



Citation for published version:

Sun, Y & Yu, B 2022, 'Greening China's Belt and Road Initiative: From Norm Localization to Norm Subsidiarity?', *Global Environmental Politics*. https://doi.org/10.1162/glep_a_00685

DOI:

[10.1162/glep_a_00685](https://doi.org/10.1162/glep_a_00685)

Publication date:

2022

Document Version

Peer reviewed version

[Link to publication](#)

Accepted version. Final published version can be found here, Yixian Sun, Bowen Yu; Greening China's Belt and Road Initiative: From Norm Localization to Norm Subsidiarity?. *Global Environmental Politics* 2022; doi: https://doi.org/10.1162/glep_a_00685

University of Bath

Alternative formats

If you require this document in an alternative format, please contact:
openaccess@bath.ac.uk

General rights

Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the public portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

Take down policy

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

Greening China's Belt and Road Initiative: From Norm Localization to Norm Subsidiarity?

Yixian Sun and Bowen Yu*

[Accepted version, forthcoming in *Global Environmental Politics*]

Abstract

From 2015, the Chinese government began to actively promote eco-sustainability in the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). China's efforts to green the BRI have evolved from top-level vision statements to various specific guidelines and governance initiatives. What political forces have driven such changes? Bringing together theories of norm localization, norm subsidiarity, and policy deliberation, we argue that China's move towards green BRI began as a norm localization dynamic, through which entrepreneurs of environmental norms took advantage of the open policy space created by China's top leaders, who carried the ambition to make the BRI inclusive, novel, and sustainable. After adopting a broad norm on environmental stewardship, different state bureaucracies began to create governance tools, which reflect both procedural and operational norms for greening the BRI. On procedural norms, a novel rule-making methodology emphasizing inclusive dialogue with host countries has emerged. This norm subsidiarity dynamic was driven both by top leaders' pursuit of international leadership and by pre-existing local norms guiding South-South cooperation. On operational norms, different Chinese actors follow their preferences to localize existing international standards or develop new ones. By examining this dynamic and complex process, the paper sheds light on the forces shaping the present and future environmental governance of China's overseas engagement.

Key Words: Belt and Road Initiative, Ecological Sustainability, Environmental Governance, China, Norms

* The authors are listed in alphabetical order and contributed equally. Bowen Yu serves as the corresponding author (E-mail: bowenyu@fudan.edu.cn). The authors thank Chenyang Ruan, a master's student in the School of International Studies of Peking University, for his research assistance. They also thank Joanna Lewis, Wei Shen, Thomas Hale, Chuyu Liu, and Ying Xia and other participants in an online workshop in June 2021 to comment on an earlier draft. The authors are grateful for the constructive feedback of the anonymous reviewers and the editors of GEP. Bowen Yu acknowledges financial support from Shanghai Philosophy and Social Science Planning Project (grant number: 2020EGJ001).

1. Introduction

In 2013, the Chinese government launched the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) as a platform for global and regional cooperation focusing on infrastructure development, trade, finance, policy coordination, and people-to-people exchange. Since then, many researchers have raised concerns regarding negative environmental impacts of large-scale infrastructure development brought by the Initiative, and stressed the need for China to introduce stronger regulatory frameworks that promote ecological sustainability (hereafter “eco-sustainability”) within the BRI (Ascensão et al. 2018; Lechner et al. 2018). Since 2015, China has made many efforts to govern the BRI’s environmental impacts, which are reflected at three levels including setting broad policy goals, developing governance methodologies, and making operational rules and standards.

First, the central government published several high-level documents, most notably the “Visions and Actions on Jointly Building Silk Road Economic Belt and 21st Century Maritime Silk Road” (2015) (hereafter “Visions and Actions”), which show the goal to treat environmental stewardship as an indispensable target of the BRI (Coenen et al. 2020; Zhou et al. 2018). Second, regarding the methodology to design substantial rules and policies, China has stressed a “dialogue-based” approach, anchored on inclusive collective deliberation and innovation by China, host countries, and other international stakeholders (Tao 2020). A typical example of this approach is the BRI International Green Development Coalition (BRIGC), a policy dialogue platform co-hosted by the Ministry of Ecology and Environment (MEE) and international partners from both the Global South and the Global North. By emphasizing the voices of and cooperation between developing countries, providing host country governments with opportunities to participate in the decision-making processes, and allowing flexibility in the rule

adoption, this rule-making methodology differs from that of the West.¹ Third, at the operational level, we are observing debates and uncertainties regarding some critical issues for environmental governance of the BRI, such as new areas of cooperation, standards for project design and implementation, and rules of development financing. There have been several examples of such developments such as guidelines on environmental protection of foreign investments issued by the MEE and Ministry of Commerce (MOFCOM).

Hence, Beijing's green BRI policy seems not just a rhetorical strategy. Instead, by building new institutions and redesigning projects, China has shown a clear shift to green development in its overseas engagement. China's rapid move towards green BRI seems to contrast with the limited attention it had given to environmental impacts of its overseas activities. Through the lens of constructivist International Relations theories, Beijing's move towards green BRI can be seen as a process of engagement with norms regarding appropriate ways to govern environmental impacts of international development cooperation and investment adopted by Western actors like the World Bank and the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (Park 2005).² In this process of normative engagement, Chinese policymakers have not only adopted key elements of some international norms—a “norm localization” dynamic, but also actively incorporated Chinese ideas—a “norm subsidiarity” dynamic (Acharya 2011).

What has led China to gradually develop this green BRI policy, which concerns not only the import of existing environmental norms but also attempts to construct new ones? We argue

¹ Although Western donors and multilateral institutions has adopted the “ownership principle” in the project design since 2005, the processes of making environmental and social safeguards have remained a top-down process with limited inputs from developing countries.

² By “norms,” we refer to a standard of appropriate behavior for actors with a given identity (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998).

that different types of norm dynamics exist in three phases of China's green BRI policy: initially, the green BRI development was driven by the localization of the international norm on environmental stewardship due to Chinese top leaders' ambition to make the BRI a flagship program of international cooperation; after this broad goal had been set, the norm subsidiarity dynamic kicked in, which was largely driven by top leaders' strategic ambition and pre-existing local norms guiding South-South cooperation; and finally for the development of operational rules and standards, different bureaucracies have followed their preferences to localize existing international norms or develop new norms.³

We proceed as follows. After reviewing the literature on green BRI, we introduce our analytical framework building on Acharya's (2011) framework of norm localization and norm subsidiarity. Considering China's political context, we further stress the importance of local deliberation—a process of collective policy deliberation among top leaders and political actors in functional areas—in triggering the localization dynamic and (potentially) transforming the localization dynamic into the subsidiarity dynamic. We then conduct a theory-guided process-tracing study on the evolution of China's efforts to green the BRI. By unpacking the logic of China's green BRI policy, the paper advances our understanding of China's strategy for governing environmental impacts of its global activities, and also China's engagement with international environmental norms.

2. Literature on Environmental Governance of the BRI

The rapid expansion of the BRI has generated many studies by environmental scientists to identify the scope and location of BRI projects and assess their biodiversity and climate impacts

³ Our study seeks to explain norm dynamics underpinning China's green BRI policy, instead of the policy's effects. While recent evidence shows that China has significantly reduced its overseas investments in high-polluting projects (e.g., coal-fired power plants), it is too early to identify the causal impacts of the green BRI policy on such changes.

(Ascensão et al. 2018; Hughes 2019; Ng et al. 2020). In comparison, the question of how China governs environmental impacts of its overseas activities under the BRI has been rarely examined in the literature on environmental politics. Among a few studies, some indicate the lack of capacity and knowledge for the Chinese government to measure and monitor environmental risks (Hale et al. 2020); others highlight the lack of binding environmental policies in China's regulations for overseas investments (K. S. Gallagher and Qi 2021; Harlan 2020). However, given that the Chinese government has made a significant effort in greening the BRI since 2015, it is important to understand the political dynamics that have made this major policy shift possible.

Two broad explanations of China's move towards green BRI can be drawn from existing discussions. First, from an international relations perspective, some argue that China's position has been driven by criticisms from outside including actors in both the West and host countries of BRI projects (Coenen et al. 2020; Jiang 2019; Lee 2021). This argument is plausible but cannot fully explain China's recent policy changes. As we will show, international pressure on the environmental governance of China's international development cooperation (IDC) and overseas investment emerged long before the launch of the BRI, but no major policy changes took place during that time. Moreover, if China's policy is driven by host countries' rising environmental concerns, Beijing can simply better monitor Chinese companies' compliance with host countries' environmental regulations, rather than develop a comprehensive governance system for green BRI. Therefore, one must pay greater attention to the dynamics of policy development within China.

Second, considering domestic drivers of green BRI policy, one may argue that China's efforts simply align with the country's recent ambition to lead global environmental and climate

governance (Finamore 2018; Shen and Xie 2018). We agree that strategic ambitions served as a powerful force driving the green BRI policy, but it falls short in explaining the development of specific norms. In addition to Beijing's political motives, it may also be in China's economic interests to build a green BRI by promoting strategic industries such as renewable energies and preventing Chinese overseas investments from becoming stranded assets (K. P. Gallagher 2018). However, as green industries have become a pillar of China's economic development only recently, their political influence cannot be overstated (Shen and Power 2017). This explanation also cannot shed light on key features of the system that China has built to govern the BRI's environmental impacts.

All in all, the existing research cannot fully explain what has driven Chinese policymakers to develop the green BRI policy. To fill this gap, we need to draw on theories of norms dynamics and social learning and conceptualize the Chinese government's efforts to green the BRI as an evolving process, involving dynamic interactions among different actors.

3. Theoretical Framework: Between Norm Localization and Norm Subsidiarity

As China's development of green BRI is based on interactions between local and global norms, constructivist international relations theories on norms diffusion are a useful analytic tool to answer our research question. While early theories of international norm dynamics focused largely on how international norm entrepreneurs spread existing norms (i.e., displacing local norms) by pressuring, teaching, and persuasion (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998), Acharya's (2004) norm localization theory improves our understanding of local norm dynamics by emphasizing local norm-takers' agency and creativity. That said, the localization theory still does not cover all the possible trajectories of local norm change. Another type of local norm dynamic can exist:

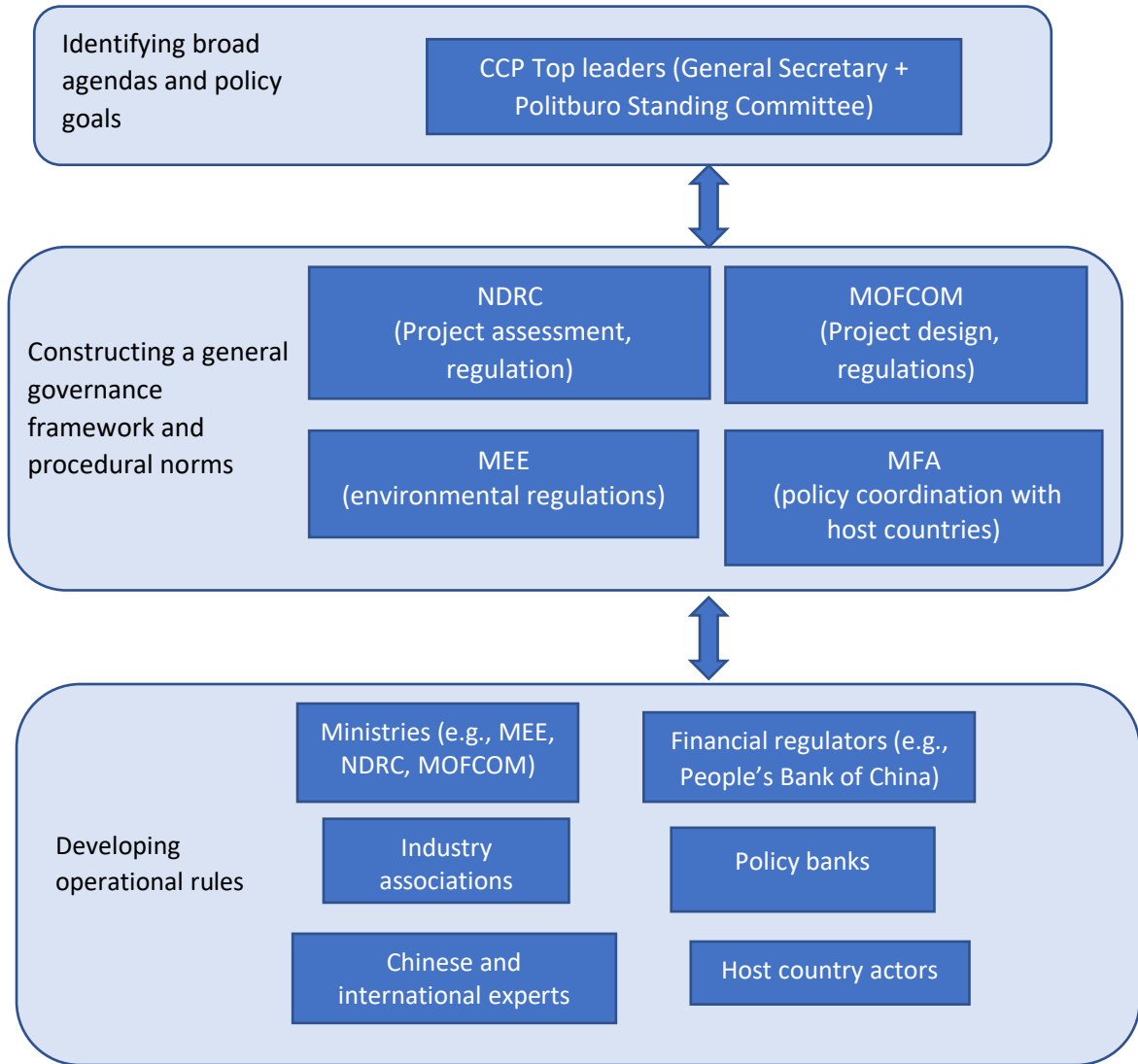
even when orthodox local norms collapse, local actors can still creatively “re-construct foreign norms” using local knowledge and thus “shape the emergence of new norms” (Pu 2012, 349). This dynamic is labelled “norm subsidiarity” in Acharya’s (2011) later work. Building on the understanding of these two types of norm dynamics, we further argue that localization and subsidiarity dynamics can take place in a sequence. This is especially possible in functional areas where a package of norms can be divided into general goals, procedural norms, and operational norms (Yu 2019). Accordingly, local actors may only adopt general ideas about an issue (e.g., environmental stewardship for overseas activities), but then try to incorporate local ideational elements while developing operational norms (e.g., specific rules to guarantee eco-sustainability in project design and implementation).

If local actors have the agency to choose between localizing international norms and making subsidiary norms, what determines their choices? Drawing upon literature on cognitive evolution (Adler 2019) and policy deliberation (Yu 2022), we argue that what makes the transition between the two norm dynamics possible is local actors’ collective deliberation (referred to as “local deliberation”). This deliberation process can be a trigger for localization and also a powerful engine driving actors to create new norms.

Local deliberation is a mechanism of local norm change centered on local communities. Therefore, it is helpful to first identify key actors in China’s policy community under our investigation (see Figure 1). In China’s decision-making processes, the Chinese Communist Party’s (CCP) top leaders hold the ultimate decision-making authority on state affairs. However, they tend to provide only broad slogans or formulations on national agendas and let bureaucrats at national and subnational levels identify ways for policy implementation (Ang 2016; Stern and O’Brien 2012). Although Xi Jinping has significantly recentralized his power, this policy-

making model continues to dominate in the BRI, which is characterized by vision setting at the top and rule-making by functional bureaucracies including NDRC (National Development and Reform Commission), MOFCOM, MEE, and MFA (Ministry of Foreign Affairs) (Ang 2019). This is not to say that non-state and international actors have no influence at all – they can certainly feed new ideas to key bureaucracies, but their influence should be conditioned by the political space defined by top leaders and their engagement with relevant government agencies (Guttman et al. 2021; Sun 2022).

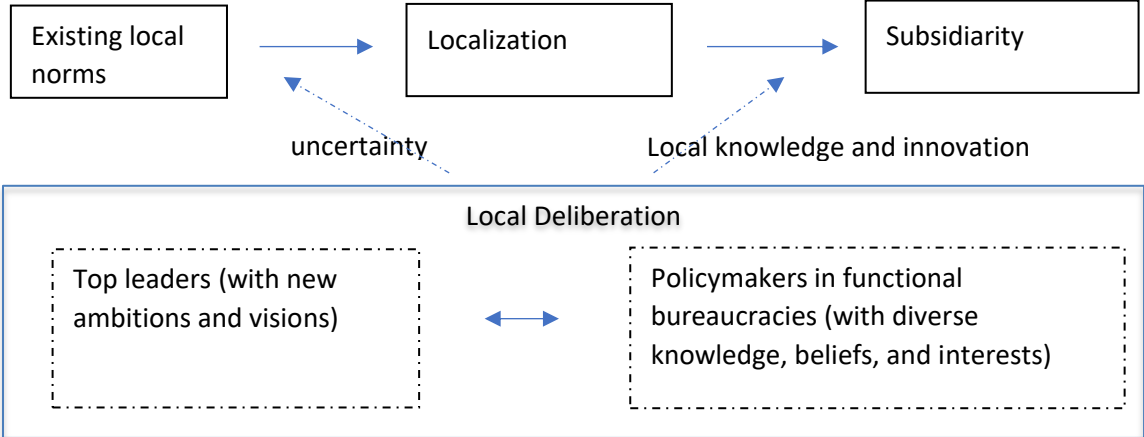
Figure 1 The Policy Circle for the BRI



Given these policy-making processes, Figure 2 shows the intervening role of local deliberation in local norm dynamics. The framework is both about the general logic of local norm change and adapted to the characteristics of China’s policy circle introduced above. First, the theories on cognitive change generally agree that demand for new norms is triggered by local actors’ growing uncertainty about the orthodox norm (Schmidt 2014; Hoffmann 2011). Such uncertainty can be caused by international pressure or incremental learning, but may also emerge

internally from a country. Existing policies may generate negative performance (e.g., failure of project implementation) forcing policymakers in functional bureaucracies to reflect upon local norms (Thisted and Thisted 2020). In the Chinese context, uncertainty in the policy circle may also originate from top leaders, who develop new mandates, new definitions of the problem, and new measurements of success (He and Feng 2013). In this situation, top leaders’ new thinking renders existing norms obsolete, opening the door for norm localization.

Figure 2 Local deliberation and local norm dynamics



Beyond triggering localization effects, local deliberation, under some conditions, can also serve as an engine of norm subsidiarity. On one hand, top leaders’ changing agenda can not only promote transnational learning but also drive local-centric norm innovation, especially when leaders have strong strategic ambitions (Hu 2019). As some scholars argued, when an emerging power has the strategic ambition to change the existing international normative structure, it can do so using distinctive local cultural and political values (Schweller and Pu 2011). Acharya (2011, 100) also finds that local norm innovation can be driven by countries’ motivation “to challenge their exclusion or marginalization from global norm-making processes” and “great power hypocrisy.” In the BRI case, in pursuit of an alternative model of international

development and building leadership in global governance, China may seek to embed the non-conditionality principle into the BRI's governance system.

On the other hand, besides top leaders' ambitions, beliefs and interests of bureaucrats in functional issue areas play an equally important role in driving norm subsidiarity attempts. The pre-condition of norm subsidiarity (especially on operation norms) is that local actors must have seeds of novel ideas to build upon (Schmidt 2014; Schindler and Wille 2015). Local actors may find novel policy ideas by borrowing transferable local ideas which effectively guide the governance of other similar issue areas (Yu 2021). For example, practitioners in IDC can borrow project implementation and development financing experiences from domestic experiences (Chen 2020). If such seeds of novel ideas exist, local actors can have more agency in evaluating different ideas' potential. Facing various candidate ideas, policymakers conduct policy experiments and select the idea showing the most promise. The evaluation and selection processes are then heavily influenced by contingent factors like interpretation and framing: promoters for candidate ideas can construct and try to sell specific interpretations of events in favor of their preferred idea (Yu 2021, 2022). Additionally, bureaucrats' political calculations matter, as they may champion a proposal providing greater political authority and resources (Mertha 2006).

Therefore, local norm change is a dynamic process filled with uncertainty and idea competition. Norm subsidiarity is possible when the aforementioned conditions—leaders' ambition, transferable local ideas generating satisfying performance, bureaucratic endorsement—are met. However, some local agencies may simply choose to import international norms due to ideational and political reasons. In this way, the logic of local norm change described here is not entirely under top leaders' control.

In summary, to explain China's engagement with international norms, our framework adapts the constructivist theories of norm dynamics to the Chinese context, integrating logics of norm localization and subsidiarity with local deliberation. While the framework's emphasis on top leaders and bureaucracies is most suitable for the Chinese context, we believe the general logic of local deliberation, also has relevance to other contexts.

The empirical study applies the process-tracing method to examine the explanatory power of our framework (Bennett and Checkel 2014). We look for evidence of three observable implications: 1) China's embracement of environmental norms in overseas engagement emerged after the announcement of its top leaders' new strategic thinking; 2) the creation of new norms is linked to top leaders' ambition and pre-existing local norms; and 3) functional bureaucracies created specific policies and rules reflecting norms most suitable for their beliefs and interests. Our data consists of primarily the Chinese government's official documents on regulations of IDC and overseas investments, publications in Chinese by researchers affiliated with government agencies, speeches of the Chinese top leaders, and also interviews with government advisors.

4. From Bilateral Development Cooperation to the BRI: Partial Adoption of the Eco-sustainability Norm

This section seeks to explain why China had been reluctant to set environmental rules for its bilateral IDC and investment activities but later turned to emphasize eco-sustainability in the BRI. By tracing major policy changes, we elaborate on key local dynamics, especially changing development views and the top leaders' ambitions attached to the BRI.

4.1 Before the BRI: Weak Environmental Rules for China's IDC

China has a long history of conducting IDC, but has for a long time, been criticized for lack of attention to environmental risks of its projects. China's bilateral IDC was featured with a focus

on infrastructure development like roads, railways, and energy infrastructure (Foster, et al. 2009; State Council Information Office 2014). In the meantime, China has been reluctant to design and apply strict environmental safeguards. It was not until 2014 that the MOFCOM—the main regulatory agency of foreign aid—first mentioned environmental issues in a ministry-level document: the “Measures for the Administration of Foreign Aid (Trial) (2014).” However, this document contained no specific environmental rules and measures (MOFCOM 2014). The records of environmental risk management were better with two Chinese policy banks (i.e., Export-Import Bank and China Development Bank), both adopting guidelines requiring companies to conduct environmental impact assessments (Gellers and Jeffords 2019). Nevertheless, those policies still only emphasized following regulations of recipient countries, potentially creating problems in countries with weak environmental governance systems (Dollar 2016).

China’s environmental regulations on overseas commercial investments were summarized by the MOFCOM’s (2013) “Guidelines for Environmental Protection in Foreign Investment and Cooperation.” In addition, the China Banking Regulatory Commission upgraded its Green Credit Guidelines in 2012, which sought to strengthen regulations on Chinese banks’ overseas lending. However, these documents also mainly required Chinese enterprises to follow recipient countries’ regulations (Voituriez et al. 2019). In fact, China’s overall attitude to environmental safeguards was passive. For China, it was the recipient country’s government that was responsible for setting safeguard rules (Bräutigam 2011, 761).

China’s approach to governing the environmental impacts of IDC and overseas investments was underpinned by both the non-conditionality norm and the passive governance style of the MOFCOM. On IDC, China has strictly followed the non-conditionality principle during the

project cycle, which puts recipient countries in the driver's seat even in designing projects (Kopiński and Sun 2014). Meanwhile, Chinese policymakers treated IDC as a purely technical business. During a project's feasibility study, factors considered seldom go beyond the availability of financial resources and technical expertise (Li et al. 2014). Such a passive governance style has become a habit of the Chinese policy body for IDC (D. Zhang and Smith 2017). Furthermore, because the project evaluation focused narrowly on individual projects' quality rather than their broader impacts, negative results of projects were often interpreted as caused either by implementation errors or by recipient countries' misuse of Chinese aid (Wei 2011; Li et al. 2014). Consequently, China's strong confidence in its practices constrained transnational diffusion of environmental norms. In the 2000s, both the OECD-DAC and the World Bank tried to socialize China through co-hosting communication and capacity-building events (e.g., the China–DAC Study Group, the World Bank's training sessions) (Kitano 2014). However, such interactions did not change China's attitude towards Western norms and rules as environmental safeguards for China's overseas activities remained weak.

4.2 More Active Environmental Governance, The BRI, and Norm Localization

China's attitude to eco-sustainability in its international economic activities underwent a major change in 2015. In that year, the MOFCOM, NDRC, and MFA co-issued the aforementioned "Visions and Actions" document, stating the goals to "promote ecological progress in conducting investment and trade, increase cooperation in conserving eco-environment, protecting biodiversity, and tackling climate change" (NDRC et al. 2015). This high-level document reflected Beijing's willingness to actively set environmental goals and take more actions in governing its overseas activities. Additionally, in 2015 and 2016, the MOFCOM published two policy documents seeking to strengthen the environmental regulations of IDC projects during the

feasibility study and construction stages (MOFCOM 2015; 2016). To understand this major policy shift, we must examine what contextual factors had changed before 2015. Two factors stand out in our investigation: Beijing's embracement of environmental governance (both domestically and internationally) and, more importantly, the pressure for policy innovation on China's overseas engagement generated by the top leaders' ambition with the BRI.

Since the 2010s, driven by top leaders' changing views, policy reflections on environmental diplomacy, and the worsened air pollution problem, China has increasingly viewed environmental governance as an essential component of development and played a positive role in multilateral environmental negotiations (Stokes et al. 2016; Ong 2012). Domestically, the 12th Five-year-plan issued in 2013 set targets of carbon intensity reduction for the first time. Internationally, China showed early support for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and actively cooperated with the US in climate negotiations in developing the Paris Agreement since 2013 (MFA 2013; Dimitrov 2016). Further, in 2015, the Fifth Plenary Session of the 18th CPC Central Committee set "green development" as one of the "Five Development Concepts." All these changes have made Chinese policymakers more active in engaging with international environmental norms, creating a favorable political environment for greening the BRI.

Beyond more active engagement in environmental governance, Beijing's strategic ambition with the BRI served as a more powerful trigger for policy innovation and learning. As a comprehensive policy framework, the BRI carries not only specific economic and strategic tasks but an ambition to "perfect the global development model and global governance" (Xinhua 2018).⁴ According to the "Vision and Actions" published by Beijing in 2015, the BRI is a "positive endeavor to seek new models of international cooperation and global governance"

⁴ Author's interview with an official of the NDRC, phone call, May 2022.

(NDRC et al. 2015). Attaching these functions to the BRI effectively changed the definition of “success” and “failure” of China’s overseas activities. Before the BRI, China’s governance of IDC and outward investments was considered successful as long as a large number of projects were built.⁵ Since the BRI, as researchers of the MEP indicated in a policy report, projects are required to generate visible benefits for sustainable development to ensure the BRI’s credibility and protect China’s international reputation (Dong et al. 2016). This new understanding pushed policymakers to pay greater attention to top-level design, project coordination, and regulation. Such a shift in bureaucratic practice was reflected by the MOFCOM’s comprehensive IDC reform in 2014, which for the first time asserted the importance of “macro-policy research, regulation building, optimizing project planning and evaluation” (MOFCOM 2014). Hence, Chinese top leaders’ ambition to develop new models of international development through the BRI served as a solid ground for new norms to be brought for governing China’s overseas engagement.

As the space for policy reflections and innovation opened, channels were created to bring in international norms and rules for the governance of BRI projects. First, under the broad agenda of promoting sustainable development through the BRI, Chinese researchers from universities and government-sponsored think tanks started critically reviewing traditional IDC’s pitfalls, including projects’ negative environmental impacts. The literature on BRI’s environmental risks in Chinese surged in 2015. Many of these works stress that policymakers should pay attention to foreign observers’ worries and criticisms (K. Wang and Ni 2019). This view was accepted by governmental officials and advisors according to records of more than 40 interviews conducted in early 2015 (Beijing Normal University et al. 2015) and meeting records of the BRI

⁵ Author’s interview with a researcher of the MOFCOM, phone call, May 2022.

Construction Leadership Group of the Ministry of Environmental Protection (MEP, predecessor of the MEE) (MEP 2016). Furthermore, studies conducted by researchers affiliated with government agencies introduced to China's policy circle environmental safeguards of international development projects used by developed countries and international organizations (Cao 2016). Second, to fulfil the BRI's policy coordination task, Chinese policymakers actively seek to link the BRI to major international environmental regimes like the Paris Agreement and the SDGs (Yu and Wang 2021). In 2016, China signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) for building green BRI with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), laying out several areas of cooperation such as sharing concepts and practices and conducting joint research.⁶ Through these policy coordination efforts, designers of the BRI were further informed of existing international eco-sustainability norms.

To summarize, the norm of environmental stewardship called attention of Chinese policymakers given China's increasing emphasis on environmental protection domestically, its commitment to make BRI a model program for international cooperation, and its active engagement with the international community. Those conditions themselves generated and were also shaped by local deliberation in China's policy circle. However, in the early days of the BRI, no policy document provided concrete rules. Hence, by 2015, Chinese norm entrepreneurs were successful only in making eco-sustainability a priority for the BRI. Chinese policymakers still took caution in adopting operational norms. In this sense, from the very beginning, China's engagement with international environmental norms should be categorized as localization rather than displacement.

5. Greening the BRI since 2017: Mixing International and Chinese Norms?

⁶ See the MoU's full text at shorturl.at/sCFHP.

The process of greening the BRI has been further strengthened since 2017 as the term “Green Belt and Road” began to appear in China’s official discourse with the emergence of a series of new policies and initiatives (see Table 1). As the list shows, beyond stating broad policy goals (i.e., environmental stewardship) in BRI, Chinese policymakers began to develop more substantial rules and policies. Regarding procedural rules, they have constructed a dialogue-based, inclusive approach to policy development, which emphasizes input of host governments. On operational rules, policymakers have sought to promote new standards and good practices based on China’s experiences (e.g., by encouraging the development of Chinese standards) (Tao 2020), while staying open to international rules. Hence, since 2017, norm localization and norm subsidiarity co-exist in China’s efforts to green the BRI. Below we trace the process of these developments and their drivers.

Table 1. Major policy guidance and initiatives for greening the BRI

| Time | Initiatives or policy plans | Leads | Key features | Types of norms |
|-------------|---|--|---|--|
| 2017.04 | Guidance on Promoting Green Belt and Road Initiative | NDRC, MEP, MFA, and MOFCOM | A general plan of green BRI development in line with the SDGs and Paris Agreement, with reference to ecological civilization and the community with a shared future for mankind | Broad policy goals |
| 2017.05 | The Belt and Road Ecological and Environmental Cooperation Plan | MEP | Identifying a governance framework for Green BRI | Broad policy goals; procedural norms |
| 2017.09 | Environmental Risk Management Initiative for China's Overseas Investment | CGFC, major Chinese associations on banking and investment, and MEP | Guidance on green investment in the BRI to Chinese and international financial institutions | Procedural norms (multi-stakeholder rule-making process); operational rules, standards, and good practices |
| 2018.11 | The Green Investment Principles for the Belt and Road | CGFC and City of London Green Finance Initiative | | |
| 2019.04 | The Belt and Road Initiative International Green Development Coalition (also the BRI Green Development Institute) | MEE (previously MEP), with UNEP, WRI, and other international partners | A platform of policy dialogue and communication, environmental knowledge and information, and green technology exchange and transfer | Procedural norms (i.e., dialogue-based, inclusive platform) |
| 2020-2021 | Green Development Guidance for BRI projects | BRIGC | Guides on green financing and transportation infrastructure | Operational rules, standards, and codes of conduct |

5.1 Enhanced Top-level Push for Green BRI and Norm Innovation

In April 2017, the term “Green BRI” appeared for the first time in the document “Guidance on Promoting Green Belt and Road” co-published by four ministries—MEP, MFA, NDRC, and MOFCOM (MEP et al. 2017). This guidance presents a general plan for promoting eco-sustainability and green development in the BRI, requiring to “incorporate eco-environment protection into all aspects and whole process of the BRI building” (MEP et al. 2017). This high-level document not only states China’s intention to participate in global environmental governance more actively but also highlights two strategic ambitions driving green BRI endeavor: one is promoting “the ecological civilization philosophy”—a concept treated as Beijing’s major normative invention in the environment realm (Pan 2003; Hansen et al. 2018);⁷ another is forging “the community with a shared future for mankind” —a key foreign policy concept proposed by Xi Jinping. These two rationales indicate the presence of strategic ambition to construct subsidiary norms in greening the BRI.

Soon after the publication of this guidance, in the opening ceremony of the first Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation (BRF) in 2017, Xi Jinping stated that the BRI “should pursue the new vision of green development” and “strengthen cooperation in ecological and environmental protection and build a sound ecosystem so as to realize the goals set by the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.” (Xi 2017) Echoing the guidance published a month earlier, Xi’s speech sent a clear message of double objectives of the green BRI – supporting

⁷ On the official articulation of ecological civilization, China’s State Council published a central document that emphasizes fostering system innovations (especially technological innovation) but also incorporating social change and governance reform (Geall and Ely 2018).

global environmental governance while providing new visions and solutions for green development led by China.

The above high-level statements were a natural extension of Chinese leaders' strategic ambition in foreign activities, that was to provide more "Chinese intellects" and "Chinese solutions" to global governance: in February 2017, Xi delivered a speech at the National Security Work Conference stating for the first time that China needs to lead the international community to perfect and reform the current international system.⁸ Under the enhanced push from the top leaders, a new trend in building green BRI started to emerge: while in 2015 they simply stressed the need to pay attention to environmental impacts of the BRI, in 2017 policymakers began not only to conduct more systemic policy development on Green BRI but also to promote methods of environmental governance with Chinese characteristics.

5.2 Inclusive Governance Innovation and Diverse Rule-making Efforts

Once the direction to greening the BRI—which simultaneously stresses embedding China's knowledge and adopting international norms—was set by top leaders, bureaucracies' policy development work accelerated. As usual, broad instructions from the top left plenty of room for policy innovation and experimentation. When crafting specific procedural and operational rules and policies, functional ministries and other high-level regulatory agencies played a central role. Due to their varied beliefs, interests, and prior connections to international norm entrepreneurs, their choices differ. Through the lens of norm change, what we are observing is a mix of localization and subsidiarity dynamics. Because the policy package for green BRI is still

⁸ See the text of the speech (in Chinese) at <http://politics.people.com.cn/n1/2017/0220/c1001-29094518.html>.

incomplete and changing, below we illustrate two types of norm dynamics to show the diverse logics of norm change in recent policy developments.

We start with the development of procedural rules. As different ministries began to develop substantial policies in 2017, they quickly drew upon a pre-existing local norm that had been guiding the BRI development since 2014: the so-called “Silk Road spirit,” which advocates “openness and inclusiveness” and “mutual learning” (Xi 2017).⁹ The idea that China needs to guarantee an inclusive and balanced policy-making process, which simultaneously considers host countries’ conditions, guidelines of the Chinese government, multilateral regimes, and rules of Western-led international organizations, was shared by high-level policy bodies like the State Council and NDRC (Tao 2020; Zhang et al. 2018). This rule-making methodology differs from Western-led organizations’ (e.g., OECD and the World Bank) emphasis on enforcing pre-designed environmental safeguards. In fact, roots of this emerging subsidiary norm can be found in China’s long-standing foreign policy principle of non-intervention and mutual respect as shown by China’s strong emphasis on South-South solidarity and host countries’ needs in its IDC practices (Yu 2021; Bräutigam 2011).

This procedural norm certainly shaped the MEP’s (renamed “Ministry of Ecology and Environment” (MEE) in 2018) policy development practices. Before the launch of the BRI, the MEP had predominantly focused on environmental protection within China and had very limited role in governing China’s overseas activities. However, once greening the BRI has been identified by top leaders as a policy goal, it quickly took up the agenda and published “The Belt and Road Ecological and Environmental Cooperation Plan” in May 2017. Concerning the

⁹ The content of the “Silk Road Spirit” was first summarized by Xi in 2014. Xi later stressed that based on the Silk Road Spirit, the BRI should follow the principle of “extensive consultation, joint contribution and shared benefits” (*gongshang, gongjian, gongxiang*). Those phrases were also mentioned in the “Guidance on Promoting Green Belt and Road.”

governance methodology for greening the BRI, the plan clearly endorsed the “Silk Road Spirit,” vowing to conduct inclusive dialogue and consultation to make sure that relevant rules and policies fully “respect the development needs of countries along the BRI” (MEP 2017).

Following this plan, the MEP, together with UNEP, established the BRI International Green Development Coalition (BRIGC) during the first BRF in 2017. Since then, the MEP (later MEE) began to work with international partners to build an “open, inclusive and voluntary international network” to ensure that “the BRI brings long-term green and sustainable development to all concerned countries” (UNEP 2019). As of 2022, BRIGC’s partners include environmental ministries of 26 host countries, 9 inter-governmental organizations, 85 non-governmental organizations and research institutes, and 32 enterprises.¹⁰ Reflecting the dialogue-based policy development methodology, actors in the BRIGC have shown a strong preference for a bottom-up approach to policy development: collecting cases of workable rules and best practices from a variety of countries and sectors, summarizing replicable lessons, and then promoting them throughout BRIGC.¹¹

Moving to operational rules and standards, we can observe both innovation attempts and learning activities due to relatively flexible methodologies for policy development. For example, the MEE, as a key promoter of the “ecological civilization philosophy,” is certainly more prone to innovation. The ministry’s “Belt and Road Ecological and Environmental Cooperation Plan” identifies key areas of cooperation. While some are similar to Western practices (e.g., green finance, capacity building, safeguards), there are areas in line with China’s long-lasting

¹⁰ See partner’s information at http://en.brigc.net/About_us/Partners/202011/t20201124_102810.html.

¹¹ Author’s interviews with a researcher of the NDRC (phone call, May 2022) and a researcher of the MEE (phone call, June 2022). See also policy reports of BRIGC at http://en.brigc.net/Reports/Report_Download/.

preferences in IDC (e.g., eco-friendly infrastructure, green demonstration parks, and province-led capacity-building and technology transfer activities) (MEP 2017).

More notably, in 2019 the BRIGC launched a research program to develop green development guidance for BRI projects. The program produced a baseline study report in 2020, which proposed a “traffic light system” classifying the positive and negative lists. The classification of projects is based not just on a project’s environmental impacts through its lifecycle, but also considers local developmental needs and measures to compensate for the project’s negative impacts (BRIGC 2020). It therefore embodies a novel governance approach to support green development in developing countries. More recently, the program also developed a sector-specific guide, which proposes an eco-environmental evaluation index system – drawing on existing best practices while also experimenting with new rules – for railway and highway projects in the BRI (BRIGC 2021). In developing these guides, MEE has been open to learning other actors’ (e.g., the EU and World Bank) safeguard policies, but at the same time expressed strong intentions to make innovations through new standards and good practices.¹² Some recommendations made by the BRIGC such as managing environmental risks in projects’ whole lifecycle have been taken up in the recent Green Development Guidelines for Foreign Investments issued by MEE and MOFCOM, which also for the first time encouraged companies to follow higher international or Chinese standards if host countries’ environmental rules are deemed insufficient (C. N. Wang and Tang 2021). Hence, the MEE’s efforts follow not only the logic of norm localization but also that of norm subsidiarity.

In addition to the MEE and BRIGC, Chinese regulators in the financial and banking sectors, especially the Green Finance Committee of China Society for Banking and Finance (CGFC)

¹² Author’s interview with a researcher of the MEE, phone call, June 2022.

have also been keen promoters of green BRI.¹³ Historically, China’s financial policymakers have been keen to adopt international financial rules and norms (Yu 2019). This long-standing preference for transnational learning is reflected in their practices to make green BRI rules. In partnership with the City of London Green Finance Initiative, the CGFC developed in November 2018 the Green Investment Principles for the Belt and Road (GIP), which are: “embedding sustainability into corporate governance” “understanding environmental, social and governance risks” “disclosing environmental information” “enhancing communication with stakeholders” “utilizing green financial instruments” “adopting green supply chain management” and “building capacity through collective action” (GIP 2018). In addition to the CGFC and the UK’s Green Finance institute, the drafting members of the GIP include major Western-led transnational initiatives and organizations working on green investment such as the UN-supported Principles for Responsible Investment, International Finance Corporation, and World Economic Forum.

Aiming at aligning with the Paris Agreement and the SDGs, the GIP developed specific guidance for implementation based on existing international principles and standards on green investment (City of London Green Finance Initiative and CGFC 2019). The initiative also established three working groups to share knowledge and best practices on green investment in the BRI.¹⁴ As of June 2022, 42 financial institutions from China and beyond – including investors in both the Global North and South – have pledged to implement the GIP and report annually on their activities.¹⁵ That said, the governance of this initiative remains dominated by Chinese and Western actors and the content of the GIP draws heavily upon relevant Western-led

¹³ CGFC is comprised of economists and officials in China’s financial and banking regulators (e.g., People’s Bank of China (PBOC) and China Securities Regulatory Commission) and those in major state-owned banks.

¹⁴ The three working groups focus respectively on environmental and climate risk assessment, environmental and climate information disclosure, and green financial product innovation, see more details at <https://gipbr.net/List.aspx?type=54&m=6>.

¹⁵ See the full list of the GIP’s signatories at <https://gipbr.net/Membership.aspx?type=12&m=2>.

principles and standards (e.g., incorporating environmental, social, and governance issues in investment decisions and promoting financial instruments like green bonds). Therefore, the GIP's development has mainly followed a norm localization logic.

In summary, driven by varied interests and beliefs, different Chinese bureaucracies have made various efforts to promote green BRI since 2017 (see Table 2). In the process of building these initiatives, Chinese actors have explicitly linked the BRI to existing global norms on sustainable development (e.g., the SDGs and the Paris climate targets). Hence, China's efforts in identifying the broad goals of green development in the BRI largely follow a localization logic. At the same time, highly-level policy bodies (e.g., MEP/MEE), encouraged by top leaders' ambition and pre-existing norms of non-conditionality and South-South solidarity, constructed an inclusive, dialogue-based methodology to policy development, which can be seen as a subsidiary norm. Furthermore, regarding operational rules and policies, MEE, financial regulators, and other actors have followed their preferences and beliefs to either localize existing international rules or develop novel Chinese rules. This is an ongoing process where localization and subsidiarity logics co-exist.

In fact, in the document on the joint implementation of green development in the BRI issued in March 2022 by the four ministries responsible for the BRI (NDRC, MEE, MFA, and MOFCOM), the government not only strengthens environmental regulations for overseas projects (e.g., encouraging companies to follow higher international or Chinese environmental standards and stop building new coal-fired power plants), but also highlights the importance of innovation (e.g., encourage Chinese companies and industry associations to develop and promote new standards, codes, guidelines, and best practices) (NDRC et al. 2022). This latest high-level

document shows once again the mixed logic of norm localization and subsidiarity for making operational rules and policies.

Table 2 Summary of the empirical findings

| Type of norms | The logic behind Green BRI policies | Examples |
|--|--|--|
| Broad concepts of environmental stewardship and green development | Mostly norm localization, with discursive call for norm subsidiarity | Directions set by the “Guidance on Promoting Green Belt and Road Initiative” (MEP, MOFCOM, MFA, and NDRC 2017): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emphasizing cooperation in environmental protection and climate change in the BRI • Establishing strong links between the BRI and the SDGs and the global climate targets • Identifying green development as a main goal of the BRI • Using the concept of ecological civilization to guide the Green BRI to pursue a new vision of green development |
| Procedural norms on how to pursue environmental stewardship and green development | Mostly norm subsidiarity | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Building multilateral, multi-stakeholder platforms to share information and build capacity (e.g., BRIGC led by MEP/MEE) |
| Specific standards, codes of conduct, and good practices for project design and implementation | Co-existence of norm localization and norm subsidiarity based on actors’ preferences | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identifying rules or codes established by Western-led institutions, to develop good practices for the BRI (e.g., the GIP, stop of new coal projects) • Developing new governance tools for greening the BRI (e.g., traffic light system and eco-environmental impact evaluation index system proposed by the MEE through the BRIGC) |

6. Conclusion

The BRI holds promise to advance global sustainable development if it can successfully manage its environmental risks. Since 2015, the Chinese government continues to strengthen its efforts to promote green development in the BRI. China's efforts have evolved from a process of localizing international norms on eco-sustainability into a dual process of incorporating global norms while seeking to create subsidiary norms on green development based on Chinese experiences and practices. By tracing China's approach to governing environmental impacts of its overseas activities from the pre-BRI era to today, we examine the forces shaping Chinese policymakers' choices. We find that Chinese leaders' ambitions to make the BRI a novel, inclusive platform of international cooperation have provided bureaucracies with opportunities to collaborate with international stakeholders in aligning the BRI with international norms, but that ambition has also encouraged policymakers to develop new governance models, rules, and standards. In this process, Chinese policymakers, building on pre-existing local norms, have developed a dialogue-based, inclusive rule-making methodology with an emphasis on host countries' inputs. But when it comes to operational rules, both norm localization and subsidiarity can happen, depending on specific policy bodies' preferences. Therefore, greening the BRI is not just a discursive move for China to protect its reputation, but dynamic processes involving various functional bureaucracies to reform the governance of China's overseas engagement.

Our investigation of Chinese policymakers' motive for greening the BRI contributes to the debate on the environmental governance of the BRI. By examining different types of norms, the paper provides a more nuanced picture of China's engagement with international environmental norms. Our finding echoes the argument that China does not always challenge the Western-dominated liberal international order (Johnston 2019; Weiss and Wallace 2021). Meanwhile, we reveal that Chinese government agencies can choose different strategies regarding Western-led

international norms based on their own beliefs, knowledge, and interests. In such cases, China's attempts to develop new international norms are driven not only by their motivations to challenge the liberal international order but also by pre-existing local norms based on their past experiences. As localization and subsidiarity logics are likely to co-exist in the future development of China's green BRI policy, researchers of global environmental politics need to better theorize and empirically assess the conditions under which Chinese actors follow existing international norms or develop new norms. Addressing these questions will allow us to identify pathways to better engaging China in reforming global environmental governance.

Lastly, as the on-the-ground impacts of different China-led governance initiatives remain to be seen, more research is urgently needed to examine the causal effects of rules and norms proposed by Chinese actors on the policies and practices of different stakeholders. More importantly, given China's intention and efforts to develop and promote new procedural and operational norms under the green BRI agenda, and also Western countries' initiatives (such as the US-led Build Back Better World) that promote sustainable infrastructure in the Global South to counterbalance the BRI, it is crucial to study how those different norms and rules interact and compete, and how such interactions may affect global governance of the environment and development. For the sake of global sustainable development, it would be necessary to explore the mechanisms through which host countries and their people can benefit from a more diverse set of norms.

Yixian Sun is an assistant professor in international development at the University of Bath. He holds a Ph.D. in International Relations and Political Science from the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies in Geneva, and was a Postdoctoral Fellow at Yale University. His research examines the changing roles of emerging economies in global environmental governance. He is the author of *Certifying China: The Rise and Limits of Transnational Sustainability Governance in Emerging Economies* (MIT Press, 2022) and published work in high-impact journals, including *Ecological Economics*, *Global Environmental Change*, *Nature Food*, *Nature Sustainability*, and *Review of International Political Economy*.

Bowen Yu is an assistant professor in the School of International Relations and Public Affairs of Fudan University. He holds a Ph.D. in political science from the University of Toronto. His research focuses on global development, global environmental governance, international organization, and international relations theory, with a particular interest in the logic of change in world politics. His research has been published in the *Chinese Journal of International Politics*, *Journal of Contemporary China*, and *Chinese Journal of Population, Resources and Environment*, among other journals.

References

- Acharya, Amitav. 2004. "How Ideas Spread: Whose Norms Matter? Norm Localization and Institutional Change in Asian Regionalism." *International Organization* 58 (2): 239–75.
- . 2011. "Norm Subsidiarity and Regional Orders: Sovereignty, Regionalism, and Rule-Making in the Third World." *International Studies Quarterly* 55 (1): 95–123.
- Adler, Emanuel. 2019. *World Ordering: A Social Theory of Cognitive Evolution*. Cambridge University Press.
- Ang, Yuen Yuen. 2016. *How China Escaped the Poverty Trap*. Cornell Studies in Political Economy. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- . 2019. "Demystifying Belt and Road The Struggle to Define China's 'Project of the Century.'" *Foreign Affairs*. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2019-05-22/demystifying-belt-and-road>.
- Ascensão, Fernando, Lenore Fahrig, Anthony P. Clevenger, Richard T. Corlett, Jochen A. G. Jaeger, William F. Laurance, and Henrique M. Pereira. 2018. "Environmental Challenges for the Belt and Road Initiative." *Nature Sustainability* 1 (5): 206–9.
- Beijing Normal University, Southwestern University of Finance and Economics, and National Bureau of Statistics of China. 2015. *China Green Development Index Report 2015: Regional Comparison*. Beijing Normal University Press. (in Chinese)
- Bennett, Andrew, and Jeffrey T. Checkel. 2014. *Process Tracing: From Metaphor to Analytic Tool*. Cambridge University Press.
- Bräutigam, Deborah. 2011. "Aid 'with Chinese Characteristics': Chinese Foreign Aid and Development Finance Meet the OECD-DAC Aid Regime." *Journal of International Development* 23 (5): 752–64.
- BRIGC. 2020. "Green Development Guidance for BRI Projects Baseline Study Report." BRIGC 2020 Policy Studies Series. Beijing.

- . 2021. “Green Development Guidance for BRI Projects Phase II Task 2: Guide for Key BRI Sectors Highways and Railways.” BRIGC 2021 Policy Studies Series. Beijing. http://en.brigc.net/Reports/Report_Download/2021/202110/P020211025599530110826.pdf.
- Cao, Jiahua. 2016. “On Connecting the ‘One Belt and One Road’ Initiative to the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda.” *Global Review* [], 3: 37–53. (in Chinese)
- Chen, Muyang. 2020. “Beyond Donation: China’s Policy Banks and the Reshaping of Development Finance.” *Studies in Comparative International Development* 55 (4): 436–59. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12116-020-09310-9>.
- City of London Green Finance Initiative, and CGFC. 2019. “Guidance for the Green Investment Principles - Draft for Discussion.” GIP. <https://www.ukchinagreen.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/1.-GIP-consultation-document-explanatory-note.pdf>.
- Coenen, Johanna, Simon Bager, Patrick Meyfroidt, Jens Newig, and Edward Challies. 2020. “Environmental Governance of China’s Belt and Road Initiative.” *Environmental Policy and Governance*, July.
- Dimitrov, Radoslav S. 2016. “The Paris Agreement on Climate Change: Behind Closed Doors.” *Global Environmental Politics* 16 (3): 1–11.
- Dollar, David. 2016. “China’s Engagement with Africa.” Brookings Institute. <https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/chinas-engagement-with-africa-david-dollar-july-2016.pdf>.
- Dong, Zhanfeng, Chazhong Ge, Jinnan Wang, Xiaodong Yan, and Cuiyun Chen. 2016. Strategic Implementation Framework for the Green Development of the Belt and Road Initiative *China Environmental Management*, no. 2: 31–41. (in Chinese)
- Finamore, Barbara. 2018. *Will China Save the Planet?* Environmental Futures. Cambridge, UK ; Medford, MA, USA: Polity.
- Finnemore, Martha, and Kathryn Sikkink. 1998. “International Norm Dynamics and Political Change.” *International Organization* 52 (4): 887–917.
- Foster, Vivien, William Butterfield, and Chuan Chen. 2009. *Building Bridges: China’s Growing Role as Infrastructure Financier for Africa*. The World Bank.
- Gallagher, Kelly Sims, and Qi Qi. 2021. “Chinese Overseas Investment Policy: Implications for Climate Change.” *Global Policy*. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1758-5899.12952>.
- Gallagher, Kevin P. 2018. “China’s Global Energy Finance: Poised to Lead.” *Energy Research & Social Science*, Energy and the Future, 35 (January): 15–16.
- Geall, Sam, and Adrian Ely. 2018. “Narratives and Pathways towards an Ecological Civilization in Contemporary China.” *The China Quarterly* 236 (December): 1175–96.
- Gellers, Joshua C., and Chris Jeffords. 2019. “Environmental Determinants of Chinese Development Finance in Africa.” *The Journal of Environment & Development* 28 (2): 111–41.
- GIP. 2018. “What Is GIP?” 2018. <https://gipbr.net/SIC.aspx?id=170&m=2>.
- Guttman, Dan, Yijia Jing, and Oran R. Young. 2021. “The State, Nonstate Actors, and China’s Environmental Performance: Setting the Stage.” In *Non-State Actors in China and Global Environmental Governance*, edited by Dan Guttman, Yijia Jing, and Oran R. Young, 17–54. Governing China in the 21st Century. Singapore: Springer.
- Hale, Thomas N., Chuyu Liu, and Johannes Urpelainen. 2020. “Belt and Road Decision-Making in China and Recipient Countries: How and to What Extent Does Sustainability Matter?” ISEP & BSG Report. ISEP, BSG, and ClimateWorks Foundation.

- Hansen, Mette Halskov, Hongtao Li, and Rune Svarverud. 2018. "Ecological Civilization: Interpreting the Chinese Past, Projecting the Global Future." *Global Environmental Change* 53 (November): 195–203.
- Harlan, Tyler. 2020. "Green Development or Greenwashing? A Political Ecology Perspective on China's Green Belt and Road." *Eurasian Geography and Economics*, July, 1–25.
- He, Kai, and Huiyun Feng. 2013. "Xi Jinping's Operational Code Beliefs and China's Foreign Policy." *The Chinese Journal of International Politics* 6 (3): 209–31.
- Hoffmann, Matthew J. 2011. *Climate Governance at the Crossroads: Experimenting with a Global Response after Kyoto*. Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press.
- Hu, Weixing. 2019. "Xi Jinping's 'Major Country Diplomacy': The Role of Leadership in Foreign Policy Transformation." *Journal of Contemporary China* 28 (115): 1–14.
- Hughes, Alice C. 2019. "Understanding and Minimizing Environmental Impacts of the Belt and Road Initiative." *Conservation Biology* 33 (4): 883–94.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/cobi.13317>.
- Jiang, Xiheng. 2019. "Green Belt and Road Initiative Environmental and Social Standards: Will Chinese Companies Conform?" *IDS Bulletin* 50 (4). <https://doi.org/10.19088/1968-2019.138>.
- Johnston, Alastair Iain. 2019. "China in a World of Orders: Rethinking Compliance and Challenge in Beijing's International Relations." *International Security* 44 (2): 9–60.
https://doi.org/10.1162/isec_a_00360.
- Kitano, Naohiro. 2014. "China's Foreign Aid at a Transitional Stage." *Asian Economic Policy Review* 9 (2): 301–17.
- Kopiński, Dominik, and Qian Sun. 2014. "New Friends, Old Friends? The World Bank and Africa When the Chinese Are Coming." *Global Governance: A Review of Multilateralism and International Organizations* 20 (4): 601–23.
- Lechner, Alex Mark, Faith Ka Shun Chan, and Ahimsa Campos-Arceiz. 2018. "Biodiversity Conservation Should Be a Core Value of China's Belt and Road Initiative." *Nature Ecology & Evolution* 2 (3): 408–9.
- Lee, Yen Nee. 2021. "Biden's Focus on Climate Change Could Turn up the Pressure on China's Mega Infrastructure Program." CNBC. January 14, 2021.
<https://www.cnbc.com/2021/01/14/climate-change-biden-could-up-pressure-on-chinas-belt-and-road-initiative.html>.
- Li, Xiaoyun, Dan Banik, Lixia Tang, and Jin Wu. 2014. "Difference or Indifference: China's Development Assistance Unpacked." *IDS Bulletin* 45 (4): 22–35.
- MEP. 2016. "MEP's Leading Group for BRI Construction Held the First Meeting." 2016.
https://www.mee.gov.cn/ywgz/gjjlh/l/sydy/201605/t20160523_343646.shtml.
- MEP. 2017. "The Belt and Road Ecological and Environmental Cooperation Plan."
http://english.mee.gov.cn/Resources/Policies/policies/Frameworkp1/201706/t20170628_416869.shtml.
- MEP, MFA, NDRC, and MofCom. 2017. "Guidance on Promoting Green Belt and Road."
http://english.mee.gov.cn/Resources/Policies/policies/Frameworkp1/201706/t20170628_416864.shtml.
- Mertha, Andrew C. 2006. "Policy Enforcement Markets: How Bureaucratic Redundancy Contributes to Effective Intellectual Property Implementation in China." *Comparative Politics*, 295–316.

- MFA. 2013. "China's Position Paper on the Development Agenda beyond 2015." 2013. https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjdt_665385/2649_665393/t1078984.shtml.
- MOFCOM. 2013. "Notification of the Ministry of Commerce and the Ministry of Environmental Protection on Issuing the Guidelines for Environmental Protection in Foreign Investment and Cooperation -." <http://english.mofcom.gov.cn/article/policyrelease/bbb/201303/20130300043226.shtml>.
- . 2014. "Press Conference on Measures for the Administration of Foreign Aid." December 8, 2014. <http://www.mofcom.gov.cn/article/fbhfn/fbh2014/201412/20141200824824.shtml>.
- . 2015. "Measures for the Administration of Complete Foreign Aid Projects (For Trial Implementation)."
- . 2016. "Administrative Measures for Establishing Foreign Aid Projects (for Trial Implementation)." <http://fec.mofcom.gov.cn/article/ywzn/dwyz/zcfg/201908/20190802893598.shtml>.
- NDRC, MFA, MEE, and MOFCOM. 2022. "Opinions on the Joint Implementation of Green Development in the Belt and Road Initiative." https://www.ndrc.gov.cn/xxgk/zcfb/tz/202203/t20220328_1320629.html?code=&state=123.
- NDRC, MFA, MOFCOM. 2015. "Vision and Actions on Jointly Building Silk Road Economic Belt and 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road." http://www.ndrc.gov.cn/gzdt/201503/t20150330_669392.html.
- Ng, Li Shuen, Ahimsa Campos-Arceiz, Sean Sloan, Alice C. Hughes, Darrel Chin Fung Tiang, Binbin V. Li, and Alex M. Lechner. 2020. "The Scale of Biodiversity Impacts of the Belt and Road Initiative in Southeast Asia." *Biological Conservation* 248 (August): 108691.
- Ong, Lynette H. 2012. "The Apparent 'Paradox' in China's Climate Policies." *Asian Survey* 52 (6): 1138–60.
- Pan, Yue. 2003. "Environmental Culture and National Revival." Government information disclosure. Ministry of Ecology and Environment of the People's Republic of China. http://www.mee.gov.cn/gkml/sthjbgw/qt/200910/t20091030_180661.htm.
- Park, Susan. 2005. Norm Diffusion within International Organisations: A Case Study of the World Bank. *Journal of International Relations and Development* 8(2), 111-141.
- Pu, Xiaoyu. 2012. "Socialisation as a Two-Way Process: Emerging Powers and the Diffusion of International Norms." *The Chinese Journal of International Politics* 5 (4): 341–67.
- Schindler, Sebastian, and Tobias Wille. 2015. "Change in and through Practice: Pierre Bourdieu, Vincent Pouliot, and the End of the Cold War." *International Theory* 7 (2): 330–59.
- Schmidt, Sebastian. 2014. "Foreign Military Presence and the Changing Practice of Sovereignty: A Pragmatist Explanation of Norm Change." *American Political Science Review* 108 (4): 817–29.
- Schweller, Randall L., and Xiaoyu Pu. 2011. "After Unipolarity: China's Visions of International Order in an Era of US Decline." *International Security* 36 (1): 41–72.
- Shen, Wei, and Marcus Power. 2017. "Africa and the Export of China's Clean Energy Revolution." *Third World Quarterly* 38 (3): 678–97.
- Shen, Wei, and Lei Xie. 2018. "Can China Lead in Multilateral Environmental Negotiations? Internal Politics, Self-Depiction, and China's Contribution in Climate Change Regime and Mekong Governance." *Eurasian Geography and Economics* 59 (5–6): 708–32.
- State Council Information Office. 2014. "China's Foreign Aid (2014)."

- Stern, Rachel E., and Kevin J. O'Brien. 2012. "Politics at the Boundary: Mixed Signals and the Chinese State." *Modern China* 38 (2): 174–98.
- Stokes, Leah C., Amanda Giang, and Noelle E. Selin. 2016. "Splitting the South: China and India's Divergence in International Environmental Negotiations." *Global Environmental Politics* 16 (4): 12–31.
- Sun, Yixian. 2022. *Certifying China: The Rise and Limits of Transnational Sustainability Governance in Emerging Economies*. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Tao, Pingsheng. 2020. *Research on Belt and Road Initiative and International Rules*. Beijing: China Development Press. (in Chinese)
- Thisted, Ebbe V., and Rune V. Thisted. 2020. "The Diffusion of Carbon Taxes and Emission Trading Schemes: The Emerging Norm of Carbon Pricing." *Environmental Politics* 29 (5): 804–24.
- UNEP. 2019. "The Belt and Road Initiative International Green Development Coalition (BRIGC)." UNEP - UN Environment Programme. 2019. <http://www.unep.org/regions/asia-and-pacific/regional-initiatives/belt-and-road-initiative-international-green>.
- Voituriez, Tancrède, Wang Yao, and Mathias Lund Larsen. 2019. "Revising the 'Host Country Standard' Principle: A Step for China to Align Its Overseas Investment with the Paris Agreement." *Climate Policy* 19 (10): 1205–10.
- Wang, Christoph Nedopil, and Yingzhi Tang. 2021. "Interpretation of the 'Green Development Guidelines for Foreign Investment and Cooperation' – Green Finance & Development Center." 2021. <https://greenfdc.org/interpretation-of-the-green-development-guidelines-for-foreign-investment-and-cooperation/>.
- Wang, Kai, and Jianjun Ni. 2019. "The High-Quality Construction of the Belt and Road Initiative." *Contemporary International Relations* 10: 28–34. (in Chinese)
- Wei Jianguo. 2011. *Africa, A Lifetime of Memories: My Experience and Understanding of Africa*. Beijing: China Commerce and Trade Press. (in Chinese)
- Weiss, Jessica Chen, and Jeremy L. Wallace. 2021. "Domestic Politics, China's Rise, and the Future of the Liberal International Order." *International Organization* 75 (2): 635–64.
- Xi, Jinping. 2017. "Work Together to Build the Silk Road Economic Belt and The 21st Century Maritim Silk Road." Presented at the Opening Ceremony of The Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation, Beijing, May 14. http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2017-05/16/c_136287878.htm.
- Xinhua. 2018. "Xi Jinping: Promoting the Joint Development of BRI and Benefit the People." August 27, 2018. http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2018-08/27/c_1123336562.htm.
- Yu, Hongyuan, and Wanfa Wang. 2021. "Green Belt and Road Initiative: Progress, Challenges and Pathways." *China International Studies*, 2: 132–51. (in Chinese)
- Yu, Bowen. 2019. *Between Chinese and Western Norms: Local Policy Deliberation and Cross-issue-area Variations in China's Global Governance Strategies*. Doctoral dissertation, University of Toronto (Canada).
- Yu, Bowen. 2021. "Cognitive Evolution and China's International Development Cooperation." *The Chinese Journal of International Politics* 14 (4): 481-505.
- Yu, Bowen. 2022. "Bureaucratic Deliberation and China's Engagement with International Ideas: A Case Study on China's Adoption of Carbon Emissions Trading." *Journal of Contemporary China*, 31 (136): 558-573.

- Zhang, Denghua, and Graeme Smith. 2017. "China's Foreign Aid System: Structure, Agencies, and Identities." *Third World Quarterly* 38 (10): 2330–46.
- Zhang, Jidong, Jian Pan, Ronglei Yang, and Guojin Xing. 2018. "Green BIR's Top-Level Design." *Globalization* 11: 42-50. (in Chinese)
- Zhou, Lihuan, Sean Gilbert, Ye Wang, Miquel Muñoz Cabré, and Kevin P. Gallagher. 2018. "Moving the Green Belt and Road Initiative: From Words to Actions." Washington, DC: World Resources Institute. <https://www.wri.org/publication/moving-green-belt-and-road-initiative-from-words-to-actions>.