Policy Brief
September 5, 2025

China's Climate Commitments and the Tibetan Paradox: An Argument for Accountability under the UNFCCC

Richard Ghiasy and Jagannath Panda

Photo credit: Nomita Drall

China today is the second-largest economy and the single largest emitter of greenhouse gases. It plays a pivotal role in any global climate resolution. Yet its internal environmental practices, especially in the ecologically critical region of Tibet, have raised questions about the consistency of its international commitments with its local governance models. Its classification as a "developing country" within the UNFCCC structure also does not reflect its economic and geopolitical stature.

Additionally, China's efforts to attain global climate leadership are undermined by a lack of full transparency. This opacity not only impedes verification of China's progress toward its climate pledges but also affects regional ecological understanding. Due to its elevation and geographical significance, Tibet plays a vital role in regulating regional monsoons and global weather patterns.

A useful precedent might be the Antarctic Treaty System, which demilitarized the continent and promoted scientific cooperation. While Tibet is inhabited and geopolitically complex, the Antarctic Treaty System may function as a thought experiment illustrating how ecological cooperation frameworks could be imagined, and a multilateral environmental accord focusing on the Himalayan region could be negotiated. International institutions, including the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), should prioritize the region in their assessments and reporting. Dedicated climate missions to the Tibetan Plateau can fill the current data gap and improve early warning systems for disasters.

The UNFCCC should institutionalize a stronger civil society presence, including representation from marginalized territories. Mechanisms such as observer status, independent reporting rights, and stakeholder consultations can democratize the climate dialogue. It should further endeavor to:

- Establish regional environmental monitoring mechanisms under trusted multilateral platforms such as UNEP, with data-sharing protocols that include the Tibetan Plateau.
- Push for multilateral treaties governing Himalayan water sources, with provisions for downstream countries.
- Promote the inclusion of indigenous knowledge and local participation in climate adaptation strategies.
- Require major emitters, regardless of classification, to submit verified climate impact reports.
- Develop multi-dimensional indices (GDP, emissions, technology capacity) to complement the developed/developing binary, creating a new 'advanced emerging economies' category.

As the global climate emergency grows more urgent, the world increasingly turns to international institutions like the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) to facilitate cooperation, enforce accountability, and guide nations toward a more sustainable future. Central to the UNFCCC's architecture is the notion of "common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities" (CBDR-RC), a principle that distinguishes obligations between (economically) developed and developing nations based on historical emissions and capacity. However, the rapid rise of certain economies, particularly China, has complicated the traditional binary between developed and developing states, raising questions about whether these categories remain adequate for assigning climate responsibility.[1]

China today is the second-largest economy and the single largest emitter of greenhouse gases. It plays a pivotal role in any global climate resolution. Yet its internal environmental practices, especially in the ecologically critical region of Tibet, have raised questions about the consistency of its international commitments with its local governance models.[2] On the international stage, China champions climate solidarity and signs major agreements. Domestically, it accelerates resource extraction in its inland peripheral territories, often at the expense of fragile ecosystems.

This policy brief critically examines China's engagement with the UNFCCC, assesses the credibility of its climate pledges, and interrogates the selective omissions in its white paper on Tibet. Given the centrality of Tibet to the global climate, as it regulates monsoons and holds Asia's largest freshwater reserves, it examines China's utilization of the plateau's resources with imperfect attention to environmental and ecological ramifications. The goal is not to assign blame but to encourage greater transparency and consistency.

China's Position in the UNFCCC: Between Diplomacy and Domestic Realities

China's participation in the UNFCCC framework dates back to the convention's inception.[3] It has positioned itself as a representative of the Global South and often invokes historical responsibility to justify its emission levels[4]— characterizing the Global North's emissions as "luxury emissions," while defining their own as necessary "development emissions," and insisting that economic growth and poverty alleviation remain central to climate action.[5] While such arguments hold merit for many developing countries, China's exceptional economic rise and rapid industrialization set it apart. Its classification as a "developing country" within the UNFCCC structure no longer reflects its economic and geopolitical stature.[6]

While China insists that its designation as a "developing country" under the UNFCCC reflects principles of climate equity, its global role makes that position increasingly contested. Historical responsibility is a key point of divergence: the U.S. and the EU together still account for over 40 percent of all cumulative carbon emissions since the Industrial Revolution, compared to China's roughly 13-15 percent share.[7] This imbalance continues to inform Chinese discourse, in which Beijing stresses quite rightfully that it cannot be expected to bear equivalent obligations to nations whose prosperity was built on two centuries of fossil-fuelled growth.[8]

Beijing maintains its developing-country status to avoid greater responsibility for cutting greenhouse gas emissions, even though its per capita CO_2 emissions now match those of many high-income nations. China's rising emissions are undermining global efforts to lower overall emissions.

China's Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC) outline significant goals to combat climate change: peak emissions before 2030, carbon neutrality before 2060,[9] a 65 percent reduction in

carbon intensity from 2005 levels, and increased use of non-fossil energy sources. China also leads the world in solar panel production, wind turbine deployment, and electric vehicle manufacturing.[10] Although China has become the world leader in solar panel production and met its 2030 wind and solar capacity targets six years ahead of schedule, coal continues to dominate its energy system, with one in every four tons burned globally consumed in China.[11] While the government is promoting emissions reductions and better air quality by encouraging a shift to natural gas in industrial and residential sectors, the country's coal-fired power fleet remains relatively young, highly efficient, and still ten times larger than its gas-fired counterpart.

This contradiction reflects Beijing's concept of 'ecological civilization,' a framework that presents China as a global leader in sustainability while simultaneously legitimizing extractive megaprojects in resource development zones.[12] This indicates a wider model of governance, where peripheries such as Tibet, Xinjiang, and Inner Mongolia are framed as both 'resource frontiers' and strategic buffers.[13] This said, the peripheries of China, Tibet, Xinjiang, Inner Mongolia, parts of Yunnan/Guizhou, are disproportionately rich in natural resources compared to much of "core China", i.e., the eastern seaboard and central plains.

Meanwhile, China's status as the "factory of the world" complicates conventional emissions accounting. Around one-fifth of its annual CO_2 emissions are embedded in goods consumed abroad, particularly in advanced economies.[14] This bolsters China's claim that Western consumption continues to drive a substantial portion of its emissions. Yet Chinese scholars acknowledge a dual reality: while exports inflate production-based measures, China's domestic industrial policies, expanding middle class, and reliance on coal remain the dominant forces behind its rising carbon profile.[15] In this sense, Beijing's argument about "outsourced emissions" cannot fully offset the accountability expected of the world's largest aggregate emitter.

The paradox becomes evident when comparing rhetoric and reality. China promotes itself as a green superpower while continuing to approve new coal power projects,[16] expand highways and military installations in Tibet, and suppress environmental activism. This duality undermines the very trust on which international climate cooperation depends.

Finally, debates about China's reclassification expose both the fairness dilemma and the institutional rigidity of the UNFCCC. Economically and technologically, China resembles an "advanced emerging" power, but UNFCCC procedures still allow countries to self-designate as "developing," insulating China from external pressure.[17] Moreover, many G77 states defend China's position because it shields their own. Chinese climate policy analysts argue that expectations must remain differentiated, but also concede that credibility will increasingly depend on transparency and willingness to accept scrutiny.[18] This tension—between historical equity and contemporary responsibility—illustrates why binary classifications of "developed" and "developing" no longer capture China's complex position within the UNFCCC framework, leaving China suspended between the mantle of a developing state and the responsibilities of a great power.

Why Reclassifying China's UNFCCC Status Matters

For the UNFCCC to retain its legitimacy, it must evolve with geo-economic and -political realities. While the CBDR-RC principle is essential to climate justice, it cannot be static.[19] China's continued claim to developing nation status enables it to:

- Avoid imposing binding emissions cuts on developed countries.
- Access climate finance mechanisms designed for less-resourced states.
- Resist international scrutiny on domestic environmental issues.

By most indicators—total GDP, technological capability, infrastructure investment, emissions

share—China no longer fits within the same category as truly developing nations. China accounts for approximately 19 percent of the global economy when measured in purchasing-power-parity (PPP) as of 2024.[20] In nominal terms, its GDP stood at US$19.23 trillion in 2025, placing it second only to the US.[21] Granted, China's per capita income still lags behind that of most OECD members. In 2024, fixed-asset investment, including infrastructure, rose by about 4.4 percent year-on-year, with high growth in high-tech and clean energy sectors.[22] Electricity, heating, gas, and water infrastructure investment alone surged nearly 24 percent.[23] China has also met its 2030 solar and wind targets six years ahead of schedule and is set to invest US$800 billion by 2030 to modernize its power grid.[24]

At the same time, and importantly, China is the world's largest emitter, responsible for approximately 35 percent of global CO_2 emissions in 2023 (IEA 2024 report).[25] China's per capita CO_2 emissions have now surpassed those of advanced economies as a group average and are around 40 percent higher than the EU average. In 2023, they exceeded Japan's for the first time, although they remain approximately one-third lower than the U.S.[26]

Amid this evolution, many voices—including delegates at COP29—noted that China no longer aligns with the trajectory or limitations typical of truly developing nations, prompting calls for a reclassification or "advanced emerging" status.[27] Earlier, several G77 members, including developing countries such as Mexico and Argentina, as well as some Asian nations, have shared this perception and requested China bear more international responsibilities.[28] Reclassifying China as a "developed" or "advanced emerging" economy within the UNFCCC framework would reflect the realities more accurately. It would not only reflect fairness but also increase pressure for transparency and better climate accountability.

Lack of Full Transparency and Environmental Data

Additionally, China's efforts at attaining global climate leadership are undermined by the lack of credibility and full transparency.[29] Despite being the world's largest emitter of carbon dioxide, the Chinese government often restricts access to critical environmental information, hindering global climate collaboration and scientific analysis.[30] Notwithstanding legal frameworks such as the 2008 Open Government Information Regulations, which mandate the disclosure of environmental data, actual accessibility remains limited. Many citizens requesting specific information are met with evasive responses or told the data "does not exist" or cannot be released—undermining public scrutiny and trust.[31] This opacity not only impedes verification of China's progress toward its climate pledges but also affects regional ecological understanding, particularly in sensitive and politically restricted areas like Tibet.

Environmental data from Tibet is tightly controlled. Independent researchers have limited access to real-time monitoring of glacial melt, river flows, and ecological degradation in the region.[32] Satellite data have indicated accelerated glacier retreat and permafrost loss in Tibet; however, on-the-ground verification remains challenging due to both logistical and political barriers.[33] Furthermore, China's censorship and suppression of local voices, including Tibetan environmental activists, restricts the flow of vital information needed for both regional adaptation and global climate modeling.[34]

As the global climate crisis intensifies, re-evaluating and redefining the roles and responsibilities of China has become not only urgent but essential to the success of international climate efforts. Aligning China's obligations with its actual capabilities and emissions profile would not only ensure a more equitable distribution of climate responsibilities but also strengthen accountability, close loopholes in international agreements, and encourage more ambitious action from other emerging economies.

In this pivotal decade for climate action, the world cannot afford outdated classifications that allow major powers to evade the responsibilities commensurate with their global impact.

Comparative Climate Accountability: China and the Global South

As discussed above, China's climate narrative often contrasts its emissions with those of historically industrialized nations like the U.S. and members of the EU.[35] While historical responsibility is a valid consideration, it does not justify inaction or concealment.[36] Beyond China, many countries in the Global South have shown that resource constraints need not prevent ambitious climate action. Costa Rica, Bhutan, and Kenya, for example, have implemented innovative programs in reforestation, biodiversity conservation, and renewable energy. At the same time, larger emerging economies such as India, Brazil, and South Africa highlight the difficulties of balancing economic growth with emissions reduction—underscoring that sustainable pathways are feasible, but require greater transparency and responsibility from nations with China's level of capacity and influence.

China, with its vast resources and global influence, must do more—not less. The argument that China should enjoy the same emissions growth trajectory as the West did in the 19th and 20th centuries ignores both the climate emergency and the technological advancements available today. Sustainable development is not a burden; it is a necessity and a test of leadership.

China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) also complicates its climate credentials.[37] While BRI includes green energy projects, it also exports coal plants, infrastructure sprawl, and ecological disruption to participating countries. This environmental externalization should be factored into global carbon accounting and climate diplomacy.

The Tibetan Plateau: A Climate Battleground

The Tibetan Plateau holds the largest reserve of freshwater outside the Arctic and Antarctic.[38] It is the source of Asia's most important rivers—the Yangtze, Yellow, Mekong, Brahmaputra, Salween, and Indus—sustaining the livelihoods of over 2 billion people across the continent.[39] Due to its elevation and geographical significance, Tibet plays a vital role in regulating regional monsoons and global weather patterns.

China's approach to Tibet, however, arguably treats it less as an ecological treasure and more as a repository of extractable wealth and a strategic military outpost. The region is home to rich deposits of copper, lithium, rare earth metals, and uranium—materials indispensable to China's technology and energy ambitions. Massive dam-building projects on Tibetan rivers, such as those on the Yarlung Tsangpo (Brahmaputra), threaten transboundary water security and risk provoking geopolitical tensions with downstream countries like India, Bangladesh, and Myanmar.[40]

Furthermore, activities such as open-pit mining, deforestation, road construction, and forced resettlement of Tibetan nomads are contributing to rapid land degradation and biodiversity loss. Tibet is among the regions experiencing the world's most rapid glacial retreat, alongside Greenland and the Andes, with permafrost shrinking at alarming rates and temperatures rising nearly twice the global average. The consequence is a possible cascading ecological crisis with (near) global implications.

The Human Rights-Environment Nexus

Environmental challenges in Tibet are closely connected with broader governance and social dynamics. [41] China's development strategy in the region tends to follow a top-down model, with policies shaped largely at the state level. This has often left limited space for Tibetan voices in shaping ecological and cultural policies. Concerns raised by local communities

regarding environmental protection or cultural preservation are sometimes restricted, with reports of monasteries being repurposed, community leaders facing pressure, and Mandarin increasingly emphasized in education systems.

In addition, programs such as residential schools for Tibetan children and initiatives encouraging interethnic integration have significantly influenced traditional ways of life and cultural autonomy. While these measures are officially presented as part of poverty alleviation and modernization efforts, and they have certainly done that, they also affect long-standing indigenous knowledge systems, including practices that historically supported sustainable coexistence with Tibet's fragile environment.

China's treatment of Tibet as a 'resource frontier' mirrors global patterns of 'center–periphery development pattern.' The U.S. turned Appalachia into a coal sacrifice zone while leaving local communities impoverished; Brazil's Amazon frontier has long displaced indigenous peoples for cattle and soy; and India's tribal belts have been reshaped by mining and dams.[42] Yet these cases also show possibilities for transformation: indigenous land rights recognition in Brazil, anti-dam activism in India,[43] and the slow shift to renewable economies in Appalachia suggest that peripheral regions need not remain sacrifice zones. Tibet, while certainly making economic strides, could likewise benefit more if ecological protection and community participation were prioritized over securitized extraction.

A Critical Appraisal of China's White Paper on Tibet

China has released 18 white papers on Tibet since 1992.[44] These documents are intended to justify Beijing's governance and portray Tibet as a harmonious, developed, and grateful region within the Chinese state. The most recent white paper, released in March 2025, however, reveals more through its omissions than its affirmations.

Most notably, the term "Tibet" is increasingly replaced with "Xizang," a Sinicization attempt,[45] though "Tibet" itself originates as a Western exonym. The paper praises infrastructure expansion, economic integration, and social welfare achievements, yet avoids any mention of environmental degradation, rising temperatures, or local opposition.[46]

The white paper[47] does not refer to:
The drying up of freshwater springs is critical for farming communities. In many parts of Tibet, particularly in the southern and eastern plateau, freshwater springs are a lifeline for small-scale agriculture and herding. These springs are fed by glacial melt and seasonal precipitation. However, with the accelerated retreat of glaciers due to climate change, many of these springs are drying up or becoming intermittent.[48] This has severely impacted farming communities, especially in remote valleys where irrigation infrastructure is lacking. Local reports and studies have noted declining crop yields and water scarcity, pushing younger generations to migrate to urban centers.[49]

The increase in natural disasters, such as landslides, glacial lake outburst floods, and droughts, is a significant concern. Tibet has seen a rise in the frequency and intensity of natural disasters in recent decades. The warming climate has led to the rapid formation and expansion of glacial lakes, which can burst their banks and trigger deadly glacial lake outburst floods (GLOFs). In 2016, a major GLOF from the Aru glacier in western Tibet displaced communities and caused significant environmental damage.[50] In addition, increased rainfall variability has contributed to landslides and severe droughts in other parts of the plateau, mainly affecting traditional grazing lands.[51]

The link between infrastructure development and seismic instability in a highly active tectonic zone. Tibet sits on one of the most seismically active zones in the world due to the collision of the Indian and Eurasian tectonic plates. Large-scale infrastructure projects, such as hydropower dams, highways, and rail lines (including the

Qinghai–Tibet Railway), have raised concerns among geologists about increasing seismic risk.[52] Hydropower dams raise concerns about landslide activity and potential reservoir-induced seismicity in a tectonically active region, though evidence remains contested. Critics argue that these projects are approved without or with limited adequate geological assessments or local consultation.[53]

But China is proceeding despite concerns. In July, it launched the construction of what is projected to become the world's largest hydropower project on the lower reaches of the Yarlung Tsangpo River (also known as the Brahmaputra).[54] The Medog dam is expected to generate approximately 300 billion kilowatt-hours of electricity annually—nearly three times the output of the Three Gorges Dam. Chinese state media have celebrated the project as a "project of the century," framing it as a key pillar in advancing China's clean energy goals and carbon neutrality targets.

However, beneath these triumphant headlines lie serious environmental, social, and geopolitical concerns.[55] As of summer 2025, the Chinese government has released no detailed information regarding the dam's design, exact location, or any social or ecological impact assessments. This lack of transparency has raised alarm among scientists, local communities, and downstream nations, particularly given the ecological sensitivity of the Tibetan Plateau and the river's strategic significance across South Asia.

The loss of traditional livelihoods due to state-led "ecological migration." Under China's state-led "ecological migration" policies, thousands of Tibetan nomadic herders have been relocated from high-altitude grasslands to newly built settlements in lower elevations. Officially justified as a measure to combat grassland degradation and climate vulnerability, these relocations have disrupted centuries-old patterns of pastoralism and self-sufficiency.[56] Many resettled communities face unemployment, cultural dislocation, and dependence on government subsidies.[57] Scholars and rights groups argue that this policy serves both environmental and political goals—limiting mobility in strategically sensitive areas while asserting greater state control over the population.[58]

Official narratives emphasize achievements while omitting critical challenges, thus limiting meaningful dialogue or reform. It also reflects a broader tendency within Chinese climate discourse to externalize blame while internalizing credit. It also confirms that China is far from transparent in sharing environmental data; it is, in fact, selectively choosing what it wants to present to the world, irrespective of the consequences to the global climate.

Regional Implications: Water Wars and Climate Security

Tibet's water resources are not just a national asset for China; they are the lifeblood of much of Asia. The rivers that originate from the Tibetan Plateau flow through some of the most densely populated regions in the world—India, Bangladesh, Nepal, Pakistan, Bhutan, Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam.[59] Any ecological misstep in this region affects the livelihoods of billions.

China's rapid construction of dams on rivers like the Brahmaputra has led to fears of potential water weaponization. The absence of any binding transboundary water treaties with downstream nations exacerbates these fears. Unlike the Indus Waters Treaty between India and Pakistan or the Mekong River Commission among Southeast Asian countries, no multilateral legal framework governs China's management of these vital rivers. This vacuum creates a strategic imbalance and increases the risk of water conflict.

Environmental degradation in Tibet could also trigger mass displacement, regional food insecurity, and political unrest—turning a domestic development issue into a transnational climate security threat. This reinforces the need for international oversight and cooperative frameworks to ensure water equity and ecological resilience.

The Way Forward: Tibet as a Global Environmental Commons

Climatologically, Tibet is not only vital for China but for the planet. Comparable to the Amazon and the Arctic, it forms an essential component of the Earth's climate system, deserving attention as a global environmental priority.

A useful precedent might be the Antarctic Treaty System, which demilitarized the continent and promoted scientific cooperation.[60] While Tibet is inhabited and geopolitically complex, the Antarctic Treaty System may function as a thought experiment illustrating how ecological cooperation frameworks could be imagined, and a multilateral environmental accord focusing on the Himalayan region could be negotiated. Such an agreement could ensure environmental protection, promote integration of local ecological knowledge into adaptation strategies, recognizing the role of pastoral and farming communities, and transboundary cooperation.

Moreover, international institutions, including the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), should prioritize the region in their assessments and reporting. Dedicated climate missions to the Tibetan Plateau can fill the current data gap and improve early warning systems for disasters.

Civil Society and Global Environmental Justice

While intergovernmental organizations play a central role, civil society must also hold China accountable. Tibetan diaspora groups, environmental NGOs, and academic institutions have already contributed significantly to raising awareness on Tibet's environmental status. However, their voices are often sidelined in official forums.

The UNFCCC should institutionalize a stronger presence of civil society, including representation from occupied or marginalized territories. Mechanisms such as observer status, independent reporting rights, and stakeholder consultations can democratize the climate dialogue. Environmental justice demands that those most affected by ecological degradation have a seat at the table.

What the UNFCCC and the Global Community Should Consider Doing:

- Establish regional environmental monitoring mechanisms under trusted multilateral platforms such as UNEP, with data-sharing protocols that include the Tibetan Plateau.
- Push for multilateral treaties governing Himalayan water sources, with provisions for downstream countries.
- Promote the inclusion of indigenous knowledge and local participation in climate adaptation strategies.
- Require major emitters, regardless of classification, to submit independently verified climate impact reports.
- Develop multi-dimensional indices (GDP, emissions, technology capacity) to complement the developed/developing binary, creating a new 'advanced emerging economies' category.

China's dual role as both a climate leader in technology and a laggard in coal dependence erodes trust. Genuine leadership requires narrowing this gap between global pledges and domestic practice. Its role in global environmental governance must be evaluated not only by the scale of its pledges but by the ecological consequences of its domestic actions—particularly in regions like Tibet, which hold continental and even planetary significance. In the end, China itself is best off with an ecologically more sustainable Tibet, and better political, diplomatic, and civil ties with its neighbors to the south and southeast.

The UNFCCC must recognize that integrity, not just inclusivity, is the cornerstone of any effective climate regime. As the world confronts a narrowing window to avoid catastrophic warming, it cannot afford to ignore the inconsistencies of its most powerful actors. Tibet must be part of the climate

conversation—because climate change does not respect political borders, and neither should climate justice.

Summing Up: A Call to Action

The Tibetan Plateau is a keystone of the Asian ecological system and a bellwether for the health of the planet. China's current trajectory—marked by rapid development, ecological trade-offs, and information control— creates risks for both Tibet and broader climate stability.

The UNFCCC must evolve from a platform of voluntary pledges to one of verifiable commitments and enforceable standards. Reclassifying China, increasing scrutiny of ecological hotspots—wherever they may be in the world—and establishing multilateral frameworks for environmental commons, such as in Tibet, are not just policy options—they are moral imperatives.

Climate leadership in the 21st century requires more than technological prowess or diplomatic finesse. It demands more transparency and, above all, responsibility. China's pace of renewable deployment is historically unmatched and its carbon neutrality before 2060 target is exemplary among major powers. Yet, if China wishes to lead even better, it must first look inward at its peripheries—toward the melting glaciers of Tibet.

Authors –

Richard Ghiasy *is an advisor and researcher on Asian geopolitics and security, often revolving around China and India. He is the Director of GeoStrat, a consultancy and academy in the Netherlands. In his 17-year career, he has provided policy advice to inter alia the EEAS, European Commission and Parliament, Ministries across Europe and Asia, the UN, the World Bank, OSCE, and OECD.*

Jagannath Panda *is the Head of the Stockholm Center for South Asian and Indo-Pacific Affairs (SCSA-IPA) of the Institute for Security and Development Policy, Sweden; and a Professor at the University of Warsaw. Dr. Panda is the editor of the most recent study, titled 'Mapping China's Himalayan Hustle: Revisionism Resistance must be the Order of the Region' (ISDP: 2024). He is also a Contributing Editor for The National Interest.*

This policy brief is a part of the ISDP's Stockholm Center for South Asian and Indo-Pacific Affairs research project titled 'Climate Crisis in Tibet'.

About ISDP

The Institute for Security and Development Policy is a Stockholm-based independent and non-profit research and policy institute. The Institute is dedicated to expanding understanding of international affairs, particularly the interrelationship between the issue areas of conflict, security and development. The Institute's primary areas of geographic focus are Asia and Europe's neighborhood.

www.isdp.eu

Endnotes

1 Emily T. Yeh and Emma R. Loizeaux, "China at COP27: CBDR, national sovereignty, and climate justice," *Climate and Development* 16, no. 10 (2024): 906–916, https://doi.org/10.1080/17565529.2024.2349652.

2 Guoguang Wu, "Climate Change in China's Governance: Agenda, Agents, and International Collaboration," Asia Society Policy Institute, June 2024, https://asiasociety.org/policy-institute/climate-change-chinas-governance-agenda-agents-and-international-collaboration.

3 UNFCCC, "China's Achievements, New Goals and New Measures for Nationally Determined Contributions," 2022, https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/NDC/2022-06/China%E2%80%99s%20Achievements%2C%20New%20Goals%20and%20New%20Measures%20for%20Nationally%20Determined%20Contributions.pdf.

4 Jianfeng Jeffrey Qi, and Peter Dauvergne, "China's rising influence on climate governance: Forging a path for the global South," *Global Environmental Change* 73 (2022), https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S095937802200022X.

5 Jilong Yang, "Understanding China's changing engagement in global climate governance: a struggle for identity," *Asia Europe Journal* 20, no. 4 (2022): 357–376, https://doi.org/10.1007/s10308-021-00643-1.

6 "What Are the Limits of CBDR?" Climate Sustainability Directory, April 7, 2025, https://climate.sustainability-directory.com/question/what-are-the-limits-of-cbdr.md.

7 Hannah Ritchie and Max Roser, "CO_2 Emissions," Our World In Data, January 2024, https://ourworldindata.org/co2-emissions#cumulative-co2-emissions.

8 Jilong Yang, n. 5.

9 Janka Oertel, Jennifer Tollmann and Byford Tsang, "Climate Superpowers: How the EU and China can Compete and Cooperate for a Green Future," European Council on Foreign Relations, 2020, https://mlgp4climate.com/uploads%2FMLGP%20Library%2FUseful%20Documents%2FEnglish%2FL459%20CLIMATE%20SUPERPOWERS.pdf.

10 Vic Langston, "China's Renewable Revolution: Leading 55% of Global Solar Installations and Dominating 70% of EV Battery Market," Medium, July 26, 2025, https://medium.com/the-geopolitical-economist/chinas-renewable-revolution-leading-55-of-global-solar-installations-and-dominating-70-of-ev-343453c7c4de.

11 Edward White, "China's accelerating green transition," *The Financial Times*, September 26, 2024, https://www.ft.com/content/4afdd319-230f-4763-8107-d8a43308dcfc; Helen Davidson, "China's coal power habit undercuts 'unprecedented pace' of clean energy," *The Guardian*, February 13, 2025, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/feb/13/china-coal-power-energy-production-quotas.

12 Joy Y. Zhang, and Michael Barr, *Green Politics in China: Environmental Governance and State-Society Relations* (Pluto Press, 2013), https://library.oapen.org/handle/20.500.12657/76367.

13 Ibid.

14 Jianfeng Jeffrey Qi, and Peter Dauvergne, n. 4.

15 International Energy Agency (IEA), "CO_2 Emissions in 2023," March 2024, https://www.iea.org/reports/co2-emissions-in-2023.

16 Helen Davidson, n. 11.

17 "COP29 debates China's status – developing country or a developed giant," Policy Circle, November 23, 2024, https://www.policycircle.org/environment/cop29-debates-chinas-status/.

18 Robert O. Keohane and Michael Oppenheimer, "Paris: Beyond the Climate Dead End through Pledge and Review?" *Politics and Governance* 4, no. 3 (2016): 142–151, https://www.cogitatiopress.com/politicsandgovernance/article/view/634.

19 "CBDR-RC Principle," Climate Sustainability Directory, March 18, 2025, https://climate.sustainability-directory.com/term/cbdr-rc-principle/.

20 Statista, "Share of Global Gross Domestic Product (GDP) by Region 2024," 2025, https://www.statista.com/statistics/256381/share-of-global-regions-in-the-gross-domestic-product.

21 IMF, "GDP, current prices," https://www.imf.org/external/datamapper/PPPGDP@WEO/OEMDC/ADVEC/WEOWORLD (accessed August 2025).

22 "China's Economy in 2024: GDP, Trade, and FDI Trends," China Briefing, January 20, 2025, https://www.china-briefing.com/news/chinas-economy-in-2024-gdp-trade-fdi.

23 Ibid.

24 Edward White, n. 11.

25 International Energy Agency (IEA), n. 15.

26 Ibid.

27 "COP29 debates China's status," n. 17.

28 S. L. Kastner, M. M. Pearson, and C. Rector, "Climate change negotiations: from hold-up to invest," in S. L. Kastner, M. M. Pearson, and C. Rector (eds) *China's strategic multilateralism: investing in global governance* (New York: Cambridge University Press; 2018), 173–216; P. Stalley, "Principled strategy: the role of equity norms in China's climate change diplomacy," *Global Environmental Politics* 13, no. 1 (2013): 1–8, https://doi.org/10.1162/GLEP_a_00150.

29 R. Keohane and M. Oppenheimer, n. 18.

30 Lei Zhang, Arthur P. J. Mol, and Guizhen He, "Transparency and information disclosure in China's environmental governance, *Current Opinion in Environmental Sustainability* 18 (2016): 17–24, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cosust.2015.03.009.

31 Tang Hao, "New Challenges to Environmental Transparency in China," China Dialogue, August 20, 2008, https://dialogue.earth/en/pollution/2321-new-challenges-to-environmental-transparency.

32 A. Smith, "Environmental monitoring in politically sensitive regions: The case of Tibet," *Environmental Politics* 31, no. 2 (2022).

33 T. Yao, et al., "Different glacier status with atmospheric circulations in Tibetan Plateau and surroundings," *Nature Climate Change*, 2 (2012), 663–667.

34 Human Rights Watch, "China and Tibet, 2025, https://www.hrw.org/asia/china-and-tibet.

35 Judy Da Zhu, "Cooperative equilibrium of the China-US-EU climate game," *Energy Strategy Reviews* 39 (2022), https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2211467X21001802.

36 Ibid.

37 "How China's Belt & Road Initiative Impacts Climate Change Accord," Asean Business Partners, https://bizasean.com/how-chinas-belt-road-initiative-impacts-climate-change-accord/.

38 "Tibetan Perspectives on Tibet's Environment: 2010-2020," Tibetan Policy Institute, 2021, https://tibetpolicy.net/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Tib.-Env.-Perspective..pdf.

39 Ibid.

40 EIU, "South Asian water security comes into focus," January 7, 2025, https://www.eiu.com/n/south-asian-water-security-comes-into-focus/.

41 Pradeep Kumar Gautam, "Climate Change and Environmental Degradation in Tibet: Implications for Environmental Security in South Asia," *Strategic Analysis*, 34, no. 5 (2010): 744–755, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/233069140_Climate_Change_and_Environmental_Degradation_in_Tibet_Implications_for_Environmental_Security_in_South_Asia.

42 Amita Baviskar, *In the Belly of the River: Tribal Conflicts over Development in the Narmada Valley*, 2nd edition (Oxford University Press, 2004).

43 Ibid.

44 "China issues 18th white paper on Tibet, marking 66th anniversary of its full annexation," Tibetan Review, March 28, 2025, https://www.tibetanreview.net/china-issues-18th-white-paper-on-tibet-marking-66th-anniversary-of-its-full-annexation/.

45 "China Erases Tibet in Latest White Paper," Central Tibetan Administration, April 22, 2025, https://tibet.net/china-erases-tibet-in-latest-white-paper/.

46 The State Council Information Office, "Full text: Human Rights in Xizang in the New Era," White Paper, March 28, 2025, http://english.scio.gov.cn/whitepapers/2025-03/28/content_117793209.html?fbclid=IwY2xjawJVtWlleHRuA2FlbQIxMAABHbnjppgJIIj3JN5OFCne-VleeEAHNrVkJ9mNv6fb7WyF6EFF_R4gX9pW7A_aem_uo8XFfSrUs5pTJ3AE6RWuA.

47 Ibid,

48 W. Wang, "Glacial retreat and water supply changes on the Tibetan Plateau," *Journal of Hydrology* 555 (2017): 456–470.

49 P. Tsering, "Rural depopulation in Tibet and water scarcity: A qualitative study," *Asian Journal of Environment and Sustainability* 6, no. 2 (2020).

50 A. Kääb, et al. "Massive collapse of two glaciers in western Tibet in 2016 after surge-like instability," *Nature Geoscience* 11 (2018): 114–120.

51 J. Qiu, "Tibetan plateau suffers more frequent droughts and landslides," *Nature News*, 2016.

52 A. Yin, "Tectonic evolution of the Tibetan Plateau," *Annual Review of Earth and Planetary Sciences* 38 (2010): 191–236.

53 Human Rights Watch, "China's development projects in Tibet raise seismic and environmental concerns," 2019, https://www.hrw.org.

54 Tessa Wong, "China begins building world's largest dam, fuelling fears in India," *BBC*, July 21, 2025, https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c4gk1251w14o.

55 Mark Doman, Katia Shatoba and Alex Palmer, "A mega dam on the Great Bend of China," *ABC*, May 25, 2021, https://www.abc.net.au/news/2021-05-25/chinas-plan-to-build-mega-dam-on-yarlung-tsangpo-brahmaputra/100146344.

56 T. E. Yeh, *Taming Tibet: Landscape Transformation and the Gift of Chinese Development* (Cornell University Press, 2013).

57 J. M. Foggin, "Depopulating the Tibetan grasslands: A case of policy failure?" *Mountain Research and Development* 28, no. 1 (2008): 26–31.

58 A. M. Fischer, "The political economy of boomerang aid in China's Tibet," *China Perspectives* 3, (2014): 38–46.

59 Lobsang Tsering, "Top 5 Great Rivers Rising in Tibet," Tibet Vista, June 18, 2024, https://www.tibettravel.org/tibet-travel-advice/top-5-great-rivers-rising-in-tibet.html.

60 David Kasserman, and Denyse Lemaire, "Antarctic Treaty of 1959,"EBSCO, 2021, https://www.ebsco.com/research-starters/military-history-and-science/antarctic-treaty-1959.