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RESEARCH ARTICLE

China's "Radicalism at the Center": Regime Legitimation through Climate Politics and Climate Governance

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Abstract The article examines whether there is reciprocity between the legitimating effects of China's regime at home and abroad and how global governance and legitimacy interact in the case of China. This is done through an analysis of Chinese climate politics and China's engagement in international climate negotiations and governance, especially its behavior during and after the Copenhagen Climate Summit in December 2009 and the Chinese regime's efforts to legitimate this behavior. While China's role in international climate governance was disputed at the Copenhagen Summit, China contributed constructively to brokering a deal with significant implications for a new climate governance architecture suiting China's preferences and being aligned with China's core interests. China defended the procedural logic of the current global climate governance framework and managed to contain institutional change. Based on Anthony Giddens' proposition about "radicalism at the centre", it is argued that China's national and international discourse on and actions associated with climate change and the international negotiations about the new climate governance architecture seem to be able to reinforce each other and may well have a mutual legitimacy augmenting effect for the 'radicals at the centre' of the Chinese regime, provided that they ensure consequential logic through targeted reduction of GHG emissions and a "green transformation" of the economy.

Keywords China · Regime Legitimacy · Climate Change · Copenhagen Climate Summit · Climate Governance

Introduction

As China is now the world's biggest emitter of green house gasses (GHG) [42, 53], it has become vital for regime in Beijing to exert influence on the development of

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global climate governance through the international climate negotiations. The leadership has also recognized that climate change is a useful platform for garnering national and international legitimacy (合法性) in support of its strategic shift towards more sustainable growth, a strategy which was initiated in 1994 [16].

However, the position taken by China during the Copenhagen Climate Summit in December 2009 surprised many Western politicians, negotiators, and observers. Some were quick to put the blame for the Summit's meager outcome on China that was criticized for only serving its own interest while losing sight of the global common good (i.a. [27, 51, 76, 78]). Ed Milliband, then British Environment Minister, even accused China for hijacking the Summit [51].

China's own perception was that its Summit team headed by Prime Minister Wen Jiabao contributed constructively to brokering the Summit's final agreement, The Copenhagen Accord [20], through a concerted effort by the BASIC countries, a new alliance between the large emerging economies: China, India, Brazil, and South Africa (基础四国), and the US. The Copenhagen Accord was a political and not a legally binding agreement. It was palatable to the five countries that drafted it, since they did not have to budge on their core national interests. The Accord still needs to be officially approved [8], but all important GHG emitters and most other countries have already committed themselves to align with it [85].

Although being short of the original expectations, the Copenhagen Summit did, after all, produce a workable result (e.g. [56]) and I will argue that the critics of the behavior of the Chinese regime may have missed the point. Anthony Giddens uses the concept: "radicalism at the centre" to explain the positive role that a political leadership can play to promote radical policies to address climate change while exerting steady efforts to shore up public and stakeholder support for them, in this case both nationally and internationally, through co-joining policies for radical innovation with long term thinking, which is a condition for dealing with climate change (Giddens:114, [30]). In line with this proposition, I will argue that China's climate politics are driven by such "radicalism at the centre" and that the Chinese leadership has used its prerogative for 'radicalism' to elaborate comprehensive and credible climate policies and to position China as a responsible actor in international climate governance.

Domestic legitimacy and international behaviour often have a reciprocal relationship. [26] find that efforts to enhance domestic legitimacy influence China's foreign policy, but that foreign policy can also affect the regime's domestic standing, and they conclude that China has adopted a restrained policy, less informed by nationalist claims, in international relations to ensure further economic growth. Furthermore, China's climate change policies and approach to climate governance interact with a fairly new, non-traditional global governance arena where climate change has become a lever for a normative and institutional shift towards a global climate governance regime that transcends the national systems and which is characterized by multiple sites of authority and legitimacy [10, 54]. Since climate change is a global and not only a national issue, the Chinese regime must relate to and engage with such public and private sites of national and international authority in ways that may well differ from how it deals with such sites at home, and—as noted by a Chinese think tank—no single authority would be able to totally dominate the negotiation process amongst these [12] and, while China is not

prepared to surrender its sovereignty, "right to development" (发展权), or "space for emissions" (排放空间, [33]), the global climate governance regime does challenge China's insistence on its sovereignty.

The Chinese leadership also uses its engagement with climate change to garner both national and international legitimacy for its 'radical' national climate policies and its approach to global climate governance architecture which are tuned in with the paradigmatic shift towards a more sustainable growth strategy.

Thus, China's climate politics is a useful case to examine whether there is reciprocity between the legitimating effects of China's regime at home and abroad and how global governance and legitimacy interact in the case of China. To do so, I will look at the response of the Chinese regime to climate change and its engagement in international climate negotiations and governance, in particular in connection with the Copenhagen Climate Summit in December 2009.

I first discuss theoretical aspects, combining Western and Chinese propositions about legitimacy and governance. Then I look at how the Chinese regime deals with the climate challenge through an analysis of China's climate negotiation stance and the events during and around the Copenhagen Climate Summit in December 2009. Finally, I will examine the Chinese elite's legitimating 'master narrative' regarding the role China played at the Climate Summit. The article concludes that China's approach to climate change has and may continue to have a strong legitimacy augmenting effect for the Chinese regime, provided that it sticks to its "radical" policies and meets its target for a "green" transformation of the Chinese economy and its goals for GHG reductions.

Regime Legitimacy and Climate Governance

Regime legitimacy is based on the need of power to legitimate itself [5] and of a political system to garner popular belief in and support for its rightfulness and its authority over government. In the long run, legitimacy must be based on positive moral authority and not on fear [2]. Legitimacy is thus an ascribed property of a regime, while legitimation is the act of ascribing it [3].

As discussed by [36, 63, 95], a variety of analyses from outside China argue that an alleged deteriorating governance performance and an inability to accommodate political participation and democratization are likely causes of a future collapse of the Chinese regime. Not surprisingly, there are disagreements. Zheng argues that a collapse is unlikely and that the Communist Party of China (CPC) is becoming an institutionalized party. In addition, the ruling elite has a more explicit focus on common interest than on private self-interest and on containing public contention rather than on accommodating disruptive social forces [95].

Gilley notes that the Communist Party enjoys a sound level of legitimacy from promoting its policy agendas combined with significant, yet "contained institutional change". These policies affect all of society, except the CPC's own "constitutional" monopoly on power. Gilley suggests that several sources of legitimacy are important for the Chinese party-state, especially post-1989: (1) Economic growth and development; (2) stability and governance; (3) political and civil rights; (4) international prestige and nationalism; (5) cultural or historical dispositions to trust

the national state; (6) social, cultural and economic rights. These sources are exploited in different mixes at different times, and the regime is now using them in support of its authoritarian-supporting modernist values and for legitimacy-enhancing contained institutional change. Interestingly, China is an "outlier" in comparison with other countries with regard to predicting the legitimacy of the regime, since it enjoys higher legitimacy than the average on the three first criteria above suggesting that the regime's legitimacy performance on the three first indicators is augmented by the latter three sources [31].

Although the lack of a viable alternative to the communist regime should not be overlooked as a factor explaining the legitimacy of the Chinese party-state [26, 36, 70], it is indisputable that the Chinese regime has shored up considerable national legitimacy through continuous economic and social reforms while being quite adept at limiting political reform through generic institutional adaptation and innovation in governance [31, 32, 90], i.e. administrative reforms [90] and so-called "political structural reforms" (政治体制改革, [36]). This flexibility reflects a pragmatist approach based on internal power balancing and an increasingly institutionalized and functionally differentiated political and administrative system [6:1–8, 90].

An analysis of Chinese regime legitimacy must be sensitive to the Chinese intellectual context, in particular philosophy and theories on power. Guo [32] argues that, in the classical tradition, a just and legitimate ruler must: (1) Possess the quality of virtue, (2) show respect to his subjects, (3) follow the rules of the ancestors, and (4) try to win the hearts and minds of the people to earn the Mandate of Heaven, which is what Guo [31] calls "cultural or historical dispositions to trust the national state".

Ideally, a ruler will strengthen his legitimacy through policies of benefit to the people and not to himself by ensuring relatively equal distribution of these benefits and by allowing the people to do what they do best. This view, argues Guo, has influenced every ruler and government throughout Chinese history. Its legitimacy stems from two sources of justification: the "original" and the "utilitarian justification". The former relates to *how the ruler garners people's belief of who should govern* and can be explained through four historical concepts: (1) Mandate of Heaven (天命, *tianming*): the right to rule is derived from a supernatural force; (2) rule by virtue (仁治, *renzhi*): ruler and government exercise ethics in their governance; (3) popular consent (民本, *minben*): the ruler must seek popular approval through winning the hearts and minds of people; and (4) legality (合法, *hefa*): i.e. governing by established laws and regulations, recognizing that the use of law has always been seen primarily as a means to strengthen the power of the ruler [32].

The "utilitarian justification" explains *how a regime maintains people's beliefs that it is legitimate*. Confucianists and Legalists believe that the ruler must be virtuous and serve the common interest. Therefore, to protect the Mandate of Heaven, the regime must avoid doing harm to the well-being of the people. This traditional vision of governance allows the Chinese regime to be assertive about its role in economic management since virtue entails a focus on: (1) benefiting the people (利民 *limin*): rulers must give primary consideration to the people; (2) equality or equalized wealth (均富 *junfu*) as embodied, for example, in the historical

idea about equal distribution of land through the "equal field" system (均田 *juntian*) [32].

Sources of regime legitimation are thus a "complex of factors" ([5]:3–41) and both Western and Chinese propositions must be taken into account when analysing the legitimacy of the Chinese regime. Most governments must struggle to garner legitimacy by balancing between the original and the utilitarian justifications, and Guo argues that a democratic regime may not be the most effective government if economic institutions are incompatible with political institutions. Thus, an authoritarian developmental state may turn out to be stable and popular if it proves efficient in balancing the needs for rapid economic growth, full employment and low inflation [32]. Effectively, legitimacy analysis has little predictive power with regard to which type of political system will be the most likely to sustain, as argued by Beetham, and therefore the legitimacy of the regime must be subject to continuous analysis, discussion and contestation nationally and increasingly also internationally ([5]:3-41).

The combination of these propositions help us understand why the Chinese communist leadership may be well equipped to act as 'radicals at the centre' when it comes to act in a new and complex policy arena such as climate change. While searching for its original roots, it mixes modern liberal with traditional Chinese norms of governance, and it sees itself as the sole guarantor of growth, stability, security, and now sustainability on the Chinese territory. Simultaneously, China presents itself as a non-aggressive, moral, and responsible power internationally which serves the common interest of the developing world [12, 38, 62, 64, 26, 36].

Since legitimacy is not a given once gained, the Chinese regime must re-legitimate itself periodically by addressing the needs of its old and new constituencies within the nation, while also learning selectively from political systems and parties in other countries ([32, 62:3,87-102]). The few surveys that exist on public attitudes towards climate change in China show that there is a growing public awareness about the seriousness of climate change and of the need to deal with it (e.g. [40]). The Chinese regime exploits this awareness when it makes policies to deal with climate change. They are utilized to re-develop regime legitimacy at home and abroad based on new ways of exploiting the sources of legitimacy identified above by Gilley [31].

Whereas surveys on public awareness about climate change can be made in China, surveys on regime legitimacy do not exist. Legitimacy can only be assumed on the basis of analyses of what Beetham ([5]:14) calls "legitimacy-in-context". He argues that power can be said to be legitimate to the extent that: (1) it conforms to established rules, (2) the rules can be justified by reference to beliefs shared by both dominant and subordinate, and (3) there is evidence of consent (either electoral or mobilizational) by the subordinate to the particular power relation ([5]:16, 90-7, 150-60).

This enquiry explores the dynamics underlying the regime's legitimacy enhancing efforts in relation to its climate change politics. It acknowledges that processes of regime legitimation are multi-dimensional and that legitimation happens at qualitatively different levels. Whatever the regime does must obtain consent from a constituency of subordinates and/or collaborators at national level and in international collaboration.

Climate Change, Global Governance and China's Legitimacy

China's participation in climate governance relates as much to what China will do at home and internationally as to what it expects from other countries, and the ongoing process to elaborate a new international climate agreement before it is too late (i.e. by the end of 2012) is illustrative of how the regime handles its international legitimacy in relation to global governance. As a rising world power and as the largest emitter of GHGs, China is involved more and more with the international architecture of cooperation, order, and governance and largely plays its engagement by the rules as a responsible international stakeholder.

Generally, leaders and governments are increasingly assessed on the validity and quality of their global behaviour. Their legitimacy in relation to global governance within multilateral institutions can derive from sources such as effectiveness, participatory procedures, tradition and democratic values. Here, legitimacy refers primarily to the actors' perception of the quality of a social order, including its institutions, norms and rules. It stems from procedural logic, i.e. rules are predictable and determined by legitimate actors, as well as from consequential logic, i.e. rules and institutions lead to collective problem-solving. Finally, it is primarily an outcome of the political order rather than a characteristic of the actors themselves and [10].

Multilateral institutions tend to be challenged on normative grounds for their democratic deficit and various types of democracy such as "transnational democracy", "cosmopolitan democracy", "discursive democracy" and "stakeholder democracy" have been advanced as institutional innovations to reduce such deficits [10]. For the Chinese regime, this does not seem to be an insurmountable challenge. China is not a democratic country in the liberal sense but it is willing to play by any, even democratic rules in international governance as long as they are transparent [13, 34] and not being dominated by any single player [12]. At the same time, the Chinese regime is not committed to or even seriously challenged to pursue liberal democratic governance at home [57, 62].

The PRC has been involved with international climate change governance since its inception, while the US withdrew from the Kyoto Protocol in 2001 [37]. China's behaviour contributes to strengthening the international systems, yet China is still unwilling to become a global leader [34], but it clearly wants to exert critical influence on the architecture of the international climate change regime. The regime's efforts provide an illustrative example of how it acts to bolster its national and international position in relation to climate change politics. It clearly seeks convergence between its national and international behaviour to strengthen its legitimacy on both dimensions and, ultimately, it probes ways to configure and participate in new types of international governance that may inadvertently challenge its precious sovereignty. Here, I will primarily examine whether China's behaviour in connection with the Copenhagen Summit reinforced or undermined the Chinese regime's pursuit of legitimacy in this particular field of global governance.

Climate Change and China's Climate Policies

China has been facing a rapid deterioration of its environment during the three decades of reform and rapid economic growth, and climate change is both an effect

and partly a cause of it [28, 66]. China's astonishing growth has also made China the dominant producer of man-made GHGs [42, 53]. If climate change had not become such a big issue, only dwindling fossil energy resources would have worried the Chinese regime. Now, the two issues are interconnected and climate change has become a top priority on the agenda of the Chinese regime [23].

The elaboration of climate change policies has followed the same trajectory as elsewhere: (1) The argument for climate change has been based on national and international scientific paradigms, practice, and results [37]; (2) the relevant policies, strategies, legal framework, and stimulus programs have been forced to consider international as well as national concerns and practices [24, 37]; (3) China has participated in international policy processes and governance institutions to develop an approach to both national and international climate governance [34].

Early on, the Chinese regime decided to address climate change through comprehensive efforts provided that they would not be detrimental to growth. They entailed control of emissions, enhanced capacity to adapt to climate change, and promotion of policies and interventions based on reliable and up-to-date climate related science, R&D, and technology transfer [17]. The climate policies are intricately linked to China's energy policies since the country must address its energy security concerns simultaneously [25, 46]. Therefore, the leadership in Beijing has focused on optimizing its energy resources by increasing energy efficiency and by exploiting low-carbon renewable energy sources in a big way [24, 84].

In addition, China has put in place a new governance framework, primarily laws and regulations [24, 17, 37], and an administrative infrastructure under a National Coordination Committee for Climate Change headed by Premier Wen Jiabao. The Committee is based in the National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC) and it is the key player in China's climate politics [37, 74, 17]. Provincial climate change plans are now being rolled out with support from the UN and other donors [98].

China's policies have largely been elaborated by the 'radicals at the centre', i.e. the Politbureau of the CPC, the Climate Commission (previously a State Council Leading Group), the NDRC and a few key ministries. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has played a principal role in conducting China's international negotiations on climate change [24, 37]. The regime in Beijing has contributed actively to international solutions based on its national efforts. China signed the Framework Convention on Climate Change in 1992, it played an important role in negotiating the Kyoto Protocol and was one of its earliest signatories in 1998. It signed the Treaty in 2002, as a non-Annex 1 developing country [9].

In sum, China's 'radicals at the centre' have recognized the environmental constraints on China's development. They have decided to promote more sustainable economic growth through a "green transformation" (绿色转型) of the economy in which energy saving, use of cleaner energy sources, and other measures to address climate change are to be key components [12, 96, 97]. While China's climate governance entail rather radical interventions, not least in relation to the energy sector, it is still unclear how other stakeholders in the "multiple sites of authority" across the country, i.e. local authorities, firms, and civil society, will be engaged in the climate change plans and it remains to be seen whether China's developmental

authoritarian state will be in a better position to take the lead in such a process than democratic regimes constrained by wider stakeholder considerations.

China's Negotiation Position and the Outcome of the Copenhagen Climate Summit

China's negotiation position in Copenhagen focused on the points below.

(1) *Climate change must be addressed within a framework of sustainable development*. China is not willing to agree to commitments that will slow its economic development. Climate change is a result of development and it must be solved as part of that [83, 41]. In Copenhagen, China refused to accept any 'hard' emission caps that could conceivably constrain China's development.

(2) *The UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and its Kyoto Protocol should remain the legal basis for the international community to address climate change*. The Bali Roadmap agreed in December 2007 [72] was a guide to the negotiations towards a broader agreement that would extend or replace the Kyoto Protocol [44]. The Chinese government issued its own Bali Road Map position paper in May 2009 which outlined China's official negotiation position based on the Kyoto Protocol principles [41].

(3) *"Common but differentiated responsibilities"*. While G77+China recognize that emissions must be reduced by half in 2050 in order to maintain the global temperature increase below 2°C, they insisted that the developed countries must carry the main responsibility for attaining the goal due to their historical level of GHG emissions and due to the current low level of per capita GHC emissions in developing countries. Developing countries should be allowed controlled increased emissions to avoid undue constraints on their development [9]. This principle of "common but differentiated responsibilities" (共同但有区别) is already embedded in Art. 10 in the Kyoto Protocol [45] which stipulates that only developed countries will have to set reduction targets. While knowing that this was exactly the reason why the US opted out of the Kyoto process in 2001 due to perceived unfairness [39, 68], the G77+China do not budge on this principle [14]. It remains highly contentious as the US and other developed countries insist on scrapping the Kyoto Protocol and design a new governance framework with binding commitments for all major emitters, including China [39]. Furthermore, China argued that the developed countries must reduce their GHG emissions by at least 40% below their 1990-level by 2020 [41] and commit themselves to attain their reduction targets which has not been the case under the current Kyoto Protocol. On top of this, the Chinese leadership wanted the developed countries to contribute 0.5–1% of their GNP annually, in addition to existing official development assistance, to finance a new agreement [9]. G77+China made it abundantly clear before the Copenhagen Summit that there would be no new agreement if the developed countries defaulted on these principles [37, 47, 89], and interestingly, President Obama seemed to concur with this as late as November 2009 when he visited China [75].

(4) *Developing countries must implement Nationally Appropriate Mitigation Actions (NAMAs) with support from developed countries*. As developing countries are not subject to binding caps, they must implement NAMAs in proportion to commitments by developed countries and financing and technology transfer from developed countries would be key instruments to support the NAMAs. Under the current Kyoto regime, China has exploited the technology transfer mechanism actively and is now host to about 40% of all registered Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) projects (http://cdm.unfccc.int, 18.10.2010). China considers technology transfer one of the pillars of a future agreement, but negotiations have been difficult as the developed countries are concerned about the protection of intellectual property rights (IPRs). They argue that technology transfer must happen through commercial transactions and that government should focus on creating better regulatory environments. Even if China and other developing countries agree on the critical and central role of the private sector, they insist that large-scale public funding from developed countries is essential to facilitate technology transfer. Essentially, the issue is whether developing countries should be able to catch up with developed countries through own efforts or whether there is a need to help them in adapting to climate change [69]. While the Copenhagen Summit was not conclusive on the matter, The Copenhagen Accord [20] reiterated intentions to promote technology transfer and capacity development.

(5) *China will reduce emissions relative to its economic growth*. In the lead up to the Copenhagen Summit, the world was increasingly focusing on the role of the world's two biggest emitters, the US and China, as key players. The US was clearly seen as the laggard, even more so since President Obama had problems with rallying support in Congress for his climate mitigation policies. In contrast, China had won recognition as a constructive and responsible player because of its efforts to tackle the climate challenge. While the likelihood of reaching a legally binding agreement had vanished long before the Summit [1, 39, 52], it still seemed possible to reach a political agreement after Presidents Obama and Hu had met in China in mid-November 2009 [75]. Shortly after, the two countries announced their specific GHG reduction targets. President Obama announced on 25.11. that the US could agree to a 17% cut of its emissions by 2020 as compared to 2005 (*The Guardian*, 25.11.2009) and Chinese Prime Minister Wen Jiabao followed suit the next day, when he announced that China would cut its carbon intensity per unit of GDP by 40–45% by 2020 as compared with 2005 levels. In other words, China did not want to put a cap on emissions like the US but the target was announced as a binding national goal that would be incorporated into China's development plans, and new measures were to be formulated to audit, monitor and assess its implementation [61]. This was clearly a sign that China was serious about its new "low carbon route" (低碳路线) [14, 91].

The announcements also signified that the climate negotiations could be on track towards an agreement in Copenhagen. Whereas the US administration had been struggling with internal conflicts before being able to make its initial and rather moderate offer, China's 'radicals at the centre' were clearly in a

much more advantageous position since they had already made decisions necessary to deal with climate change at the national level.

(6) *China will strengthen its mitigation measures*. Climate change has gradually become mainstreamed into China's national policies, strategies, and plans, but the capacity of the administrative systems at all levels to implement them and monitor progress lags behind and China is looking for international collaboration to improve the situation [89, 24]. In projects financed under the Kyoto regime, China has been open to external monitoring and verification, and the projects have lead to enhanced capacity for "indigenous innovation" (自主创新) in different climate change related fields, e.g. within renewable energy [24]. However, as the carbon intensity target proposed by China is a NAMA, China will not be subject to international monitoring and verification (MRV) under the current Kyoto regime. The US chief climate negotiator, Todd Stern, criticized China publicly before the Copenhagen Summit for its unwillingness to submit itself to international MRV [86, 87], and it became a key point of contention in Copenhagen [39, 52]. Still, China has a long history of national-level energy accounting, and the reliability of the data has improved significantly in recent years. On the other hand, GHG emissions accounting only goes back to 1994 but China is actively improving these systems as well [59]. Since China has made its carbon intensity reduction target a binding national commitment it will be incorporated into the government's plans, and local government officials will be monitored on their success in fulfilling them and may even be sacked if they fail [77].

With its comprehensive national climate change policies and the specific goal for reduction of its carbon intensity in hand, the Chinese negotiators in Copenhagen were able to confront the developed countries self-confidently, not least based on the argument that the developed countries had talked a lot but not done much [19]. China insisted on its original negotiation strategy and could do so because the leadership had decided that it could go it alone if necessary. China did not give in on any of its core concerns, with the possible exception of international financing. China was in a position where it could emerge, if not triumphantly then unscathed at the end of the negotiations as one of the brokers of an agreement that did not violate to China's core interests.

Legitimation of China's Actions During the Copenhagen Climate Summit

Eventually, the Kyoto principles neither won nor lost in Copenhagen. While the BASIC countries did not budge on "common but differentiated responsibilities", the Bali Roadmap, and the need for a legally binding agreement based on the Kyoto architecture [4], the Copenhagen Accord was a voluntary political and not a legally binding agreement. The Accord acknowledges that global temperature increase must be kept below 2°C. and the developed countries promised to provide additional financial resources, primarily to the least developed countries, initially 30 bill. USD for the period 2010–2012 and with a promise to raise 100 bill. USD annually by 2020. The funding would come from both public and private sources and a

significant portion of it shall be channeled through a new "Copenhagen Green Fund" [20].

While the Accord was not endorsed, countries interested were asked to inform the UN about their intended reduction targets before 1.2.2010 and 139 countries have engaged or are likely to engage with the Accord, representing 86.76% of global emissions. Eight countries have decided not to sign up, representing only 2.09% of global emissions [20, 85]. It is now up to subsequent Conferences of the Parties (COP) to finalize the Accord.

Climate change has presented the Chinese leadership with a golden opportunity to demonstrate that it is able to act as forceful and responsible 'radicals at the centre', both at home and in critical international negotiations. But the negotiations in Copenhagen were unruly and chaotic [7, 39]. The Chinese delegation headed by Prime Minister Wen Jiabao played its cards in ways that confused many participants and observers, and quite a few were angered as already discussed. However, after the dust has settled, assessments of the events have been more balanced [11, 39, 52, 56, 60, 71]. The Un Chief negotiator, Yvo de Boer, iterated the mainstream position when he said that Copenhagen raised climate change policy to the highest political level. The Summit significantly advanced the negotiations on the infrastructure needed for well-functioning, global climate change cooperation, including improvements to the Kyoto Protocol's CDM instrument. Progress was made in narrowing down options and clarifying choices that need to be made on key issues and, finally, The Copenhagen Accord is a clear letter of political intent to constrain carbon emissions and respond to climate change in both the short and in the long term [22].

Here, I will focus on the legitimation efforts of the Chinese leadership in relation to the Copenhagen Summit, primarily through examining the explanation of its behavior in Copenhagen, the events at the Summit, and the subsequent need for reconciliation and follow up to ensure that a new Protocol will be signed. The Chinese narrative explored here has been put together from a variety of official sources, mainly negotiators, experts involved, and key media stories. It is the elite's master narrative constructed by the 'radicals at the centre', a narrative that largely remains unchallenged till date.

1. *Copenhagen was important*. Wen Jiabao [81, 82] and Yang Jiechi, China's Foreign Minister Xiang [88] who have likely endorsed the official Summit narrative noted the following results: (1) The principle of "common but differentiated responsibilities" was maintained as the basic principle underlying future climate governance. (2) Progress was made with regard to agreeing that the developed countries would implement forceful reductions while developing countries would decide on their own reductions. (3) A common position was developed with regard to long term financing, technical support and transparency. Copenhagen was not the end, but a new starting point and the Summit heightened the global awareness about climate change and confirmed the need to embark on a low carbon road in the future [33]/Su Wei). Chinese negotiators, Xie Zhenhua and Su Wei, both representing NDRC, argued that the main outcome was to strengthen the common aspirations at the global level and to clarify the way forward. The final

document provides a political and to some extent a legal basis for the coming negotiations and it was put together by countries representing the two tracks in the negotiations [44, 67].

2. *Copenhagen was not so important, after all*. On the other hand, some Chinese elite observers noted that the outcome of the Summit was meager and that "there were no fairy tales in the capital of fairy tales" (童话之都没有童话) [29]. Senior Researcher Jiang Kejun from the Energy Research Institute under NDRC, argued that it was more important to focus on what China decided to do itself and to recognize that the Chinese carbon intensity target was a national goal with no relation to targets set under the Kyoto regime [91].
3. *China played a constructive role in drafting the Agreement*. The Chinese participants and observers agree that China played a constructive role at the Summit together with the other major emerging economies [67]. As for supporting developing countries, China exerted itself and showed flexibility all the way through to find solutions [44, 48] and, at the end, Chinese viewpoints prevailed in The Copenhagen Accord [20] despite pressure from President Obama and other Western Leaders [29].
4. *China used its "veto" to protect its right to development*. China blocked a proposal to write into the Copenhagen Accord that global emissions should be cut by 50% in total by 2050 as compared to 1990 and that developed nations would cuts of 80%. China's veto angered many Western leaders [50;230-47, 52]. According to Lü Xuedu, Deputy Director General of the National Climate Centre, such targets would easily restrict China's development. Global carbon emissions in 1990 were 21 billion tons and a 50% cut by 2050 would mean emissions of 10.5 billion tons. In 2005, China emitted 6 billion tons of carbon. If the current rate of development continues, those 10.5 billion tons might not be enough for China alone [79]. Furthermore, the Chinese negotiators pointed to the fact that the developed countries have not yet fulfilled their commitments under the Kyoto Protocol and that none of these countries had the decency to say "sorry" at the Summit ([33]/Wei Jianguo; [73]).
5. *The role of Prime Minister Wen Jiabao*. On the way to the Summit, Wen Jiabao talked to the accompanying press on the plane: "It is a huge task to attend the conference on behalf of the Chinese government. I am deeply aware of the heavy responsibility upon me"… "On my way to the airport, I thought of two ancient sayings. One is 'He who is cautious may seem timid in the beginning, but his mettle will shine through in the end', and the other is 'Thorough planning at the outset will serve one well in his ensuing endeavors'. In other words, if you think carefully as you embark on a mission, you will be able to act with courage and resolve" [94]. These classical *bonmots* seemed to foretell his behavior during the Summit.

   Before the Summit and during his two days in Copenhagen, Wen coordinated closely with all key players, especially the presidents of the other BASIC countries with whom he met several times [88]. In his speech to the Summit, he reiterated the Chinese position and emphasized that China's carbon intensity goal was without conditions and had no direct bearing on the reduction targets set by other countries [82].

Many leaders expressed the hope that other parties would display the same commitment as Wen [88]. But this type of international negotiations was a challenge for everybody, including Wen Jiiabao who is not used to engage personally in open and messy negotiations that are televised globally round the clock. Otherwise, the following remark from Ambassador and negotiator Yu Qingtai would seem rather odd: "Premier Wen Jiabao went to work in the front line himself" (温家宝总理亲赴一线做工作) ([33]/Yu Qingtai). Was that not what he was supposed to do in Copenhagen?

However, Wen did not go to all the official meetings. He missed out on a meeting with other leaders in the evening of 17.12., and on 18.12. he sent He Yafei, Deputy Foreign Minister, to an important meeting with Barack Obama. According to Wen's own account after the Summit, he was not invited for the meeting on 17.12. and only heard about it through a colleague during a dinner hosted by the Danish Queen. He found it "absurd" that he was not invited and immediately sent He Yafei to protest [94]. Wen repeated this view at his annual press conference at the NPC session in March 2010 and he added that he did not understand why "China was the problem" since China had already done a lot to deal with climate change within its national borders and since he had exerted himself to obtain a result at the Summit [93].

6. *The role of He Yafei: a "snub" on President Obama?* On the evening of 17.12, when He Yafei was sent by Wen Jian Bao to protest that China had not been invited to the meeting of world leaders, he was also asked by Wen to hold a Press Conference to "explain on what issues China had to stick to its position and on what other issues China would be ready to show flexibility". He expressed that China was concerned that the host had arranged the meeting with "hidden motives" and asked that the principle of openness and transparency must be respected [94]. On 18.12., several observers noted that He Yafei was seen in agitated discussion with President Obama at the time when Wen Jiabao was absent. Internationally, Wen's behavior was called a "snub" on President Obama [18], but the official *Xinhua* account [14] noted that Wen was under the impression that the organization was chaotic and that the meeting did not have a clear agenda. Other leaders were packing and Wen was unhappy about closed meetings. But he was also preparing for a meeting with the other BASIC countries [94].

However, there is still no completely satisfactory explanation for Wen's absence from the important meeting with President Obama on 18.12., unless he had already decided to meet with the other BASIC countries to draft the basics of The Accord. The *Xinhua* story and other accounts imply that much [94], [50]:230-47). *The Independent's* version was different, however, as it noted that President Obama criticized China's reluctance to be transparent about its actions in his speech to the Summit on 18.12. and that Wen Jiabao apparently found Obama's remarks to be a slight on China's honesty. Therefore he returned to his hotel and asked He Yafei and Yu Qingtai to continue negotiations (*The Independent*, 19.12.2009).

Although there are not many voices of dissent in China, a journalist at *Nanfang Dushibao* speculates that if *Xinhua's* official account [14] is accurate then it is worth asking why trust between China, the United States and the

European Union was so weak after more than twelve months of intensive consultations? He also expressed concern about the Chinese approach and recommended that China decided on a better strategy for handling of international negotiations and relations in the future [55].

7. *It was a meeting fraught with contradictions; China did not "hijack"* (劫持) *it*. The historical responsibilities, financing, and technology transfer were the major issues confronting the North and the South at the Summit [67] and Xie Zhenhua accused the developed countries of shirking their responsibility and attempting to make the responsibilities of certain developing countries the focal point of the negotiations [44]. As soon as Ed Milliband [51] had criticized China for "hijacking" the Summit, a Chinese spokesman noted that there could be no denying that China played a constructive role. He accused British politicians for shirking their responsibility and they were asked to correct their own mistakes and display a stronger sense of responsibility towards the developing countries [92]. Later, a Chinese observer argued that Milliband's remarks revealed a deep rift between developing and developed countries ([33]/Wei Jianguo).
8. *China and the BASIC countries* (基础四国). Xie Zhenhua found that the large majority of the developing countries supported the constructive approach of the BASIC group. It was a strong alliance with considerable negotiation power [44]. Representatives of the BASIC countries and Sudan as chair of the G77 had already held consultations in Beijing on 27–28 November 2009 when they also met with Prime Minister Wen to prepare the Summit [94]. As noted earlier, Wen Jiabao coordinated closely with the BASIC leaders in Copenhagen and met them late in the afternoon/early evening on 18.12. when President Obama decided to barge in on their meeting to restart negotiations after his confrontation with He Yafei ([50]: 230-47). Obama was invited to join and eventually the five leaders reached agreement about the wording of The Copenhagen Accord [94].
9. *Protection of China's core* (核心利益) *interests* was a key Chinese concern and the leadership had stated on numerous occasions that China's right to development (发展权) must be respected and that China's sovereignty (主权) and security (安全) were unalienable [33, 67]/Yu Qingtai). Eventually, BBC quoted Xie Zhenhua for saying that both sides managed to preserve their bottom line and that the protection of China's sovereignty and national interest was important [21].

   One Chinese source observed that the interests of the developed countries are "vested interests", they wanted to protect what they had already gained through development, whereas the developing countries were defending their right to development, including their space to emit GHGs. Without such a space for emissions, there would be no right to development, he argued [33]/Wei Jianguo). This being said, Chinese experts also argued for the need to secure "carbon justice" (碳公平) under a future 'Kyoto-2' regime, i.e. treating everybody equally with due note of historical circumstances [44].
10. *Relations to international society*. The Copenhagen Accord inspired trust and hope in international society [48] and China was praised for its ambitious emission reduction goal by many foreign heads of state and experts, some of

whom characterized the criticisms of China at the Summit as "dishonest" [88]. China's national reduction goals were seen as an important signal to the outside world that China has embarked on a low carbon road, even if others hesitate. It was a reminder to the rich countries that have not done anything as yet [91]. Xie Zhenhua argued that the developed countries neglect the right to development of the developing countries [44], while, at the critical moment, China and other developing countries had stood up and defended the poor countries [48]. In particular, China emphasized the fragility of the small island states and Wen Jiabao promised continuous support and assistance to them within the South-South framework [88, 94].

11. *Global climate governance*.

Two-track regime to continue. Nobody in the international community can claim leadership on the basis of empty promises said Su Wei [67], and Foreign Minister, Yang Jiechi, and NDRC's Xie Zhenhua both emphasized that the two-track system known from the current regime should be maintained [88]. China insisted on a second phase of the current climate change regime (第二承诺期) based on the Bali Road Map which means that the principle of "common but differentiated responsibilities" must continue [48].

Legally binding agreement. Already before the Summit, President Obama and EU Commission Chairman Baroso had announced that it would not be possible to get agreement for a legally binding agreement. China was basically in agreement and saw only a miniscule chance that it would happen [48].

Technology transfer. In one interview, Xie Zhenhua argued that, despite pressure, the developed countries did not commit to a specific mechanism to facilitate technology transfer and only agreed to exchange information and provide technical assistance. Therefore, the prospect of transferring climate friendly technology to developing countries seems quite remote. Actually, The Copenhagen Accord [20] does mention that facilities for technology transfer must be established, so Xie's conclusion here seems out of tune with the facts. In contrast to this, Jiang Kejun, the Energy Research Institute Senior Researcher, argued that China's technological advancements have been so fast that China is close to catching up with the most advanced technologies in some sectors where China produces much faster than abroad and Chinese technology is much cheaper. In fact, China is undergoing an industrial transformation to become competitive in "green" technologies and it has ample investment capital to develop new sectors [91].

Monitoring, Review and Verification (MRV). Prime Minister Wen noted that as a developing country China is responsible for its own reduction of GHG emissions and that they are not negotiable. China would spare no effort to exceed the national targets set for reduction [94]. Furthermore, China did make commitments to strengthen its internal MRV and, at the press conference on 17.12., He Yafei announced that China would establish a monitoring and verification system that is legally binding at the national level. All relevant information would be made publicly available and subject to legal control and monitoring by the media. Further, China would improve its national communications on the matter to enhance transparency and, in terms of mitigation actions, China would be interested in international exchange,

dialogue and cooperation “that is not intrusive, that does not infringe upon China’s sovereignty” [35].

China is not interested in the money, the developed countries are vague about the money. Although China was particular about the need to secure adequate financing and technology transfer to the developing countries, it also made clear that it did not compete for even one cent with these countries. Indeed, China expressed willingness to help those in debt to the developed countries [48, 94]. Xie Zhenhua noted that the developed countries focus on the role of the carbon market and the private companies in mobilizing funding for reduction of emissions. However, they did not acknowledge the critical role of the governments nor did they specify the source of the funding pledged under the Copenhagen Accord [44].

12. *Doubts about climate change*. Each country has dissenting voices when it comes to climate change and there has indeed been periods of intensive debates between different scientific schools about the issue until a world consensus was built [58, 80]. Whereas there has not been a serious public debate in China as yet, questions are raised and comments made, even by high level people within the ‘radical centre’. At a meeting of the BASIC countries in Delhi in January 2010, Chinese Chief Negotiator, Xie Zhenhua, said that it was necessary to adopt an open attitude to climate science and to include as many views as possible "to be more scientific and to be more consistent." Xie was referring to the controversy over the UN's climate science panel's 2007 assertion that Himalayan glaciers could disappear by 2035 [15]. Lü Xuedu from the National Climate Centre also criticized the use of flawed projections about the speed of melting of Himalayan glaciers and recent evidence that IPCC scientists at the University of East Anglia had blocked criticism. He found that there are problems with the way some of the IPCC documents are assessed and checked and he recommended that the IPCC should be reformed to prevent political interference, to improve research, and reduce Western bias [79].
13. *The way forward*. The Chinese leadership sees two ways forward after Copenhagen: A national and an international. China recognizes the global significance of climate change but the international society needs to deal with the following issues to move forward: (1) A correct understanding of the importance of historical emissions for global warming; (2) a stronger focus on the need to follow and implement the Bali Roadmap; (3) a stronger, legally based commitment by the developed countries to emissions reduction as well as to provision of finance and technology transfer to developing countries; (4) strengthened international collaboration with respect for the needs of different types of developing countries; (5) a need to implement promises fully and not stall on them like some developed countries have due to their lack of sense of urgency [67].

But China can also go its own way if the international society does not address these issues. The need to deal with climate change is indisputable and it will stimulate China’s “green transformation” ([33]/Fan Jiehua) which will encompass all aspects of economic life, including investments and consumption ([33]/Su Wei). Chinese politicians and experts largely agree that China must and will do what it has promised: As one source put it: ”China does what

it says it will do" (中国是这么说的, 也是这么做的) [48] and it is important to show the Chinese people and the world that China is able to go ahead while doing a service to the global community ([33]/Wei Jianguo & Xu Qinghua).

It is undoubtedly a challenge to implement the ambitious plans at the local level where the 'radials at the centre' need the backup of local officials and many other stakeholders at multiple sites of authority. With China's decentralized structure, this will not be plain sailing and there have already been warnings. China's energy intensity rose by 3.2% during the first quarter of 2010 and Wen Jiabao seems to be losing patience with local governments and threatens to use the "iron fist" to make them toe the line [43].

Most of these commentaries do not mention China's emerging economy status as a specific issue. The observers present a China that selflessly teams up with other developing countries, while this was clearly not the case at the Summit. Effectively, by taking a middle position, the BASIC countries distanced themselves somewhat from the G77 when they negotiated the final deal against the interests of some developing countries. Dessima Williams, Chair of AOSIS (Association of Small Island States), criticized the Accord for being a substandard political document that does little to guarantee the safety and continued survival of the small island states [65].

Analysis and Conclusion

The Copenhagen Summit was meant to function as a platform for re-configuration of the architecture of global climate change governance while securing global legitimacy for the process and its outcome. As a site of authority at the highest level in the emerging, fragmented, and multi-layered global regime, the Summit contributed to asserting its values, norms, and structures. The Copenhagen Accord was seen as a defensible output, not what many had expected, but a basis on which to proceed in a pragmatic manner.

As legitimacy in global governance derives from sources such as effectiveness, participatory procedures, tradition, and democratic values [10], China's behaviour in the process may be seen to draw legitimacy to varying degrees from all of these four sources.

Effectiveness The Copenhagen Accord was the best possible outcome under the circumstances. The alternative would have been no agreement which would have been disastrous for the entire UN system and the Heads of states and governments participating in the Summit. Although reluctantly, China sacrificed its position as a close ally of the G77 countries to line up with the big emerging economies and the US to secure a result perceived to be in the interest of a majority of countries, not least those drafting the Accord.

Participatory Procedures China felt excluded from the negotiations at a certain stage and criticized the secret procedure pursued by a small group of developed countries. In the spirit of UN practice, China supported a participatory process, but

towards the end the Chinese negotiators chose to violate this principle and team up within the BASIC alliance for the sake of effectiveness.

Tradition China managed to infuse its principle of "contained institutional change" (cf. [31]) into global climate governance by defending the traditions of the negotiation process as well as the need to adapt the existing Kyoto Protocol governance regime in the future.

Democratic Values This is a trickier concept since democratic legitimacy is mostly associated with domestic models of electoral democracy that are less suitable to evaluate transnational non-electoral, non-territorial governance arrangements. Therefore, accountability becomes a key concern since, during negotiations, the countries enter into more or less formalized networks where there is little information disclosure and this renders the mechanisms for accountability unclear [10]. It is obvious now that China can and will play the rules of the game in an international governance context, whether secret, quasi-democratic, or democratic. China's accountability primarily derives from its acceptance of both formal and informal rules and procedures, i.e. the 'rules of the game', and the increasing willingness of the regime to disclose and debate relevant information.

The focus here has been on the legitimacy of the authoritarian 'radicals at the centre' and their ability to defend China's core interests by negotiating a climate governance regime with significant Chinese footprints. Despite initial international criticisms, China has insisted on a positive assessment of its constructive performance at COP15 and its approach to development of the climate change governance architecture. As I look at legitimation as a process of garnering "legitimacy-in-context", I will discuss the legitimation process by applying Beetham's [5] criteria discussed earlier:

Conformity with rules As argued above, there is little doubt that China accepts the 'rules of the game' and their procedural logic, whether formal or informal.

Justification by reference to beliefs shared by dominant and subordinate The discourse by China's 'radicals at the centre' regarding their approach to climate change is closely integrated with the national Chinese development discourse and contributes to its transformation as well through new concepts such as "sustainable development", "green transformation", and a "low carbon economy". Concepts used in the climate negotiations, such as "common but differentiated responsibilities", "right to development" and "space for emissions" also resonate with the leadership's focus on sustainable development. The climate change discourse and the associated governance practices may thus become a platform for a difficult and dramatic transformation of the Chinese economy that will address environmental challenges while building on old beliefs that what the government does well will work for the common good. Whether these beliefs are shared by dominant and subordinate is still difficult to argue due to the inadequacy of other empirical evidence than tradition (cf. [32]).

Evidence of support to the power relation At home there has been little criticism of the leadership for its climate change policies, although difficulties may arise soon

when the plans are rolled out at local level. At the international level, China's new power status has been accepted. The Copenhagen Summit demonstrated that China can and will exert power. But China does not want to do it alone yet and it clearly prefers to use the leverage of partnerships, although it is not yet clear whether the BASIC alliance is a strategic alliance or—to use a concept borrowed from Lo [49]—an "axis of convenience"? There is no doubt that this new power relation has been accepted internationally and may well garner belief, support, and legitimacy both at home and abroad.

Finally, based on [32] propositions I would argue that climate change policies are connected with the "original justification" found in Hu Jintao's "modernization" (现代化) vision with his focus on "people-centered" (以民为本) "sustainable development" (可持续发展) with a "scientific outlook" (科学发展观) under "the rule of law" (法治), concepts that all have implications for national and international governance. The utilitarian justification comes from the need to tackle the consequences of "modernization" with a focus on such ideas as "green transformation" (绿色转型), "low carbon route" (低碳路线), and "indigenous innovation" (自主创新) that will help create new jobs and welfare as well as economic spinoff in new economic sectors. Hu's vision may well augment the process of re-legitimation of the 'radicals at the centre'.

In sum, while China's role in international climate governance was disputed at the Copenhagen Summit, China contributed constructively to brokering a deal with strong implications for a new climate governance architecture suiting China's preferences and being aligned with China's core interests. China defended the procedural logic of the current global climate governance framework and managed to contain subsequent institutional change. China's national and international discourse on and actions associated with climate change and the international negotiations seem to be able to reinforce each other and they may well have a mutual legitimacy augmenting effect for the 'radicals at the centre' of the Chinese regime, provided that they ensure consequential logic through targeted reduction of GHG emissions and a "green transformation" of the economy.

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