

Joint Master Programme of China & International Relations

# China's Climate Change Policies after the Paris Agreement: a Two-Level Pressure Analysis

Master Thesis

Keystrokes: 147.661

Supervisors: Shi Yadong & Wu Fuzuo

Key words: Climate Change, Policy-making, China, EU, Paris Agreement,  
International Community

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May 15, 2019



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## Summary

The international community is increasingly focusing its attention on global climate change, and as the repercussions are felt all over the world, it influences state-actors' domestic and foreign policy making to a greater extent. The Paris Agreement was perceived as a milestone to unite all the parties in consensus of the urgency of acting upon the issue. The US announcement to withdraw was therefore considered a setback to the climate change regime's agenda. However, China and the EU, quickly issued a joint statement expressing their commitment of progressing the mitigation of climate change, to signal the remaining signatories of their shared interest of combating the global threat.

China has in particular been subject to questions of its commitment to climate change mitigation since the US withdrawal, as the country's rapid development rate has been a contributing factor to the worsening of the issue. For instance, the massive fossil fuel consumption driving its development has had a negative effect on matters such as air quality and food security in the country. Domestic and international pressures have therefore mounted on China to increase its efforts within this sphere, and the EU has especially sought a cooperative partner in China to combat the phenomenon in the absence of the US. This has led to questions about China's international position, as championing climate change through transitioning its energy sector towards renewables and providing the international community a global good through mitigating climate change could increase its status and recognition among other actors. On the other hand, when the US could easily announce its intended withdrawal from the Paris Agreement, what holds other actors from opting for the same? To reach an understanding of this puzzle, this thesis has conducted an analysis of China's climate change policies and the inherent measures the country has taken within this sphere since the signing of the Paris Agreement, while additionally explored the pressures that have been exerted on the actor both domestically and internationally.

The analysis has been assisted by the guiding thinking of Neoliberal Institutionalism, to provide a basic understanding of state- and non-state actors' influence on international politics, while additionally accounting for the fragility of reaching consensus in a decentralised international community where cooperation and harmony among actors is a multifaceted challenge. Additionally, the Two-Level Pressure Analysis Framework has been implemented to illustrate that China has faced both domestic and international pressure to not opt out of the climate change regime. The findings have displayed how a desire to generate wealth through energy procurement and phasing out reliance on coal has been a driver for China to remain in

the treaty, as well as its ambition to acquire more status in the international community through providing the world a public good of mitigating climate change by shared leadership with the EU. Finally, while China faces pollution challenges, the country is also investing heavily in renewables and envisions to connect the world through enormous projects such as the Belt and Road Initiative. The international initiative's projects have been found to introduce measures that could potentially assist the involved countries in becoming better equipped to combat the phenomenon, while simultaneously helping China to achieve more political and economic clout in the international community. China's relations with the EU has been found to include an element of asymmetrical interdependence as the European institution seeks reassurance from China of its commitment to cooperate on climate change matters in the absence of the US. Interestingly, as China is investing heavily in the renewable energy sector, it still lacks components to reduce the costs of realising its own energy transition, and so, the EU may pressure the country into complying with the international climate change regime's agenda in return for technology that China requires.

Finally, mitigating global climate change stands as a multifaceted issue, which solution may lie in the unification of all parties to take policy measures that align with the international community's norms and guidelines. Through examination of China's policies after Paris, it has been found that both wealth, status, and asymmetrical interdependence relations between actors are essential variables to include when assessing an actor's incentive to remain in treaties such as the Paris Agreement. In China's case, domestic and foreign policies thus become intertwined to reach the most favourable position when pressured to combat an issue that not necessarily stands as a national interest.

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## 1 Introduction

*“Leaders of the world, you must lead. The continuation of our civilisations and the natural world upon which we depend, is in your hands”* (Attenborough 2018). These were the final words of David Attenborough’s speech at the 24<sup>th</sup> Conference of Parties (hereafter COP) in Katowice, 2018, which was articulated to emphasise the dire need for achieving a tangible rulebook for enforcing the Paris Agreement. Climate change is a phenomenon that affects every corner of the world, and the majority of politicians and scientists across the globe are in consensus that the benefits of international cooperation to combat the issue by far outweigh the costs of the future ramifications. Since the 2015 signing of the Paris Agreement on climate change mitigation, facilitated by the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (hereafter UNFCCC), the untraditional security threat has been shown as a pillar on which actors across the development spectrum can unite and fight a common cause, despite differences in other spheres (UN Climate Change secretariat 2018). The Paris Agreement was exceptional as the first time all participating members of the UNFCCC, 195 nations and the European Union, signed a treaty to combat a common threat and signalled the world that it is a top priority within the international community to collaborate on solutions to sustain the future of the planet, human health and promote a global green economy (Li 2015). At the summit in Paris, new evidence was put forward in a comprehensive report, which claimed that if the goals in the treaty were not met, ecosystems across the globe would be gravely affected, resulting in several million people forced to live under climate-induced poverty and large landmasses turning to desert-like conditions. Decreased food-security and severely increased water scarcity are also among the dangers of neglecting to enact effective climate change mitigation policies, conditions which are apparent and intensifying in already climate sensitive countries (Xu 2018).

As the UNFCCC declares that climate change impacts are not isolated to particular areas, it insinuates that all states possess an incentive in combatting the issue, no matter their position on the development spectrum. Thus, as the global economy is becoming more interdependent, meaning a nation such as China depends on the prosperity of some of its climate sensitive trading partners, nations and regions not directly affected by climate change yet may regard the more exposed nations’ decline as an incentive to act on the treaty. Hence, the pressure on the largest economies in the international community seems to increase along with the worsening of climate change. China, for example, has experienced huge economic

growth rates in recent decades, resulting in an increase in both energy demand and consumption (Wu 2018, 73). As the amount of energy needed now exceeds what the country can produce itself, China has positioned itself as the world's largest energy-consumer and oil-importer and it is relying on imports that mainly come from regions already exposed to the dangers of climate change (Wu 2018, 3-4). Along with the country's opening-up policy, China is also seeking to expand its economic and political influence in other regions, which means it is necessary for the country to carefully consider how its presence is perceived in the international community. For instance, if China neglects to consider climate change when investing in the energy sector abroad, or disregard internationally consensual normative behaviour such as laid out by the UN's frameworks, the country may find it difficult to exert the influence it desires without becoming prone to scrutiny from other actors or international institutions. This means that climate change stands as a multifaceted issue affecting both national and international policy-making, ranging from political, economic and ethical spheres when decisions are to be made.

However, the effort and expectations of the participants has shown to vary a great deal, which was most evident when the world's second-largest emitter of greenhouse gasses, the US, withdrew from the Paris Agreement after the inauguration of President Donald Trump. The disengagement by the US administration was perceived not only as a neglect of its responsibilities to the international community, but also as a move towards isolationism and protectionism (Barro 2017). It sparked criticism from other world leaders, especially from the remaining great economies in the treaty who, through their articulated commitment to the Paris Agreement, reiterated that the US withdrawal would not stop the rest of the world from pursuing the goals stated in the treaty. Most notably, China and the EU issued a joint statement after the 20<sup>th</sup> EU-China Summit wherein they emphasised their commitment to the treaty, an act which both reassured the remaining signatories of the treaty's importance, and to signal the US administration that both the EU and China disapprove the move. The joint statement was furthermore instigated as an indication that despite the US' attempts to disrupt multilateralism, the EU and China would utilise their consensus on climate change policy to strengthen the relations between the two economies in the future, and further promote globalisation and connectedness between nations (Lungu 2017). President of the European Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker, commented on the EU-China relations: *"We have underlined our joint, strong determination to fight climate change and demonstrate global leadership. It shows our commitment to multilateralism and recognises that climate change is a global challenge affecting all countries on earth. **There is no time for us to sit back and watch passively**"*

(European Commission 2018). In addition to Juncker's statement, President Xi Jinping of China also made remarks on the US withdrawal in a speech at the 19th Chinese Communist Party Congress in October 2017, and though without mentioning the US explicitly, he stated that China was ready to take a leadership role on the issue of global climate change (Montague 2017).

Given China's previous reluctance to comply during climate negotiations, as with the collapsed negotiations during COP15 in Copenhagen, Xi's rhetoric came as reassurance to the international community that China was now ready to fully cooperate in regard to fighting global climate change. Excluding purely economic and political reasons, this could be due to China's own concerns with e.g. rising sea-levels, air pollution, water scarcity, food security, desertification, all of which already affect certain parts of the enormous and climatically diverse country. Considering the vast coastline on the Eastern shores and the less developed rural areas to the West, combined with the international community's search for a responsible stakeholder of China's magnitude in the absence of the US, President Xi could utilise the US administration's decision as an opportunity to display China's global climate governance aspirations. This means the US withdrawal might have come at the right time in history for China, as the world's fastest growing economy has seen pollution rates increase exponentially in the name of economic development during the past decades. Also, the country has on several occasions expressed its desire to be perceived as a responsible stakeholder that should be granted more clout and respect in the international community. Indications of such behaviour have been displayed in the sense of the establishment of international financial institutions such as the New Development Bank, the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, and the Silk Road Fund, institutions established with the main purpose of injecting economic aid to developing countries. Other aspects include China's first military base abroad in Djibouti, investments in European ports and technology firms, and the enormous Belt and Road (BRI) infrastructure project (Goodman and Perlez 2018). These institutions and initiatives are, according to Beijing, all established for the betterment of the world, and the BRI is even articulated as a grand strategy with means to combat climate change outside China's borders by the aid of the abovementioned financial institutions, increased investment in renewable energy, and improved infrastructure in the involved countries. As of 2015 and 2016, so-called clean energy investments in BRI involved countries amounted to \$11.8 billion, demonstrating that Beijing takes the initiative very seriously, and focus on green BRI projects has increased since the Paris Agreement (Zhang 2018). The vision of implementing such a vast initiative has however

caused other large economies, e.g. the EU, to question how the Chinese influence will affect the world economy, and whether the initiative will be carried out with a climate-friendly approach. This due to the fact that China could position itself in the centre of global trade and energy, and thus gain more clout over other countries. Speculation in the EU of how China will act on such a position has therefore been voiced (Stojanovic 2019).

Regarding the mitigation of climate change domestically, President Xi has been perceived to make good on his word so far by cutting back on heavy polluting industries, investing greatly in the development of green technology and made efforts to reduce air pollution through policies and public articulations such as “war on pollution”, and governmental collaboration with international institutions such as the World Bank (Helping China Fight Air Pollution 2018). Beijing’s recent two Five-Year plans have particularly mentioned how sectors relating to climate change affect the nation’s policy-making, both from political and economic perspectives. It stands to reason that while China is experiencing a new normal period with decreasing economic growth rates, exploring and prioritising how mitigating climate change could assist stimulating economic growth, alleviate domestic demand of a sustainable environment, and improve China’s image in the international community is an opportunistic position for its government.

Considering China’s role in a global context, however, means that what has been done domestically to reduce its carbon footprint does not exclude China from being scrutinised on behalf of its global impact, which makes it interesting to examine the pressures for remaining committed to the Paris Agreement. As previously mentioned, China is highly dependent on energy to drive its development and while it has closed a significant amount of domestic coal-plants, it remains the largest coal-producer in the world. As such, the country is investing in foreign coal plants, which means that China may export its coal to operate foreign plants without raising its own emission rates, however, still affecting other nation’s contribution to the worsening of climate change by import/export measures of fossil fuels (Taylor 2017). The mentioned aspects prompt this thesis to examine China’s efforts and policy behaviour to mitigate climate change and the motivations for cooperating with international institutions and remaining committed to the Paris Agreement. This is conducted to explore whether the nation is being pressured into collaboration as well as how political and economic incentives drive the policy behaviour. As the US has announced its disengagement from the Paris Agreement, China and the EU remains as the two largest economies in the treaty, meaning both possess an interest in progressing the UNFCCC’s agenda. The interplay between the two actors within the



realm of climate change may thus illuminate how new energy circumstances and reputation in the international community are affecting China's policy behaviour.

### 1.1 Research question

The aspects on the topic of climate change mitigation and the discussed themes above have prompted the following research question:

- *Why does China stay in the Paris Agreement despite the US' withdrawal from it?*

In order to clarify and narrow the scope of the research question, two sub-questions have been articulated as premise for the analysis:

- Which policy measures have China taken since the Paris Agreement, domestically and internationally?
- What are the two-level pressures on China to undertake these measures, and why has China taken these policy measures to address climate change after the Paris Agreement?

## 2 Literature Review

This section displays different literatures on what kind of research has been conducted on China's policies to address climate change after the Paris Agreement, and explores the potential gaps in the existing literature. Since the historical first mentioning of climate change, it has grown to become a phenomenon with literature addressing how to combat the issue and how much or little effort is being made by state and non-state-actors. Analyses about the issue are therefore far-reaching and diverse within the political, economic, scientific, and social sphere. It is widely recognised within academia that to succeed in this unprecedented challenge requires both cooperation in the international community and substantial policies at the domestic level. This section exemplifies some of the aspects of the multifaceted issue.

Wang, Liu and Wu (2018) structure China's climate governance into three dimensions, that is, the state, the market, and civil society. They argue that *"The three dimensions are not exclusive of each other but overlap in many important respects, and their roles and relative levels of importance in China's climate governance have changed over time"* (Wang, Liu, and Wu 2018, 664). By this method, they argue that China faces both international and domestic pressures to address climate change, and China's climate policies after the Paris Agreement will continue to have significant impact on global climate governance. Gao (2016) deals with China's understanding of the issue of climate change. By assessing China's participation in the

UN's body, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), an improved understanding has emerged: *"Through participating in international scientific assessments of climate change, conducting climate change research and carrying out three consecutive national assessments on climate change, China has deepened its understanding of the scientific facts (...)"* (Gao 2016, 9). It is furthermore argued that China's participation in international climate change negotiations displays that the country is a responsible power, and that the principle that have emerged from the improved understanding will be a platform for implementing the Paris Agreement's goals nationally.

Hilton and Kerr (2017) examines the changes in attitude of China's climate change position between the Copenhagen conference and Paris. The authors argue that by the implementation of China's 12<sup>th</sup> Five-Year Plan (2011-2015), there was a shift in economic policies towards focus on low-carbon technologies, which provided the Chinese government the incentive to change its attitude in the Paris negotiations. By considering the 'new normal' economic period for China, the authors argue that by the implementation of domestic policies with targets of transitioning to a greener economy, and a decreased focus on exponential growth rates, increased the willingness of China to be a more constructive actor in climate change negotiations (Hilton and Kerr 2017). Engels presents another perspective, in which she utilises mode of government as the variable to understand whether China may be more effective in implementing policies to address climate change, and to test the assumption that *"China's state-led non-participatory authoritarianism will effectively offer a solution to the global climate problem"* (Engels 2018, 1). The author argues that due to its policy measures of improvements in CO<sub>2</sub> efficiency, decreased emissions, and low-carbon development, China is increasingly perceived internationally as a "climate change mitigation champion" (Engels 2018). Averchenkova et al., assess both the climate change policies of China, the EU, and the US, as a method for examining future prospects of compliance with the goals of the Paris Agreement. They argue that since the three actors are responsible for the majority of global emissions of GHG and produce half of global GDP, a pressure from the international community is exerted on all three to enforce even stricter climate policies. In their report, the authors additionally argue that the international pressure on China mainly stems from the power of institutions as they: *"(...)" wield certain pressure on a state-actor to shape and comply with climate change policies"* and *"(...)" they [institutions] enable comparability of climate action between nations"* (Averchenko et al. 2016, 21). Furthermore, they argue that the rise and fall of emissions in China are directly linked to economic development and the ongoing 'new

normal' phase of its economy, thus linking China's climate change policies to the domestic pressure of creating wealth for the nation (Averchenkova et al. 2016, 6-7).

Sandalow's book on Chinese climate policy outlines both the domestic policies initiated by the government and comment on how these will affect climate change domestically and internationally. Sandalow's work examines both emission rates, policy tools, and background on China's climate change policy behaviour in order to comprise a comprehensive "Guide to Chinese Climate Policy". Sandalow is guided by both the Chinese government's own reporting on the issue and by the international conventions: *"This guide does not catalogue all policies that could affect emissions or the climate, but instead focuses on policies most directly related to climate change, including those on energy, transportation, urbanization, forestry, climate adaptation and climate diplomacy"* (Sandalow 2018, 5). Chai et al. (2017) base their research on the US withdrawal from the Paris Agreement and systematically evaluates the potential outcomes within mitigation, climate finance, and global climate governance. Through their self-developed model, they conclude that the US withdrawal will *"(...) affect the existence and implementation of successive climate policies"*, and with these findings they compose policy suggestions to the largest remaining economies in the Paris Agreement, China and the EU, on how to shape their climate policies going forward (Chai et al. 2017).

In summation, the existing literature has conducted research on China's climate policies after the Paris Agreement through different perspectives, although with limitations. First, the explored research has not fully updated the policy measures China has adopted at both domestic and international levels to address climate change. Secondly, the existing literature has excluded the International Relations theories to systematically explore the motivations behind China's climate policies after the Paris Agreement. Therefore, this thesis attempts to fill these two gaps by applying the Two-Level Pressure Analysis Framework along with the guiding thinking of Neoliberal Institutionalism, and by considering China's most recent policy measures.

## 3 Methodology

### 3.1 Outline of Research

Based on the aspects of climate change mentioned in the introduction, and China's central role in mitigating the phenomenon on a global scale in the absence of the US, this thesis is conducted to examine the inherent domestic and international pressures for China to stay committed to the Paris Agreement, and to a certain extent the influence of the EU and the

UNFCCC. Exploring China's policies and how they illustrate an articulated commitment to climate change mitigation through the lens of domestic and international pressure is therefore the modus operandi of the thesis, while executive statements and joint communiques are included to illuminate the interplay between actors. As global climate change mitigation after the Paris Agreement has proven to be multifaceted and affected by multiple actors, the thesis focuses on China, albeit also considering the role of institutions like the UN, more specifically its body, the UNFCCC, which facilitates the platform for international cooperation in this issue-area. Furthermore, the EU as an actor and cooperative partner to China regarding climate change mitigation is considered pivotal in the absence of the US and therefore also plays a part in the thesis, as it is regarded as an institution with both economic and political clout to affect China's behaviour and how the country is perceived in the international community. Lastly, as the thesis' focal point is China's climate change policies after the Paris Agreement, it has been deemed necessary to both assess the state-actor's behaviour domestically and internationally. This is conducted through the guiding thinking of *Neoliberal Institutionalism* and the theoretical framework of *Two-Level Pressure Framework* in chapter five; the chosen theories are elaborated in chapter four, while the findings are outlined in chapter six. The puzzle of China's role in mitigating climate change while still contributing to the worsening of the phenomenon through coal consumption and extensive emissions of greenhouse gases is therefore explored through the country's climate policies since the Paris Agreement and afterwards how the policies and international influence affects its status in the international community.

### 3.2 Choice of Method

In order to analyse the research question in full, this thesis chooses to focus on qualitative analysis of existing literature although empirical data to complete the research on China's climate change policies and the actor's motivations for remaining committed to mitigating the global threat is also implemented. As this thesis concentrates on qualitative document analysis, a research question has been articulated based on the gathered knowledge about the topic of China's role in global climate change and then paired with applicable theories to investigate the issue. Furthermore, two sub-questions have been articulated to narrow the scope of the thesis' topic and assist the reader in following the logic of the analysis in chapter five. The thesis mainly considers textual data in the form of both official state documents and texts from mass media. The method of qualitative document analysis may be applied when considering official documents as the authenticity of these can rarely be questioned (Bryman

2012, 549-550). Furthermore, the qualitative method can be explored through mass media to broaden a perspective on a topic, however with focus on subjectively chosen sources of certain reliability. As the thesis deals with perspectives of a politically on-going issue, global climate change, it is deemed necessary to include an element of discourse, which enables the analysis to consider written texts from different perspectives. Jorgensen and Phillips define the practice of discourse as: “(...) *a particular way of talking about and understanding the world (or an aspect of the world)*” (Jorgensen and Phillips 2002, 1). They argue that questions of national identity and state behaviour can be analysed and answered through discursive perspectives by considering a wide variety of empirical texts and in that way provide qualitative insight to spheres such as world politics (Jorgensen and Phillips 2002, 2-3). This method enables the thesis to not restrict itself to analysing actions, but also to consider statements and articulations from world leaders whose utterances reflect the state’s or institution’s actions and intentions. By utilising theories that are applicable to examine the chosen topic, this thesis aims to explore China’s most important policies related to climate change after the Paris Agreement and which pressures that have shaped the need for these policies.

### 3.3 Selection of Theories

In this thesis, two theories are applied: *Neoliberal Institutionalism* and *Two-Level Pressure Framework*. The theories of this paper are selected due to their applicability within this field of research. They are utilised in an analysis to attempt answering the research question. As the Two-Level Pressure Framework is developed on elements and convictions from different theories, including neoliberal institutionalism, it enables this thesis to utilise the two theories in conjunction as an analytical tool. Neoliberal Institutionalism (hereafter NLI) is selected because of its actor-minded approach, in which an inclusion of China’s behaviour towards the UNFCCC and EU can be considered in the analysis. It is also chosen due to its focus on the effect of regimes as: “(...) *principles, norms, rules, and decision-making procedures around which actor expectations converge in a given issue-area*” (Krasner 1982, 185), in this case with focus on the international climate change regime. Furthermore, NLI theorists argue that this theoretical approach is applicable if and when actors share mutual interests, hence some mutual gain from a cooperation must be evident. If there is an absence of mutual gain from the cooperative relationship the NLI approach is rendered irrelevant (Keohane 1989, 3). In this thesis, both state- and non-state-actors possess incentives for maintaining and strengthening their cooperative relationship, as global climate change affects all actors and reaches both the political, economic, and social sphere. The NLI approach may

therefore assist this thesis in assessing to what extent an institution like the UNFCCC or the EU may affect a state-actor's (read: China's) motivations for staying committed to the Paris Agreement.

On the other hand, the Two-Level Pressure Framework is selected due to its proactive and reactive state-actor approach and the theory's inherent concepts of *Wealth*, *Status*, and *Asymmetrical Interdependence*. The theoretical framework puts emphasis on the unit- and systemic level, meaning that it takes into consideration both domestic and international aspects when assessing a state-actor's behaviour: "(...) the "two-level pressures" model describes how the execution of China's and India's domestic preferences has been constrained by systemic or international factors" (Wu 2018, 34). Applying these concepts allows this thesis to analyse an actor's behaviour within a specific field, in this case climate change mitigation and policy behaviour. Putting these concepts into an analytical framework therefore assists answering the research question by assessing if China continues its commitment to the Paris Agreement based on pressures stemming from national interest of wealth creation, seeking status in the international system, and/or asymmetrical interdependence with other actors, and whether such behaviour is caused by domestic or international pressure, or a combination of the two. The concepts are elaborated in the theory section.

### 3.4 Choice of Data

This section of the thesis is devoted to exemplifying the kind of data that is selected, and the way in which it is applied throughout the paper. Both primary and secondary data sources are included as a necessity for conducting an in-depth perspective on the issue and enables this thesis to answer the research question in the most precise way. The primary data sources include policies and state-plans such as China's 13<sup>th</sup> Five-Year Plan (hereafter 13<sup>th</sup> FYP) that outlines the country's domestic and international goals. More specifically, chapters regarding China's approach to climate change, energy, and clout in the international community are of interest. This thesis subjectively chooses chapters of state-plans of this magnitude, to select the data that specifically suits this thesis' issue-area. Also, China's pledges to the UNFCCC such as the Intended Nationally Determined Contributions (hereafter INDC), articles, treaties such as the Paris Agreement, and official statements such as the EU-China joint statement on climate change from the Beijing summit in 2017 are included as empirical data, along with speeches, reports and articles from the international climate change regime. Additionally, secondary sources constitute issue-related scientific journals, media reports and news articles in order to broaden the perspective on the main issue and explore in which aspects

China is pressured to remain committed to the Paris Agreement and global climate change mitigation in general (Bryman 2012, 312-313). Furthermore, as the Belt and Road Initiative remains a key project for China both domestically and abroad, sources that provide perspectives on the contemporary policy measures that relate to this ambitious initiative are also incorporated.

### 3.5 Delimitations

This thesis' delimitations consist of several aspects. First, as global climate change is a phenomenon that can be extended into almost all spheres of research, it is necessary to clarify that this thesis deals with the explicit area of China's domestic and international role of the issue. Thus, the research restricts itself to the area of social science and refrains from commenting on issues that e.g. pertain to environmental protection within the natural or technological sciences. Also, the timeframe that this thesis deals with is concentrated to the time after the signing of the Paris Agreement, as it is in this period of time that China has made pledges to reduce its carbon footprint and made policy measures to mitigate climate change domestically and abroad. Consequently, policies and measures prior to this time in history may be mentioned, however, such data does not play a major role. Second, the US is recognised as a key actor in the question of mitigating climate change, however, due to its announced withdrawal from the Paris Agreement, it is no longer considered relevant for point of analysis for answering the research question. Instead, the thesis regards China, the EU, and the UNFCCC as the most important actors, and accordingly, the remaining signatories of the Paris Agreement are likewise not included, as involving all participants would change the focus of the research. Third, regarding the utilisation of empirical data such as China's 13<sup>th</sup> Five-Year Plan, this thesis opts to subjectively choose chapters that are explicitly concerned with climate change related sectors, and chapters that do not fall into this category are therefore excluded from analysis. Finally, sources of Chinese language have been omitted from consideration due to linguistic limitations of the author, with the only exception of China's INDC as the document contains both an English and a Chinese version.

## 4 Theory

This section accounts for the chosen theories and their core concepts, respectively. The main objective of this section is to provide an overview of theoretical framework of this thesis.

## 4.1 Neoliberal Institutionalism

To conduct an analysis within this field of research, this thesis applies Neoliberal Institutionalism (hereafter NLI) as one of two guiding theories to conduct analysis on China's climate change behaviour. The theory has been developed by several scholars through time and is widely recognised as a school of thought on world politics. Scholars of NLI emphasise the importance of transnational relations and the inherent affiliations between both state and non-state-actors. They furthermore agree that the international system is decentralised in its way of governance, meaning that the actors within the system do not adhere to a specific set of rules. As such, NLI agrees with other schools of thought, for instance, constructivism, which states that the international system is anarchic in its structures, albeit arguing that the term "anarchy" can be perceived as rhetorically loaded. This is due to it being closely connected to words such as chaos and disorder. It should be understood in the sense that "(...) *world politics lacks a common government*" (Keohane 1989, 1) and thus underscore one of the main notions of NLI that state-actors are and has been essential to the cooperation between states in the international system (Saryal 2015, 3-4). Although, despite the anarchic structures, neoliberal institutionalists argue that because of the lack of a central world government, institutions and organisations possess a vital role to facilitate platforms for cooperation and orderly procedures between states. In this sense, when considering this theory, both decentralisation and institutionalisation should be taken into account, as it is assumed that the behaviour of states depends on the inherent guidelines that are laid out by the regimes in which the actors participate (Keohane 1989, 1-2).

Accordingly, to the thought of a decentralised world government, institutions may therefore prove vital for cooperation among states who possess different opinions of which measures are required to reach a common goal. Likewise, institutionally established regimes therefore have the ability to assist further in narrowing how and by which conditions actors should align themselves with in order to reach consensus on an issue-area. Hence, the NLI approach emphasises the importance of regimes and this thesis focuses on the climate change regime established by the UN's body, the UNFCCC, which renders the guiding thinking of the theory applicable. Additionally, regimes are considered important as they may set the frame for the compliance of states in matters of conflicting interests. The regimes thus assist establishing multilateral agreements and treaties of which state-actors may be held accountable, as with the Paris Agreement (Reus-Smit and Snidal 2008, 212). In this sense, the neoliberal institutionalists argue that both cooperation and discrepancies between states can only be understood when considering the institutions that provide the platform for communicating



either consensus or disagreements (Keohane 1989, 2). On the other hand, as proven with the recent withdrawal from several treaties by the US administration, the neoliberal institutionalists do not claim that states are completely constrained by the expected compliance to institutions, however, it believes that: “(...) *state actions depend to a considerable degree on prevailing institutional agreements (...)*” (Keohane 1989, 2).

An established proponent of the NLI approach, Robert O. Keohane, therefore argues that the institutional agreements, or conventions, affect: “1) *the flow of information and opportunities to negotiate*; 2) *the ability of governments to monitor each other’s compliance and to implement their own commitments – (hence the ability to make credible commitments in the first place)*; and 3) *prevailing expectations about the solidity of international agreements*” (Keohane 1989, 2). To summarise, the basic assumptions of this branch of neoliberalism within the frame of state-actors’ behaviour are understood as: first, *states are key actors when it comes to what path international politics will take*. This assumption asserts that most state-actors act rationally in the international community and will take the path towards absolute gain through cooperative measures rather than relative gains in issue-areas of common interests such as dealing with global climate change. Second, *states are not the only actors to decide and define the path of international politics*. As decentralisation has been recognised, no multilateral agreements may take place outside the frames of internationally institutionalised platforms such as the signing of the Paris Agreement within the UNFCCC. Third, *cooperation between states is a non-predictable phenomenon*, which means that non-compliance and withdrawal from signed and accepted agreements can occur. However, this assumption is also built on the premise that states will act appropriately to the institutions’ guidelines if these coincide with the state’s national interest and if other states comply as well (Saryal 2015, 3-4).

In order to clarify what constitutes an institution, Keohane argues that these can take one of three forms: *a) formal intergovernmental or cross-national nongovernmental organisation*. To this thesis’ scope, this refers to institutions such as the EU and the UN. Correspondingly, such kind of institutions are driven by purpose with the capability to monitor and react to other actors and are deliberately established by states. *B) intergovernmental regimes*, constituting an institution such as the climate change regime, more precisely the Paris Agreement, with specific regulations consensually signed by governments. Following this logic, international regimes are not established as law-enforcing entities but are rather acting as kinds of contracts to organise intergovernmental relationships to the mutual benefit of the participants (Keohane 1984, 88-89). *C) Conventions*, these are referred to as e.g. the UNFCCC.

Within the scope of NLI, conventions are especially important to keep in mind, as the absence of these would render the establishment of intergovernmental regimes almost impossible. Conventions should be regarded as institutions which can shape the expectations of other actors, and these can resemble regimes as they are established as a kind of conformity for the participants to follow, in the sheer sense that following the guidelines of a convention is practical when other actors are also doing so (Keohane 1989, 4).

Nonetheless, NLI argues that both established regimes and conventions can be fragile and subject to change or renegotiation (Keohane 1984, 88-89). This was witnessed during the discrepancies between parties at COP15 in Copenhagen, which ultimately led to failed negotiations that was then renegotiated at COP21 where a deal on combatting climate change was eventually finalised and signed. The NLI's emphasis on conventions is therefore evident in the light of the fact that in the absence of conventions, it would be complicated for states to negotiate or even understand the meaning of each other's actions: "*(...) regimes therefore depend on the existence of conventions that make such negotiations possible*" (Keohane 1989, 4).

Regarding states' attitudes towards negotiation, the adjusted priorities in China's development model are now more aligned with the climate change mitigation agenda, where the reasons for the change may be explored through a point of departure in the abovementioned aspects of NLI. More specifically, Beijing's shift in the direction of sustainable development means there is room for lowering the expectations of exponential growth in order to implement policies that consider transitioning into a more climate change friendly economy. The eventual consensus on the Paris Agreement may thus have sprung from the fact that Chinese domestic and foreign policy interests have changed, proving that state-actors and international institutions are essential to the progress of international politics. Lastly, NLI theorists emphasise that international agreements are difficult to achieve and that sustaining them highly depends on the human-constructed institutions' ability to shape strong and clearly specified guidelines in the treaties, and that these are routinely obeyed by the participants (Keohane 1989, 2-3).

#### 4.2 The Two-Level Pressure Framework

The second theoretical approach of this thesis is *The Two-Level Pressure Framework*, developed by Fuzuo Wu in her latest book: "Energy and Climate Policies in China and India: A Two-Level Comparative Study" (2018). The main notions draw upon several schools of

thought and concepts within the research field of international relations (Wu 2018, 14). The Two-Level Pressure Framework is based on what scholars of realism, constructivism and neoliberalism agree upon, namely that the international system is anarchic in the sense that the system's governance is decentralised and that state-actors within the system are considered rational egoists; meaning they will seek out the most favourable position when accruing both wealth and seeking to improve status (Wu 2018, 31-32). However, this thesis takes notice in the framework's alignment towards neoliberal institutionalism as it emphasises states and institutions as key actors in international politics and that pressure on a state can amount internally or be wielded by the external environment. Hence, this theoretical approach argues that mainstream international relations theories possess certain limitations or are conflicted regarding where a state's motivations stems from, and what shapes a state-actor's behaviour in the international system (Wu 2018, 35). The theory's assertions emanate from the notion that climate change is not a part of China's basic national interest, and thus prompts the idea that the state-actor is somehow pressured into a commitment of mitigating the global threat and will therefore seek the most favourable outcomes of such behaviour. Consequently, the analytical framework is set up as a tool to analyse and determine whether and how such pressure comes from within the state or from the international system; whether an actor's behaviour is *proactive* or *reactive*; and by which means a state-actor acquires its modified goals (Wu 2018, 30-32).

Accordingly, the framework considers both the unit- (domestic/state) and systemic- (international) level as intertwined aspects when conducting an analysis of a state-actor's policy behaviour. It is assumed that an actor's behaviour may be *proactive* or *reactive*, or a combination of the two: “(...) a *proactive and reactive foreign policy can be defined as a being where a state typically adopts some independent foreign policy measures to secure its national interests, but occasionally needs to modify or adjust those measures in response to external influences or pressures*” (Wu 2018, 33). A state-actor's foreign policy measures can therefore be initiated as a proactive move to accommodate anticipated circumstances, however prompt a reactive response when external pressure amounts or if more advantageous situations are envisaged. The concept of proactive and reactive state-behaviour derives from the assumption of state rationality in the sense that states act accordingly to cost-benefit calculations in order to maximise the outcome of the chosen policy path. It furthermore suggests and underscores the assertion that a state's behaviour can be initiated as proactive, and if circumstances change, the counteraction response will be applied accordingly (Wu 2018, 32). Thus, following the

theoretical assumption that China has no initial national interest in mitigating climate change, the fact that climate change policies are now in effect, must have been instigated by reactive responses to domestic and/or international pressure. From an analytical perspective, China's policy behaviour can therefore be described as both proactive and reactive, as actions toward maximising domestic wealth has been moderated in certain climate change related sectors, and efforts to which the end-goal may be to enhance China's image in the international system; or to create wealth based on the new and modified goals.

These are called the *inside-out* and the *outside-in* processes and are utilised to indicate whether an actor's policy-making primarily comes from domestic or international pressure. This proves to be of use to this research as analysing whether China's relation to the Paris Agreement comes from a domestic pressure of e.g. ensuring public health by reducing pollution rates or generating wealth for the population are the main drivers, or whether external pressure from the international community, e.g. through institutional pressure from the climate change regime or the international community are the main causes (Wu 2018, 39). Assuming China's interests have mainly been driven by economic development, a pledge to engage in mitigating climate change both domestically and internationally could potentially impede economic growth. In proactive/reactive terms and considering the inside-out and outside-in processes, such circumstances could be interpreted to be curbed by China through investing heavily in renewables, enforcing climate change related policies within economic, political and social sectors, and making statements in the international system that supports the climate change regime.

As the guidelines and regulations for mitigating climate change mainly derive from the international institutional level, this theoretical framework thus considers China's climate change policy behaviour as a process of "outside-in", as the international community prescribe both guidelines and the norms of said issue-area (Wu 2018, 39). In this case, the Two-Level Pressure Framework aligns itself with the assumptions from the neoliberal institutionalist approach, in which state-actors are not the only influential actors in international politics. The international institutions and their conventions possess certain clout when it comes to interstate initiatives like mitigating climate change: "(...) the "two-level pressures" model describes how the execution of China's and India's domestic preferences has been constrained by systemic or international factors" (Wu 2018, 34).

## Wealth

In international relations it is often discussed what drives a state's motivations in the international system. According to the two-level pressure framework, this theme falls well within the scope of the concept of *wealth*, due to several aspects. First, it is widely acknowledged that states naturally seek survival, but as there are no imminent threat of war between states in the contemporary international community, states are more concerned with securing their survival by other means: “(...) *states main effort have therefore been devoted to developing their economy (...)*” (Wu 2018, 36). This applies to China as well, as by now it has been well established that the country's past decades prosperity has largely been driven by economic development. Hence, as the world economy has become more interdependent, accruing wealth and modifying international behaviour by cooperative means, rather than focusing on relative gains, has become a more effective way for states to secure stable development.

Following Wu's logic, an estimation of a state's wealth can be indicated by measuring GDP, and a fundamental way of sustaining GDP growth is through energy security. Three criteria for sustaining GDP growth within the sphere of energy security are mentioned in the framework as essential: “*a state's supply of energy must be adequate in volume, and there is a supply level below which national security would be jeopardized*”; “*the supply of energy must be uninterrupted and continuous*”; and “*energy must be available at 'reasonable prices'*” (Wu 2018, 38). Consequently, any neglect of the abovementioned could prove detrimental to the development of a state's GDP, which provides this thesis the incentive to investigate China's energy situation and how its leaders articulate energy security in the era of climate change mitigation. Putting this into the frame of climate change, this would translate to exploring China's policies that deal with patterns of green energy investments or the securing of energy supply by agreements with trade-partners that may affect China's pollution rates. Also, policy measures that indicate Beijing's effort to secure economic growth despite remaining in compliance with the climate change regime's guidelines may be of interest to this point of analysis as the theoretical framework argues that: “*a state's climate policy, domestic or foreign, has usually been regarded by states as hindering their domestic economic growth*” (Wu 2018, 39). Thus, the question of why China should stay committed to the Paris Agreement presents itself when the international system's hegemon, the US, could easily opt out of it, and especially if remaining committed may hurt China's economic development trajectory.

## Status

The second concept in this theoretical framework concerns states seeking status in the international system. This concept is based on the constructivist notion that reality is up for interpretation and that identity is shaped by how others perceive an individual, or in this case, a state: “(...) *a state’s status is fundamentally different from its material position in the international system, because status is a product of social construction*” (Wu 2018, 49). Therefore, external perception of a state may determine its ranking within the international community and thus affect how much clout that state can exert. Also, the importance of status is a focal point in social identity theory, which was initially developed within the field of psychology to assess an individual’s in-group behaviour. Applying it to the field of international relations, however, means modifying the concept to assess a state’s identity behaviour. Hence, it can be utilised to examine whether a state is attempting to increase its status in the international system and how other actors acknowledge or disregard this kind of image-improving behaviour (Wu 2018, 49-50).

For an actor like China that has already accumulated material wealth, the two-level pressure framework argues that it is natural to then seek a favourable immaterial position of status to gain more respect and influence in the international system (Wu 2018, 48-50). It is argued that a given state’s ranking, or identity, is based on several aspects such as: “*wealth, coercive capabilities, culture, demographic position, socio-political organisation, and diplomatic clout*” (Wu 2018, .49). Analysing China’s status seeking efforts in relation to climate change could thus be applied by assessing China’s motivations for remaining committed to the Paris Agreement; how much clout it exerts in the climate change regime and how it cooperates with other actors with high status. Since the US’ withdrawal from the Paris Agreement, it has been pondered whether China will take the position as the spearhead of global climate change leadership, which would be an indication of increased status in the international system. As such, status can be defined as the other actors’ beliefs about a state, and as the international community is yearning for a high-ranking actor to step up and display leadership behaviour in the absence of the US, this concept can be applied as a marker of China’s status seeking behaviour. However, in instances of an actor behaving inappropriately to the inherent rules and norms, e.g. by behaving contradictorily to its commitments by increasing pollution rates or prioritising economic development over climate change mitigation, the in-group may turn to social opprobrium, which will in effect hurt the actor’s status or rank: “*They [states] are, in short, motivated by a desire to avoid the sense of shame or social*

*disgrace that commonly befalls those who break widely accepted rules”* (Wu 2018, 50). The compliance to the climate change regime’s guidelines and norms can thus be regarded as a marker of status seeking behaviour but should however always be reflected in the statements made by other actors in the international system as status depends on the collective approval from other actors within the same group (Wu 2018, 58-59).

### *Asymmetrical Interdependence*

The third and final concept of the two-level pressure framework that this thesis includes deals with asymmetrical interdependence (hereafter AI), which is a kind of systemic pressure in terms of superiority and subordination among states in the international system. Within the international system, the AI is characterised by unbalanced distribution of power and energy resources, and to some extent military power. The latter quite explicitly concerns the United States in the post-Cold War era and has to a large degree cemented the US’ unipolarity in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Wu 2018, 63). This concept suggests that as the world economy grows more interdependent, the relationship between states are becoming more intertwined. This means that lesser dependent states in effect wield more power over more dependent states and can therefore exert more pressure on the dependent states when it comes to drafting foreign policies (Wu 2018, 62). The unevenly balanced dependency relationship among states are often displayed in the sense that the more dependent states will comply to the lesser dependent state’s influence as it can be costly for the dependent state to break the ties, especially if the dependency concerns energy, infrastructure, or another sector closely linked to a dependent state’s economic development. Thus, it is often a matter of rationality, and like the neoliberal institutional approach, this theoretical concept assumes that more dependent states act out of rationality and absolute gains.

In this regard, China may be regarded as a state with the economic capability to pressure other states which it has relations with, and this concept can therefore be applied to analyse instances where China has provided economic payments or investments to a state to gain access to uninterrupted energy supply. On the other hand, as China lacks a large reserve of natural resources itself, it can in some instances be seen on both sides of the interdependency table. Considering China’s immense demand for energy and the unevenly distributed natural resources, the states that supply the energy may wield power over China, or at least influence China when it comes to negotiations in the international system: *“(…) countries with rich energy resources can employ their energy supply as a source of power to influence those energy-poor and importing countries’ policy choices lies in the fact that uninterrupted and*

*sufficient energy supplies are prerequisites for any economic activities and development*” (Wu 2018, 63). Another aspect of AI may surface in the sense that China could be subject to pressure concerning climate change commitments from e.g. the EU. This is based on the fact that much of China’s economic growth depends on exports and China will therefore, according to this theory, act rationally and seek to comply with other actors’ proposals rather than risk the costs of being reluctant and hurt important ties (Wu 2018, 62-63). In summation, China may be anticipated to comply with other actors’ influence if it perceives non-compliance within climate change behaviour to affect other sectors such as energy or trade.

## 5 China’s Climate Change Policy Measures after the Paris Agreement

This section of the thesis first explores which policies China has implemented after the Paris Agreement, and exemplify aspects of how these policies affect the country’s handling of climate change related issues.

### 5.1 The 13<sup>th</sup> Five-Year Plan

To indicate the path of development the country is taking and how to get there, China issues a national social and economic development plan each five years. Currently, the 13<sup>th</sup> FYP is in effect, and it is centred around how to maintain stable growth of 6.5-7% per annum, although with a focus on transitioning China’s economy from relying on heavily polluting industries and mechanisms, into a more sustainable economic development path guided by the principles of “innovative”, “coordinated”, “**green**”, “open”, and “shared development” (Communist Party of China 2016, Part I). The most emphasised areas relating to climate change includes water, soil, air quality, and coal consumption, as well as progressing the country’s cooperation with other state-actors and international institutions. In China’s pursuit of becoming a “moderately prosperous society” by 2020, one of the major development philosophies of the 13<sup>th</sup> FYP states: *“Green: both a necessary condition for ensuring lasting development and an important way in which people can work to pursue a better life”* (Communist Party of China 2016, Chapter 4). As China recognises the need for change in its unsustainable sectors, a major point of the 13<sup>th</sup> FYP focuses on how to transition China’s energy sector. The emphasis on transforming its energy sector towards reliance on renewables may display a reaction to a systemic pressure, as China could have proceeded with the contemporary energy consumption to sustain economic growth instead of abiding to international norms of phasing out pollutant energy sources. As the country has made pledges to the international community prior to the effectuation of its 13<sup>th</sup> FYP, it may be derived that



the established norms of the international community reflect a pressure on China to comply with these. Several indications on how this transition will be reached is provided in the FYP, including decreasing carbon- and energy intensity per unit of GDP by 18% and 15% compared to the end of the 12<sup>th</sup> FYP, respectively.

In the development plan, peak carbon emission targets are stated as well as ambitions for the energy sector and how new mechanisms and monitoring systems will be put in place to gradually phase out energy reliance from fossil fuels in favour of renewables. Following an increase of both international and public opinion of the Chinese government caring more about economic growth rates than its people's welfare, a distinction from the 12<sup>th</sup> to the 13<sup>th</sup> FYP is perceived in that sustainable development and people-centred policies are in focus (Zhang and Tang 2017). The goal of a “*moderately prosperous society in all respects*” (Communist Party of China 2016, Part I) seems based on the acknowledgment of the Chinese government that unhinged economic growth equals challenges in other developmental spheres that may be to the detriment for its people, while also contributing to the worsening of climate change through issues such as ozone depletion, reduced air and water quality, food security, desertification of already exposed land-areas etc. All of which possess negative connotations to the people's prosperity and may evidently affect the economy negatively, hence also potentially intensify both the domestic and international pressure, which would obstruct the objective of reaching a moderately prosperous society and be unfavourable to China's image. As the public pressure on the Chinese government has mounted over the years due to pollution via emissions from energy sources, the energy policy measures in the 13<sup>th</sup> FYP can thus be regarded as an essential aspect of the Chinese government's ambition to accommodate the domestic pressure and maintain its integrity, and thereby reflects an inside-out process. By articulating the urgency for improving its domestic environment through climate change related policies, China may additionally be noted to react to an international pressure that, if neglected, could translate into shaming the country for not acting on the current unsustainable situation. Thus, in this respect, the 13<sup>th</sup> FYP presents both aspects of inside-out and outside-in processes, as China is pressured from both unit and systemic level to tackle its issues.

Hence, China's economic development has been highly dependent on an uninterrupted energy supply, much of which has been driven by coal. In the section explaining the energy mix of 2016-2020, the 13<sup>th</sup> FYP mentions how measures will be taken to both focus on innovative and eco-friendly solutions to accommodate the increasing energy demand in China, however, the development plan also emphasises the continued use of coal, although with

alterations. “*We will optimize the development of national comprehensive energy centers and step up efforts to ensure the **cleaner** and more efficient use of coal*” (Communist Party of China, Part VII, Chapter 30, Section 1). This kind of measure could be interpreted as a way to partly curb the full transition away from polluting energy sources by making assurances that the coal industry will be sustainable in the near future. More specifically, the issue of “clean coal” is something the current US administration has also been advocating for as a way to make the country energy self-reliant and to bring back domestic jobs within the energy sector to strengthen its economy without relying on external factors such as bilateral energy deals. Thus, as international pressure on fossil fuels abatement intensifies, major coal producers and consumers like the US and China can be noted to attempt to react to such pressure by reshaping the discourse of coal by framing it as a potential sustainable energy source while simultaneously emphasising climate friendly goals in development plans. It is a strategy that has since backfired within both academia and the media due to lack of evidence that such measures actually work. The idea of making clean coal mainly derives from the technique of storing the otherwise emitted carbon in the ground instead of letting it get to the air. The issue of this technology is however multifaceted, as experts state that the sheer technology to realise clean coal, or “carbon capture and storage”, is both “in its infancy” and extremely expensive to develop. In the US, only one coal plant is experimenting with this new technology, and the expenses reached \$190 million to undergo this transition (Plumer 2017). As China’s energy demand is ever-increasing, and considering it approximately opens a new coal plant each week, the costs of realising such a transition would be detrimental to its economy (Moors 2018). Within the energy sector, it would therefore seem more sustainable for the Chinese government to achieve its goals of investing heavily in renewables and gradually shift away from the reliance on coal. The 13<sup>th</sup> FYP’s ambition is to cap total energy consumption at 5 billion metric tons of standard coal by 2020 (LSE 2016).

Besides heavy reliance on coal, the 13<sup>th</sup> FYP also recognise the issue of its transportation sector, and it states that transportation measures to address air quality will be taken to reduce toxic air in major cities of up to 25% (Communist Party of China 2016, Part X, Chapter 44, section 1). Additionally, the development plan explains that China aims to expand the electric vehicle market and aims to remove high-emission vehicles from the roads. Within this sector, the government will issue subsidies and tax breaks to carmakers and individuals who buy new-energy vehicles (or NEVs) and has since implementation seen an increase in sales of 80%, while in 2017 the production rate of NEVs increased by 51.4% (Xinhua News

Agency 2017). Congested traffic is an enormous issue in the larger cities in China, and a considerable contributor to the worsening of the air quality, and it therefore makes sense to aim to shift away from exhaustion vehicles to zero-emission vehicles. The 13<sup>th</sup> FYP states that “*We will take climate change into full consideration in both economic and social development (...)*” (Communist Party of China, Part X, Chapter 46, Section 2), and it seems that increased focus on green technologies and transitioning China’s energy sector will act as the most reliable variables for the 13<sup>th</sup> FYP to succeed within this area and accommodate both public and international pressures.

## 5.2 China’s Emission Trading Scheme

As part of domestic measures to combat climate change by reducing GHG emissions and take better control of major carbon-emitting industries (mainly power, steel, building materials, and chemical), the 13<sup>th</sup> FYP states that a “national carbon emission trading scheme” will be established, or so-called “cap-and-trade” system; a market-based approach to provide motivation for industries and corporations to reduce emissions (Communist Party of China 2016, Part X, Chapter 46, Section 1). In its essence, it means that a government will sell a limited number of permits to corporations, which grants them permission to pollute accordingly. In areas where comparable schemes are implemented, such as the EU, corporations are thus required to possess permits and their pollution rates may not exceed these. China is by no means the first state to come up with such a scheme to combat climate change domestically, however, it may signal the international community that the Chinese government is taking measures to keep its infamous polluting industries and corporations on par with governmentally articulated aims of improving the air quality countrywide. According to the EU, such mechanisms can ensure cost-effective emission cuts and additionally “*promotes investment in clean, low-carbon technologies*” (EU Commission 2016) as it restricts corporations’ permitted levels of emission, thus encouraging them to seek more eco-friendly technologies. Once operating, the Chinese scheme is set to become the world’s largest as it “*aims to cover 8 billion tonnes of carbon dioxide emission per annum from around 100.000 industrial plants*” (Xu, Martina, and Navaratnam 2019), a substantial amount of the estimated total 10.15 billion tonnes China emitted in 2016 (Ritchie and Roser 2017).

In terms of how far the government has come in the process of implementing the scheme, China initiated preliminary establishment of the system in 2017, and most recently expects the first trades to happen in 2020 due to legal and technical infrastructure construction. Consequently, a timespan of two years from its first mentioning to the actualisation of the

mechanism has past, and whether the scheme will be effective or not, or if it will be established simply to display climate change action on par with the EU remains to be seen. Even in China, it is discussed whether it will be effective, as the target of lowering carbon intensity by 45% by 2020 has already been met in 2018 (45.8%), according to Chinese figures (Xu, Martina, Navaratnam 2019). The new scheme does therefore present multiple aspects, portraying China's climate change behaviour as reactive based on both domestic demands of urgently improving conditions for the public, and international pressure on China to abide by the climate change regime's norms of keeping the country's businesses in check. Nevertheless, the mechanism was applauded by CEO of International Emissions Trading Association, a close partner to the UN within its Sustainable Development Goals Partnership Platform, who stated that these market-based systems are both growing in number and leading the way in cutting climate emissions, as well as praising China for harmonising its policies and taking actions on its long-term commitment to combat climate change (UNFCCC 2017). Thus, the establishment of such system evidently shows that China responds to international pressure by taking measures on the issue of climate change, and that such measures accompany respect from global institutions that encourage this kind of behaviour, ultimately portraying China as a more responsible stakeholder in the international community. Through reactive measures based on systemic pressure, China's can thus be noted to improve its international image by improving domestic grasp on climate change, however the time it takes to get it operational indicates that the country lacks technology and know-how, attributes which its European counterpart possesses.

### 5.3 Additional Climate Change Related Measures

#### *Ministerial Restructuring*

Aside from implementing policies, the Chinese government is currently restructuring ministerial assignments related to climate change. Simply put, the Ministry of Environmental Protection (MEP) under the State Council was in 2018 transformed into the new Ministry of Ecology and Environment (MEE). The change of ministries may be an attempt to strengthen the government's grasp on climate change related issues and will be accompanied by new laws and monitoring systems, in an effort to increase compliance from polluting industries, enforce effective climate change policies, and to reduce bureaucratic procedures between legislative bodies (Stanway 2018). The change of ministries will stand as the largest ministerial transformation in years and signal a heightened focus on the issue of climate change while also providing assurance to the public that measures are being conducted on the central government

level. Specifically, the ministry's main objectives will include the enforcement of policies in pollution areas such as GHG emission and protection of water resources, two major issues in China. According to some Chinese experts, the change is a positive move to gather climate change related issues under one roof, whereas the handling of issues was previously scattered between different ministries and agencies (Buckley and Bradsher 2018). For instance, issues such as regulating water and land pollution were divided between two different ministries, the same was the reality for regulation of carbon emissions, which evidently complicates both drafting and implementation of new policies. While specific plans for how the transformation of ministries will materialise is currently scarce, some of the MEE's main objectives along with the ministerial bodies currently in charge has been published:

*“(...) climate change and emissions reduction policies, currently under the NDRC; underground water pollution regulation, currently under the Ministry of National Land and Resources; Watershed environment protection, currently under the Ministry of Water Resources; Agricultural pollution control, currently under the Ministry of Agriculture; Marine conservation, currently under the State Oceanic Administration; Environmental protection during project implementation, currently under the State Council's South-to-North Water Diversion Project Construction Committee (Li 2018).*

What can be deduced from this restructuring in the ministries is the fact that the bureaucracy regarding drafting, implementation, and monitoring may now be much more effective as one body of the government will oversee all the above, instead of them being scattered among multiple governmental departments. However, while the transfer of duties to the MEE seems logical, it may be speculated whether the new ministry will be able to wield the same clout as the powerful NDRC, the management agency under the State Council, has done for years. The NDRC stands as one of the most powerful commissions in the government, so while the transformation might provide overview of climate change issues and policies, enforcing them and pushing forward the agenda may be challenging (Stanway 2018). Ultimately, the efficacy of the ministries will depend on how determined the Communist Party of China is on resolving climate change issues. The restructuring, however, may be perceived as a governmental acknowledgement that in order to tackle climate change related issues and achieve the goals in the 13<sup>th</sup> FYP, improvements within bureaucratic procedures and red tape must be enforced.

### *The 2020 Air Pollution Action Plan*

As stated in the 13<sup>th</sup> FYP, the Chinese government aimed to implement measures to combat air pollution in its cities, and on June 27, 2018, a three-year plan was released: “The 2020 Air Pollution Action plan”. By comparison to 2015, this plan implements specific targets for reducing emissions of sulphur dioxide (SO<sub>2</sub>) and nitrogen oxides by 2020, both of which to decrease at least 15%. Significantly, the two compounds are released when burning fossil fuels such as coal when producing electricity, and by setting stricter reduction targets for these indicates the Chinese government’s ambition of aligning itself with the other major polluters like the EU and the US; both of which have stringent laws to prevent excessive emission of the mentioned particles. Additionally, several EU member-states have already met their 2020 target and correspondingly set new targets for 2030 (European Commission 2019).

The 2020 Air Pollution Action Plan also includes targets for the hazardous concentration of PM<sub>2.5</sub> particles to be decreased by 18% and requires the annual number of days “with fairly good air quality” to increase to at least 80%, whereas “slightly polluted” days must decrease by at least 25%. The plan is highly expected as it expands so-called key regions where pollution is especially heavy. The plan will broaden the “war on pollution” to cover 82 cities in China, including coal-producing areas such as Shanxi and Shaanxi, and heavily industrialised areas like Henan, Anhui, Zhejiang, Jiangsu, and the region surrounding Shanghai (Xu and Stanway 2018). The plan is expected to be carried out with precision as it now falls under the newly established MEE’s jurisdiction, whereas the previous plan was instigated by the NDRC. Furthermore, the previous plan was often hailed as China’s most influential environmental policy and considered an important variable in the country’s fight against air pollution, especially because it considered the reduction of dangerous PM<sub>2.5</sub> particles in a broader sense (Zhang 2018).

Aside from reduction targets on the mentioned air particles, the plan also includes restrictions on manufacturing of steel and aluminium in the key areas, and the government will even suspend water, electricity, and raw materials for firms that fail to comply with the rules in the action plan. Furthermore, the action plan expands on the 13<sup>th</sup> FYP targets within the transportation sector, more specifically to raise new energy vehicles to around two million a year in order to reduce emission from exhaustion on the Chinese roads (Xu and Stanway 2018). The plan may therefore be perceived as a result of the aims stated in the 13<sup>th</sup> FYP, and the 2020 Air Pollution Action Plan’s time of implementation, after the Paris Agreement, implies that China is making a reactive effort to combat air pollution domestically in alignment with both

the climate change regime's and other global institutions' urgent call for combatting climate change and securing public health on all governmental and institutional levels (Ovais 2018). These aspects thus indicate that the Chinese government has been pressured into taking additional measures to combat a part of an issue that both concerns its own population's health and reflects China's commitment to the global issue by following the way in which the international community aims to proceed with combatting climate change.

#### *National Plan for implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*

In October 2016, China issued its national plan for implementing the UN's *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, which constitutes 17 sustainability targets that encompass both social, environmental, institutional, economic, and human rights issues. According to Premier Li Keqiang, the implementation will highlight China's Five-Year approach as "innovative, coordinated, green, open and shared development". This plan is initiated as a tool to both review China's achievements of the previous "Millennium Development Goals" and based on those will address the opportunities and challenges that will be accompanied by implementing the 2030 Agenda. It will additionally act as a plan to develop individual action plans for China to deal with the 17 sustainability goals in the 2030 agenda, and within goal 13 that concerns climate, it correlates with China's 13<sup>th</sup> FYP to improve air and water quality, and will furthermore work as a means to shift the economic growth model in the green direction to accommodate challenges related to the energy sector.

The 2030 Agenda's 7<sup>th</sup> goal concerns energy, wherein China again pledges to increase the share of non-fossil fuels to about 20% by 2030 and outlines how China intends to strengthen cooperation with the UN to establish sustainable energy goals (Paul 2016). During the International Day of South-South Cooperation (SSC), China was hailed by UN Resident Coordinator, Nicholas Rosellini, for its proactive efforts to assist developing countries in combatting climate change through the SSC, mentioning how pledges in the region of \$3 billion to two separate funds within the 2030 agenda framework showed serious commitment and leadership role by the Chinese government (Rosellini 2017). The recognition can be interpreted to demonstrate several aspects of China's changed focus. First, it displays China as a responsible stakeholder by the willingness of providing aid to other developing states in need, so they may also act on climate change themselves with improved capabilities. Secondly, the appraisal may send a signal to both developed and developing countries that China is displaying leadership qualities by allocating significant amount of funds to climate change mitigation within the UN's sustainability framework, and thus acquire more respect and status in the

international community. The country may in this way be argued to seek the most favourable outcome of a pressure that encouraged China to increase its climate change effort. While there might be some economic setback in the short-term, the immaterial gain of strengthening its reputation may outweigh such setbacks by long-term goals of increased influence and respect from the countries that receive aid from China.

### *China's INDC*

Prior to COP21 in Paris, 180 countries submitted their Intended Nationally Determined Contributions (or INDC) papers to the UNFCCC, which details their commitment and adaptation to climate change mitigation after 2020. A country's INDC is supposed to link domestic and international policy goals, providing an overview for both the UNFCCC and other signatories to observe by which measures a country will approach climate change mitigation. Specifically, China's pledge to the UNFCCC includes the following main targets: *"To achieve the peaking of carbon dioxide emissions around 2030 (...); To lower carbon dioxide emissions per unit of GDP by 60% to 65% from the 2005 level; To increase the share of non-fossil fuels in primary energy consumption to around 20%; To increase the forest stock volume by around 4.5 billion cubic meters on the 2005 level"* (Wang et al. 2016, 9). China additionally pledges to tackle climate change *"(...) through enhanced mechanism- and capacity-building (...)"* (Wang et al. 2016, 9-10). Considering the initial carbon emission target alone, accomplishing this goal would mean China achieves peak emissions earlier than any developed country. Hence, the pledge to the UNFCCC, stemming from systemic pressure, presents reactive measures and ambitions on par with the fully developed countries, displaying China's willingness to adopt policies which contrasts its current status as the world largest polluter. China's INDC furthermore includes an emphasis on the abovementioned policies and climate change measures, and additionally mentions how the government will develop and improve upon mechanisms for verifying emission rates.

Notably, it has been discussed within the international community how accurate the Chinese measures are, and what has caused the slowed emissions, where some argue it is simply due to lower economic growth. The argument is that lower economic growth equals decreased energy consumption (Peters 2017). Considering this, as emission sources such as coal have declined because of less activity at the coal plants, it may be more due to economic slowdown than the government's "war on pollution" policies. China may thus utilise the inspiring goals and prior achievements stated in its INDC to boost its image of a responsible stakeholder that is making good on its climate change policy claims simply because the



economic growth is slowing. Following this logic, for China to maintain its decreasing emission rates would mean that economic growth should be halted accordingly, or that China will have to realise a transition away from coal consumption and thus accelerate the utilisation of renewables to sustain or even increase its economic growth rate. On the other hand, the pledge to the UNFCCC of strengthening statistics on climate change and expanding monitoring- and verification mechanisms while allowing other states to examine the emissions, could be perceived as a reactive measure towards more transparency and may reflect China's opening-up approach. In this sense, China can be interpreted to acknowledge that its reporting has been inconsistent, and the pledges in the INDC could be a measure to avoid further social opprobrium from the international community, which in turn adds to the image of being more responsible. In its essence, China's INDC indicates aspects that reflects both economic and political aspects of the state's climate change efforts (Stanway and Chen 2015).

## 6 The Two-Level Pressures on China after the Paris Agreement

This chapter of the thesis first aims to illustrate China's climate change policy measures by providing examples of the complexity of global climate change mitigation. Subsequently, the following sections attempts to clarify and explore the pressures that have been exerted on China to implement both its domestic and international policy measures, more specifically, how *wealth*, *status*, and *asymmetrical interdependence* have shaped China's climate change policies.

### 6.1 Policy Behaviour and the Global Climate Change Regime

The Paris Agreement was perceived as a milestone for the international community to reach consensus on how to tackle climate change and keep the Earth's temperature from reaching an increase to 2.0 degrees Celsius pre-industrial levels. In its ratification of the agreement, China has emphasised the approach of "*common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities of all countries*" as its guideline for how it will move forward with climate change policies (Communist Party of China 2016, Part X, Chapter 46, section 3). This indicates the country maintains the perception that individual actors must address responsibility according to their respective capabilities. After the Paris Agreement, Beijing therefore laid out more specific goals for how this approach was going to be actualised according to China's contemporary capabilities.

As with previous environmental agreements, such as the Kyoto Protocol, commitments to the climate change regime is not directly legally binding for any of the signatories yet. The

lawfully enforcement of the Paris Agreement is expected to be effectuated after a much anticipated “rulebook” has been drafted and signed (Evans and Timperley 2018). However, and importantly, the recent agreement does present aspects that could be interpreted as legally binding, as some articles include words such as “shall” when describing what Parties are required to do by ratifying the agreement. Linguistically, this evidently means the parts including this kind of word-choice make those specific parts of the agreement legally binding, such as article four in the treaty: “Parties **shall** account for their nationally determined contributions (...) Parties **shall** promote environmental integrity, transparency, accuracy, completeness, comparability and consistency (...) in accordance with guidance adopted by the Conference of the Parties (...)” (UNFCCC 2015, 5). The agreement contains 117 usages of “shall” in its paragraphs, which means the signatories are held accountable to some extent, however, since the wording is rather vague, and the use of other modal-verbs like “should” and “may” are also included: “All Parties **should** strive to formulate and communicate long-term low greenhouse gas emission development strategies (...)” (ibid, 6), plus the fact that the US easily announced its withdrawal from the agreement, the legal implications for non-compliance has yet to surface. This means that “commitment” is still up to the individual signatory to interpret and comply with in the way it sees fit until an actual rulebook for how to materialise the goals from Paris has been drafted and enforced. The lack of lawful enforcement can be argued to result in the accountability of states to come down to the social opprobrium applied by the international community onto those who do not comply with the articles in the Paris Agreement. In China’s case, therefore, the cost of potential non-compliance might not include lawful actions but would most likely be detrimental to its international image and ambition of seizing a role for global governance, proving an incentive for the country to remain in the treaty.

The recent COP24 in Poland was a clear display of how difficult it is to accommodate every state-actor’s priorities in a system of no central government, and although some parts of the much anticipated rulebook were agreed upon, the finalisation has been postponed to 2019’s COP25, in Chile (Evans and Timperley 2018). The lack of lawful enforcement in treaties such as the Paris Agreement, for now, therefore, displays more an indication of in which direction the international community is moving than the individual actor’s approach to handle the issue. It additionally illustrates how international institutions may be the facilitator of international politics, although the treaties are fragile and subject to both change and delay due to the power of states. Hence, exemplifying that both states and institutions are vital to the progression of international politics.

However, documents such as states' INDCs may provide clarity of just how serious a state-actor is about its climate change responsibilities. As China has seized the position as the number one greenhouse gas emitter in the world (per 2016 calculations)(World Resources Institute 2019) and has acknowledged the need for change in its development plan, along with its search for more respect and clout in the international community, it can be argued that the changed stance on emission reduction commitment derives from a fear of a negative image in the international community, and that it is therefore more beneficial for China to focus on shared leadership with the EU and provide a global public good through climate change mitigation. The link between China's policies and the relation with the EU becomes noteworthy when considering that China has expanded its interests abroad by e.g. the enormous BRI and the related investments and influence in Europe. Within this area, the submitted INDC may reflect reactive policy measures stemming from China's compliance with the EU's expectations, since the EU seeks responsibility and conjoined leadership from China: *"China will stand for the common interests of all humanity and actively engage in international cooperation to build an equitable global climate governance regime that is cooperative and beneficial to all"* (Su 2015). This paragraph in China's INDC signals its commitment to the international community and that besides taking domestic measures into account, it will engage in climate change leadership with other high-ranking actors in the climate change regime, such as the EU, to provide the international community a global public good. This stance was later reaffirmed in the China-EU joint statement after the 20<sup>th</sup> summit between the two economies: *"The leaders welcomed the increase in high-level contacts on environmental protection and natural resource conservation, and the importance of assuming greater leadership on the global environmental agenda (...)"* (European Commission 2018). Hence, if China's initiatives and foreign projects are perceived as out of alignment with development norms within the climate change regime and instead identified as driven by self-interests rather than for the prosperity and green development of all the involved countries in wide international initiatives such as the BRI, then succeeding in implementing such a vast initiative could be hindered by reluctance from the countries China aspires to deal with. In cases such as this, the INDC may thus provide clarity and assurance to the already involved countries, and the international community, about what Beijing's intentions are and how it will act on its foreign policies when implementing initiatives of BRI's magnitude.

Under this circumstance, China's pledge to the UNFCCC may therefore indicate how an outside-in pressure translates into maintaining a positive image in the international

community, hence reflecting the country's ambitions of carrying out international initiatives with increased awareness on eco-friendly implementation. China has recently acquired a deal with the government of Italy amounting to approximately \$2.8 billion dispersed over several projects within BRI (Chatzky 2019). Italy then becomes the first major economy in Europe to join the initiative, which could indicate that EU member-states may be changing their perception on how China goes about its foreign policy behaviour after the Paris Agreement. Similarly, China's relations with other EU member-states have increased, latest with Greece to be adopted in to the 16+1 development initiative (now 17+1), which up until now consisted of EU and non-EU members from post-communistic countries, and China (Istenič 2017, 2). The relations between Greece and China may be argued to have propelled since China's shipping firm, COSCO, acquired the majority share of the Greek port of Piraeus, and gave the Mediterranean economy a much-needed boost during its economic crisis. Conspicuously, Greece afterwards blocked an EU vote on a joint statement of China's supposed aggression in the South China Sea. Hungary, a country where China has pledged to invest billions in a railway related to BRI, likewise blocked the EU vote (Horowitz and Alderman 2018). Furthermore, the Greek port is set to be the largest in the Mediterranean Sea and is additionally part of the Chinese BRI. These aspects display both how China's political and economic influence in Europe is increasing and may also exemplify how China's image is changing in several EU member-states. Hence, China's heavy investments and increased interest in European economies may therefore substantiate why it aspires to be on good terms with the EU and refrain the risk being shamed or subjected to sanctions by going back on its climate change related promises, which may display how climate change is influencing other spheres of interests for actors in the international community. Interestingly, China has since the Paris Agreement implemented mechanisms that are aligned with the EU's approach to climate change in the energy sector. This is apparent with the previously mentioned emission trading scheme, which indicates that China intends to raise itself to the standards of the EU, and in that way should be regarded as a responsible stakeholder in the international community. An international pressure may thus be noted in the way the country is leaning more towards the EU's mechanisms and standards to seek more respect and avoid social discontent by members of the international community.

Apparently, China's change in direction of its development path may be attributed to both inside-out and outside-in processes, as domestic pressure from its public to find more sustainable solutions for economic development has mounted since 2005, where emissions

reached unprecedented levels and most major cities were covered in smog. This demand from the public resulted in more resolute goals in the 13<sup>th</sup> FYP than was apparent in the 12<sup>th</sup> FYP. Also, while China's middle class is growing, a substantial amount of the public still lives in poverty, meaning the central government has been required to find solutions to maintain a stable economic growth to accommodate the demands from the middle class and to alleviate the remaining part of the public still living in poverty, which is perceived in its policy focus on a green transition of its energy sector. These trends can therefore both be interpreted to derive from domestic pressures and as a way to find sustainable energy flow without impeding its growth of GDP. Within this area, it can thus be argued that the Chinese government has drafted its policies to accommodate a wealth issue that is connected to public demand, and that the means to that end are linked to its relations with other large economies like the EU.

The outside-in process is evident in the sense that the international community's pressure on heavily polluting states to find alternative drivers for their development has increased after the Paris Agreement. The international community, disregarding the US, can be perceived to move in a persistent direction of sustainable development, which means that China may be pressured into conformity if it wants to be perceived as a responsible stakeholder and partake in global climate change governance with the EU. This behaviour indicates its policy measures as being reactive when it comes to both domestic and international climate change practices and illustrates the complexity of mitigating the phenomenon. Thus, the Chinese government has increasingly focused its policies after the Paris Agreement to take measures that align with the international community's search for responsible stakeholders among the major economies, while still maintaining stable economic growth. The war on pollution and the path towards an ecological civilization, as famously articulated by President Xi, may thus have been initiated within China to both seek economic growth through more sustainable means, raise the living standards of the Chinese public, and to seek the most favourable position in the international community by norm-abiding behaviour and displaying signs of leadership willingness within this sphere. By these examples, the complexity of climate change mitigation in the international community may thus be argued to increasingly influence actors' policy measures and reach into social, political, and economic spheres of interests.

## 6.2 Maximising Wealth Under New Circumstances

China's current stage of development owes much to a focus on exponential economic growth during past decades. However, the costs of the economic boom have been evident in light of the mentioned pollution rates and has resulted in a change of focus towards generating

wealth by different measures. Thus, one of the larger puzzles for today's China regards how a transitioning of its energy sector may affect its growth of GDP, as the government has now shown commitment towards reducing emissions from its main energy supply, namely coal. Based on the mentioned pressures and the signifiers by both policies and statements from government officials, Beijing has thus committed itself to downscale its reliance on fossil fuels and may therefore look to other measures to sustain a stable growth rate.

The new circumstances where China may not rely completely on coal and other polluting energy sources to drive its economic development therefore brings attention to alternative energy sources, however, as the country is relatively limited when it comes to natural resources, Beijing may have to look abroad to sustain its energy demand. Apart from the policy measures mentioned in the previous section, one such policy measure can be observed in the largest initiative during Xi Jinping's tenure, namely the BRI. This initiative may assist the country in sustaining an adequate volume of energy in the long term based on several factors. If China is to phase out domestic coal production and consumption, it must either rely on energy import or the development of renewable technologies and implementation of mechanism. Some estimates put the timeframe for complete energy self-sufficiency in China by 2050 as unrealistic, and focus has thus remained on how the country can acquire energy abroad while also implementing renewable measures domestically according to the country's contemporary capabilities (Delman 2018). Currently, China's imported energy, in the form of oil and gas, mainly runs through areas controlled by the US navy such as the Persian Gulf and Africa, through so-called sea lines of communication (SLOC). Interruption or energy cut-off of any kind would therefore mean China's economy would be significantly weakened, which means that as long as the US has control over the SLOC, China may opt to find alternative routes for its imported energy to ensure energy security when aiming to phase out domestic coal (Tata 2017).

In this context, the BRI aims to build railways and pipelines in the involved countries, which could be a possible source of energy import that circumvents maritime routes. Although, securing energy in this way means that China may be forced to take other challenges into account, e.g. Beijing's \$62 billion investment in the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor. The corridor is connected to the Pakistan-Iran pipeline, which has been built already. However, finalising the Pakistan-China corridor, which includes the Gwadar Port will take years, and adding to that, the corridor runs through disputed areas prone to both terrorism, extreme weather, and has a history of severe earthquakes. However, as Xi Jinping's signature initiative,

the BRI proves to be closely connected to China's wealth seeking behaviour based on its enormous energy and infrastructure projects, and if China truly aims to succeed in realising its domestic energy transitioning policies, procuring sufficient and uninterrupted flow of energy through ports such as Gwadar in Pakistan could prove a necessity. Approximately 40% of the world's oil passes through the Gwadar Port and can therefore be considered important to China's ambitions of sustaining economic growth through energy procurement (Zhang 2018; Tata 2017).

Succeeding in securing energy supply through the BRI, however, could potentially mean the US would have no means to interrupt the flow of energy that runs through SLOC. In this way, China would accommodate the domestic pressure of securing energy and a viable source for sustained GDP growth, and additionally be in compliance with the international community's norms of transitioning countries' energy sources away from coal. Thus, the domestic pressure of accommodating an increasing energy demand may be determined as proactive. On the other hand, the BRI also poses some incentive questions regarding China's energy-mix and climate change. The state has reportedly been involved in some 240 coal power plants projects in 25 BRI involved countries, which would evidently put the initiative in violation with the international community's climate change pathway (Zhang 2018). Adding to this, investing heavily in some of the BRI involved countries comes with both opportunities and risks for the recipients. The poorer countries along the BRI could see an increase in biodiversity loss and environmental degradation if the projects are not implemented with eco-friendly measures, which would result in them becoming more prone and lesser capable to cope with climate change (Ruta 2018). As of 2018, some estimates put six of the ten most climate sensitive countries within the BRI, meaning how and by which measures the BRI is carried out might have an immediate effect on the involved countries (Zhang 2018).

However, it should be noted that some of the investments in the coal power plants abroad were initiated in 2013, before the Paris Agreement, and China has changed its emphasis towards investing in renewable projects since ratifying the climate change agreement, investing circa \$78.3 billion domestically in the clean energy sector in 2016, and \$11.8 billion in BRI countries abroad (Zhang 2018). Consequently, China's search for ensuring wealth through energy sources abroad proves multifaceted. While being involved in coal plants both domestically and internationally, initiatives such as the BRI also includes the mentioned clean energy investments. Furthermore, the initiative focusses on improving infrastructure for the involved countries, which is a central aspect of the international community's focus on climate

change and mentioned on several occasions by bodies of the UN: *“Investing in sustainable infrastructure is key to tackling three simultaneous challenges: reigniting global growth, delivering on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and reducing climate risk”* (Global Commission on the Economy and Climate 2016). Thus, by improving infrastructure in climate sensitive countries, China indicates that the issue of energy security is about more than ensuring sufficient and uninterrupted energy flow and that it is accompanied by intertwined challenges and opportunities within the issue of climate change.

The domestic pressure of acquiring adequate and affordable energy to sustain stable economic growth after the Paris Agreement seems intertwined with the pressure of ensuring the public a healthy environment and is reflected in the abovementioned policies such as The 2020 Air Pollution Action Plan. The plan for combatting air pollution may not necessarily have been implemented with an economic end-goal; albeit, possible success in accommodating the economic growth pressure by transitioning China’s energy-mix towards renewables and acquiring energy from abroad might have a positive effect on matters regarding domestic public health and improved environment, as the country’s fossil fuel energy production would decrease significantly. Thus, the implemented low-carbon measures may fulfil goals concerning energy security while simultaneously affecting climate change mitigation, hence the government’s actions may be interpreted as reactive. Moreover, Beijing has also experienced systemic pressure to rethink its energy-mix, as well as the country has been pressured into modifying policies in an endeavour of finding alternative energy sources to sustain stable economic growth. Consequently, as the climate change mitigation may transpire as a benefit from the energy policy-making, it may be argued that energy security is prioritised over climate change policy. This supports the notion that the Chinese government has been pressured into modifying its policies rather than acting out of self-interest. Due to the PRC’s changed energy seeking behaviour, the state’s pursuit of wealth through domestic and international energy security can in this way be perceived as a drive for shaping its climate change policy after the Paris Agreement. Also, the changed energy seeking behaviour can be interpreted as a way of securing energy while remaining aligned with the international community’s vision for energy transition and climate change.

### 6.3 Status Seeking Behaviour in the International Community

As previously mentioned, China aims to achieve peak carbon dioxide emissions around 2030; to lower carbon dioxide emissions per unit of GDP by 60%-65% from the 2005 level to 2030; to increase the share of non-fossil fuels in primary energy to around 20% by 2030; and



to increase the forest stock volume by around 4.5 billion cubic meters from 2005 levels to 2030 (Sandalow 2018, 33). The goals were both mentioned in China's 13<sup>th</sup> FYP and later highlighted in its submitted INDC to the UNFCCC, meaning that it moved from a plan for domestic goals to become integrated in its pledge to the international community, cementing the country's ambitions for international cooperation on the issue of climate change. Thus, the INDC is significant in the sense that Beijing commits to mitigating its GHG emissions and displays a reaction to a systemic pressure from the international community, hence China acknowledges its responsibilities. Also, the fact that the country requires developed countries to take responsibility, China must also participate when it has surpassed developed countries' emission rates and become the largest GHG emitter in the world, which adds clout to the pressure on the country. The economic growth thus means more responsibility is expected from China and neglecting this could cause the country to be subject to international scrutinization. The objectives in the INDC do however build on previously stated ambitions that date back to pre-Copenhagen conference. Nevertheless, considering China's increased focus on a green transition of its economy in its current 13<sup>th</sup> FYP, the modified targets are now more aligned with the climate change regime's norms and reflect a status seeking behaviour by increased participation and norm abiding behaviour. A systemic pressure may thus be noted to have been exerted on China to shape its policies to be more aligned with the contemporary norms of including a climate conscious aspect when considering development and thus providing the world a public good of combating climate change.

As displayed in section 6.2, China's climate change policies after the Paris Agreement have been articulated with emphasis on how the country's rate of development has brought climatic challenges both domestically and internationally, and that future development therefore will be focused on quality rather than exponential growth. Hence, apart from an economic pressure of transitioning its energy-mix, China may also have chosen this path due to immaterial circumstances, e.g. that the international community has increased its attention on how state-actors act on climate change related issues. Considering that Beijing aims to expand its clout in international political and economic affairs by initiatives such as the BRI and the established international financial institutions like the AIIB, the New Development Bank, the Silk Road Fund etc., the Chinese government is now in a situation where it may have to contemplate how the international influence and actions of these institutions affect the country's image. Importantly, the international community has applauded China for its extraordinary development rate which has helped the country raise living standards for a

substantial amount of its citizens. However, the country has likewise received criticism for the environmental deterioration and neglect of meeting international health standards, due to e.g. bad air quality, which has been one of the costs of the rapid development (Eleanor and Xu 2016). Furthermore, the economic growth means that China increases its attention on investments and acquisitions abroad, especially in areas that may either be suitable for sustaining its increasing energy demand, or strategic destinations where investments and bilateral deals may lead to political influence and more clout in the international community.

Although the country's investments are often directed at infrastructure that may be linked to the mitigation of climate change, concerns have risen that deals with Beijing come at a price. For instance, the major economies in the EU, such as France and Germany, are increasingly voicing their concerns about Chinese presence in economically vulnerable member-states, due to those being more susceptible to Chinese influence as it could boost those economies. As previously mentioned, Beijing has recently signed bilateral deals with Italy to secure the first large economy in the EU to join President Xi's signature initiative, the BRI. Hence, other EU leaders currently perceive China's increased involvement in European economies as intrusive and remain sceptical of the outcome of the Chinese presence (Horowitz and Erlanger 2019). On the other hand, the acquisition of partners of Italy's magnitude could also indicate that some EU member-states are changing their perception of China to the positive, especially in times of US isolationism. Thus, should the US continue its current trajectory, it is likely that more European countries, and EU member-states, will look to China for cooperation, which would be clear markers that its image and status in the international community is improving.

However, the aforementioned scepticism may damage China's international image, which may explain why the Chinese government has increased its focus on articulating an emphasis of combating climate change in its policies since the Paris Agreement; to prove that its intention is to abide by institutional norms and that its principle of multilateralism is trustworthy. Therefore, as climate change continues to pose a global security threat, Beijing could strengthen its position in the international community by displaying a willingness to take on global governance responsibility and through this sphere strengthen its ties with strategic partners such as the EU. China may therefore seek to share the climate change leadership with the EU to seek greater status in the international community. Continuously, since Donald Trump's announcement of withdrawing from the Paris Agreement, the US left a leadership vacuum within the climate change regime, arguably providing China an opportunistic position

as the world may then perceive the US' lack of climate change action as a neglect of its international responsibility in an increasingly important sector. With the international community's attention on the US' neglect, the opportunity for China to improve its status is thus perceived through its potential climate change leadership with the EU, illustrated via its climate change policies after the Paris Agreement, and additionally through executive statements where China and the EU reiterates their commitment to international institutional norms and guidelines. With the heightened focus on climate change as an issue that demands multilateral solutions, China's policies can thus be regarded as reactive, as they signal a desire for acquiring more respect in the international community through responsible stakeholder behaviour by adjusted climate change and development policies, to raise itself to the standards of actors like the EU. In this regard, President Xi Jinping emphasised China's commitment at the Belt and Road Forum in 2017:

*“We should pursue the new vision of green development and a way of life and work that is green, low-carbon, circular and sustainable. Efforts should be made to strengthen cooperation in ecological and environmental protection (...) so as to realise the goals set by the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”* (Yamei 2017).

This statement resonates with the guiding principles of the 13<sup>th</sup> FYP and by mentioning the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, President Xi illustrates that China's intention is to remain committed to the UN's international frameworks. The increased opening-up and being more cooperative with international institutions and their frameworks has not gone unnoticed, as China's efforts and willingness to transition has been mentioned on several occasions by both UN executives and leaders within the EU, especially noted in the joint China-EU “Leaders' Statement on Climate Change and Clean Energy” in 2018. In this statement, the EU and China explain why the climate change regime and the UNFCCC's framework is essential to sustain a habitable planet:

*“Climate change is exerting increasing stress on ecosystems and infrastructure to the point of threatening hard-won development goals. Its detrimental impacts (...) have become a multiplying factor of social and political fragility, and constitute a root cause for instability (...) The increasing impacts of climate change require a decisive response, in view of striving for the common good of all humankind”* (European Commission 2018).

The shared statement may be argued to emphasise the EU's call for a major economy to step up in the mitigation of global climate change, and thus, indicate international pressure

on China to maintain its commitment to climate change action by exerting leadership behaviour within this sphere. This is further substantiated by the pledges in China's mentioned INDC and the fact that approximately at the same time the US president announced the country's withdrawal from the Paris Agreement, around 200 nations declared climate change mitigation a global urgent duty at COP22 in Marrakech (de Carbonnel 2017). Hence, Beijing may feel obligated to remain on the course of green development after the Paris Agreement, since going back on its pledge to the EU and the UNFCCC would potentially cause distrust among other signatories in the international system, and thus damage China's image and status. Accordingly, a damaged image in the international community could hinder China's international ambitions of progressing its interests within other spheres than those directly related to climate change, as discussed in section 6.2. At the latest COP24 in Poland, China's Special Representative on Climate Change, Xie Zhenhua, firmly reiterated the country's stance on mitigating the phenomenon and displayed its adopted norm-abiding behaviour: *"All parties should fulfil their commitments under the Climate Change Convention and the Paris Agreement without compromise, strengthen their actions before and after 2020"* (CGTN 2018). This statement further indicates China's behaviour as a responsible stakeholder and is a clear marker that the country seeks more status-recognition and respect in the international system.

Consequently, the systemic pressure on China to remain committed to the Paris Agreement and future treaties of the climate change regime is apparent in the sense that it would prove costly for the country to neglect its accepted responsibilities, and in the light of the intensified statements on not only its own responsibilities but also the remaining actors within the climate change regime. Also, the norm-abiding behaviour by China indicates that it seeks to increase its status in the international system by providing the world a public good by combating climate change through shared leadership with the EU. To that end, China may have established financial institutions and initiatives on its own, however, the increased compliance within the UNFCCC framework and the apparent shared interests with the EU of achieving success within climate change mitigation can be perceived as a signal that the country recognises the need for multilateral and institutional cooperation in order to achieve its foreign interests. In summation, China may be argued to seek status in the international community for two main reasons. First, to share the leadership with the EU in global climate governance by adherence and progressing the climate change regime's agenda. And secondly, to provide the international community a global public good of combatting climate change.

## 6.4 Signs of Asymmetrical Interdependence between China and the EU

In order for China to reach its potential within climate change mitigation, both domestically and to assist the EU in global climate change governance, the country may require technology within this sphere from developed countries to maximise the output of renewable sources like wind power (de Oliveira Vasconcelos 2018). This may be argued to be both for maintaining the position as a frontrunner of implementing renewables and to reduce the costs of transitioning its energy sector, as a realisation of fossil fuel consumption reduction arguably requires an equally sufficient amount of alternative energy source output. Although the country currently leads within several domains of influence in the renewable energy sector, topping the world's list of investments in wind power, solar capacity, solar-panel manufacturing, and being among the top ten wind-turbine producers, China has acknowledged a need for a greater technological drive to sustain the costs of maintaining this developmental path (The Economist 2018). As mentioned in its 13<sup>th</sup> FYP: *“With our sights set on the **world’s cutting edge of science and technology**, we will be guided by China’s national objectives and strategic needs in developing top quality national laboratories. We will work faster to develop national science and technology infrastructure for research on energy (...) and environmental science (...)”* (Communist Party of China 2016, Part II, Section 3). By the above articulation, the Chinese government is perceived to acknowledge a lack of sufficient technology and expertise and have thus looked to the Western developed countries for such acquisitions, mainly through investments (Nicholas 2018).

As this issue relates to China's ambition of transitioning its energy sector, acquiring the needed technology may be argued to be of utmost importance, indicating a domestic wealth pressure and a systemic pressure of mitigating climate change, thus both relating to an inside-out and outside-in process of its policies. To accommodate these, and for Chinese companies to become more competitive, and the country self-reliant and innovative within this sector, China may have to compromise by complying with a climate change partner such as the EU. Hence, by technological accessibility and expertise, the EU may in this way be in possession of something China desires, by which it may influence China's policy-making, illustrating an asymmetrical interdependence relationship. The country's 13<sup>th</sup> FYP further substantiates this notion via articulations of China's development goal of improving its technologies and knowledge within sectors related to climate change: *“We will transform and upgrade major manufacturing technologies and improve policies to support enterprises in **emulating** world-wide models in terms of techniques, processes, equipment, energy efficiency, and*

*environmental protection (...)*”(Communist Party of China 2016, Part V, Chapter 22, Section 3).

As previously mentioned, China is currently extending its economic influence in European economies, illustrated by heavy investments in European companies who possess expertise within the renewable energy sector. In 2016, the Chinese investments in the EU markets mounted to \$42 billion, compared with \$840 million in 2008, indicating China’s interest in this region has increased exponentially in the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Zeneli 2019). This strategy may be argued as a Chinese attempt to curb the asymmetrical interdependence relationship with the EU, and thus build on the argument of why some EU leaders are worried of the increased Chinese presence in their member-states’ economies. Hence, if China acquires the technology through takeovers of European companies rather than a bilateral technology-swap as a result of China complying with EU expectations in international climate change related matters, such as stating a commitment to the climate change regime’s agenda or pledging to share the leadership of climate change governance, the EU may lose the upper hand and might then no longer rely on its materially advantageous position over China. On the other hand, the EU’s high-ranking position in the international community arguably carries weight and may thus be utilised as an immaterial tool to portray China in a negative discourse, should the country reverse its articulated commitments regarding increased climate change mitigation efforts (Broer 2019). Likewise, when the EU negotiates with China bilaterally, it stands as an intergovernmental institution, which could act as an obstacle to China’s ambition of increasing its influence and expansive relations with individual EU member-states, as with the mentioned BRI. Thus, while China aspires to transition its energy sector, the EU is still observed as pivotal factor in the successful achievement of such objective as it is perceived as an actor that can influence both the flow of technology towards China, and instigate obstacles to the country’s future endeavours with individual member-states if China refrains from acting in accordance with its policy pledges; and thus the international climate change regime’s agenda. In this regard, the EU may thus hold both material and immaterial advantageous over China.

In the same vein, since the INDC acts as a link between domestic and international goals, the EU’s role as a developed economy in the international community may have had an effect on shaping China’s changed climate change behaviour, illustrated by China’s desire for influence, technology and know-how that may be acquired through deals with EU member-states, as articulated in the country’s 13<sup>th</sup> FYP: “*In adapting to China’s ever-deepening*

*integration into the world economy, we will pursue a mutually beneficial strategy of opening up (...) and work simultaneously to attract foreign investment, technology, and talent”* (Communist Party of China 2016, Part I, Chapter 4). Thus, China’s desire to obtain technology and talent may be realised through strengthened relations with the EU, demonstrating in return its willingness to increase its efforts within climate change mitigation. Further indications of the results of such interdependent relationship between the country and the EU is illustrated by the two actors joining forces to display their now shared interests about the issue after the US’ withdrawal. China may therefore have complied to issue a strong joint statement on the basis that such action and utterance about its climate change policy alignment with the EU results in increased technology-transfer and cooperativeness from the European institution. The two actors’ joint communique reiterating both actors’ policy behaviour, illustrated that even though the treaty is not legally binding in its entirety, they will not disregard their responsibilities and instead strengthen the relations between them based on their shared interest in climate change mitigation after the Paris Agreement (Apparicio and Mathiesen 2018). In the joint statement, both actors expressed how their mutual interests may be achieved through strengthened climate action: *“The EU and China underline their highest political commitment to the effective implementation of the Paris Agreement in all its aspects, including, inter alia, mitigation, adaptation, finance, **technology development and transfer**, capacity-building and transparency of actions and support”* (European Commission 2018, 3-4).

As China has articulated both commitments to the EU and UNFCCC, it may be argued that it would be costly to be labelled as unreliable by reversing such commitments, as the country was shamed by the West in the aftermath of COP15 in Copenhagen for not being willing to partake in global climate change mitigation (Dembicki 2017). China’s policy measures after the Paris Agreement thus indicate that it requires the technology and knowledge of developed countries to combat both domestic and international climate change, which further exemplifies the incentive to remain a cooperative partner to the EU. On this note, it may be argued that the EU is in possession of something China desires to achieve a transition from exponential growth to quality development, as stated in its 13<sup>th</sup> FYP, namely access to technology and specialised knowledge that could bring the country closer to becoming technologically self-sufficient, and thus accelerate its process of renewable energy transition by reducing the costs and increasing its capabilities. An asymmetrical interdependence relationship between China and the EU within the climate change sphere have thus been noted, as the efficiency of Beijing’s energy transition to a certain degree depend on the EU’s

willingness to provide access to climate change technology. Additionally, it follows that the EU's willingness depends on China's effort in acting as a responsible actor and displaying reliable behaviour by upholding the pledges made through official documents such as joint statements; commitments China may otherwise not have made had the EU not had some leverage.

## 6 Conclusion

This thesis has assessed China's climate change policies and what has shaped them after the Paris Agreement. As such, aside from drawing conclusions on the state-actor's measures within this realm, it can be concluded that climate change stands as a multifaceted issue that increasingly intertwines domestic and international policies, especially for the largest economies remaining in the treaty. China's wealth- and status-seeking behaviour, assessed through its climate change policies, have therefore been found to be entwined and affected by the asymmetrical interdependence relationship with the EU, proving that China benefits the most from opting to remain in the treaty. These findings have been assisted by the guiding thinking of Neoliberal Institutionalism and the theoretical framework of The Two-Level Pressure Framework, and it has further been deduced that since the US withdrawal, attention on the remaining largest economies in the Paris Agreement has been intensified, meaning China's actions are assessed and commented on to a greater extent than previously, which has made the state-actor react by modifying its policies. The international community thus expresses how all actors have a stake in resolving the untraditional global security threat, which evidently contributes to the shaping of China's climate change policies. This trend has thus been found to encourage Beijing to consider how its international behaviour is perceived by other actors, such as the EU and the UN, since these actors to a large degree contribute to the perception of China's status and level of respect in the international community. The state-actor's policies have thus been found to be a reaction to a systemic pressure of emphasising a developmental transition towards sustainability and an aspiration of gaining more status in the international community through shared climate change leadership with the EU; which may be materialised by providing a global public good of mitigating climate change.

In this regard, the applied theories have assisted the thesis in exploring how the climate change policies have affected China's wealth- and status-seeking behaviour, which in turn illustrates why the country remains in the climate change regime. Since Paris, an increase in investments in renewable energy has also been noticed, domestically and abroad. This thesis



has thus found that China's reaction to its energy situation has been shaped by both domestic and international pressures. This is substantiated by the examination of the climate change related policies initiated after the Paris Agreement, such as the INDC, wherein the country pledges to reduce GHG emissions and incorporate sustainable measures in its development model. This finding is essential as it has been explored that some of the Chinese government's international interests may be climate sensitive, such as the country's endeavour to sustain its increasing energy demand by importing fossil fuels from abroad, and its increased political and economic influence in regions of interest. Accordingly, China's presence in European economies is increasing and has been shown to be included in the plans for the Belt and Road Initiative, which further motivates the Chinese government to consider its relations with the largest remaining economy in the climate change regime, namely the EU.

The implementation of the BRI has proved to be a catalyst of China's reaction to domestic and international pressures, as it concerns both a search for energy supply through infrastructure, and the potential to either worsen or mitigate climate change through bilateral deals that include investments and projects in climate sensitive countries. Consequently, should the country neglect to focus on green investments and projects within the initiative, it could result in increased scrutinization from the EU and thus affect its status in the international community. Furthermore, regarded as part of the developed world, the EU could provide China the required access to technology within the renewable energy sector, which could accelerate the country's energy self-reliance and boost its international competitiveness within this sector, by which the European institution in turn may require China to comply with its expectations of shared climate change leadership.

On the other hand, it has been displayed how vast initiatives like the BRI may assist mitigating climate change by green energy investments and improved infrastructure in both China and in the involved countries. The BRI thus stands as a proactive initiative, although not a policy, that has been reactively modified since Paris to increase focus on green projects within the framework. The element of proactive and reactive measures is therefore illustrated by the notion of non-state and state-actors' influence on another actor's policy behaviour, and it can be concluded that the climate change regime has had an effect on China's climate change policies; which in turn reflects that it would be more beneficial for the country to remain in the Paris Agreement, as it has made certain pledges to both the EU and the UNFCCC.

On this note, it has been established that the EU has been wary of the increased Chinese presence in its region wherein the joint statements, on the matter of climate change and strengthening relations in general, from the two actors has been found to act as assurance for the EU that China may be held accountable to its commitments. The interdependent relationship between the two actors may additionally be concluded to have sprung from the fact that the US has withdrawn from the Paris Agreement, meaning the EU looks to China for a partnership in climate change leadership. Also, with the bilateral deals with Italy as the first major economy in Europe to sign on to the BRI, it has been noticed that China may be attempting to improve its image in this region through its climate change policies, as these may convince worried EU leaders of China's reliability. An alteration of China's policies towards the EU's standards, such as the implementation of the domestic emission trading scheme, has thus been noticed, by which China seeks to increase its status by recognition from the EU, whereas the EU has been noted to expect greater international climate change responsibility of China in return, especially in the absence of the US.

Successfully achieving its international interests, China has thus been noted to adopt a norm-abiding attitude in alignment with the UNFCCC's guidelines and the expectations of the EU. Simply put, reacting to domestic concerns about worsened climate and sustaining stable economic growth through energy measures, and abiding to the norms of the international community, the country aims to improve its climate situation domestically by transitioning its energy consumption and emphasising sustainable development. Internationally, China has been found to express strengthened relations with state- and non-state actors within the realm of climate change, which extends into other spheres as well, displayed through the evolving relationship with the EU. Conclusively, China's incentive to remain in the Paris Agreement and future climate change regimes is substantiated by the fact that withdrawing would be detrimental to both its search of wealth through energy, and its status in the international community. Additionally, it has been established that global climate change mitigation continues to increase in importance, proving that remaining in the treaty and displaying leadership aspirations are more beneficial to China. Finally, the economic and social costs of neglecting to act on climate change domestically, with the increased climate change awareness of the Chinese public and climate induced challenges to China's environment in mind, far outweighs the reasons for opting to withdraw from future engagement in the regime.

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