

Master Thesis

China's Aspired Global Environmental and Climate Leadership; Green Beacon of Hope or Purely Rhetoric?

Programme: Master International Relations

Track: Global Order in Historical Perspective

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Date: 6th of July 2018

Word count: 16.236



**Universiteit
Leiden**

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1 Introduction

This thesis will dive deeper into China's shifting political attitude towards the environment and climate change. During the past couple of decades China has witnessed a gradual shift in which it increasingly prioritises both topics as important global issues whereby it subscribes itself a leading role. Especially during the past few years this trend has become visible (Kwon & Hanlon, 2015; Zhang 2016). Additionally, there are signals that China takes on a more assertive role in the international realm as a rising global power (Yan, 2014). This thesis will explore the motives behind China's shift regarding environmental and climate issues and by doing so analyse what the implications are for its role in global governance.

This thesis makes a distinction between the subjects of the environment and climate change. It defines the environment in terms of the physical environment upon which all living organisms are dependent for their existence (United Nations Statistics Division [UNSD], 2018). It conceptualises climate change both as the index of anthropogenic-induced change in global climate systems as well as a cause of other related phenomena (Hulme, 2016). Especially the topic of climate change and to a lesser extent the subject of the environment are morally loaded issues which states can easily utilise to gain international political legitimacy (Chasek, Downie & Brown, 2016). Foremostly, climate change is prone to rhetoric and lends itself well as tool for achieving a range of political means besides solving the issue of climate change. However, precisely how states treat the topic does not only provide opportunities but also sets limitations for what is seen as legitimate governmental policymaking. Therefore, researching how China has treated the topics over time provides more insight in the motives behind this prioritisation in relation to wider Chinese politics (Hulme, 2016; Schweller & Pu, 2011; Victor & Keohane, 2016). This will be done by exploring how, by whom and for what reasons China is prioritising these topics. Especially, China's attitude during the past 1.5 years, after the Trump presidency created a power vacuum in global environmental governance, provides insight in China's potential global leadership role (Betsill, 2017; Wagner & Keith, 2016). In academic literature, a lively discussion has emerged about reasons why China changed its stance (Boyd, 2012). These reasons can be classified in three categories on the domestic level and one on the international level. On the domestic level, energy security, more balanced economic growth and pressure from an increasingly critical public opinion play a role (Boyd, 2012; Hilton & Kerr, 2017; Kassiola & Guo, 2010; Schmitz, 2017; Schroeder, 2008). On the international level prestige and legitimacy as a responsible rising global power form the main reason for China's shift (Hurrell & Sengupta, 2012; Kassiola & Guo, 2010; Roberts, 2011; Schweller & Pu, 2011; Wagner & Keith, 2016).

This thesis will analyse Chinese policy documents and research how these different reasons are framed from 1996 until the present. It will scrutinise the relative importance of domestic versus

international factors over time and analyse what this implies about China's role as rising global power. Specifically, it will analyse how this prioritisation trend has developed in reaction to the emerged power vacuum since the United States' (US) withdrawal from global environmental governance. It will thereby explore if this has led to just a continuation of the trend, an acceleration or even a qualitative shift in China's environmental politics, as this reveals to what extent China intends to take on a more prominent role in environmental governance. It will also consider to what extent policies are concrete and fit for implementation (Wagner & Keith, 2016). This thesis will thereby answer the research question:

To what extent is China's prioritisation of the environment and climate change as global issues in which it should take a leading role signalling a wider shift in China's position in the international political realm?

This question will be answered by focussing on two sub-questions:

1. What reasons are discernible for China to change its stance on the environment and climate change since 1996 until 2015?
2. How has the determined trend developed over the past 1.5 years in reaction to the emerged power vacuum in international environmental politics and what does this imply about China's status in the international political arena?

This thesis defines leadership as the power of a state "to induce a group to adopt a particular line of policy" (Andresen & Agrawala, 2002, p. 41). The group thereby bases its policy line on the values of the leading state (Andresen & Agrawala, 2002). The main research question is relevant as it provides insight in China's role in shaping the international political system, a topic which is currently lively debated in academic literature (Schweller & Pu, 2011). Climate politics can be regarded as an example of China's increasing international political assertiveness in the international political system which reflects the policy shift in which the state is formally moving from "Keeping a Low Profile" to "Striving for Achievement" (Yan, 2014, p. 153). This raises the question to what extent China wants to take on more responsibility in the current global political system as being a responsible rising global power, or to what extent it merely seeks to shape international environmental governance in accordance with its own interests (Ikenberry, 2009). Especially after the power vacuum emerged, this has become a relevant question (Betsill, 2017). This thesis will shed light on the direction international environmental governance is heading as China is a key player in this domain (Foot & Walter, 2011).

The structure of this thesis proceeds as follows. The second chapter clarifies the research methods and design. Subsequently, chapter 3 conceptualises the topics of the environment and climate change, after which chapter 4 outlines the rise of global environmental and climate governance. The fifth chapter examines the debate on China's role as emerging power, after which

chapter 6 explains the different reasons behind China's policy shift found in the literature. Finally, chapter 7 analyses China's political attitude towards climate change and the environment on the basis of Chinese policy documents, whereupon the conclusion follows.

2 Methods and Design

This thesis will answer the main research question by a within-case research design in which it will examine the relationship between China's changed attitude in environmental politics and its position in global governance. It will do so by analysing the relative importance of domestic versus international reasons as rivalling explanations for China to prioritise the environment. It will study policy documents of a period of two decades from Chinese governmental bodies. Chinese policy documents form the basis of this research as they are well available and provide the closest insight into China's policy objectives. Only English documents will be analysed, but this forms no disadvantage as this thesis will mainly examine how China frames these topics for the international community. This thesis uses a broad definition of framing which includes "any effort to influence public opinion through the formulation of messages" (Schaffner & Sellers, 2009, p. IX). This research will use process tracing as main method, through which it will examine how the trend of increased prioritisation of the environment as a global issue in which China should take a key role has evolved over time and which rivalling explanations are mostly and in which way referred to. Bennet (2004, p. 22) explains that "[p]rocess tracing looks at the observable implications of putative causal mechanisms in operation in a case [...]. The goal is to establish which of several possible explanations is consistent with an uninterrupted chain of evidence from hypothesized cause to observed effect". The four different strands of reasons form the independent variables and China's policy shift the dependent variable.

In order to gain a thorough understanding of the process of China's policy shift, this thesis will examine documents from a wide time range. 1996 will form the base year, as it is only from this moment onwards that the topic of the environment became relevant to China's policy agenda (Schroeder, 2008). After examining this starting point, this thesis will analyse documents from the years 2005 and 2015, as these are a decade apart and therefore clearly reveal China's policy shift. Additionally, 2015 is the year in which a landmark multigovernmental climate accord was reached in Paris (Zang, 2015). Scrutinising these three benchmark years will provide a sound understanding of the trend regarding the prominence and depiction of the different explanations for China's policy shift. Afterwards, this thesis will analyse documents from the past 1.5 to see how China has reacted to the vacuum in environmental governance. To create a comprehensive overview, it will study documents from a diverse range of Chinese government-affiliated bodies. These sources vary from organisations related to the Communist Party, the National Congress, several ministries and commissions, to China-

led bi- and multilateral cooperation bodies. It will examine several types of documents from these sources such as policy documents, speeches, summit summaries and news articles.

This thesis will analyse the selected documents in the following way: Firstly, it will pick the relevant parts by searching in the documents for the terms: environment, climate change, and sustainable/sustainability. It will count how often these topics are mentioned throughout time and how elaborately they are covered. Furthermore, it will analyse how and in what way the documents have described the several reasons over the past two decades, in relation to either the environment or climate change. The thesis will pay attention to the differences between the various types of policy documents, when applicable. Subsequently, it will evaluate the trend from 1996 until 2015, after which it will analyse the development of this trend during the past 1.5 years, as related to China's role in the international political realm.

3 Conceptualisation of the Environment and Climate Change

This chapter will firstly conceptualise environmental and climate governance, as this are central topics to this research. Next, it will conceptualise the environment and subsequently climate change, as their definitions have implications for policymaking. This thesis defines international environmental governance as the "wide range of relationships governing the interactions within and between governments, businesses, and environmental advocates around the world" (Clark, 2000, p. 98). It specifically focusses on "the formal treaties among states governing intercontinental environmental issues" (Clark, 2000, p. 97). For international climate governance the same understanding applies, only applied to the topic of climate change. Even though an increasingly wide range of non-state actors has become involved in environmental and climate governance, this thesis will primarily concentrate on states because of their central role (Clapp & Dauvergne, 2011).

In order to grasp the dynamics of environmental governance, it is necessary to clearly define the environment. According to the United Nations (UN) "[t]he environment is the totality of all the external conditions affecting the life, development and survival of an organism" (UNSD, 2018, para. I). The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's Glossary (OECD Glossary, 2018, para. I) further refines it as "[t]he naturally produced physical surroundings on which humanity is entirely dependent in all its activities". From these definitions two important findings follow. Firstly, the environment includes everything that the natural physical surroundings consist off and is thereby a very broad subject matter. Secondly, according to this view humankind is dependent on these natural surroundings for its existence, which gives the topic a certain moral value. Benson and Jordan (2015) add an economic dimension to this as they argue that the environment comprises of the relations between society, the economy and the physical surroundings, thereby making the topic even more

comprehensive. Environmental policies often focus on the more concise topic of environmental deterioration. According to the UNSD (2018, para. 1) environmental degradation is the “deterioration in environmental quality from ambient concentrations of pollutants and other activities and processes such as improper land use and natural disasters”. These definitions reveal that whereas the environment is a very broad topic, the related spatial issues of environmental deterioration make it much more clearly demarcated. Examples of issues that lead to environmental deterioration are: pollution, waste disposal, and natural hazards. These problems can result in issues like air, water or soil pollution, desertification, deforestation or biodiversity loss (Benson & Jordan, 2015; UNSD, 2018).

The topic of the environment has political implications: states that prioritise it can increase their national and international legitimacy because of its moral value. However, the explicitness and clear visibility of environmental issues make it more difficult to use the topic rhetorically on the international level without undertaking any domestic policy measures as practical issues ask for practical policy solutions. Even so, on the global level, the wide scope of the topic and highly diverging interests of different states make it hard to reach a consensus on concrete international policy measures, despite the rising importance of the issue on the international political agenda (Benson & Jordan, 2015; Chasek et al., 2016).

The topic of international climate governance emerged several decades later. The issue has become ever more prominent on the international political agenda. Its emergence fits within a wider shift from dealing with the practical implications of environmental damage to tackling the root causes of these problems, as climate change could be depicted as one of the sources of certain forms of environmental degradation (Benson & Jordan, 2015). The understanding of the term climate change has shifted during the past decades. Until the 1970s the term climatic change implied “all forms of climatic inconsistency on timescales longer than 10 years, irrespective of cause” (Hulme, 2016, p. 1). However, from the 1970s onwards the notion emerged that human action could lead to alterations in climates on a global scale. Hereby the issue did not only become a phenomenon caused by human activities, but it also gained agency as it was perceived to create further social and environmental change. So, it became simultaneously an index of change as well as a cause of wider phenomena (Hulme, 2016). The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change’s (UNFCCC, 1992, p. 7) definition reflects this dual and anthropogenic nature of climate change as it states that climate change “means a change of climate which is attributed directly or indirectly to human activity that alters the composition of the global atmosphere and which is in addition to natural climate variability observed over comparable time periods”. Authors sometimes also refer to climate change as the (enhanced) greenhouse effect or global warming. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change’s (IPCC, 2001, p. 788) definition of climate change largely follows the UNFCCC’s, but states that

“[c]limate change may be due to natural internal processes or external forcings, or to persistent anthropogenic changes in the composition of the atmosphere or in land use”. It hereby leaves some room for the role of natural processes in relation to global warming. Concretely, climate change is characterised by changes in temperature, precipitation, wind, seasonal lengths and extreme weather events. Subsequently, these issues can cause phenomena such as rising sea-levels, fresh water shortages, ecosystem damage, biodiversity loss, which subsequently affect the lives of humans and animals. The burning of fossil fuels and deforestation are viewed as the main human-induced causes of climate change, as these lead to the accumulation of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere. Reforestation and greenhouse gas reductions can mitigate climate change, for example by replacing carbon-intensive energy sources by renewable energy sources (Gupta, 2014).

The move from the understanding of climate change as a purely technical, physical phenomenon to being much more than that made it into a contested political issue (Hulme, 2016). It is surrounded by much uncertainty as its precise interpretations vary and are very much context dependent (Doyle, McEachern & MacGregor, 2015; Gupta, 2014; Young, 2011). The long timescale between cause and effect and the unclear scope of the topic add to this lack of clarity (Benson & Jordan, 2015). In this sense, climate change is a very abstract and morally loaded policy issue, as the perceived consequences are threatening the sustainability of the earth and thereby human existence (Hulme, 2016). This makes the topic prone to rhetoric and an attractive option to gain (international) legitimacy. It is relatively easy for a country to position itself strongly on climate change, without taking any far-reaching policy measures as the issue is so abstract (Haas, 2002). Keohane and Victor (2016, p. 570) argue that for this reason “there has been lots of ‘climate talk’ and little ‘climate action’”.

It can be concluded that the topics of environment and climate change have a different nature, as the former is broad but concrete and the latter much less tangible. This has implications for policymaking in both areas. Both matters have a high level of morality and provide states that prioritise them with legitimacy in the international community. However, the more concrete topic of the environment is less easy to use rhetorically than the much more abstract topic of climate change (Hulme, 2016). Despite being separate topics, climate change and the environment are also related. On the one hand, climate change forms a cause of environmental issues such as ecosystem damage and on the other hand, the state of the natural environment also influences the process of climate change, for example through de- or reforestation. However, climate change is only one of the several sources of environmental degradation (Chasek et al., 2016).

4 The Rise of International Environmental and Climate Governance

After the previous chapter has conceptualised environmental and climate governance, this chapter will discuss the emergence of these topics on the international political agenda. As previously mentioned, environmental governance emerged first on the global political agenda, before the topic of climate change gained foothold. The rise of environmental concerns originates in the Industrial Revolution in the global West. The increasing manifestation of transborder detrimental environmental consequences of the Industrial Revolution in combination with population growth incited concerns about the protection of the environment from the 19th century onwards (Clapp & Dauvergne, 2011). During the 1960s and 1970s, the publication of popular books in the US further exacerbated these concerns as they spurred sentiments about environmental degradation resulting from economic development. Examples are Rachel Carson's 'Silent Spring' (1962), Paul Ehrlich's 'The Population Bomb' (1968) and The Club of Rome's 'The Limits to Growth' report (1972) predicting the future depletion of the world's resources, if this type of economic development continued. Consequently, in the West the world was increasingly seen as interconnected, albeit through a North-South divide, and the planet as fragile (Clapp & Dauvergne, 2011; Doyle et al., 2015).

Pressure for an international political response mounted and subsequently resulted in the first UN conference on the Human Environment (UNCHE) in Stockholm in 1972. Delegates from 114 countries attended the conference and thereby pursued global environmental cooperation. However, the outcomes of the summit were limited in terms of international collaboration and real action (Elliot, 2004). Nevertheless, Stockholm's most important outcome was institutional, as the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) was established "ensuring that the UN system would become the major site for international environmental diplomacy and the development of international environmental law" (Elliot, 2004, p. 12). In 1979, climate change gained presence on the international level for the first time as the first World Climate Conference was held in Geneva. The most important outcome of this academic conference was the creation of the scientific intergovernmental body of the IPCC in 1988, as part of the UN system, which further spurred concerns about the possible drastic impacts of climate change (Kwon & Hanlon, 2015; Schroeder, 2008). In 1987 the Brundtland Report coined the term sustainable development to bridge the gap between the global North and South. According to this view, the seemingly opposing issues of economic industrialisation and environmental protection can be reconciled through sustainable economic growth. Sustainable development is relevant to both environmental and climate governance. Foremost Western politicians increasingly recognised sustainable or green politics as a popular issue and made them more important topics on their political agendas (Clapp & Dauvergne, 2011).

In 1992, the second major international environmental conference followed: The United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. This so-called 'Earth Summit' was attended by 179 states and a big number of Non-Governmental Organisations' (NGOs) representatives, thereby the largest UN-conference to date. It gave the issue of the environment a global character and strongly resonated the matter of sustainable development. Additionally, it set the international standard by making a clear distinction between developed and developing countries, whereby the voice of the latter was strongly represented. This is mostly visible in the principle of "common but differentiated responsibilities", which states that developed countries have to carry the main responsibility for environmental protection as of their substantially higher historical contribution to environmental deterioration (United Nations General Assembly [UNGA], 1992, para. 7). Additionally, principles like "the right to development" and "the polluter pays" are in the interest of developing countries (Harris, 2011, p. 27). Besides the Rio Declaration, the conference produced "Agenda 21": an action programme to reach global sustainable development. Additionally, the Earth Summit generated two legally binding documents: The Convention on Biological Diversity and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). The goal of the UNFCCC (1992, p. 4) is to "achieve stabilization of greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere at a low enough level to prevent dangerous anthropogenic interference with the climate system", which is ratified by 154 UN member states. The principle of "common but differentiated responsibilities" is also mentioned in the UNFCCC and thereby applied to the topic of climate change (Caney, 2009). Despite being a landmark in environmental governance, the Earth Summit had limited outcomes in terms of concrete action and has been criticised for being top-down and containing many diplomatic compromises. It has been succeeded by the Rio+10 (2002) and the Rio+20 (2012) conferences. Both summits largely suffered similar critiques of lacking concrete implementation (Elliot, 2004; Haas, 2002; Sánchez & Croal, 2012). Apart from these summits in Rio de Janeiro, different actors have held a multitude of other summits on the environment. However, the Rio summits remain the leading framework for global environmental governance. Besides, the environment is regarded as an ever more important issue in global politics. One of the reasons for this is that it has become associated with other significant matters in world politics such as social and economic development and sometimes even security issues. The latter finds its origin in the reasoning that environmental problems and resource depletion are threat multipliers that exacerbate existing instabilities between opposing groups, which can result in violent conflict and thereby affect the (inter)national security (Chasek et al., 2016).

Something tangible that the Earth Summit's UNFCCC did produce is the organisation of annual global conferences on climate change. The main goal of these so-called Conferences of the Parties

(COPs) is to spur negotiations on greenhouse gas reductions. At the end of each year a different country hosts a COP. As there are no procedural rules agreed upon, decisions are consensus-based, which leads to compromise and hinders high ambition as the interests of the 197 participating countries are highly diverse. In addition, a dichotomy between developed and developing countries exists regarding the topic of mitigation versus adaptation. The former give priority to tackling the root causes of climate change or “mitigation” in the form of emission reductions, whereas the latter often lack the means for “adaptation” or handling the most direct effects of climate change and therefore prioritise this topic (Fischer et al., 2002, p. 9, 11). Furthermore, the controversial, highly interpretable principle of “common but differentiated responsibilities” has become a deadlock in negotiations as it made major emitters like the US reluctant to ratify conventions as of their distributive (in)justice (Foot & Walter, 2011). This dynamic has partly been addressed by a deal made during COP 2009 between developed and developing countries in which the former provide financial and technological assistance to the latter in exchange for the approval of international measurement, reporting and verification (MRV) of the resulting greenhouse gas reductions (Light, 2016). In addition, since 2009 the top-down system has been replaced by a more bottom-up approach in which states can put forward their own objectives for reductions and MRV. These commitments are not legally binding, but international peer pressure functions as motivation for states to stick up to their promises, as a state’s participation in the global climate regime “is a key part of its profile as a good international actor” (Light, 2016, p. 494). The new system seems to have made countries more willing to make international commitments, but simultaneously increased the risk of states shirking out as these are non-binding. In hindsight, from the annual COPs the Kyoto Protocol (1997), the Copenhagen Climate Conference (2009) and the Paris Climate Conference (2015) are the most outstanding in terms of (pursued) achievements (Keohane & Victor, 2016; Zang, 2015). Besides the UN framework focussed on climate change, multilateral and bilateral climate diplomacy forms an important addition to pursue effective international climate governance (Foot & Walter, 2011; Light, 2016).

5 China as an Emerging Global Power

In order to contextualise China’s pursued leadership role in global environmental and climate governance, this chapter will scrutinise the academic debate on China’s emerging role in global governance in general. Ikenberry (2009) argues that the Western liberal order which shaped the international system after the Second World War is currently going through a shift. The hegemony of the US has largely determined the previous order and it is strongly build on the principles of state-sovereignty and non-interference. However, the rise of several non-Western states in terms of economic and strategic power has infringed upon the US’ primacy (Cui, 2012). This fits within a shift

from unipolarity to multipolarity in global governance (Ikenberry, 2013). Additionally, economic globalisation has increased the interdependence between states and the subjects of human rights and the responsibility to protect have undermined the principles of sovereignty and non-interference. Consequently, the scope of global governance has widened and it has become more intrusive of state affairs. These dynamics prompt the question who can legitimately govern the international political arena and shape it to its interests (Ikenberry, 2009).

With its rapidly increasing economic and strategic capabilities, China forms one of the most prominent examples of current emerging powers (Ikenberry, 2013). In addition to its increasing hard power, China also pursues to increase its soft power. Soft power can be understood as “the ability to affect others to obtain the outcomes one wants through attraction rather than coercion” (Nye, 2008, p. 4). This raises questions about China’s potential global political role. To what extent will China join or oppose the institutions and accompanying rules of the current system? Will China become a stronger power within this system or will it set the rules according to its own interests? And will this result in strife between the US as current hegemon and China as potential revisionist power? Scholars’ opinions differ on this topic (Schweller & Pu, 2011). Some argue that China will uphold the current Westphalian liberal order whereas others put forward that China wants to substantially change the system.

Ikenberry (2013) for example argues from a liberal point of view that China will integrate into the current world order instead of testing it, because this would serve its interest better. Cui (2012, p. 15) agrees that China will peacefully participate in the existing international system as its core objectives are economic modernisation and “win-win” cooperation. In contrast, Schweller and Pu (2011) argue from a realist point of view that China tries to delegitimise the US with the goal of overthrowing its hegemonic power as this is the only way the shift from unipolarity to multipolarity can proceed. Jacques (2012) agrees and argues that China will replace the US as the world hegemon of the 21st century and thereby create a more Chinese international system. He believes that China’s often discussed high economic impact will translate into big political and cultural influence. Yan (2014, p. 153) follows this line of reasoning, as he argues that China will take on a bigger role on the international level because it is changing its foreign policy strategy from “Keeping a Low Profile” to “Striving for Achievement”. According to Yan (2014) it is in China’s national interest to increase its international political power and legitimacy to undermine the power of the US by building alliances with other states.

As previously mentioned, the environment and especially climate change form prime examples of subjects which lend themselves well to gain international political leverage and legitimacy and thereby extend a state’s soft power (Light, 2016). Additionally, the topics take in an ever more

important role in global politics (Clapp & Dauvergne, 2011). By analysing China's political attitude towards the environment and climate change, this thesis will research what China's more assertive role implies. On the one hand it could signify that China takes on a more responsible role on the international stage as a global power, but on the other hand this shift could also benefit China to shape the international order according to its own interests (Wagner & Keith, 2016; Yan, 2014). This thesis will further analyse the tension between these two roles and thereby shed more light on China's highly debated role in international politics.

6 Reasons for China's Policy Shift

The previous chapter explained how China's prioritisation of the environment could relate to a quest for soft power on the international level. However, China's policy shift has also caused a lively debate amongst scholars on both domestic and international reasons for this changed attitude, which this chapter will explore. Roughly, these reasons can be subdivided into three interrelated strands at the domestic level: energy security, economic advantages and a changed public opinion. Some are more directly related to environmental issues and others to climate change (Boyd, 2012; Hilton & Kerr, 2017; Schmitz, 2017; Schroeder, 2008). These domestic reasons are all connected to the three decades of soaring industrial economic growth China has experienced. At the international level one strand of reasons can be found, which relates to the interplay between major powers in global governance (Hurrell & Sengupta, 2012; Kassiola & Guo, 2010; Roberts, 2011; Schweller & Pu, 2011; Wagner & Keith, 2016). Analysing the relative importance over time of these domestic and international motivations in China's policies provides insight in China's (pursued) role in the international political realm.

6.1 Energy Security

Academic literature often mentions China's concerns about energy security as reason for its policy shift. The aforementioned economic growth has resulted in a staggering rise in domestic energy demand and a scarcity of domestic natural energy resources (Kassiola & Guo, 2010). As China's economy transformed from state-planned towards market oriented, it developed a large share of carbon intensive industries. Due to its large population of 1.4 billion people living increasingly modernised lives, and rapid export-based industrialisation, energy-demand has grown spectacularly. China's oil consumption for example ranks nowadays as the world's second largest. However, Chinese natural resources have become increasingly scarce. Due to its role as "the world's factory", China's reliance on foreign energy sources has become an ever-bigger worry for the government as China's dependence on overseas resources has risen and its main providers are rather unstable countries in the Middle East and sub-Saharan Africa (Kassiola & Guo, 2010, p. 70). Additionally, maritime

transportation routes are often risk prone. Moreover, China's energy thirst has led to direct competition with the US and European Union (EU), not only in terms of energy security, but also in the form of an image crisis, because China is making oil deals with politically sensitive countries in Africa. Therefore, it is in China's geopolitical interest to decrease its dependence on foreign countries and increase the amount of domestically produced energy sources. Investing in domestic renewable and nuclear energy is one way to do so (Kassiola & Guo, 2010; Schmitz, 2017).

Energy security relates most directly to China's policy shift in prioritising climate change, as energy-efficiency and clean energy-sources fit perfectly in the climate change paradigm. However, the topic is also, less directly, linked to China's environment as energy sources such as coal and gas are part of the Chinese natural environment (Benson & Jordan, 2015; Hulme, 2016).

6.2 More Balanced Economic Growth

Hilton and Kerr (2017, p. 48) argue that the key drivers behind China's remarkable shift are economic interests. They talk about a "New Normal" economic development model in which the government shifted from growth based on energy-intensive, industrial, exports-driven economic development, to a more balanced growth, based on services, domestic consumption, innovation and green technologies. The goal is to remain internationally competitive (Boyd, 2012). The transition from carbon-based energy sources to non-fossil energy fits within this new paradigm. Furthermore, a major reason for the implementation of this new economic development model is trade friction, which resulted from China's unprecedented economic growth during the past thirty years. As China used an export-driven economic development model, many countries moved their labour-intensive industries to it and consequently flows of foreign direct investment have soared. This did not only result in China earning the name-tag "The World's Workshop" (Rosen & Hauser, 2007, p. 36), but also in growing trade-deficits with both developed and developing trade-partners. China has developed a huge trade surplus which triggered friction with its economic partners. China's "New Normal" economic development model serves therefore both as a way to cut down on carbon-intensive export industries and to reduce this extreme trade-imbalance (Hilton & Kerr, 2017, p. 48; Kassiola & Guo, 2010). Besides, Boyd (2012) argues that China has comparative advantages which make it suitable to become the global low-carbon leader. As China's population ages, rural to urban migration slows down and the level of wealth rises, it is not feasible anymore to base economic development on cheap labour and subsidised low energy prices (Boyd, 2012; Schroeder, 2008). As China pursues to become the global technological and innovative leader in low-carbon industries, this will create jobs and generate income. Furthermore, it aids public revenue generation through the means of taxes. Since 2006, there is even a legal foundation behind this economic shift in the form of the Renewable Energy Law, which focusses on the development of the domestic renewable energy sector (Schmitz, 2017).

A more balanced economic growth is linked to both environment and climate change. Firstly, it is linked to environmental protection because this new form of economic growth prevents further environmental damage, for example by limiting pollution and the harmful disposal of waste. Secondly, it is related to climate change as it is less energy-intensive and therefore creates lower amounts of greenhouse gas emissions (Benson & Jordan, 2015; Hulme, 2016).

6.3 A More Critical Public Opinion

A third strand of literature focusses on an increasingly critical domestic public opinion on China's environmental and climate governance, which triggered it to prioritise these issues. The above-mentioned Chinese economic development model did not only result in China becoming "the world's factory, but also its smokestack" (Kahn & Landler, 2007, para. 6). At the end of the 20th century the government propagated the message that economic growth should be strived after at any cost. However, this staggering economic growth has led to a number of domestic environmental problems. As environmental problems have become increasingly visible, the public opinion about the relevance of the environment and the issue of climate change has shifted. Air pollution problems have become so severe that they lead to a claimed death toll of hundreds of thousand citizens each year and coal mine tragedies have become a regular topic in the news. Furthermore, the country deals with wider pollution problems in other sectors as a consequence of its highly energy-consuming economic growth. As this pollution directly affects the lives of ever more Chinese citizens, people have started to demand a policy reaction from the Chinese government (Bomberg, 2017). A rarely critical Chinese public opinion poll held in 2011 revealed that over ninety percent of the citizens were seriously worried about air, water and soil pollution and the issue of climate change (Garschagen, 2017).

This critical opinion could be regarded as a stimulus for the government to shift its environmental and climate policies (Kassiola & Guo, 2010). Schroeder (2008) thereby argues that the organisation of China's civil society in non-governmental organisations (NGOs) has further enhanced this process. Chinese NGOs have started to raise public awareness about the topic of climate change via various channels such as the publication of research material, education and media campaigns. It could be argued that the organisation of Chinese citizens in collaborate channels in the form of civil organisation has heightened the pressure on the central government to prioritise the issue on its political agenda. However, recently the Chinese government has started to increasingly restrict the space for NGOs with new laws, such as the Law on the Management of Overseas NGOs' Activities in Mainland China, which has come into effect on the 1st of January 2017. This limits the space for civil society to be critical on topics such as the environment and climate change (Jia, 2017).

6.4 International Prestige and Legitimacy as a Responsible Global Power

On the international level there are also reasons why China has prioritised the environment and climate change as global matters in which it is willing to take the lead. Hurrell (2010) argues that climate change negotiations are related to the international global political order as the dynamics of climate cooperation reveal underlying power dynamics of the states shaping the climate regime. Kassiola and Guo (2010) specify this in the sense that they argue that climate change negotiations form an international arena for the power games between the major world powers. This is reflected in the dynamics between the power blocks of the US, EU and China. According to this line of thinking, China has changed its stance in regard to climate change politics in order to undermine the legitimacy of the US as world hegemon. As the US and a divided EU are unwilling and unable to take a leading role in climate change negotiations, China fills this power void and thereby proves its legitimacy as responsible rising power (Donald, 2017; Hurrell & Sengupta, 2012; Roberts, 2011; Schweller & Pu, 2011; Wagner & Keith, 2016). Pressure on China to take action as being the world's major emitter has arguably played a role in this policy shift (Kassiola & Guo, 2010). Especially Western countries increasingly view climate change as a world threatening issue, which responsible states cannot ignore but must act upon (Elliot, 2004). As for these views, reframing its stance helps China to gain legitimacy in these parts of the globe and undermine the legitimacy of the US. Moreover, in this way China pursues to drive a wedge between the US and EU. Kwon and Hanlon (2015) agree with this and argue that China's shift is mainly driven by the interests of China's political elites and their pursuance of a leadership role for China in the international realm. Haas (2002) adds to this that the wide media coverage of international climate conferences nowadays provides states with an excellent opportunity to influence their international reputation by broadcasting their views on the topic of the environment.

7 China's Political Attitude Towards the Environment and Climate Change

This chapter will analyse China's stance regarding the environment and climate change on the basis of policy documents dating from 1996 until the present moment. Each section will describe a different moment in time and analyse the framing of China's attitude on both topics, as well as the evolvement of the four different strands of reasons for China's policy shift.

7.1.1 China's Environmental and Climate Governance in 1996

1996 is the first year in which the environment and climate change really appeared on China's policy agenda and in which the government published the first White Paper on both topics (The State Council Information Office [SCIO], 1996; Schroeder, 2008). This thesis will therefore use it as baseline for China's environmental and climate policies. The White Paper gives an elaborate description on China's

stance regarding these subjects, including policy measures to be taken. However, the policy measures are very vague and patchy, and it is clear that subjects like the environment and climate change are of very little priority on China's policy agenda.

Firstly, from the four arguments for China's policy shift, economic considerations form the most dominant explanation for China's prioritisation of the environment. The document mentions resource scarcity and especially industrial pollution in urban areas as main reasons to make the economy more environment-friendly. From the first paragraph onwards, it is evident that economic growth is China's core policy objective and that it clearly prioritises this over environmental protection. However, it also states that rapid industrialisation and population growth can have detrimental outcomes for the environment and that it pays "great attention to the environmental issues" which stem from this (SCIO, 1996, para. I). The government concludes that so far, it has successfully limited environmental damage through good governance, however, further attention can be given to this issue as it remains "an arduous task" (SCIO, 1996, para. III). Environmental issues in urban areas form the main focal point. Overall, the tone of the text is rather optimistic but also ambiguous, as the SCIO also sporadically makes some critical notes. The Paper frames sustainable development as the solution to reconcile the seemingly contradictory objectives of rapid economic growth and environmental protection. It argues that the move towards sustainability can go well together with the transformation of the economy towards a market economy. This broad term forms a practical political solution for the Chinese government to fit its paradoxical policy stance, as it is often used without further specification of what it exactly implies. The SCIO mentions that science and technology have a role to play here. Further, the White Paper suggests some cautious and extremely broad policy measures which should be developed to create "a [s]ustainable [d]evelopment [s]trategy" (SCIO, 1996, para. I), such as "incorporating environmental protection into the plans for national economic and social development" or "placing environmental protection on a legal footing" (SCIO, 1996, para. I). The document supplements these vague policies with a few modest concrete examples of progress in limiting industrial pollution, for example closing down certain polluting factories in urban areas. Nevertheless, it remains questionable to what extent these patchy examples represent a wider trend in China.

Secondly, the White Paper covers the relation between the environment and energy security much less elaborately. It states that coal is the main energy source in China and that burning coal has detrimental outcomes for the environment and possibly for climate change. However, the document declares that the "economization on energy and expansion of the energy industry" are equally important to the readjustment of the "energy structure" (SCIO, 1996, para. III). The main way China wants to limit the environmental harm caused by the energy sector is to produce coal-based energy

cleaner and more efficiently. As supplement, it could develop nuclear power and conduct research on renewable energy sources. However, these are only unspecific future plans. The document relates the energy sector most directly to environmental pollution but also, in less direct words, to the issue of climate change. Even though China intends to limit greenhouse gas emissions, it does not give any concrete targets, and severely stresses the low per capita use of energy. The government has much confidence that the latter will remain the case in the future, despite its contradictory core objective of expanding the energy sector. Therefore, "China is under no specific obligation to limit the emission of carbon dioxide" according to UNFCCC standards (SCIO, 1996, para. III).

Thirdly, the White Paper covers the topic of the public opinion of China's civil society quite elaborately, but almost only by means of stressing the responsibility of the Chinese people to protect the environment. It fully omits any criticisms of civil society on China's environmental governance. The government prescribes itself an active role and wants "to popularize environmental protection knowledge among the people and raise their consciousness about environmental protection and gradually [...] cultivate fine environmental ethics and codes of conduct" (SCIO, 1996, para. VI). Additionally, it intends to create a pool of specialist workers on the topic. Publicity and education are the means to do so and the government argues that it already applies this on a big scale. China defends this statement by providing several numbers on concrete measures it has taken. The SCIO (1996) for example states that 1,500 journalists from 750 new units have produced 10,000 articles on environmental issues and that scholars have written 860 scientific books about the topic. Furthermore, it also states the number of schools providing environmental studies. The elaboration on all these numbers raises the question what the government tries to prove with it and how much impact these measures really have. Additionally, while some of these numbers seem quite high, the huge Chinese population must be considered as being the context. Furthermore, the Paper omits the topic of how critical these articles, books and studies can be, for example on the role of the Chinese government.

Fourthly, China's international role forms a dominant theme in the Paper, so it can be concluded that the government finds it important to show that China "earnestly fulfilled its international obligations" (SCIO, 1996, para. 1). The White Paper does not only reveal an ambiguous tone when it discusses the economy, but also when it outlines China's role in international environmental and climate governance. On the one hand, the Paper very much emphasises that China actively participates in international environmental and climate governance. On the other hand, it repeatedly stresses China's limited responsibilities as developing country and the principle of national sovereignty. Protecting its own environment is as far as China's responsibility reaches as it has "a large population base", low GDP, and overall backward level of science and technology (SCIO, 1996, para.

l). However, it is unclear if the government has taken any concrete measures to protect its domestic environment.

As previously stated, as developing country China feels it can rightfully prioritise economic development over environmental protection. The SCIO emphasises that “economically developed countries should take more responsibility” regarding this matter (SCIO, 1996, para. VII). This echoes the UN principles of “the right to development” and “common but differentiated responsibilities” as the international community should not put restrictions on China’s domestic affairs (Harris, 2011; UNGA, 1992, para. 2, 7). Nevertheless, China actively participates in “environmental activities launched by the UN organisations”, by regional Asian bodies and by bilateral initiatives (SCIO, 1992, para. VII). The government hereby considers climate change as a subtopic of environmental governance and uses both interchangeably. It gives most attention to issues related to the environment and climate change seems hardly to be a topic for China at all. Subsequently, the Paper gives an elaborate list of all the UN environmental summits, conventions and treaties China has joined and signed. More details about China’s actual contributions are lacking, however. Despite China’s effort to prove its active role in global environmental governance, the most concrete form of cooperation consists of aid from international institutions to help China to take “the road to sustainable development” (SCIO, 1996, para. VII). This clearly reflects China’s role as passive developing country in need of other countries and institutions to help it protect the environment and mitigate climate change.

It can be concluded that in 1996 China tries very hard to prove that it prioritises the “global” issues of environmental protection and climate change but it remains questionable how far the few indicated policy measures reach (SCIO, 1996, para. I). The Paper displays a paradoxical tone on how China regards these issues. On the one hand, the government argues to hold them in high regard, but on the other hand, it already handles the situation well, has limited responsibilities as a developing country and makes very few suggestions for concrete policy measures. Environmental issues, such as industrial pollution in urban areas, which are more visible and urgent, receive more direct policy responses than the more abstract topic of climate change, for which China denies any responsibility. The Paper clearly states that adjustment instead of mitigation is the way forward and China should not restrict greenhouse gas emissions.

Economic matters are the biggest motivation for the government to prioritise the environment. This is probably the case because industrial pollution is the most directly visible issue with a relation to the environment. However, the tone on the situation at the time is very light and positive. This is probably the case because this puts less pressure on the government to undertake action. China’s international role also takes in an important part and the document stresses repeatedly

how actively the state participates in global environmental governance. However, the great emphasis on China's backward developing status takes away almost all responsibility to implement policy measures on environmental issues. Energy security is much less of a topic, which can be explained by the abundance of available domestic energy sources such as coal and oil reservoirs, and the relatively smaller demand at the time (Kassiola & Guo, 2010). Lastly, the Paper describes the public opinion also in very optimistic tones but leaves little space for any critical reflection on the environmental performance of the Chinese government and it is questionable how far indicated measures reach.

7.1.2 China's Environmental and Climate Governance in 2005

Nine years after the government published the first White Paper on the environment, the environment and climate change have become slightly more of a topic in its policymaking. Overall, they still rank low on its list of priorities as China holds other matters to be much more relevant and pressing.

Firstly, economic explanations for China's policy shift are not very different from the previous decade. Rapid economic growth remains the government's core objective, as it will do its best to double the GDP within a decade. However, this economic growth will be of a different quality than previous growth spurts. The general view on the environmental situation remains rather optimistic, but growing consumption demands of a rapidly expanding population put pressure on the environment. Pollution in urban areas continues to be a central issue related to economic growth, due to fast urbanisation. China puts the catchy term of the "circular economy" forward as a solution and wants to make polluting businesses cleaner and increase their resource efficiency (China Council for International Cooperation on Environment and Development [CCICED], 2005b, p. 2). However, it does not elaborate on the scale of the issue and implementation of these measures. Again, sustainability seems to be the solution to reconcile the contradicting objectives of rapid industrialisation and environmental protection and can be well combined with China's opening-up of the economy. The government makes many statements as to how the economy should become more advanced and sustainable. However, measures are extremely broad and the scope of their implementation remains unclear. This new type of economic growth will put the "people first", create more advanced production methods and new technological industries, expand the service sector, generate increased economic returns and be more resource efficient (SCIO, 2005, para. 1). How the government will exactly achieve this is uncertain, even though it makes some loose suggestions. The government puts much emphasis on the role of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) and international partnerships to promote technological advancement in China. It holds developed countries responsible to help make its economy more sustainable. Domestically, China will introduce a legal framework, measurement system, market instruments and financial incentives to achieve sustainability objectives. Overall, the

vast majority of what is discussed is about future plans and policies still to be developed. Concrete policy actions in 2005 remain vague or are totally absent.

Secondly, energy security is much more of a topic in China in 2005 than it was almost a decade before. The main reason for this is a risen oil price in combination with a quickly increased domestic energy demand. China's core objectives are therefore to remain predominantly self-reliant and increase energy efficiency. Mr Zhang, Vice Chairman of the National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC, 2005b, para. 1), stresses that "[i]t is quite unnecessary for the world to over-react to the growth of China's energy consumption, since its dependence on the world is insignificant. The international community should also respect China's right of development and the inspiration of the Chinese people to get out of poverty and lead a decent, well-off life". He additionally stresses that the per capita consumption of energy in China is just a fraction of that in countries like Japan or the US. Coal and oil will continue to form the basis of China's domestic energy supply. However, their extraction and consumption should become cleaner and more efficient, and nuclear and renewable energy sources could supplement carbon energy sources. The government mentions the Renewable Energy Law as the legal framework to support this energy diversification shift but gives no elaboration on its contents or implementation. Furthermore, China stresses that "to have a balanced and orderly development of the world economy, the international community must handle the energy problem properly" (SCIO, 2005, para. III). China takes its share of responsibility as it will stimulate its cooperation with other countries to increase energy security and develop a more sustainable energy sector. Despite these statements, the lack of concrete policies or data raises the question to what extent the government will really implement these transformative plans.

Thirdly, the public opinion is a scarcely mentioned topic in the year 2005. The government makes some indirect references to topics such as increased labour safety in (coal) mines and living conditions in urban areas which are threatened by pollution. But again, the state puts most emphasis on the responsibility of the Chinese people to live sustainable lifestyles and drafts some policy plans. According to the CCICED (2005a, p. 2) "campaigns that advocate a lifestyle consistent with Chinese ideals should be carried out, directed towards improved understanding of ecological footprints and the local environmental carrying capacity". But what these greener lifestyles precisely consist of, does the government not explain. Interestingly, it mentions that NGOs can play a role in this respect. It seems that China allows the organisation of civil society up to a certain extent if it considers topics such as climate change or the environment. But overall, the documents give little critical notion to the opinion of civil society regarding these subjects.

Fourthly, China's role in global environmental and climate governance in 2005 forms largely a continuation of the base line set in 1996. The marginal difference is that climate change seems to be

a slightly more important topic than a decade before, especially at the international level. Domestically, acute environmental issues remain at the centre China's of attention. While the state stresses that it attaches great importance to these topics, its main message is that its responsibilities as developing country are limited as developed countries should take the lead. Its core responsibility is confined to handling the domestic environmental situation. China argues to have taken an active role in international environmental and climate governance because it attended most important summits and signed multiple agreements. It does not mention, however, that most of these agreements are non-binding and contain many diplomatic compromises (Elliot, 2004). The state cites the principle of "common but different responsibilities" and "the right to development" as the core regulations China upholds from the UN framework (SCIO, 2005, para. V). Furthermore, it prescribes itself a passive role as recipient of help from developed countries and international organisations for it to become more sustainable. CCICED Premier Wen hopes that they can "actively put forward comments and suggestions to contribute to [the] sustainable development of China" (CCICED, 2005c, p. 1). This can be in the form of technology transfers, or financially through the sale of emission reductions which support China's Clean Development Fund. The government wants to further intensify cooperation with other states in this respect. Moreover, China blames the US for not yet ratifying the Kyoto Protocol and therefore delaying the moment it enters into force. This only happens when at least 55 countries, responsible for at least 55 percent of the world's total emissions have ratified the convention. Simultaneously, China praises Russia for having signed the Protocol and thereby having it made possible to come into power on the 16th of February 2005. This friction versus praise reflects China's different relations with both superpowers at the time (Kassiola & Guo, 2010). In sum, China depicts itself as dependent on developed countries to create a more sustainable economy and energy sector. It thereby shifts most of the responsibility to the international community and other global powers. It uses as main argument that it is a developing country, which largely lacks capacity and has other more important policy priorities. Moreover, the tone of most of the documents is rather optimistic and China argues that the government is already effectively handling environmental issues. This lies largely in line with China's objectives in 1996.

Overall, despite the fact that the environment and climate change are slightly more important topics in 2005, the ambiguity of China's policy stance remains in 2005. Economic reasons play a less dominant role in 2005 than in 1996, but the focus on transforming the economy and tackling environmental issues remains present. Energy security is a much more important topic in 2005, which can be explained by a hike in oil prices and a rapidly increased domestic demand (Kassiola & Guo, 2010). Self-reliance is crucial to China and this can be achieved by intensifying the oil and coal sectors. The development of less carbon intensive clean energy sources can be researched but is not an

important part of the solution. The public opinion is a marginal topic in 2005, and almost the only way the state touches upon it is by emphasising the responsibility of the Chinese people to live sustainable lifestyles. However, little is said about how they are supposed to do so. An interesting note is the small comment on the role of civil organisations, which can be declared by the rapid growth of social organisations at the time (Schroeder, 2008). On the international level China's attitude from 1996 mostly continues in the same way, as it prescribes itself a very passive role as developing country and lays most responsibility at the doorstep of developed countries such as the US and Russia, while it simultaneously stresses its active participation in global environmental and climate governance.

7.1.3 China's Environmental and Climate Governance in 2015

China has radically shifted its political attitude towards environmental issues and climate change between 2005 and 2015. Both topics receive much more attention and are portrayed as being of considerable significance for the future development of the country. The quantity of policy documents and news articles covering the topic is much bigger, and the government addresses the issue more extensively in a sterner tone. Furthermore, the different reasons to which the state links the topic have changed substantially, despite some continuances.

Firstly, economic objectives play a far more dominant role in China's prioritisation of the environment and to a lesser extent climate change in 2015 than in previous decades. The government's stance still reveals some notion of ambiguity. On the one hand, it draws a positive picture about the effectiveness of its environmental governance and the current state of affairs. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA, 2015a, para. VII) mentions for example that "China has [...] reversed the trend of environmental and resource degradation" and much progress is made regarding environmental protection. On the other hand, China discusses some grave industrial environmental issues and a quest for deepened economic reform is a central topic in many of the policy documents. The latter is motivated by wider economic concerns, which threaten China's future economic growth. The current economic model which heavily relies "on high levels of investment and energy consumption and is heavily driven by quantitative expansion becomes difficult to sustain" (National People's Congress [NPC], 2015a, para. II). Therefore China "must continue to promote development in a sound and balanced way through reform and speed up the transformation of the growth model so as to achieve quality, efficient, and sustainable development" (NPC, 2015c, para. 1.1). Therefore, the government will take "aggressive measures" to protect the environment and reform the economy (CCICED, 2015a, p. 2). It views sustainable reforms as a solution to multiple socioeconomic problems. This does not only include reforming existing industries but also creating new "growth poles", for example by developing environmental industries as new pillar of the economy (NPC, 2015a, para. 6). The private sector will play a bigger role in this move towards sustainability, which is in line with

China's policy of market reforms. Besides, leaving things up to the market is also an easy way to shift some of the responsibilities from the government to the private sector.

The documents pay much attention to pollution in urban areas, as well as environmental degradation caused by the agricultural sector. The state advertises technological advancement as a major part of the solution. This lies in line with the core topics from the past decades. Additionally, it more frequently uses popular terms such as the green and circular economy, which are also often heard in Western framing. These terms are convenient to use as they sound promising while having very broad interpretations and therefore demand limited concrete action. The government suggests a wide range of measures to aid this move towards a more balanced and sustainable economy. Examples are: More effective governance, environmental taxes, environmental pricing systems, monitoring, stricter legislation with penalties for failing actors. The documents state that not only should China make the legal framework more comprehensive, but the authorities should also implement it more effectively. It stands out that the majority of these policy measures lack concreteness and entail future plans, still to be developed and implemented. This suggests that in reality the scope of already implemented policy measures is limited, which is in stark contrast with the strong rhetoric China uses.

Secondly, energy security as reason for China's prioritisation of the environment and climate change has undergone a radical shift between 2005 and 2015. Whereas in 2005 the government fiercely emphasised the right to development and wanted to expand the fossil energy sector, this has changed substantially. In 2015 the government preaches a far-reaching transformation of the energy sector into a low-carbon industry. China intends to become the global leader in this respect and has launched some "major projects" in clean energy, such as renewable and nuclear energy (NPA, 2015c, para. 5.3). According to the Ministry of Commerce (MOFCOM, 2015b, para. 3) China is "now topping the world in terms of energy conservation and utilization of new and renewable energies". This has a very direct link with China's more prominent role in international climate change governance, as greenhouse gas and particularly carbon dioxide emission reductions form a crucial part of climate change mitigation. On the international level, China trades with developed countries in Carbon Emissions Rights. Additionally, transforming the energy sector fits neatly in the previously mentioned wider economic reforms. Reforming the energy sector seems to be a two-way street for the Chinese government. However, when taking a closer look, it becomes clear that conventional energy sources still play a dominant role in China's energy security. Coal, oil and gas remain the primary energy resources and a large part of transforming the energy sector consists of making these industries more efficient and less polluting, just as in the previous years. This is also reflected in cooperation projects with countries such as Norway which mainly concentrate on the trade of fossil fuels, or the major role

carbon energy sources take in in China's Belt and Road Initiative. Nevertheless, the development of renewables sounds more attractive and fits better into the global climate paradigm and is therefore more emphasised even though this only reflects part of reality.

In contrast to economic reforms, China guides the transformation of the energy sector by concrete targets on the share of renewable energy and greenhouse gas reductions. Chinese citizens should decrease their energy consumption as one important part of the solution. In contrast to China's economic objectives, regarding its energy transformation some tangible outcomes on renewable energy are already apparent. Furthermore, ideas for future policies already have a high level of concreteness. It seems like China has yet started parts of the implementation of these policies and is likely to follow with the rest swiftly. Examples of policy measures are: Subsidies on low-carbon transport and buildings, taxes and price incentives on products such as oil and coal, creating a national emissions trade system and promoting energy-saving industries. Furthermore, the state wants to put severe penalties on actors that fail to meet emission standards. It intends to "crack down on those guilty of creating illegal emissions and ensure they pay a heavy price for such offenses; and hold those who allow illegal emissions to account, punishing them accordingly" (NPC, 2015a, para. III.1.1).

Thirdly, remarks on the public opinion as related to environmental and climate policies remain much scarcer than the other topics in China's policy documents. However, the authorities make a few more critical notes and their tone has become more severe, which are things that were almost completely absent during previous years. Also, the government has shifted the emphasis from solely focussing on educating the Chinese people to implement more sustainable consumption patterns, to both their lifestyle and their more demanding opinion regarding the environment, to some extent. The CCICED (2015a, p. 2) for example states that "[e]cological progress is also critical to foster a beautiful country, which is essential to meeting the Chinese people's expectations".

Environmental pollution, the dominant issue of the past two decades, remains the central topic in relation to the public opinion. However, China has extended its acknowledgement of the influence of pollution on people's lives. According to the NPC (2015a, para. V) "[e]nvironmental pollution is a blight on people's quality of life and a trouble that weighs on their hearts". The other topic which mainly shapes civil societies opinion: unsafe working conditions in (coal) mines is also said out loud for the first time, as the NPC (2015a, para. I) declares that "major accidents in the workplace are not uncommon". Subsequently, the words China uses to describe the topic of the environment are much more theatrical and value laden. Xi for example states that people "need to cherish the environment as they value their own eyes, and nurture it as they do life itself" (CCICED, 2015a, p. 2). How they should do so is still not elaborated, nevertheless. This makes it seem like shallow talk. Besides stressing the responsibility of the Chinese people towards the environment, for the first time

the government mentions that environmental quality should also be regarded a civil right. However, this more stringent tone on the environment as a right and taking the public opinion seriously are only mentioned by the CCICED, an advisory governmental body specifically focussed on the environment. The CCICED (2015b, para 3.4) also advises the government to develop laws “to better protect the public health”, create more transparency on the environmental performances of the government and corporations, and stimulate cooperation between the government and civil organisations. Especially the latter is striking in the light of China’s increasingly restrictive policies on non-governmental organisations (Jia, 2017). However, other policy documents do not echo these recommendations and they therefore do not represent the more conservative attitude of the Chinese government regarding public criticisms.

Fourthly, internationally China fulfils a much more proactive role in global environmental and climate governance in 2015 than before. Additionally, the documents reveal a shift from emphasis on environmental issues towards an extreme focus on the topic of climate change, even though they do not always make a clear distinction between the two. This shift can partly be explained by the fact that the prominent Paris Climate Convention was held in December 2015, but also indicates that China is seeking to increase its moral legitimacy and dominance in the international arena as the topic of climate change lends itself better for this purpose (Hulme, 2016). China no longer solely expresses its limited obligations as developing state but takes the responsibility to put the issue on the international political agenda and motivates other countries to take responsibility and action. However, China’s stance still reveals signs of ambiguity. While vehemently emphasising its potential leadership role, China simultaneously continues to emphasise the interests of developing countries.

On the one hand, China still focusses very much on the opinion of developing states in climate governance, despite using some more Western-style climate rhetoric. While climate change is “one of the greatest threats facing humanity” (NDRC, 2015b, para. 1), it should be addressed through the existing UN framework which is based on the principles of “common but differentiated responsibilities, equity and respective capabilities” (MFA, 2015a, para III). China claims to represent the voice of developing countries, according to its dominant role in the Group of 77 and China expresses that developed countries must stick up to their responsibilities. They have to transfer financial and technological expertise to developed countries and contribute to their capacity building. Furthermore, China argues that not only climate mitigation is important, but that there should be put enough effort into climate adaptation, which is more relevant to developing countries (Fischer et al., 2002). Developed states should support developing countries in this respect. In sum, North-South cooperation should remain to form the main channel of cooperation. However, on the other hand, China wants to strengthen South-South cooperation as a supplement to North-South cooperation. As

a responsible developing country China argues to be actively involved in supporting other developing countries to become more sustainable, for example through its own climate fund. Additionally, economic cooperation, international green industrialisation, and trade in renewable energy sources and techniques are important ways by which China aspires to assist other countries. For example, China wants to “implement a low-carbon, environment-friendly and green BRI [Belt and Road Initiative]” (CCICED, 2015b, p. 8). Again, China subscribes an important role to the private sector. Interestingly, China emphasises how its South-South sustainable development aid has a different nature than conventional North-South cooperation, as it is based on a much more equal relationship. “Win-win cooperation” is an often-heard phrase in this context (MFA, 2015a, para. II). It seems as if China wants to prove that the Chinese way is better than the traditional, at times criticised, Western way.

Besides multilateral environmental and climate governance, China is also involved in bilateral and regional governance. China has greatly stepped-up its role in the latter in 2015, as is reflected by the extensively mentioned frequent bilateral and regional meetings. These are often hosted and lead by China. However, the documents place little emphasis on the contents of these meetings and it is therefore unclear to what extent these various meetings are limited to diplomatic rhetoric or if they produced tangible policy outcomes. An interesting dynamic is the climate dialogue through multiple fora between China and the US in the advance of the Paris Climate Convention. Both states strongly emphasise their friendly relationship, that they will take their share of responsibility and do their utmost best to make the international climate meeting a success. Several meetings between both countries’ presidents and a subsequent Joint Presidential Statement showcase this narrative. According to this Statement (NDRC, 2015b, para. 1) the cooperation is “marking a new era of multilateral climate diplomacy as well as a new pillar in their bilateral relationship”. This remarkable cooperation should be seen in the light that both states have often been reluctant to take (costly) climate action if the other state did not, as they both find it easy to point to each other for responsibility. It seems like the presidents try to overcome this deadlock, which was one of the main reasons for the failure of the COP in Copenhagen in 2009 and did not contribute to both states’ reputations (Foot & Walter, 2011).

In sum, the presence of all four reasons has become more important and the documents display radical shifts in this regard. International reasons have most notably gained in importance and elaboration. This is reflected in an extended focus on the more moral topic of climate change, which implies that China wants to pursue a bigger role in the international political arena and put its own mark on global environmental and climate governance. Furthermore, economic objectives also play a much more dominant role and China proposes deep reforms. These are mainly motivated by practical

concerns about the feasibility of China's current growth model. Even though China has put some of these reforms into practice, the majority consists of future plans and it is unclear when and to what extent these radical reforming objectives will be implemented, as the documents report barely any measurable targets. Energy reform objectives show the similar radical shift in rhetoric. In contradiction to economic reforms, China has started to implement substantial steps in renewable energy and more efficient modes of energy production. However, when taken a closer look it becomes clear that the pursued shift is less radical as depicted, as conventional energy sources will remain to form the core of the energy supply. This could be explained by China's difficulties in drastically transforming the energy sector which is so strongly based on fossil fuels. Finally, the public opinion remains a scarcely covered topic. This could either imply that it is of little importance, or it could indicate the prudence of the governmental bodies to stir negative sentiments among an already increasingly vocal and critical civil society.

7.2 Overview of China's Policy Stance from 1996-2015

The importance of the environment and climate change and the subjects they are related to have changed substantially from 1996 until 2015. Especially between 2005 and 2015 China has impressively reversed its policy stance. The issue has transformed from being a totally unimportant side-issue into a prominent topic held in high regard. Additionally, China's understanding of it has become much more comprehensive. It turned from a very practical issue focussed on industrial pollution and ecosystem preservation into an almost holistic solution for a wide range of societal issues.

The reasons behind China's policy shift have also changed most substantially between 2005 and 2015, despite a few continuities. Almost all the reasons show a strong shift, which fits the higher prioritisation of these topics. China has become much more internationally involved over the years. Very interesting is its shift from almost solely emphasising environmental issues to a strong focus on the more rhetorical topic of climate change. This fits China's increased prominence on the international level. Other reasons have also become more internationally oriented. However, domestic reasons such as economic reforms and energy security have gained considerable importance as well, albeit not as extreme as international aspects. It seems like attaching importance to the environment and climate change gives China the chance to achieve multiple objectives at the same time. To gain international prestige seems one of the dominant reasons, but it is also convenient that China can simultaneously safeguard continued economic growth, solve energy security issues and to a lesser extent increase its domestic legitimacy. Additionally, these morally loaded subjects function as a perfect veil to distract attention from other domestic issues which do not go so well, such as decreasing economic growth and widening inequalities (CPC Congress, 2017). China therefore elaborately covers the topic in more severe terms in its policy documents. However, the gap between

rhetoric and reality remains wide and these promising words seem to be no guarantee that the government will implement all the outlined future plans anytime soon, as its restricted capabilities as developing state remain at the core of its message and developed countries should take the main responsibility. This paradoxical tone creates uncertainties but also much policy freedom for the Chinese government, as it can manoeuvre the topic to its own interest and only take action in ways which suit it.

7.3.1 China's Environmental and Climate Governance in 2017 and 2018

China's attitude on the environment and climate change has quickly evolved between 2015 and the past 1.5 years. It seems like China is now fully committed to proceed further on the sustainable development path while it puts ever more importance on the topic of climate change and environmental degradation. They remain at the heart of China's political agenda and are elaborately considered in extensive policy documents and dozens of governmental bodies are involved in them. As China's environmental narrative expands and matures, the separate reasons for China's policy shift have become more intertwined. The tone is more eminent, critical and stringent and policy plans have become more concrete. But, even though China has started the translation from rhetoric into practice, its implementation is still in its infancy and the gap between rhetoric and reality remains wide.

Firstly, a qualitative shift is visible in the relation between the environment and China's economy. Instead of merely depicting sustainable development as something to aim for, the documents portray it now as crucial condition to be met in order to reach economic and social prosperity. This reflects an ever more comprehensive understanding of the environment, as resonated in Benson and Jordan's (2015) definition. Therefore, China intends to accelerate and deepen economic reforms. Furthermore, it no longer just talks about what should be transformed and which plans should be made but expresses clear ideas on how it wants to achieve this transformation and has set the first steps in motion. The multiple concrete policy plans showcase that China intends to expand these developments in the future. Moreover, the documents have shifted from adaptation towards tackling the root causes of environmental and climate issues. Examples of concrete policies are: To expand and implement the legal framework, improve monitoring and evaluation and further unfold the national functional zoning system, including the creation of protected national parks. However, despite the numerous elaborately outlined fancy plans and first steps of their implementation, it is often not clear to what extent it is feasible for China to translate rhetoric into real world action. This is especially the case because many objectives are incredibly ambitious and are diametrically opposed to previous economic development and the majority of reform guidelines is non-binding.

The tone of the documents on the current progress continues to be positive, however at the same time there is much more room for self-criticism on what is not yet going well and which issues

remain very difficult to solve. The National Congress of the Communist Party of China (CPC Congress, 2017, p. 4) for example states that “there has been a clear shift away from the tendency to neglect ecological and environmental protection”. This reflects a positive outlook on the current progress, while it is simultaneously critical on what went wrong in China’s governance. The CPC Congress tries very hard to prove its efforts in thoroughly transforming China’s economy and states that “the entire Party and the whole country have become more purposeful and active in pursuing green development” (CPC Congress, 2017, p. 4). In documents mainly meant for a domestic audience, such as the CPC Congress, and NPC, the central objective of current economic transformations is to fight environmental pollution. In documents from governmental bodies with both a national and international outlook, such as the MFA and NDRC, climate change is by far the most important issue for which the economy should be reformed. Furthermore, the government clearly outlines how it faces several other “major structural problems [...] and mounting downward pressure on the economy”, which it will also solve by the creation of more sustainable and balanced economic growth and new growth drivers (NPC, 2017b, para. 8). China has added new catchy terms to describe the transformation towards “green, low-carbon, and circular development” (CPC Congress, 2017, p. 45). Interesting is the division of the roles the government describes. Whereas it assigns itself a leading role, corporations should explicitly hold the main responsibility for implementation, while being supported by an actively participating civil society. This fits neatly in the increasingly market oriented economy of China while it also conveniently transfers considerable responsibility away from the government and Party. Subsequently, the trend of decentralisation continues, which also fits in a more modern governance strategy. However, this also brings the risk of failed implementation and leads to inconsistencies in environmental governance between different authorities, as brought up by a critical CCICED (2018, p. 2).

Secondly, energy security has become more neatly intertwined with China’s political narrative on the environment and climate change. Especially with the latter, which has become an increasingly prominent policy objective of China, as it fits well in the story of cutting down greenhouse gas emissions. Additionally, energy security is closely related to the persistent issue of industrial pollution. Therefore, the topic is not only mentioned more often, but it has also become one of China’s showpieces of its “green” transformation (CPC Congress, 2017, p. 45). Hence, it is one of the few policy objectives that has developed an increasingly concrete form and is expressed in measurable targets, which makes it possible to judge the general progress made. These measurements on the one hand display a considerable rise of non-fossil energy sources, which accounted in 2016 for thirteen percent of the total energy consumption. However, on the other hand, the extremely polluting coal industry still accounts for over sixty percent of China’s energy consumption. Furthermore, the government has

stabilised the relative share of oil and even increased the use of gas and conventional energy sources still form the core of China's bilateral cooperation on energy resources. Besides, a rise in the controversial generation of nuclear energy constitutes a considerable part of China's non-fossil energy sources. The ways in which China pursues to achieve an energy transformation largely elaborate on previous years. Examples are developing sustainable and energy-efficient transportation, building and industrial sectors. Despite grand words, prestigious targets and some progress, the shift in China's energy supplies evolves only slowly. This can probably be explained by the tremendous difficulties and costs of moving away from the coal lock-in after such a long and intensive dependence on it as main energy source. China is well aware of these negative consequences for the conventional industries but tries very hard to mask them by positive words on the economic chances created by renewable energy sources.

Thirdly, it is highly remarkable that China addressed the public opinion much more in 2017 and 2018 than in previous years. Even between 2015 and 2017-2018, the differences are striking. The role of the Chinese citizens to develop more sustainable lifestyles is still an important subject, but the government has greatly increased the room for the environmental expectations of civil society and the role of social organisations, which is in stark contrast to previous decades. The documents centre around the topics of environmental pollution, related health risks and disasters with miners, which is in accordance to the predictions in the literature (Bomberg, 2017). They explain for the first time how people could achieve more sustainable lifestyles. It seems that as the government is now fully intended to pursue sustainable economic growth and transform the economy, it is less afraid to acknowledge the critiques of the public on its governmental failures. According to the CPC Congress (2017, p. 45) the people have "ever growing demands for a beautiful environment" and they "are desperately hoping for [...] [f]aster progress in work to improve the environment" (NPC, 2017b, para. 7). In addition, "[l]ush mountains and lucid waters are as valuable as gold and silver" (NPC, 2017a, para 4.3). Moreover, there is another reason for this unconventional frankness and great emphasis on the communication of the topic. As explained by the CCICED (2018, p. 2) "[s]tringent environmental policies and green development can be fully implemented only after there is a broad understanding that green development is not a burden but a driver for better lives and livelihoods". It is crucial for the government to convince both officials and citizens through education and publicity that this new direction will have a positive influence on their livelihoods, in order to make them cooperative rather than obstructive. Especially since this new path will also take its toll in the form of job losses and collapsed industries. Even though this could be interpreted as if the government is expanding the room for critical public opinions, in reality it is still very much steering this opinion in its own direction of environmental awareness. It is not per se the space for civil society that has altered, but China's policy

objectives, as the country has not implemented the CCICED's advices on more transparency and environmental rights and it still tightly controls the content of media publicity (NDRC, 2017a). The NPC (2017b, para. 2) even explicitly states that the government wants to "[d]o better in guiding expectations". Stimulating the participation of the public fits into China's goals of starting to translate policy into practice.

Fourthly, China has altered its language on the international aspects of the environmental and climate changes most extremely of all four strands of reasons. Most notably, it has changed its self-subscribed role in environmental and climate governance. Where it previously mainly stressed its constructive role as responsible participant, it now clearly intends to take on a leading position. Climate change has thereby definitely become the dominant topic. This is reflected by a 72-pages document from the NDRC (2017a) solely dedicated to China's climate policies, something not shown before. This leadership role is striking, as China has considered the topic of climate change relevant only from its thirteenth Five Year Plan (2016-2020) onwards. This role as "torchbearer" does not only consist of setting a good example but it also comprehends that China points at other countries to take their "responsibilities" (CPC Congress, 2017, p. 4). This is mainly the case regarding the Paris Climate Agreement. President Xi for example stated that it is "a hard-won achievement" and "all signatories should stick to it instead of walking away from it as this is a responsibility we must assume for future generations" (MFA, 2017b, para. 2). Subsequently, he stressed that "[w]hatever the vicissitudes of the international situation, China will remain committed [...] and actively respond to climate change" (MFA, 2017b, para. 5). China clearly expresses that it has set ambitious, legally binding goals on greenhouse gas emission reductions and that it is one of the main contributors to the success of the Agreement. Its tone on the progress is very positive, and the CCICED is the only governmental body which remarks that current efforts are not sufficient to meet international targets on mitigating global warming. Additionally, China makes great efforts to describe the positive socioeconomic outcomes of pursuing sustainable development, while it conceals any negative consequences. It is interesting to see that China increasingly tries to put its own mark on global climate and environmental governance. Accordingly, the state is "contributing Chinese wisdom to solve global environmental problems and build a beautiful world" (MOFCOM, 2017, para. 2). Furthermore, the government has subtly brought up the global move towards multipolarity and shifting global power, which implies that it sees chances to increase its power.

Despite claiming to still present the interests of developing countries, the tone in which China does so is less severe. Moreover, its role in environmental and climate governance increasingly resembles the role China says developed countries should take. China actively supports developing countries financially, technologically and in capacity building. At the same time, it repeatedly stresses

that this South-South cooperation uses fairer methods of win-win cooperation than North-South cooperation does. Simultaneously, a shift from climate adaptation, often prioritised by developing countries, towards mitigation, advocated by developed states, is visible (Fischer et al., 2002). These paradoxical developments show that the ambiguity on China's stance has only increased over the years, which heightened the uncertainty around its role. However, this is only to China's advantage. It provides ample opportunity to handle the topic exactly as China sees fit anytime, and simultaneously increases China's legitimacy in the West while keeping developing countries satisfied. According to the MOFCOM (2017, para. 2) China tries to create a consensus and "[t]ogether with all countries, China will be good friends to the environment". This diplomatic position, however, does not imply that China's promising words are implemented into its policies, as their rhetoric value is much higher than their importance in real life. China has to make some efforts in reality to be credible, but how far these will stretch remains a big question.

7.3.2 Reflection on the 1996-2018 Trend of China's Policy Shift

It can be concluded that China's policy shift has not only accelerated after the power vacuum in global environmental and climate governance, but it has also caused a qualitative change in China's stance. China has not only stepped up its efforts for domestic change, but also greatly changed the rhetoric used to describe the topics. International reasons for China's policy shift have changed most substantively. The morally loaded topic of climate change has pushed environmental issues to the side and China's pursued international role has changed dramatically. It subscribes itself a clear leadership role and implicitly delegitimises countries not upholding the Paris Agreement. Without stating so, it is highly likely that this is aimed at the US. From the friendly cooperation between the two biggest emitters is nothing left. China has manoeuvred itself into a diplomatically influential position as responsible bridgebuilder between developed and developing countries. This radical change in policy is reflected in the self-critical role regarding the public opinion. Whereas this was barely a topic before, it is now used to make the Chinese people cooperative towards environmental and climate policies. Subsequently, this smoothens the pursued implementation of economic and energy reforms, that remain arduous and not without cost. Overall, it could be argued that China's international objectives predominate as reason for its policy shift. It is convenient that this simultaneously forms the solution for some difficult domestic issues, but these could also have been addressed in a different way.

The international power vacuum seems to have affirmed the government's choice for a sustainable and more balanced development path. This is reflected by the started implementation of various policy plans. However, it is very clear that the rhetorical value of these topics weighs much heavier than their value in reality, as China is moulding the topic to suit its own interest. Therefore, the government makes economic and energy realities to fit into this narrative, which leads to

inconsistencies and paradoxes in its green policy objectives. Additionally, the documents leave very little space for genuinely critical reflections on China's environmental and climate governance. This makes it less easy to predict how China will treat the topic in the future and implement it in its society because its interests could change. Nevertheless, in the near future it seems like an attractive narrative to sustain, due its many advantages in the state's interest.

8 Conclusion

This thesis posed the research question:

To what extent is China's prioritisation of the environment and climate change as global issues in which it should take a leading role signalling a wider shift in China's position in the international political realm?

From the analysis it follows that the reasons for China to prioritise the environment and climate change have altered substantially over time. These topics have become increasingly important and China's policy aspirations to tackle these issues ever more concrete. This is reflected in the language the government uses to describe these subjects as well as in their increasingly elaborate coverage in an ever-bigger range of policy documents. The issues changed from being regarded as a side-issue of little significance into a critical condition for China's economic and social prosperity. Differences on how the topics are treated are considerable between 2005 and 2015, however the power vacuum since early 2017 has caused an even wider qualitative transition in the trend. While the related reasons for this prioritisation reveal some continuation regarding the matters being covered, the way in which the policy documents discuss them has totally reversed. Overall, the analysis revealed a clear shift from adaptation and almost no responsibilities for the Chinese government to mitigation and full responsibilities to conduct sweeping reforms regarding all four related motivations, in order to protect the environment and tackle climate change. Furthermore, China shows a striking shift from emphasising domestic environmental issues towards taking full responsibility for the much more value loaded topic of climate change.

International reasons for China's policy shift gained the biggest momentum between 2015 and 2017-2018. Therefore, it can be concluded that China's aspired leadership role in environmental and climate governance signifies that China pursues a more dominant position in global governance. The emerged power vacuum has only further confirmed China's sustainable development narrative and aspirations to gain a leadership position. It could be argued that instead of being a self-appointed "green beacon of hope" for the international community, China merely uses the topics of the environment and climate change as powerful rhetorical tools to gain international legitimacy and put its own mark on the rules of global governance (CCICED, 2018, p. 2). Moreover, this forms a way to

delegitimise the US and form alliances. Framing China's development objectives in a sustainable narrative gives it the chance to both achieve international legitimacy while it simultaneously addresses three mounting domestic issues. To support its environmental and climate rhetoric, China is obliged to execute domestic economic and energy reforms. That this in the meantime forms a way to tackle persistent economic and energy security issues, which China is very eager to solve, is very convenient. Additionally, China can address the increasingly critical voice of the Chinese citizens and its threatened domestic legitimacy in the same sweep. Moreover, the promising words on China's environmental governance disguise attention from other still persisting issues it is unable to tackle. The fact that these aspired radical societal reforms will take their toll is thereby conveniently omitted. However, overall, China's international reputation seems to form the dominant explanation for its shift. This argument is supported by the split between a central focus on climate change on the international level, and a focus on the more domestically visible topic of environmental pollution on the national level.

By leaping into the power void created by the US, China has neatly positioned itself in a very desirable diplomatic position in global environmental and climate governance. Its ambiguous tone and dual position as bridgebuilder between developed and developing countries provide it with the space to handle the topic exactly as suits its interest and increasingly set the rules of international environmental and climate governance. While the government boosts its reputation with grand and catchy words on increased responsibilities, it does not let other countries impose any ideas on China's role as it pushes away all official responsibilities to developed countries. The result is that it only has to uphold its self-determined commitments made during the Paris Climate Convention and if convenient it can take on some voluntary responsibilities such as helping developing countries, to increase its soft power. Moreover, while giving the topics more eminence, China efficiently pushes the main domestic responsibilities towards lower authorities, the private sector and civil society. But while this decreases expectations on the Chinese government, it also leads to fragmentation, inconsistencies, and patchy results of policy implementation. In the long run, this could undermine China's credibility.

While China's paradoxical position might seem very convenient for political reasons, the country balances on a very fine diplomatic line. Its ever more ambitious grand policy objectives seem hardly feasible in relation to its developmental capabilities. The lack of genuine critical self-reflection and inconsistencies in its patchy implementation make it questionable to what extent it will be able to meet its grand promises. This raises the question if this diplomatic chance occurred too early considering China's development. It remains to be seen if China will be able to live up to the high expectations it created within the international community and decrease the gap between rhetoric and practice for the sake of its credibility. And more importantly, how long will this sustainable

development path remain to be suitable to China's interest? All in all, future expectations on China's behaviour are very uncertain. However, these questions might not be as relevant to China's political objectives, as its main goal seems to be to extend its soft power by making use of the rhetorical value of the issues of the environment and climate change. What happens in reality is only of secondary importance.

Future research will have to reveal the answer to these future-oriented questions, as the topic is rapidly evolving and the scope of this thesis is limited. The outcomes of this thesis give an indication of how China framed its policy objectives to the external world and what conclusions can be drawn from this narrative. Unfortunately, it is not possible to have direct insight in the political processes behind closed doors. However, it would very interesting for succeeding research to examine to what extent the described policy objectives are implemented and how successfully their implementation proceeds. Especially as targets are becoming more measurable, this would be a very insightful supplement to the results of this thesis. Moreover, future research could examine to what extent China can successfully set the rules of global environmental and climate governance and influence the policies of other states. This would provide even more insight in China's role in global governance.

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