

66 Raymond Cléménçon, "The Two Sides of the Paris Climate Agreement: Dismal Failure or Historic Breakthrough?", 7.

67 Green Climate Fund, "Resources Mobilized", Accessed April 2, 2017. <http://www.greenclimate.fund/partners/contributors/resources-mobilized>.

68 Ibid.

69 Ibid.

70 Thomas Hale, “All Hands on Deck”: The Paris Agreement and Nonstate Climate Action”, 13.

71 United Nations, “Paris Agreement”, 15.

72 Thomas Hale, “All Hands on Deck”: The Paris Agreement and Nonstate Climate Action”, 18.

logic of the agreement.⁷³ In this new ‘bottom-up’ approach, sub-state actors can influence NDC’s, which allows the agreement to have increased responsiveness to localized needs.⁷⁴

2.3 China’s Previous Climate Policy

Prior to the Paris negotiations, China actively obstructed international climate governance.⁷⁵ China consistently argued that emission reduction should be the responsibility of those countries that were historically large contributors, and that the Global South has the “right to develop”.⁷⁶ Similarly, Chinese leadership has advocated that for an international climate agreement to be equitable, it must ensure that developing states have flexibility to meet their commitments.⁷⁷ China has also consistently supported the CBDR principle on normative grounds.⁷⁸

I identify two core policy requirements of international climate policy that Chinese leadership have consistently advocated for, prior to the Paris Agreement:

1) Common but Differentiated Responsibilities

Chinese leadership have argued that any equitable climate agreement must contain the CBDR principle to ensure that developing states have flexibility to meet their emission reduction commitments.⁷⁹ Chinese leadership have consistently suggested that emission reduction cannot come at the expense of economic growth, as the Global South are entitled to the ‘right to develop’.⁸⁰ Similarly, Chinese leadership has advocated that developed countries/historical

73 Ibid, 20.

74 Ibid, 20.

75 Kai He and Stephen Walker, "Role Bargaining Strategies for China’s Peaceful Rise", *The Chinese Journal of International Politics* 8, no. 4 (October 2015): 371-88, 384.

76 Elena Gladun and Dewan Ashan, "BRICs Countries' Political and Legal Participation in the Global Climate Change Agenda", 16.

77 Avinash Godbole, "Paris Accord and China’s Climate Change Strategy: Drivers and Outcomes", *India Quarterly* 72, no. 4 (2016): 362.

78 Ibid, 362.

79 Ibid, 362.

80 Ibid, 362.

emitters should be held accountable for historical emission contributions.⁸¹ The Paris Agreement dropped the CBDR principle, and contains binding reporting commitments for all states, regardless of the Annex I/non-annex I distinction, and therefore it appears that the agreement does not meet this core policy requirement.

2) Respect for National Sovereignty

China has consistently supported nationally regulated climate policies, and has resisted internationally imposed climate law.⁸² Likewise, China has historically opposed the inclusion of non-state or sub-state actors in climate negotiations, and has advocated for the consolidation of authority over climate and environmental regulation at the national level. Likewise, the binding reporting mechanism requires China to be held accountable to a supranational authority. Given that, unlike the Kyoto Protocol, the Paris Agreement utilizes non-state and sub-state actors as a core element of the compliance process, it appears that the Paris Agreement does not meet one of China's core policy requirements.

The Paris Agreement dropped the distinction between developed and developing countries, has binding commitments for all countries, and includes non-state and sub-state actors. It therefore appears that the design of the Paris Agreement does not capture China's national self-interest. However, in the following sections, I will argue that the Paris Agreement embeds the liberal economic norms through institutionalized flexibility, and that the agreement does not represent a significant departure from previous agreements. Institutionalized flexibility also satisfies China's previously articulated policy requirements.

⁸¹ Ibid, 362.

⁸² ZhongXiang, Zhang, "Are China's Climate Commitments in a Post-Paris Agreement Sufficiently Ambitious?", 2.

2.4 The Compromise of Liberal Environmentalism

In his 2001 book *The Compromise of Liberal Environmentalism*, and in his 2004 article “Liberal Environmentalism and Global Environmental Governance”, Steven Bernstein argues that the norms of liberal environmentalism predicated environmental protection and emission reduction on the maintenance of free trade, corporate freedom, and market growth.⁸³ Thus, the design of climate agreements is endogenously limited by institutionalized liberal economic norms that preclude stringent emission reduction commitments.⁸⁴ Bernstein further argues that the UNFCCC “institutionalized the view that liberalization of trade and finance is consistent with, and even necessary for, international environmental protection”.⁸⁵ Likewise, climate agreements emphasize opportunities to link efficient economic growth with environmental protection.⁸⁶ Bernstein suggests that international environmental governance embeds two broad liberal norms: economic interdependence, through the promotion of free trade and market-based mechanisms, as well as sovereignty, through the establishment and protection of resource and property rights.⁸⁷ These norms gain perceived legitimacy through institutionalization and legalization.⁸⁸

2.4.1 Economic Interdependence

The inclusion of market-based mechanisms in the UNFCCC and Kyoto Protocol institutionalized the view that “liberalization in trade and finance is consistent with, and even necessary for, international environmental protection”.⁸⁹ The CDM flexibility mechanism

83 Steven Bernstein, “Liberal Environmentalism and Global Environmental Governance”, *Global Environmental Politics*, 1.

84 Ibid, 14.

85 Ibid, 4.

86 Ibid, 7.

87 Ibid, 4.

88 Ibid, 2.

89 Ibid, 4.

allowed signatories to the protocol to avoid nominal emission reduction. Likewise, the JI mechanism institutionalizes the notion that increasing global trade and finance are environmental outcomes. The GIS flexibility mechanism relies on accurate global carbon accounting, which is often difficult or impossible to obtain, and assumes that economists are able to accurately estimate the price of environmental externalities. Likewise, the capacity of states to account for carbon is vastly different, particularly between the Global North and Global South (although this gap has become smaller over the last decade).⁹⁰ The carbon accounting gap allowed many states to take advantage of the flexibility mechanism without achieving emission reductions.⁹¹ In short, the “compromise of liberal environmentalism” deepened free trade at the expense of nominal emission reductions by signatories. Further, the agreement ensured that large emitters would remain competitive in the global market, regardless of actual emission reduction.

2.4.2 Sovereignty

Bernstein argues that the CBDR principle, as well as the annex distinctions, institutionalized the belief that sovereignty over resources and environmental protection policies is an inherent right of the state.⁹² Climate change is an inherently international problem: the carbon emissions produced by a single state will impact the global commons, regardless of borders or national regulation. However, the UNFCCC and the Kyoto Protocol institutionalized the regulation of emissions under national jurisdiction, rather than regional or international. The CBDR principle entrenched development as a right of sovereign states, and that the right to develop is more important than environmental outcomes (emission reduction).⁹³ China has

90 Daniel M. Bodansky, Seth A. Hoedl, Gilbert E. Metcalf, and Robert N. Stavins, "Facilitating Linkage of Climate Policies through the Paris Outcome", 960.

91 Ibid, 960.

92 Steven Bernstein, "Liberal Environmentalism and Global Environmental Governance", *Global Environmental Politics*, 3.

93 Ibid, 3.

strongly supported this view, and has consistently advocated for historical emitters to bear the burden of emission reduction, as well as differentiated and flexible commitments to allow developing states to grow their economies.⁹⁴

2.5 Embedded Liberal Norms in the Paris Agreement

While the institutional design of the Paris Agreement is significantly different from previous multilateral climate agreements, the Agreement retains the liberal norms of past negotiations. Like the Kyoto Protocol, the Paris Agreement has a high degree of institutional flexibility that allows signatories to escape nominal emission reduction. The agreement utilizes two kinds of institutional flexibility: *adaptive flexibility* allows institutional commitments to adjust to exogenous changes, and ensure the agreement is robust over time.⁹⁵ Adaptive flexibility is an ‘escape clause’ to allow signatories to alter their commitments as the international political and economic environment changes over time.⁹⁶ The agreement has a high degree of adaptive flexibility compared with the Kyoto Protocol: rather than adopting centralized, ‘top-down’ binding commitments, NDCs ensure that signatories have legal flexibility to meet their obligations.⁹⁷ This is particularly important for developing states that may require increased resources and time to implement large-scale infrastructure changes. Likewise, NDCs ensure that national governments can remain competitive in changing international markets, and are able to adapt to scarcity or exogenous market shocks.⁹⁸ In this way, the adaptive flexibility of the Paris Agreement ensures that states are able to remain market-competitive into the future, regardless of whether this may, in the long term, result in an aggregate stasis or increase in global emissions.

94 Avinash Godbole, "Paris Accord and China's Climate Change Strategy: Drivers and Outcomes", *India Quarterly* 72, no. 4 (2016): 362.

95 Barbara Koremenos, Charles Lipson, and Duncan Snidal, "The Rational Design of International Institutions", 773.

96 Ibid, 773.

97 Thomas Hale, "All Hands on Deck": The Paris Agreement and Nonstate Climate Action", 20.

98 Elena Gladun and Dewan Ashan, "BRICs Countries' Political and Legal Participation in the Global Climate Change Agenda", 19.

Market-based mechanisms also allow states to escape nominal emission reduction by offsetting carbon emissions: the Green Climate Fund is a centralized financing institution that will provide developing states with the resources to mitigate and adapt to climate change.⁹⁹ The first approved project by the GCF was a private venture by Acumen in Rwanda and Kenya.¹⁰⁰ The project requires a \$5 million technical support grant, as well as \$20 million in equity capital, to invest in small, off-grid solar companies.¹⁰¹ Half of the projects funded under GCF are mitigation projects, such as resilient building, irrigation development, dam building, water management systems, etc.¹⁰² The other funded projects are aimed at adaption, and include renewable energy development and infrastructure, carbon capture projects, energy savings insurance, etc.¹⁰³

While financing for climate change mitigation and adaption is extremely important, particularly for developing states with little capacity to implement renewable technologies, as well as developing states that are particularly vulnerable to climate change, financing these technologies does not reduce nominal emissions, or prevent damage to climate systems and the environment more generally.¹⁰⁴ Rather, climate financing is an offset measure: developed states commit funds to aid developing states in renewable energy implementation instead of

99 Green Climate Fund, "Resources Mobilized", Accessed April 2, 2017. <http://www.greenclimate.fund/partners/contributors/resources-mobilized>.

100 Ibid.

101 Ibid.

102 Green Climate Fund, "Browse Projects", Green Climate Fund. Accessed May 15, 2017.

http://www.greenclimate.fund/projects/browseprojects?p_p_id=101_INSTANCE_Hreg2cAkDEHL&p_p_lifecycle=0&p_p_state=normal&p_p_mode=view&p_p_col_id=118_INSTANCE_4ZRnUzRWpEqO_column2&p_p_col_count=1&_101_INSTANCE_Hreg2cAkDEHL_delta=30&_101_INSTANCE_Hreg2cAkDEHL_keywords=&_101_INSTANCE_Hreg2cAkDEHL_advancedSearch=false&_101_INSTANCE_Hreg2cAkDEHL_andOperator=true&p_r_p_564233524_resetCur=false&_101_INSTANCE_Hreg2cAkDEHL_cur=2#portlet_101_INSTANCE_Hreg2cAkDEHL

103 Ibid.

104 Raymond Cléménçon, "The Two Sides of the Paris Climate Agreement: Dismal Failure or Historic Breakthrough?", 4.

committing to nominal emission reduction.¹⁰⁵ The GCF implies that international investment is an environmental outcome, and further entrenches the liberal logic through economic interdependence. The GCF also ensures a global market for renewable technology will be preserved indefinitely, over future commitment periods.

A second kind of institutional flexibility, which Koremenos et al. terms *transformative flexibility*, allows institutions to remain relevant, and to renegotiate without dissolving the agreement.¹⁰⁶ The ratchet-up mechanism is an example of transformative flexibility: the Paris Agreement will maintain relevance, even after states meet currently declared NDCs. This ensures that states will recommit to the Paris Agreement, rather than formulate a new agreement. Similarly, the Paris Agreement creates a guaranteed market for renewable energy technology, as well as carbon capture/storage technology, through the Green Climate Fund. The Agreement maintains its continued relevance through transformative institutional flexibility: the legitimacy of the institution is not consolidated solely in the ability of the agreement to achieve aggregate emission reduction, but rather the ability of the agreement to continue to integrate environmental problems into the global market.

Thus, the institutional design of the Paris Agreement embeds flexible commitment types, and ensures that states will remain competitive in the global market, regardless of their emission reduction. The Paris Agreement also creates and protects a new international market for renewable energy technology. Transformative flexibility precludes the creation of a new agreement in the future: the agreement establishes and guarantees a continued market for renewable technology into the future, and frames international investment as an environmental

105 Ibid, 4.

106 Barbara Koremenos, Charles Lipson, and Duncan Snidal, "The Rational Design of International Institutions," 773.

outcome. In this way, the Paris Agreement embeds economic interdependence and calcifies this norm into multilateral climate governance.

Likewise, the Paris Agreement affirms state sovereignty: Article 13(3) states that the framework should be implemented “in a facilitative, non-intrusive, and non-punitive manner, respectful of national sovereignty, and avoid placing undue burden on the parties”.¹⁰⁷ This represents a significant departure from previous regulatory efforts to centrally limit global emission reduction: rather, this clause suggests that the Agreement should not ‘intrude’ on the sovereign affairs of national governments, and should not penalize states that deviate from the agreement. Further, Article 7(9) commits individual parties of the Agreement to “diversification of sustainable management of natural resources”.¹⁰⁸ However, Article 7 recognizes that adaptation goals are entirely individual, and “country-driven”, rather than centrally enforced at the international level.¹⁰⁹ The Paris Agreement, like previous climate agreements, affirms individual state sovereignty and natural resource property rights.¹¹⁰

The design of the Paris Agreement legalizes the compromise of environmental goals, but does not compromise on liberal economic objectives. Thus, the “standard of appropriate behavior” is that environmental outcomes should be sacrificed to ensure state sovereignty and economic growth and development. However, what is significant about the institutional design of the Paris Agreement, specifically, is that unlike previous regulatory agreements, the Paris Agreement commitments require *only* voluntary compliance.¹¹¹ While the institutional design of the Kyoto Protocol was flexible in many ways, the agreement ultimately utilized a regulatory

107 United Nations, “Paris Agreement”, 16.

108 Ibid, 10.

109 Ibid, 10.

110 Steven Bernstein, “Liberal Environmentalism and Global Environmental Governance”, 7.

111 Robert Falkner, “The Paris Agreement and the New Logic of International Climate Politics”, 1118.

approach to emission reduction.¹¹² Unlike strictly regulatory agreements that centrally enforce and coordinate emission reduction and adaptation, the Paris Agreement is predicated on national governments acting as ‘responsible’ international players, and relies on voluntary compliance.¹¹³

2.6 Logics of Compliance

Prior regulatory approaches have imposed a ‘top-down’ limit on emissions through a centralized international agreement.¹¹⁴ The incentive for states to take on internationally regulated emission obligations is twofold: first, given that no supranational authority exists, climate agreements coordinate problems that could not be solved by the national laws of individual states.¹¹⁵ If successful, agreements will eliminate a significant threat to the survival of the state. The second rationale for compliance is that while agreements constrain the behavior of a given state, that individual state can be assured that other signatories will be constrained as well.¹¹⁶ Thus, the overall unpredictability of the international system is reduced. States can be sure that if they do not comply, they will incur enforcement penalties or reputational costs that may spill over into other international issue areas.¹¹⁷ Therefore, the rationale for compliance is that a threat is eliminated, and the behavior of other states will be constrained in predictable ways. States will sign on to regulatory agreements if they strongly support the purpose of the agreement, or if they feel the reputational costs of not signing are too high.

Gary S. Becker’s seminal article “Crime and Punishment: An Economic Approach” demonstrates that legal compliance “is a function relating the number of offenses by any [individual] to his probability of conviction, to his punishment if convicted” to a ‘portmanteau’

112 Ibid, 1111.

113 Ibid, 1118.

114 Robert O. Keohane, and Michael Oppenheimer, "Paris: Beyond the Climate Dead End through Pledge and Review?", 145.

115 Robert O. Keohane, and David G. Victor, "Cooperation and Discord", 572.

116 Ian Hurd, "International Rule of Law and the Domestic Analogy", *Global Constitutionalism* 4, no. 3 (2015): 391.

117 Robert Falkner, "The Paris Agreement and the New Logic of International Climate Politics", 1122.

of other influences (such as personal willingness to break the law, or expected utility from breaking the law).¹¹⁸ Consider international emission governance: in a ‘top-down’ regulatory framework, compliance is a function of how harsh the penalty for noncompliance is (including penalties or reputational costs), to the likelihood of being caught by the centralized body, to the preference of that state for noncompliance.¹¹⁹ For a state to comply, the regulatory agreement must be effective at solving the collective action problem (by setting an effective cap on aggregate emissions), as well as providing credible monitoring and punishment.¹²⁰ A state will only be forced to comply with the agreement if the agreement is perceived to be at least somewhat effective at achieving aggregate emission reduction, and there is assurance that other states will be similarly constrained through credible monitoring and penalty administration.¹²¹

Given its high degree of institutional flexibility, does the Paris Agreement constrain state behavior? Under the principles established at the Vienna Convention, the Paris Agreement is a legally binding treaty: signatories are under obligation to ‘implement’ their respective NDCs, as well as a legal obligation to report efforts and progress towards NDCs, but signatories are not necessarily required to ‘achieve’ their emission reduction targets.¹²² Compliance thus occurs in three steps:

- 1) Signatories sign and ratify the agreement
- 2) Signatories submit NDCs
- 3) Signatories measure, report, and verify national carbon emission reductions

118 Gary S. Becker, "Crime and Punishment: An Economic Approach", *Journal of Political Economy* 76, no. 2(March/April 1968): 10.

119 Ibid, 10.

120 Ibid, 10.

121 Daniel M. Bodansky, Seth A. Hoedl, Gilbert E. Metcalf, and Robert N. Stavins, "Facilitating Linkage of Climate Policies through the Paris Outcome", 966.

122 Daniel Bodansky, "The Legal Character of the Paris Agreement", 146.

Noncompliance will result if any of these three obligations are not met. The Paris Agreement does not have an enforcement mechanism to ensure that signatories fulfill their legal obligation to ‘implement’, measure, report, and verify their progress towards NDC, or to ensure that states will ‘ratchet-up’ their commitments in the future.¹²³ The force of the agreement is thus in the transparency mechanism and ‘name and shame’ mechanism, which uses domestic and international pressure to influence national governments to comply with the agreement.¹²⁴ Thus, the agreement constrains state behavior insofar as domestic constituents and other states are able, or willing, to pressure national governments to comply. As Ian Hurd suggests, “legalization changes the calculations of actors because it specifies an action is permitted or not. It gives a standard by which to judge the state as compliant or not”.¹²⁵ Therefore, the strength of the Paris Agreement lies, not in its ability to constrain the behavior of any particular state, but to provide a standard by which to judge the behavior of a given state *in relation to other states*.

This logic of compliance does not constrain the behavior of individual states, nor does it cause states to ‘ratchet up’ to compete with one another. In fact, states have a perverse incentive to ratchet slowly: while a foundational principle of regulatory agreements is that all signatories are equal, and will be held equally accountable, the voluntary nature of commitments made at Paris means that states are necessarily not held equally accountable.¹²⁶ National pledges are offered by national governments, and are not centrally regulated or enforced.¹²⁷ Therefore, there is no credible threat to ensure that states will actually meet their targets, or ratchet-up targets their respective targets in the future. Becker’s model demonstrates that states will only comply if

123 Dimitrov, Radoslav S., "The Paris Agreement on Climate Change: Behind Closed Doors", 7.

124 Daniel Bodansky, "The Legal Character of the Paris Agreement", 149.

125 Ian Hurd, "International Rule of Law and the Domestic Analogy", 378.

126 Robert Falkner, "The Paris Agreement and the New Logic of International Climate Politics", 1115.

127 Daniel Bodansky, "The Legal Character of the Paris Agreement", 146.

there is a relatively high probability of being caught, as well as a high penalty for being caught.¹²⁸ Under the Paris Agreement, states are not held accountable as individuals, but rather are held accountable in relation to one another. Rather than constrain behavior, the Paris Agreement establishes a ‘standard of responsibility’ by which they can be judged. While states can be sure about what that ‘standard of responsibility’ looks like in the present, there is uncertainty about what other states will commit to in the future. Likewise, states will be uncertain about what the market will be like in the future. Therefore, states have a dominant strategy to commit to as little as possible now to ensure they have greater flexibility, should they be required to ratchet up higher in the future to meet the future ‘standard of responsibility’.

Consider the following scenario: Chinese leadership desires to appear either responsible or cooperative. However, China also wants to be constrained as little as possible by international agreements, and does not want to reduce emissions at the cost of economic growth. Therefore, China will commit itself to emission reduction targets that are achievable (or at minimum achievable through cheating or poor carbon accounting). However, the Paris Agreement actually incentivizes states to ‘low-ball’ their commitments relative to the actual capacity of each state: as there is no credible enforcement to ratchet up commitments in the future, the agreement does not constrain state behavior. At minimum, China wants to seem as responsible as the other signatories. The Chinese leadership knows that other states will also set achievable emission targets in order to appear responsible. However, there is uncertainty about what the commitments of other states will look like in the future. Likewise, there is uncertainty about fluctuations in the global market in the future, therefore China may feel pressure to significantly ratchet up if other states significantly ratchet up in the future. Because China cannot be certain about what other

¹²⁸ Gary S. Becker, "Crime and Punishment: An Economic Approach", 10.

states will commit to in the future, China has an incentive to set as low a target as possible in the present. This will be the dominant strategy of all states. Therefore, the agreement incentivizes a race to the bottom: given that there is uncertainty about what future commitments will look like, all states will commit as minimally as possible in the present to give themselves flexibility in the future.

Given that all states are likely to behave in this way, it is plausible that the Paris Agreement may incentivize states to commit to less than they may have done without the agreement: all states have a dominant strategy to commit as minimally as possible, and achieve this minimal target. Consider the behavior of domestic constituents without the Paris Agreement: if emission reduction were a particularly salient issue for domestic audiences, voters and civil society would hold their government accountable to some abstract, relative target that is specific to the capabilities of that state. However, the Paris Agreement serves as a benchmark for ‘responsible’ governance: if a state fulfills its minimal commitments at Paris, it will be seen as a ‘responsible’ player in comparison to other states. This minimal benchmark may actually incentivize states to commit to an artificially low target to seem ‘responsible’. Likewise, there is an increased incentive for governments to be opaque about carbon accounting, as well as to misrepresent progress made towards emission reduction targets.¹²⁹ Becker’s model would further suggest that there would be significantly increased incentives to cheat.¹³⁰ The voluntary compliance achieved in the Paris Agreement further embeds the “compromise of liberal environmentalism”, and further entrenches the expectation that environmental outcomes cannot come at the expense of economic growth and development.

129 Daniel M. Bodansky, Seth A. Hoedl, Gilbert E. Metcalf, and Robert N. Stavins, "Facilitating Linkage of Climate Policies through the Paris Outcome", 958.

130 Gary S. Becker, "Crime and Punishment: An Economic Approach", 10.

2.7 China's Current Climate Policy

Thus far, I have argued that the Paris Agreement embeds liberal economic norms as environmental outcomes through institutionalized flexibility. This is consistent with China's climate policy objectives: first, the agreement is more flexible than the Kyoto Protocol, and allows China, and other developing states, to voluntarily pledge and ratchet-up their commitments. The adaptive and transformative flexibility ensure that China will have stability and flexibility for future commitments. Likewise, the market-based mechanisms allow China greater emission reduction flexibility. While the Annex distinction and CBDR principle are not explicitly articulated in the agreement, the compliance mechanism of the Paris Agreement affords China and other developing states far more flexibility to meet commitments than any previous climate negotiations, and compromises environmental outcomes for economic growth. This satisfies China's first policy objective.

Second, the agreement also consolidates national authority, despite including non-state and sub-state actors in the negotiation process: the agreement affirms that adaptation is fundamentally a nationally driven policy, and avoids placing undue burden on any one state to reduce emissions. Likewise, emission reporting and carbon accounting is conducted at the national level, and is not centrally enforced. Much like the Kyoto Protocol, the Paris Agreement entrenches national sovereignty norms, and therefore satisfies China's second policy aim. For these reasons, it appears that the Paris Agreement satisfies China's previously articulated climate policy objectives.

Chapter 3: Exogenous Change

This thesis argues that the Paris Agreement fulfills two complementary outcomes for China: the design of the agreement appeals to China because it reinforces state sovereignty, ensures commitment flexibility, and largely maintains the economic status quo. However, this explanation is not sufficient to explain China's support for the Paris Agreement, as previous climate negotiations also entrenched liberal economic norms, and yet China obstructed international climate governance until 2015. As previously stated, China has consistently advocated for nationally regulation, rather than multilateral commitments. President Xi's support for the Paris Agreement indicates a radical shift in Chinese foreign policy, and therefore the design of the agreement is not sufficient to explain China's support. I will argue that a third policy objective has been added to China's climate policy: China has become increasingly interested in branding itself as a 'responsible' power on the international stage.

The first section of this thesis found that the agreement creates a flexible and relative standard by which states can be judged as 'responsible'. As a committed signatory, China is able to signal to other states, particularly developing states in the Global South, that China intends to be a 'responsible' and status quo power. This suggests that China has not passively internalized the liberal norms, or been socialized into cooperative climate governance, but rather that China has strategically operationalized the agreement as part of a larger branding strategy to signal China's benevolent rise, in response to negative perceptions of China's governance strategies.

3.1 Negative Narratives

The design of Paris Agreement empowers states to leverage sustainable practices into governance authority. States that comply with the limited emission reduction obligations of the agreement are able to 'brand' themselves as responsible leaders in climate change governance.

‘Responsible’ branding can be a kind of legitimation strategy. Legitimacy is “the normative belief by an actor that a rule or institution should be obeyed”.¹³¹ However, responsibility is slightly different from legitimacy: in her 2013 article “Governing the World: China’s Evolving Conceptions of Responsibility”, Pichamon Yeophantong suggests that a Chinese conception of responsibility is that which is “solely one’s burden to carry” (*ze you you gui*).¹³² Legitimacy, or the right to act as an authority, is therefore derived from being perceived as taking on a fair share of a burden.¹³³ Using this definition of responsibility, China’s national branding strategy is to combat negative perceptions of China, and to assure other powers that China intends to ‘carry its burden’.

There are two audiences that a state may be interested in branding itself towards: domestic constituents, as well as other states. Pichamon Yeophantong identifies three broad narratives to describe China’s economic and political rise that China may seek to combat: the first narrative is the perception that China’s main policy aim is to consolidate power, and that performance on the international stage is a means to signal strength to domestic constituents, referred to as the “China Collapse Thesis”.¹³⁴ This narrative would suggest that China’s support for the Paris Agreement is to signal responsible behavior (and therefore legitimacy) to domestic constituents.

In recent years, protests have erupted in response to poor air quality and haze in several

131 Ian Hurd, "Legitimacy and Authority in International Politics", *International Organization*, 381.

132 Pichamon Yeophantong, "Governing the World: China's Evolving Conceptions of Responsibility", *The Chinese Journal of International Politics* 6 (October 2013): 333.

133 Ibid, 333.

134 Ibid, 348.

large Chinese cities, notably in Chengdu and Daqing.¹³⁵ The Xi government has swiftly responded to these domestic concerns. In March of 2011, the 12th Five-Year-Plan announced an internal emission trading system between seven Chinese provinces: Beijing, Tianjin, Shanghai, Chongqing, Hubei, Guangdong and Shenzhen.¹³⁶ This system has since developed from a regional domestic pilot project into a unified carbon market under a cap and trade mechanism.¹³⁷ The National Energy Administration has also stopped approving construction of new coal plants in 13 regions until 2018.¹³⁸ These examples demonstrate how the Xi government has undertaken significant domestic reforms to combat pollution in order to confer domestic legitimacy. However, in her 2016 dissertation “*Invisible Sky, Visible State: Environmental Governance and Political Support in China*”, Iza Ding demonstrates that public pressure in China is relatively ineffective at garnering substantive action to solve pollution problems.¹³⁹ Ding suggests that China’s civil society, particularly NGOs and domestic groups concerned with environmental issues, is relatively weak.¹⁴⁰ Ding further argues that the Chinese government engages in a “performative governance” strategy that merely signals a bureaucracy’s competence and responsiveness to a domestic audience without generating substantive environmental improvements.¹⁴¹ Performative governance is effective at satisfying local grievances and pressure from domestic audiences but is entirely ineffective at producing long-term

135 The Economist, "China's Citizens Are Complaining More Loudly about Polluted Air", *The Economist*, March 2, 2017. Accessed June 22, 2017. <http://www.economist.com/news/china/21717975-government-wants-silence-them-chinas-citizens-are-complaining-more-loudly-about-polluted-air>.

136 Jun Dong, Yu Ma, and Hongxing Sun, "From Pilot to the National Emissions Trading Scheme in China: International Practice and Domestic Experiences", *Sustainability* 8, no. 522 (May 31, 2016): 2.

137 Ibid, 2.

138 Kathy Chen, and David Stanway, "China to Halt Construction on Coal-Fired Power Plants in 15 Regions", *Scientific American*, 2017. Accessed June 22, 2017. <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/china-to-halt-construction-on-coal-fired-power-plants-in-15-regions/>.

139 Iza Ding, “Invisible Sky, Visible State: Environmental Governance and Political Support in China” (Presentation, Banff, Alberta, June 3, 2015).

140 Ibid.

141 Ibid.

environmental protection.¹⁴²

Ding's article specifically examines the China government's responsiveness to air pollution, rather than climate change; however, it is likely that her results similarly apply for emission reduction. In contrast to pollution, climate change is an inherently international issue, and therefore the Chinese government does not need bear full responsibility for the effects of climate change, as all countries are perpetrators. Likewise, climate change impacts include invisible environmental harms, such as ocean acidification, sea level rise, etc., which are not visible and present in the everyday lives of domestic constituents. While air pollution directly affects the health and wellbeing of citizens, greenhouse gas emissions have a less obvious impact on the wellbeing of the general public. For this reason, it is unlikely that domestic pressure had a significant impact on the Chinese government's support for the Paris Agreement, or that the Paris Agreement is primarily a component of a domestic legitimation strategy. It is more likely that the primary target of China's 'branding' is other states, rather than domestic audiences, and that the "China Collapse Thesis" is not the primary narrative that China seeks to combat.

The second narrative Pichamon Yeophantong identifies is called the "China Threat Thesis": this narrative suggests that China's economic and political rise represents a threat to the existing international world order.¹⁴³ This narrative suggests that China seeks to actively disrupt existing liberal institutions and norms.¹⁴⁴ Thus, the China Threat Thesis would suggest that China's support for the agreement is an assurance by Chinese leadership that China is a status quo power and does not seek to overthrow existing governance structures, and is interested in becoming a cooperative international power. This narrative further suggests that China's

142 Ibid, 39.

143 Pichamon Yeophantong, "Governing the World: China's Evolving Conceptions of Responsibility", 331.

144 Ibid, 331.

advocacy of the Paris Agreement is intended to signal to existing world powers, such as the United States, United Kingdom, France, and Germany, that China represents a constructive force on the world stage, rather than an assertive or destructive rising power.

China's commitment to the Paris Agreement and climate governance was affirmed in President Xi's speech presented at Davos. This is significant in several ways: first, President Xi affirmed his commitment to the Paris Agreement at the World Economic Forum, which reinforces the notion that climate governance is and *should be* an economic issue. Further, the conference is intended to be a forum for world leaders to communicate and collaborate on economic liberalization and integration, and Davos itself has become synonymous with the liberal world order.¹⁴⁵ China has not historically been accepted as a core driver of economic liberalization (largely pushed by the western Global North), nor has China demonstrated an interest in leading international governance.¹⁴⁶ Finally, President Xi is the first Chinese president to attend Davos, and has waited until the fifth year of his presidency to attend.¹⁴⁷ President Xi brought the largest Chinese delegation ever sent to Davos.¹⁴⁸ President Xi's speech, as well as the resources committed to the conference, indicates that China wants to be actively engaged in global governance 'rule setting', and signals to the Global North that China is satisfied with the current economic world order.¹⁴⁹

Likewise, following President Trump's withdrawal from the Paris Agreement, China released a joint statement with the European Union. EU Commissioner Arias Cañete stated that "the EU and China are joining forces to forge ahead on the implementation of the Paris

145 The Economist, "The New Davos Man: Xi Jinping Portrays China as a Rock of Stability", *The Economist*, January 21, 2017. Accessed May 15, 2017. <http://www.economist.com/news/china/21715035-does-he-really-want-be-global-leader-xi-jinping-portrays-china-rock-stability>

146 Ibid.

147 Ibid.

148 Ibid.

149 Ibid.

agreement and accelerate the global transition to clean energy.”¹⁵⁰ China’s support for the Paris Agreement, and the release of this joint statement signals that China is largely satisfied with global climate governance and liberal economic norms, and therefore is interested in being perceived as a status quo power, engaged in responsible governance.¹⁵¹ The reputational benefits of China’s support for the Paris Agreement are no doubt compounded by President Trump’s political alienation from other G7 world leaders.

However, China’s rise has been protracted since the 1990’s, and yet China has not outwardly supported internationally regulated climate governance until President Xi’s appointment. If the China threat thesis were the primary narrative that China seeks to challenge, it seems likely that China would have engaged in global governance far before 2015. Likewise, if China were truly supportive of multilateral institutions, we would expect to see China support most or all existing international institutions across the board. However, China has shifted support and resources toward ‘shadow institutions’ to govern other issue areas, such as the creation of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank and the One Belt, One Road initiative, which suggests that China is perhaps not as engaged in combatting the China Threat narrative.¹⁵² While President Xi’s speech undoubtedly signaled to the Global North that China is interested in playing a more active international role, I argue that the primary objective of Xi’s ‘responsible’ branding, as well as considerable resources, is to assure developing states in the Global South of China’s responsible rise.

150 Daniel Boffey, and Arthur Nelsen, "China and EU Strengthen Promise to Paris Deal with US Poised to Step Away", *The Guardian*, June 1, 2017. Accessed June 22, 2017. <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2017/may/31/china-eu-climate-lead-paris-agreement>.

151 Alastair Iain Johnston, "How New and Assertive Is China's New Assertiveness?", 31.

152 Sebastian Heilmann, Moritz Huotari, and Johannes Buckow, "China’s Shadow Foreign Policy: Parallel Structures Challenge the Established International Order", Report no. 18. Mercator Institute for China Studies, 2014. Accessed May 15, 2017.

http://www.merics.org/fileadmin/user_upload/downloads/China-Monitor/China_Monitor_No_18_en.pdf.

The third narrative that Pichamon Yeophantong identifies is what she calls the “China Responsibility Thesis”: given that China straddles a unique identity as both a Great Power and a developing state, China seeks to identify itself with both a leader and developing state, without alienating either group.¹⁵³ This narrative suggests that China’s foreign policy is not an attempt to respond to negative perceptions, but rather to cultivate a brand as a new kind of responsible power. While the design of the Paris Agreement allows China greater flexibility to meet commitments, and further entrenches the liberal economic order, the agreement also complements several foreign policy projects taken up in the last three years by China to signal that China is interested in behaving as a responsible power by shouldering the burden of peace and development in the Global South.

3.2 Reputation and Influence

China has invested considerable resources and expertise to signal responsible behavior to the Global South: in 2016, the State Council Information Office of the People’s Republic of China released a White Paper called “The Right to Development: China’s Philosophy, Practice and Contribution”. In the document, the Chinese leadership affirms that China “integrates the principle of universal application of human rights with the country’s reality”, and that “poverty is the biggest obstacle to human rights.”¹⁵⁴ The White Paper affirms the Chinese leadership’s continued commitment to fostering development, both domestic and abroad: this document further suggests that “China has a development mindset of balance and sustainability, regarding the harmonious development between humanity and nature, between economy and society, as a

153 Pichamon Yeophantong, "Governing the World: China's Evolving Conceptions of Responsibility", 331.

154 State Council for the People's Republic of China, "The Right to Development: China's Philosophy, Practice and Contribution", The White Paper. Last modified December 1, 2016. Accessed March 26, 2017.

http://english.gov.cn/archive/white_paper/2016/12/01/content_281475505407672.htm

new means of realizing and protecting the right to development.”¹⁵⁵ Published in Mandarin and English, the White Paper is accessible worldwide, through Chinese news media sites (Xinhuanet and China Daily are available on YouTube and English media sites), through the State Council website, as well as ChinaHumanRights.org. This indicates that the White Paper is intended for both domestic and foreign audiences.

Like the Paris Agreement, the White Paper affirms the sovereign right of states to develop natural resources.¹⁵⁶ The White Paper also emphasizes the importance of flexibility and accommodation for international environmental agreements, and affirms China’s commitment to national sovereignty.¹⁵⁷ This is important to most of the developing world, which are extremely wary of international involvement in the domestic affairs of other states.¹⁵⁸ The ‘win-win’ philosophy described the White Paper is part of a greater diplomatic strategy by the Chinese government to frame China’s economic rise as part of a harmonious world: the White Paper emphasizes the Chinese principles *Datong*, (“great harmony”) and *anju leye* (“living in peace and contentment”).¹⁵⁹ A key aspect of *Datong* is to respect the domestic affairs of other states.¹⁶⁰ Likewise, the White Paper highlights the importance of ‘equal opportunity for development’, and emphasizes that “all are entitled to participate in and share the benefits of development on an equal basis.”¹⁶¹ Further, the White Paper affirms China’s commitment to “mutual respect,

155 Ibid.

156 Ibid.

157 Ibid.

158 Stephen Chan, *The Morality of China in Africa*, New York, NY: Zed Books, 2013, 124.

159 State Council for the People's Republic of China, "The Right to Development: China's Philosophy, Practice and Contribution", The White Paper. Last modified December 1, 2016. Accessed March 26, 2017.

http://english.gov.cn/archive/white_paper/2016/12/01/content_281475505407672.htm

160 Stephen Chan, *The Morality of China in Africa*, 52.

161 State Council for the People's Republic of China, "The Right to Development: China's Philosophy, Practice and Contribution", The White Paper. Last modified December 1, 2016. Accessed March 26, 2017.

http://english.gov.cn/archive/white_paper/2016/12/01/content_281475505407672.htm

equality of treatment, win-win cooperation, and common development, and promotes the interests of its own people and the common interests of other peoples”, and that “China supports the developing countries, especially least developed countries” in mutual efforts to achieve emission reduction, as well as and development goals.¹⁶² The Chinese vision of development as a sovereign national right and ‘win-win’ cooperation is attractive to much of the Global South, and provides an alternative to western aid that has often stunted economic growth in developing countries, particularly in Africa.¹⁶³

As a formerly colonized state, China is sensitive to the concerns from much of the Global South about invasive liberal international governance.¹⁶⁴ China’s brand as a responsible environmental leader, but more importantly, as an economic partner, is particularly well received by many African countries, which view American and European investment and aid as exploitive and colonial.¹⁶⁵ In 2013 alone, China invested \$26 billion in large-scale infrastructure projects in both commodity-rich African countries, such as Nigeria and South Africa, as well as projects in commodity-poor countries, such as Ethiopia and Kenya.¹⁶⁶ China has also provided 13% of Africa’s total loans: unlike European and American loans and aid, Chinese infrastructure loans are non-concessional, meaning the loans are tied to market-based interest rates.¹⁶⁷ These loans are for-profit investments, and are made on the basis of mutual reciprocity and state-to-state partnership, unlike much western aid.¹⁶⁸ Likewise, the intent of the loans is to stimulate the local economy, rather than provide monetary aid. The Paris Agreement facilitates the China/Africa

162 Ibid.

163 Stephen Chan, *The Morality of China in Africa*, 124.

164 Ibid, 52.

165 Ibid, 129.

166 University of Pennsylvania, "China's Investments in Africa: What's the Real Story?", Knowledge at Wharton. Last modified January 19, 2016. Accessed April 3, 2017. <http://knowledge.wharton.upenn.edu/article/chinas-investments-in-africa-whats-the-real-story/>.

167 Ibid.

168 Stephen Chan, *The Morality of China in Africa*, 130.

partnership in several ways: the White Paper signals that China is committed to the equal right to development of sovereign states, and is willing to work in partnership for mutual gain. The Paris Agreement is thus part of a larger legitimation strategy to ingratiate the Chinese government to potential economic partners in the Global South.¹⁶⁹

In recent years, China has taken up several other projects in the Global South, particularly in Africa, as part of this ‘responsible power’ branding strategy. For example, since 2013 China has deployed over 600 troops to Mali as part of a UN mission to stabilize the Northern region, and support the Malian national government against rebel factions and terrorist organizations.¹⁷⁰ Unlike China’s previous deployments, such as in South Sudan, China has no significant infrastructure or investments in Mali.¹⁷¹ Likewise, there are only about 3,000 Chinese nationals in Mali, which is significantly less than elsewhere in Africa.¹⁷² Chinese leadership does not currently view the jihadist groups active in the Sahel and Maghreb to be a significant threat to China’s national security.¹⁷³ Given that Mali is a high-risk deployment, and that China has no significant national interest in Mali, China’s deployment to the region appears to be part of this larger branding strategy to signal to the Global South that China intends to be a ‘responsible’ power.

It is also significant to note that although China does not have infrastructure or investments in Mali, China is one of Mali’s largest export destination, and that in comparison to other African states, Malians tend to view China more favorably: the 2016 Afrobarometer Report

169 John G. Ikenberry, "The Future of Liberal World Order", *Japanese Journal of Political Science* 16, no. 3 (2015): 452.

170 Frans Paul van der Putten, "China’s Evolving Role in Peacekeeping and African Security: The Deployment of Chinese Troops for UN Force Protection in Mali", *Clingendael Netherlands Institute of International Relations*, 2015, 9.

171 Marc Lanteigne, "China’s Peacekeeping Policies in Mali: New Security Thinking or Balancing Europe?", Report no. 11. Working Paper Series. Berlin: Freie University, 2014, 10.

172 Frans Paul van der Putten, "China’s Evolving Role in Peacekeeping and African Security: The Deployment of Chinese Troops for UN Force Protection in Mali", 19.

173 *Ibid*, 19.

found that 92% of respondents reported favorable views of China.¹⁷⁴ The same report found that out of 36 African countries surveyed, China is, overall, perceived as having the greatest external influence in African countries (after former colonial powers).¹⁷⁵ As Joseph Nye suggests, positive perceptions of China is not the same as international influence, however engagement in collective action problems, such as peacekeeping or climate governance, allows China to project international legitimacy.¹⁷⁶ Nye further suggests that soft power relies on three resources: culture, political values, and foreign policy.¹⁷⁷ I argue that China has taken this third approach, and has taken up these international policies to project legitimacy/moral authority.

Indeed since 2012, China has expended considerable resources and expertise to convey its responsible behavior. Peacekeeping deployments, infrastructure and loan projects, as well as the White Paper on development are all examples of ‘responsible’ Great Power behavior that signal to the developing world in particular that China’s rise is benevolent. As the world’s largest carbon emitter, accounting for 27% of global emissions, China has faced significant criticism and pressure to reduce emissions over the last few years particularly by developing states in the Global South that are prone to desertification, or small island states that are most affected by sea level rise.¹⁷⁸ Climate change is also perceived to be the most significant threat for developing countries: in 2015, the Pew Research Center conducted a poll in over 40 countries to determine what global problem is perceived to be the greatest threat.¹⁷⁹ While much of the Global North (The United States, Canada, Australia, and Western Europe) suggested that the rise of ISIS is the

174 AfroBaroMeter, “China’s Growing Presence in Africa Wins Largely Positive Popular Reviews”, Report no. 122. 2016. Accessed May 15, 2. 2017. http://afrobarometer.org/sites/default/files/publications/Dispatches/ab_r6_dispatchno122_perceptions_of_china_in_africa1.pdf.

175 Ibid, 3.

176 Joseph S. Nye, "Public Diplomacy and Soft Power", 95.

177 Ibid, 96.

178 Raymond Cléménçon, "The Two Sides of the Paris Climate Agreement: Dismal Failure or Historic Breakthrough?", 7.

179 Jill Carle, “Climate Change Seen as Top Global Threat Americans, Europeans, Middle Easterners Focus on ISIS as Greatest Danger”, Pew Research Centre, 2015, 4.

greatest global threat, the Global South (countries in South America, Africa, and Asia-Pacific) overwhelmingly voted that climate change was the greatest global threat.¹⁸⁰ For example, 71% of French respondents stated ISIS to be the greatest global threat, while 48% were concerned about climate change.¹⁸¹ In Australia, 69% of respondents were concerned about the rise of ISIS, while only 37% were concerned about climate change.¹⁸² In comparison, 72% of respondents in the Philippines were concerned about climate change, while only 49% were concerned about the rise of ISIS.¹⁸³ Likewise, 74% of Ugandan respondents were concerned about climate change, while only 39% were concerned about ISIS.¹⁸⁴

In the days following the American withdrawal, Xinhuanet quoted the responses of several Global South leaders: for example, Tanzanian State Minister January Makamba stated that American withdrawal would cause "Africa [to] suffer significantly. Africa can not single-handedly fund climate change mitigation initiatives".¹⁸⁵ Likewise, on June 3, 2017, Xinhuanet reported the South African government's criticism of American withdrawal, and emphasized "that the international community regards climate change as the single biggest threat to wellbeing, health and socio-economic development facing humanity this century. Climate change negatively affects mostly the poor and most vulnerable."¹⁸⁶ On June 2, 2017, Xinhuanet published announcements from Tuvaluan Prime Minister Enele Sopoaga, who suggested that

180 Ibid, 4.

181 Ibid, 4.

182 Ibid, 4.

183 Ibid, 4.

184 Ibid, 4.

185 Xinhuanet. "Tanzania Disappointed by U.S. Decision to Withdraw from Paris Agreement." *Xinhuanet*, June 8, 2017. Accessed June 22, 2017. http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2017-06/08/c_136347992.htm.

186 Xinhuanet. "S. Africa Calls on U.S. to Reconsider Withdrawal from Paris Agreement." *Xinhuanet*, June 3, 2017. Accessed June 22, 2017. http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2017-06/03/c_136335831.htm.

American withdrawal was “really an act of abandoning small island countries like Tuvalu.”¹⁸⁷

These statements signal a growing anxiety in the Global South, particularly in countries vulnerable to sea-level rise or desertification, and China’s support for the Paris Agreement represents an important opportunity to signal to the developing world that China does not intend to leave them behind.

3.3 Material Interests

It is important to note that responsible behavior can, and often is, synonymous with a state’s self-interest, and this thesis does not suggest that China’s support for the Paris Agreement is purely ideational. China’s electricity is produced by a central, state-owned enterprise called State Grid Inc.¹⁸⁸ The State Grid announced in 2015 that the company would aim to create a global power grid that will transmit 80% renewable energy by 2050.¹⁸⁹ China’s domestic law requires that, at minimum, 16% of total energy be produced renewable through wind, biomass, solar, and hydropower.¹⁹⁰ The former chairman of the State Grid, Liu Zhenya, now heads the UN Global Energy Interconnection Development and Cooperation Organization, which will work in partnership with the corporation to create a global grid that would connect rural communities with major city centers.¹⁹¹ In a 2016 speech at the UN, Liu suggested that fossil fuel pollution and greenhouse gas emissions will exacerbate health and environmental concerns in the future, particularly in the Global South, therefore world leaders need a mechanism to dramatically

187 Xinhuanet. "Tuvalu Speaks out against U.S. Move on Paris Agreement." *Xinhuanet*, June 2, 2017. Accessed June 22, 2017.

http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2017-06/02/c_136334621.htm.

188 John Fialka, "Why China Is Dominating the Solar Industry", *Scientific American*. Last modified December 19, 2016. Accessed April 3, 2017. <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/why-china-is-dominating-the-solar-industry/>.

189 Ibid.

190 Elena Gladun and Dewan Ashan, "BRICs Countries' Political and Legal Participation in the Global Climate Change Agenda", 32.

191 John Fialka, "Why China Is Dominating the Solar Industry".

reduce greenhouse gas emissions in the long-term¹⁹². Liu advocated that the UN, in partnership with the Chinese State Grid, address energy consumption requirements and emission reduction through renewable energy adaption.¹⁹³

The global grid, what Liu calls the Smart Grid, will develop in three stages: first, individual states will redesign their own power grids to include local renewable energy production.¹⁹⁴ This will require a significant infrastructure investment into solar, wind, and nuclear technology.¹⁹⁵ China now produces the most renewable energy of any country in the world, and has pledged to produce 300 GW of solar and wind power by 2030.¹⁹⁶ It is therefore likely that China would be the primary supplier of renewable infrastructure for the Smart Grid. Liu suggested that the Smart Grid would have a “win-win” outcome, as the process will bring both more energy and energy-generating income to developing states.¹⁹⁷ Liu argued that, upon completion of the Smart Grid, “the world will turn into a peaceful and harmonious global village with sufficient energy, green lands and blue sky.”¹⁹⁸

The Paris Agreement supports the Smart Grid project in several ways: the GCF secures long-term funds to be used for climate infrastructure projects in developing states. The Smart Grid would ensure that these infrastructure projects will be connected to a global grid, and ensure that rural areas, as well as areas with poor capacity to produce renewable energy, have access to power.¹⁹⁹ The transformative flexibility of the ratchet-up mechanism secures this funding indefinitely, and ensures that a new agreement will not be negotiated in the future. Likewise,

192 Ibid.

193 Ibid.

194 Ibid.

195 Ibid.

196 Raymond Cléménçon, "The Two Sides of the Paris Climate Agreement: Dismal Failure or Historic Breakthrough?", 17.

197 John Fialka, "Why China Is Dominating the Solar Industry".

198 Ibid.

199 Ibid.

China's engagement and support of the agreement signals to developing states that China is interested in promoting economic growth and infrastructure development in the Global South and in rural areas that are typically overlooked by western investors.²⁰⁰ The Paris Agreement thus serves China's interests abroad in several ways: the Agreement secures and maintains a market for renewable energy into the future, and allows infrastructure advancement to take place in new markets in the Global South. The Green Climate Fund will provide a stable source of financing for developing countries to invest in renewable energy infrastructure projects, and the Smart Grid will ensure that these developing countries have access to a reliable energy grid. Therefore, the Paris Agreement, in tandem with the Smart Grid project, reinforces economic interdependence, particularly in the Global South, which are projected to be the primary recipients of energy from the Smart Grid. Likewise, the Agreement secures stable funding for renewable energy projects, which China stands to benefit from.

Likewise, the One Belt One Road initiative, announced during President Xi's visit to Kazakhstan and Indonesia in 2013, will link the 'Silk Road Economic Belt' and the 'Maritime Silk Road of the Twenty First Century' to create a trade route between the West and the East, with China at its hub.²⁰¹ While the initiative is still in its infancy, and it is too soon to tell what this ambitious initiative will actually look like, or if it will indeed materialize, Hong Yu suggests that the primary objective of the initiative is that "China is keen to help Asian countries to modernize their infrastructure and improve cross-border transport and other crucial infrastructure facilities. This in turn will help China to forge strong bilateral trade and economic integration

200 Stephen Chan, *The Morality of China in Africa*, 55.

201 Hong Yu, "Motivation behind China's 'One Belt, One Road' Initiatives and Establishment of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank", *Journal of Contemporary China* 26, no. 105 (2017): 353.

with its Asian neighbors”.²⁰² Further, the Silk Road will give Chinese goods and services access to emerging markets, and better integrate China’s eastern provinces, such as Xinjiang and Yunnan, into the global market.²⁰³ The Paris Agreement represents a significant opportunity to ingratiate China to its developing neighbors to secure regional economic development and integration. Given that the Paris Agreement is extremely flexible, and does not require strict commitments from China, the Paris Agreement is an effective forum to secure economic and reputational gains without incurring significant costs.

202 Ibid, 357.

203 Ibid, 358.

Chapter 4: Conclusions

I argue that China's support of the Paris Agreement is not the product of 'social learning' or the internalization of environmental protection, as suggested by Dimitrov.²⁰⁴ Rather, China's support for the Paris Agreement is to preserve and further entrench the liberal economic norms embedded in previous climate negotiations. If China were truly 'socialized' into multilateral institutions, we would expect to see China support international climate agreements or protocols in the absence of material gains. Given that China has shifted support and resources toward 'shadow institutions' to govern other issue areas, such as the creation of Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, it does not seem likely that China has been fully 'socialized' to support multilateralism across the board. Likewise, if environmental or climate protection had been 'socially learned' by China, we would expect to have seen China support more rigorous and less flexible commitment types at the Paris negotiations. Given that the agreement ensures flexibility for China's emission commitments, as well as secures long term funding for Chinese renewable energy, it is unlikely that norm internalization or environmental 'social learning' can explain China's support for the agreement. Socialization is extremely difficult to disprove, as if a state has been truly socialized, the effects of the process will be invisible. However, given that the agreement represents significant material and reputational gains for China, I argue that President Xi's continued support for the Paris Agreement is more likely the product of strategy, rather than socialization, and can be interpreted as support for existing liberal economic order. Therefore, this thesis does not suggest that China has no interest in environmental protection, but rather that there is insufficient evidence to suggest that China has been socialized into climate governance.

204 Sebastian Heilmann, Moritz Huotari, and Johannes Buckow, "China's Shadow Foreign Policy: Parallel Structures Challenge the Established International Order", Report no. 18. Mercator Institute for China Studies, 2014. Accessed May 15, 2017.

http://www.merics.org/fileadmin/user_upload/downloads/China-Monitor/China_Monitor_No_18_en.pdf

The Paris Agreement does not effectively constrain individual state behavior: the institutional flexibility of the Agreement compromises environmental outcomes to preserve future economic growth. Likewise, the Agreement serves as a benchmark for ‘responsible’ governance, and empowers states to commit to lenient, achievable, and voluntary emission reduction targets. Domestic audiences and global civil society are not likely to be able or willing to hold national governments accountable, and thus the Paris Agreement represents a significant compromise on environmental outcomes to preserve economic growth. Despite these shortcomings, the Agreement does do ‘work’ for its signatories: China has used the Paris Agreement as part of a legitimation strategy to brand itself as both a responsible leader in international governance, as well as a driver of economic development in the Global South. The Paris Agreement frames development goals as coupled with environmental outcomes: this has instrumental value for Chinese leadership, as the agreement secures market for renewable energy infrastructure. Likewise, the agreement signals China’s peaceful and harmonious rise as an ascendant economic power. The Paris Agreement is thus an ineffective environmental tool, but an effective legitimation strategy for China to endear itself toward other states, particularly developing states in the Global South.

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