

## Sino-American Rivalry: Global Climate Governance Leadership?

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### SUBMISSION TRACK

Received : 20 December 2021  
Final Revision : 02 May 2022  
Available Online : 30 May 2022

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### KEYWORD

China, Climate, Competition, Leadership, United States

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### KATA KUNCI

Tiongkok, Iklim, Rivalitas, Kepemimpinan, Amerika Serikat

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### ABSTRACT

This paper explains the implications of great power rivalry between the United States and China in global climate governance. It is important to discuss because China and the United States have intense rivalry. On November 4, 2020, the United States officially left the Paris Agreement. This created momentum for China to become a leader in the global climate governance and strengthen its influence in the international world. Since Sino-American rivalry is a struggle for influence, China's active role in the Paris Agreement has implications for its competition with the United States. This paper used qualitative method with secondary data sources mainly from journal articles, newspapers, and online news. The findings of this research show that China's influence and commitment to the Paris Agreement show that China has the potential to become the leader in global environmental issues. However, China's status as the largest developing country in the Paris Agreements shows that China has not chosen hegemony. This choice created momentum for the United States to take the lead on climate change issues again

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### ABSTRAK

Tulisan ini menjelaskan implikasi persaingan antara Amerika Serikat dan China dalam tata kelola iklim global. Hal ini penting untuk dibahas karena China dan Amerika Serikat memiliki rivalitas yang intens. Pada tanggal 4 November 2020, Amerika Serikat secara resmi keluar dari Perjanjian Paris. Ini menciptakan momentum bagi China untuk menjadi pemimpin dalam tata kelola iklim global dan memperkuat pengaruhnya di dunia internasional. Karena persaingan Tiongkok-Amerika adalah perebutan pengaruh, peran aktif Tiongkok dalam Perjanjian Paris berimplikasi pada persaingannya dengan Amerika Serikat. Makalah ini menggunakan metode kualitatif dengan sumber data sekunder terutama dari artikel jurnal, surat kabar, dan berita online. Temuan penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa pengaruh dan komitmen China terhadap Perjanjian Paris menunjukkan bahwa China memiliki potensi untuk menjadi pemimpin dalam isu lingkungan global. Namun, status China sebagai negara berkembang terbesar dalam Perjanjian Paris menunjukkan bahwa China tidak memilih menjadi hegemon. Pilihan ini menciptakan momentum kembali bagi Amerika Serikat untuk kembali memimpin masalah perubahan iklim.

## Introduction

Since China's rise in the last decade and the global economic crisis in 2008 marked the beginning of the United States' decline, the United States and China have been in an unstable relationship. Goldstein<sup>1</sup> explain its as strong rivalry. Rudolf<sup>2</sup> later called this phenomenon as the Sino-American rivalry. Referring to Khan<sup>3</sup>, this competition emerges because China is considered a country capable of competing with the dominance of the United States at the global level. According to Layne<sup>4</sup>, the competition began to appear when Obama announced the Pivot to Asia strategy due to China's increasing influence in the Asian region. If there is no response, the dominance of the United States in various aspects at the international level may decrease. In contrast, China has increased its influence through the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in Asia.

The fact that the United States withdrew from the environmental regime, the Paris Agreement, in 2017, has undoubtedly creating more opportunities for China to have bigger role global environmental governance. According Yu Hongyuan<sup>5</sup> that China could strive for a bigger role in

leading global efforts to address climate change. Furthermore, Hai-Bin Zhang et.al<sup>6</sup> argue that the United States withdrawal aggravates the leadership deficit in addressing global climate issues. China could have a bigger role in global climate issues, and assert influence on global climate governance. The Paris Agreement is a regime that regulates state behavior related to climate change. In global environmental governance, the problem of climate change becomes a significant issue. Climate change is a global environmental issue with long-term impacts on all countries in the world<sup>7</sup>. Therefore, this vision of China can be seen in Xi Jinping's statement declaring China as a participant, contributor and leader in global environmental issues<sup>8</sup>.

As a member of international community, China already take part in global environmental affairs. Since 1981, China has signed 17 international environmental treaties, where 11 treaties are broadly related to global environmental issues<sup>9</sup>. Environmental degradation has been considered an important issue by China. China's State Council argues that "many environmental problems that have haunted

<sup>1</sup> Goldstein, Avery. "US–China Rivalry in the twenty-first century: Déjà vu and Cold War II." *China International Strategy Review* 2 (2020): 48-62.

<sup>2</sup> Rudolf, Peter. "The Sino-American World Conflict." *Survival* 63.2 (2021): 87-114.

<sup>3</sup> Khan, Raja Muhammad. "Sino-US rivalry in Southeast Asia." *Turkish Policy Quarterly* 11.3 (2012).

<sup>4</sup> Layne, Christopher. "Avoiding a Sino-American confrontation." *Atlantisch Perspectief* 39.4 (2015): 3-8.

<sup>5</sup> Yu, Hongyuan. "The US Withdrawal from the Paris Agreement: Challenges and Opportunities for China." *China Quarterly of International Strategic Studies* 4.02 (2018): p.281

<sup>6</sup> Zhang, Hai-Bin, et al. "US withdrawal from the Paris Agreement: Reasons, impacts, and China's response." *Advances in Climate Change Research* 8.4 (2017): 220-225.

<sup>7</sup> UNFCCC, *Introduction to Climate Change*, (2021), <https://unfccc.int/topics/climate-finance/the-big-picture/introduction-to-climate-finance/introduction-to-climate-finance>

<sup>8</sup> Li, S., Does China still want to be a global environmental leader. *The Diplomat*. (2018). <https://thediplomat.com/2018/10/does-china-still-want-to-be-a-global-environmental-leader/>

<sup>9</sup> Huang, Xibing, et al. "Environmental issues and policy priorities in China: a content analysis of government documents." *China: An international journal* 8.02 (2010): p.234

developed countries in different phases of their 100-year-long industrialization have occurred in China all at the same time."<sup>10</sup> The World Bank estimated that China's economic losses due to environmental degradation amounted to eight per cent of country's GDP<sup>11</sup>. This motivated China to have a more active role in global climate change governance. China participated by facilitating the conclusion of the Paris Agreement by reaching a Joint Announcement on Climate Change with the United States<sup>12</sup>. China and the United States also ratified the Paris Agreement and plan to discuss greenhouse gases in the amendments to the Montreal Protocol and support actions to deal with aviation emissions. Furthermore, in 2017, China took the initiative to close its ivory market as a form of commitment to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) Regime in supporting the conservation of elephant species<sup>13</sup>. China government commitment to environmental issues has become the goal of the Chinese Communist Party, which is based on the principles of Ecological Civilization. This principle is a set of critical values in China's development to harmony in

development and the environment<sup>14</sup> (Kuhn, 2019). Sun<sup>15</sup> also argues that this principle shows China's commitment and seeks to show its potential as a country capable of leading in global environmental governance. China's seriousness was also seen with the holding of the National Eco-Environmental Protection Conference in 2018. On this occasion, Xi Jinping conveyed his thoughts regarding the principle of Ecological Civilization, which is a response to today's world's challenges and offers solutions to the future of the environment<sup>16</sup>. This behaviour implies that China is seeking to increase its influence on global environmental issues.

China and the United States are the two world economic powers that account for 40 per cent of global carbon emissions<sup>17</sup>. United States withdrawal will benefit China by giving Beijing the opportunity to take the mantle of global leadership over efforts of global environmental issues<sup>18</sup>. According to Yu Hongyuan<sup>19</sup> United States sudden renouncement of climate leadership has led the world to pin their hope on China. China is one of the potential candidates to take the role as global environmental leader. China is currently the world largest producer of wind and solar energy and the largest investor in green energy projects. Five of the world six

<sup>10</sup> Information Office of the State Council, "White Paper on Environmental Protection in China (1996–2005)", at <http://www.china.org.cn/english/2006/Jun/170355.htm> (5 June 2006).

<sup>11</sup> World Bank, *Clear Water, Blue Skies: China's Environment in the New Century* (Washington, DC: World Bank, 1997) p.2

<sup>12</sup> Sun, Yixian. "The changing role of China in global environmental governance." *Rising Powers Quarterly* 1.1 (2016): 43-53.

<sup>13</sup> Permata, Inda Mustika, and Elsi Wahyuni. "Behind the Ivory Trade Shutdown in China." *Journal of International Wildlife Law & Policy* 23.3 (2020): 151-165.

<sup>14</sup>Kuhn, B. Sustainable Development Discourses in the P.R. China. *Journal of Sustainable Development*, 9(6), (2016).

<sup>15</sup> Sun, Yixian, 2016

<sup>16</sup> Zhou, Xin. "Ecological civilization in China: Challenges and strategies." *Capitalism Nature Socialism* 32.3 (2021): 84-99.

<sup>17</sup>Geall, Sam. *Clear waters and green mountains: Will Xi Jinping take the lead on Climate Change?*. Lowy Institute for International Policy., 2017.

<sup>18</sup> Swaine, Michael D. "Chinese Attitudes toward the US Withdrawal from the Paris Climate Accords." *China Leadership Monitor* 54 (2017): p.1

<sup>19</sup> Yu, Hongyuan, 2018

largest solar manufacturing companies can be found in China<sup>20</sup> (Cohen, 2019). This makes the potential of China's leadership in global environmental issues interesting to study.

Therefore, even though the United States rejoined the Paris Agreement again, the United States could face competition from China as the leader in global environmental issues, that could be taken by China after the United States decided to withdraw from the Paris Agreement in 2017. Through the active role of China, which is involved in environmental issues, it can show its potential as an actor with the capacity as a leader. A major motivation of China to lead global environmental issues is to increase its sphere of influence. Sino-American Rivalry are competition for influences<sup>21</sup>. From Chinese point of view, the United States will never let China influence growing and expand further, while United States view China as revisionist power that aim for global supremacy<sup>22</sup>. According to Anthony Zito<sup>23</sup> that global leadership in environmental issues is achieved through the role as negotiator, innovator, market, and model in environmental issues. Miranda Schreurs<sup>24</sup> argue that based on Japan's role in environment issues, the leader of these

issues must establish a development model for other countries to follow. In line with Zito's argument, the global leader in environmental issues must act as a model and innovator.

Therefore, this paper seeks to explain the implications of Sino-American rivalry in global climate governance leadership. Because Sino-American rivalry is described as the struggle for influence in global politics. This paper consists of three parts: first, it discusses their rivalry in international politics. This discussion shows that in the international world, the two are competing for influence. Then the second part discusses the ability of the United States and China as leaders in environmental issues. The final section discusses the implications of rivalry between the United States and China on global environmental governance, especially after the United States' withdrawal from the Paris Agreement.

### Research Method

This paper uses a qualitative method. The type of data used is secondary data. The data was collected from journals, reports, books, and news based on keywords such as China, Paris Agreement, Climate Governance Leadership, Sino-American Rivalry, Global Environment, and Climate Change. After the data has been compiled the data is analyzed using conceptual framework from Nabers, which synthesizes the concepts of power, leadership, and hegemony into a conceptual framework that makes it possible to understand countries such as China and the United States to be influential through hegemony and leadership by looking at processes and meanings. Nabers elaborates the requirements of effective leadership in international affairs: First, leadership must

<sup>20</sup> Cohen, Ariel. "US Withdraws From Paris Accord, Ceding Leadership To China." *Forbes* (7 November 2019), online: < <https://www.forbes.com/sites/arielcohen/2019/11/07/us-withdraws-from-paris-accordceding-leadership-to-china> (2019).

<sup>21</sup> Perthes, Volker. "Dimensions of rivalry: China, the United States, and Europe." *China international strategy review* 3 (2021): 56-65.

<sup>22</sup> Perthes, Volker. 2021, p.58

<sup>23</sup> Zito, Anthony R. "The European Union as an environmental leader in a global environment." *Globalizations* 2.3 (2005): 363-375.

<sup>24</sup> Schreurs, Miranda A. "Assessing Japan's role as a global environmental leader." *Policy and Society* 23.1 (2004): 88-110.

essentially be conceptualized as an activity. Brute power does not necessarily entail leadership, nor does power always help to achieve the desired outcomes. Nabers define power that transcends materialist accounts, Nabers define powers in leadership as ability "to make decisions, gather resources, use incentives and threats, formulate visions, and build coalitions"<sup>25</sup>. Secondly, the leader country has social activities within an institutional context and specific issues to deal with. It is also important for the leader to demonstrate that the vision it has regarding this specific issue is applicable to all countries and relevant to others. The process of the state becoming a hegemon and Nabers describe a leader in four stages : (1) The emergence of a crisis or a problem (2) the emergence of competition between different political forces in handling the crisis and emerge as a leader and hegemony in its handling (3) Acceptance of a coping framework crisis by other countries (4) The framework has become routine and politically institutionalized<sup>26</sup>. After describing the characteristics and analyzing the dynamics of competition between actors to become hegemonic, a conclusion can be drawn about the implications of the rivalry between the United States and China in global environmental governance.

### **Sino-American Competition in International Politics**

In recent decades, China has undergone a rapid transformation on a large scale. This transformation led to China's growing economic and political influence. For the United States, the rise of China is considered

<sup>25</sup> Nabers, Dirk. "Power, leadership, and hegemony in international politics: the case of East Asia." *Review of International Studies* 36.4 (2010): p.935

<sup>26</sup> Nabers, Dirk. 2010

a threat to the United States' position in the international world<sup>27</sup>. According to Rudolf, the relationship between the two is based on regional and global competitions to pursue status in the international system characterized as emerging bipolarity. Flannery<sup>28</sup> termed the phenomenon of the relationship between the two as "the new cold war." This phenomenon indicates that both of them are in a position to balance each other out.

This new cold war is different from the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union. According to Austin<sup>29</sup>, the difference is that first, the cold war is an ideological competition between two opposing systems and wants to outperform, but in the context of the new cold war, neither the United States nor China makes the destruction of capitalism or communism as the primary policy. Second, both China and the United States do not face each other militarily. Nevertheless, according to Rehman<sup>30</sup>, both compete for influence in the international world. Therefore, the relationship between the two is unique. On the one hand, China emerged as an authoritarian power and became a strong competitor to the United States. Nevertheless,

<sup>27</sup> Rudolf, Peter. 2021

<sup>28</sup> Flannery, Russel, "Is a U.S.-China Cold War in the Cards?" *Forbes*, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/russellflannery/2018/04/03/is-a-u-s-china-cold-war-in-the-cards/#24aa8adf2df5>.

<sup>29</sup> Austin, Michael , Beware the Cold War Trap – It's a Geopolitical Competition , In Rehman, Iskander. "Policy Roundtable: Are the United States and China in a New Cold War?." *Texas National Security Review* 15 (2018).

<sup>30</sup> Rehman, Iskander. "Policy Roundtable: Are the United States and China in a New Cold War?." *Texas National Security Review* 15 (2018).

on the other hand, the two are connected economically<sup>31</sup>.

The relationship between the two fluctuates in the international world. Both were at their lowest point when the United States was under Donald Trump's leadership. He declared that China is a major strategic competitor for the United States<sup>32</sup>. Of course, this declaration clarifies the United States' position as opposed to China in global politics. This is further strengthened by the United States National Security Strategy document statement that China is a "revisionist" force that aims to replace the United States in the Indo-Pacific region<sup>33</sup>. Revisionist mean that China is starting to replace United States as the dominant influential actor. The competition between the two can also be seen in the Southeast Asia region, especially in terms of influence<sup>34</sup>. Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is considered China attempt to assert greater influence in Eurasia and Indo-Pacific. Tudor Onea argue that "dominant actors are prone to fear that they will lose their upper rank, and, due to this status anxiety, resist the efforts of emergent

powers to match or surpass them"<sup>35</sup>. Furthermore, Onea explain that the effort to resist the upcoming power because the dominant actors fear they will lose their upper rank, they fell the status anxiety<sup>36</sup>. While the assumption of great power rivalry could end in war based on the "Thucydides Trap" analogy, it is rarely will happen in Sino-American rivalry. Xiangning Wu argue that the "Thucydides Trap" analogy fails to considering the factors of international institutions, economic interdependence and public resentment towards war<sup>37</sup>. In the world that become interconnected through globalization and economic dependence, make the possibility of direct war between Beijing and Washington may not happen. Because the possibility of direct war of Sino-American rivalry is quite thin, the status anxiety of Sino-American rivalry then incarnated in the form influence pursuit in international system in the Asia Pacific and South Asia regions, geopolitical, geostrategic and geo-economic interests<sup>38</sup>. The African region is also the arena of competition for both labour and military issues<sup>39</sup>.

As a result of such dynamics, the United States believes China's global influence will pose a threat to its position. This is somewhat contradictory when China has always positioned itself as a developing

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<sup>31</sup> Art, Robert J. "The United States and the rise of China: Implications for the long haul." *Political Science Quarterly* 125.3 (2010): 359-391.

<sup>32</sup> Tellis, Ashley J., Alison Szalwinski, and Michael Wills, eds. *US-China Competition for Global Influence*. National Bureau of Asian Research, 2020.

<sup>33</sup> White House, *National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (Washington, D.C., December 2017), Hal.25  
<https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/NSS-Final-12-18-2017-0905.pdf>

<sup>34</sup> Sutter, Robert. "The United States and China in Southeast Asia: Conflict or Convergence?." *Southeast Asian Affairs* 2010.1 (2010): 44-59.

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<sup>35</sup> Onea, Tudor A. "Between dominance and decline: status anxiety and great power rivalry." *Review of International Studies* 40.1 (2014): 125-152.

<sup>36</sup> Onea, 2014, p.127.

<sup>37</sup> Wu, Xiangning. "Technology, power, and uncontrolled great power strategic competition between China and the United States." *China International Strategy Review* 2.1 (2020): 99-119.

<sup>38</sup> Tehseen, Mohammad. "Sino-US Competition." *Strategic Studies* 37.4 (2017): 1-17.

<sup>39</sup> Conteh-Morgan, Earl. "Militarization and Securitization in Africa." *Insight Turkey* 21.1 (2019): 77-94.

country<sup>40</sup>. Meanwhile, the United States views China as a country whose economic power is getting bigger<sup>41</sup>. Of course, this has implications for the dynamics of both of them at the World Trade Organization (WTO). Because, with China's status as a developing country, China can certainly benefit. Privileged treatment includes additional time to fulfil its commitments, greater market access, and preferential treatment related to trade barriers. The United States' view of China's status in the WTO is, of course, a natural thing that China's economic power as the second largest in the world that continues to grow. In 2020, the United States claimed that China is a developed country and no longer a developing country<sup>42</sup>. Of course, the United States' claim aims to eliminate the benefits that China accrues through its status in the WTO.

Besides, the competition between the two can also be seen in global governance. For example, in the World Health Organization (WHO), Chorev<sup>43</sup> shows that China's presence poses a threat to the United States'

influence in WHO, especially during Trump's time. Chorev explained the threat of the United States could be seen from his behaviour which decided to leave the WHO. This decision emerged because the United States saw that WHO was dependent on China. Therefore, today's reality shows that the United States and China are competing with each other for influence in international politics.

### **The Ability of China and the United States as Leaders in Global Environmental Issues**

The previous section discussed the competition between the United States and China. This section identifies the ability of both to become a leader, especially in a global environmental issue. However, previously discussed the dynamics of both in environmental issues. As industrialized countries, China and the United States are the two countries with the most significant carbon emission production in the world<sup>44</sup>. The bilateral agreement between China and the United States in Scientific and Technology Cooperation was marked by the bilateral agreement in 1979. The agreement focused on protecting the environment and energy. Then in 2009, President Obama prioritized climate change in collaboration with China<sup>45</sup>. This indicates that both are important actors in environmental issues and have the same goal of solving everyday problems. However, when brought to global environmental governance, China can be

<sup>40</sup> Xinhua, Commentary: Why is China still a developing Country?, (2018), [http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2018-06/05/c\\_137231686.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2018-06/05/c_137231686.htm)

<sup>41</sup> Kennedy, Scott, and He Fan. "The United States, China, and global governance: A new agenda for a new era." *Beijing, China: Rongda Quick Print. Distributed by the Research Center for Chinese Politics & Business, Indiana University and the Institute for World Economics & Politics, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences* (2013).

<sup>42</sup> Reuters "China Accuses U.S. of 'Cold War Mentality' with New Nuclear Policy," Reuters, <https://www.reuters.com/article/uk-usa-nuclear-china/china-accuses-u-s-of-cold-war-mentality-with-newnuclear-policy-idUKKBN1FO02O>

<sup>43</sup>Nitsan Chorev, The World Health Organization between the United States and China, , Vol. 20(3) (2020) 378–382

<sup>44</sup> Wu, Fengshi, and Yuan Xu. "Sino-American environmental relations: the potential of trans-societal linkages." *Issues and Studies* 49.3 (2013): 73.

<sup>45</sup> Lewis, Joanna. "The state of US-China relations on climate change: Examining the bilateral and multilateral relationship." *China Environment Series* 11.7-39 (2010).

said to be a newcomer. Often China refuses to sign various commitments; for example, in 1972, the United Nations Conference on Human Environment signed the agreement. Then in 2009, at the UN Conference on Environment and Development, the Chinese Prime Minister said that China at that time was more focused on economic development<sup>46</sup>.

However, since Xi Jinping's government, China has begun to show its attention to environmental issues. The principle of Ecological Civilization has begun to be applied in the policies to be implemented. Besides, in the last decade, China has made environmental issues one of its political agendas. With its activeness, China has the potential to become a leader in environmental issues. This phenomenon will, of course, create competition between the United States and China is competing for influence over other countries in global environmental governance. Referring to the Nabers model, there are three indicators that a country can become a leader.

First, in terms of the use of power to become a leader. In this case, China has these criteria. The emergence of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) raises concerns that it will impact the environment. Through BRI, which involves 130 countries, China is actively developing an institutional architecture for its "Green BRI" vision<sup>47</sup>. The vision of "Green BRI" is a commitment from China to ensure BRI implementation is

environmentally friendly and based<sup>48</sup>. Xiaofeng Liu<sup>49</sup> argue that China has the ambitions to become a global scientific power and a leader in green energy and climate change through BRI.

President Xi Jinping introduced "green" as one of the BRI's key characteristics, along with "open" and "clean"<sup>50</sup>. China's initiative with the "Green BRI" is effort from China using its influence to shape a green initiative through BRI that could be followed by other countries. Sri Lanka is one of the examples for country that implemented green BRI through major BRI project. There are two of China's major investments in Sri Lanka: the Colombo Port's Colombo International Container Terminals (CICT) and the Hambantota Port. Sri Lanka must set strong normative standards of on how these ports are developed under the green BRI framework<sup>51</sup>. The implementation of Green BRI could also be seen in China and Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) countries energy cooperation program that since the launch of BRI China has continued engage Southeast Asia through both cross-national development plans and bilateral economic cooperation agreements,

<sup>46</sup> Sun, Yixian. 2016

<sup>47</sup> Coenen, Johanna, et al. "Environmental governance of China's belt and road initiative." *Environmental Policy and Governance* 31.1 (2021): 3-17.

<sup>48</sup> Green-BRI, (2021) Belt and Road Initiative International Green Development Coalition (BRIGC), <https://green-bri.org/belt-and-road-initiative-green-coalition-brigc/?cookie-state-change=1617804290575>

<sup>49</sup> Liu, Xiaofeng, and Mia M. Bennett. "The geopolitics of knowledge communities: Situating Chinese and foreign studies of the Green Belt and Road Initiative." *Geoforum* 128 (2022): 168-180.

<sup>50</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China (2021) Let Us Strengthen Confidence and Solidarity and Jointly Build a Closer Partnership for Belt and Road Cooperation, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/wjz\\_663304/wjz\\_663308/2461\\_663310/202106/t20210624\\_9168101.html](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/wjz_663304/wjz_663308/2461_663310/202106/t20210624_9168101.html)

<sup>51</sup> Hundlani, Divya. "Navigating a green BRI in Sri Lanka." *Silk Road to Belt Road: Reinventing the past and shaping the future*. Singapore: Springer Nature Singapore, 2018. 215-233

including many energy projects with negative environmental impacts<sup>52</sup>.

Indirectly, China fulfils the second and third conditions in the Nabers model. Through the Green BRI, China institutionalized the development of environmentally-based BRI that can be participated by 130 countries. The Green BRI application is also in line with the principles of Ecological Civilization. According to Hansen, Li, and Svarverud<sup>53</sup>, this principle provides an opportunity for China as a centre for solving global environmental problems based on a philosophical and cultural approach to China. In November 2007, "ecological civilization" was embraced as a central policy objective by the Chinese government. Since then, the Chinese government has substantially increased expenditures on technology aimed at decreasing greenhouse gas emissions and ameliorating environmental damage. Additionally, it has sponsored numerous conferences on ecological civilization and promoted it on a global scale<sup>54</sup>.

This Chinese behavior indicates that it continues to strive to show commitment to protecting the environment in contrast to the United States, which shows the opposite attitude. The United States is more focused on domestic issues and has also decided to leave the Paris Agreement. Besides,

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<sup>52</sup> Liao, Jessica C. "Talking Green, Building Brown: China-ASEAN Environmental and Energy Cooperation in the BRI Era." *Asian Perspective* 46.1 (2022): 21-47.

<sup>53</sup> Hansen, Mette Halskov, Hongtao Li, and Rune Svarverud. "Ecological civilization: Interpreting the Chinese past, projecting the global future." *Global Environmental Change* 53 (2018): 195-203.

<sup>54</sup> Gare, Arran. "China and the struggle for ecological civilization." *Capitalism Nature Socialism* 23.4 (2012): 10-26

President Trump's position is also sceptical on the issue of climate change. Although in a different context, between China and the United States, based on the Nabers indicator, China is potential leader's in global environmental governance. Not only initiatives but also substantial contributions in institutionalizing a vision accepted by many countries are crucial for China. United States withdrawal from the Paris Agreement, of course, will affect China's influence in global environmental regime, it opened the door for China to assert influence without the presence of United States.

### **Rivalry Implications for Global Environmental Leadership on Climate Change Issues**

In the previous section, it was discussed that China has a character capable of being a leader in the global environment. Referring to Nabers' model of the state process becomes a hegemon. Thus, China has reached the second stage, namely, competition with other actors to solve the crisis.

In the Nabers model, the first process is the emergence of a crisis or problem to be resolved. The phenomenon of the United States withdrawal from the Paris Agreement can be identified as a crisis that occurred. This withdrawal is considered capable of influencing the foundations of environmental governance, particularly on climate change. This could be seen from research study from Qimin Chai et.al<sup>55</sup> that evaluates the three

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<sup>55</sup> Chai, Qimin, et al. "The gap report of global climate change mitigation, finance, and governance after the United States declared its withdrawal from the Paris Agreement." *Chinese Journal of Population Resources and Environment* 15.3 (2017): 196-208.

potential “major deficits” in terms of mitigation, climate finance, and global climate governance, as a result of the US withdrawal from the Paris Agreement. According to the study, the United States' withdrawal from the Paris Agreement will adversely impact the implementation and existence of successive climate policies and will result in an additional 8.8-13.4% increase in the global emissions reduction deficit. As a result of the United States' withdrawal, the existing climate finance mechanism will also deteriorate. Funding gaps for the Green Climate Fund (GCF) will increase by about US\$2 billion, while long-term climate finance gaps will increase by about US\$5 billion. Interestingly this study also mentions that either China or European Union (EU) could fill the governance deficit caused by United States withdrawal. Johannes Urpelainen and Thijs Van de Graaf<sup>56</sup> explain that United States withdrawal could raise high barriers to global climate cooperation in the future because United States non-participation in raising climate finance. Aaron Saad<sup>57</sup> explain that Trump decision to withdraw from Paris Agreement will open 4 “pathways by which these harms might be transmitted in the coming years: (1) by prolonging the viability of U.S. fossil fuel development; (2) by prolonging a period of slow and unambitious global climate action; (3) by extending to climate efforts a worldview that will open future climate policy up to reactionary resistance; and (4) by rescinding

funding for adaptation projects in vulnerable communities.

The withdrawal of the United States will undoubtedly reduce the emission quotas of other countries and increase the cost of emissions that must be incurred, and the reduction in aid funds to developing countries makes it difficult for these countries to mitigate the challenges of climate change<sup>58</sup>. Besides, it will undoubtedly harm the international community as a country with sizeable carbon emission when the United States leaves. The United States cannot be monitored and will be sanctioned to implement policies that are incompatible with addressing climate change.

Furthermore, according to Zhang , the United States cuts aid funds for activities related to climate change. This cut is around 28.7% or the US \$ 10.9 billion. This is not easy because, during the Obama administration, the United States committed to assisting with the US \$ 3 billion. This fund is planned to be used to assist developing countries in mitigating the impacts of climate change. At that time, the United States had paid 33.3% of the total aid. Unfortunately, during the Trump administration, the remaining US \$ 2 billion in aid was cancelled.

Besides, Zhang et al.<sup>59</sup> also explained that the departure of the United States would open up opportunities for other countries to cancel their commitments to resolve climate change. The United States is one of the countries with the most research and literature related to climate change. With this withdrawal, it means that the United States

<sup>56</sup> Urpelainen, Johannes, and Thijs Van de Graaf. "United States non-cooperation and the Paris agreement." *Climate Policy* 18.7 (2018): 839-851.

<sup>57</sup> Saad, Aaron. "Pathways of harm: The consequences of Trump's withdrawal from the Paris Climate Agreement." *Environmental Justice* 11.1 (2018): 47-51.

<sup>58</sup> Zhang, Hai Bin. 2017

<sup>59</sup> Zhang, Hai Bin. 2017

will not contribute much towards developing solutions to climate change. From these four things, it can be identified that the departure of the United States is a crisis in global environmental governance. Besides, the departure of the United States leaves a vacuum on who will be the leader in handling global environmental issues<sup>60</sup>. Carolina Arlota<sup>61</sup> argue that the absence of United States creates leadership vacuum in global environmental governance. Furthermore, Arlota explain that United States “provides an unprecedented opportunity for China and India to boost their international reputations and soft power”.

Furthermore, it will enter the second stage, namely the emergence of new forces competing to solve the crisis. Regarding this void, China is emerging as a rising actor in global environmental governance. China's commitment can be seen from the statement made by the spokesperson for the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Hua Chunying, that China remains committed to global governance regarding climate change. He also said that China would also continue to strive to deal with climate change and continue to play an active role in the existing process<sup>62</sup>. Xi Jinping's statement further strengthened China's position at the 19th Chinese Communist Party Congress that

China was ready to take a leadership role in global climate change<sup>63</sup>. Although, the potential candidate to replace the United States is not only China. The European Union has also emerged as an actor capable of replacing the United States' position beside China.

European Union is also considered an essential factor in climate change policy negotiations<sup>64</sup>. Regarding the departure of the United States, the President of the European Parliament, Antonio Tajani, revealed that the European Union would continue to lead the way in fighting climate change<sup>65</sup>. The statements made by China and the European Union show that they are ready to lead the world even though the United States is no longer with the environmental regime.

When linked with the Nabers model, both China and the European Union compete to fill the crisis. Referring to Hongyuan<sup>66</sup>, at COP24 in 2018, China contributed to the negotiation mechanism and detailed rules regarding the implementation of the Paris Agreement and set the course of the Taranoa Dialogue. At the dialogue, the parties introduced domestic best practices on addressing climate change and encouraged

<sup>60</sup> Chai et.al, 2017; Urpelainen & Van de Graaf, 2017

<sup>61</sup> Arlota, Carolina. "Does the United States' Withdrawal from the Paris Agreement on Climate Change Pass the Cost-Benefit Analysis Test?." *U. Pa. J. Int'l L.* 41 (2019): p.931

<sup>62</sup> Foreign Minister People's Republic of China, Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Hua Chunying's Regular Press Conference on June 2, 2017, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/xwfw\\_665399/s2\\_510\\_665401/t1467465.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/xwfw_665399/s2_510_665401/t1467465.shtml)

<sup>63</sup> Montague, Zach.. "Is President Xi's Climate Leadership Overstated?" *The Diplomat.* (December 1, 2017)

<https://thediplomat.com/2017/12/is-president-xis-climate-leadership-overstated/>

<sup>64</sup> Zito, Anthony R. "The European Union as an environmental leader in a global environment." *Globalizations* 2, no. 3 (2005): 363-375

<sup>65</sup> Europarl, EP President Tajani "the Paris agreement is alive and we will take it forward"(2017), <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/press-room/20170601IPR76521/ep-president-tajani-the-paris-agreement-is-alive-and-we-will-take-it-forward>

<sup>66</sup> Hongyuan, 2019

cooperation between the parties. Besides, China is also active in encouraging the transformation of the parties towards a green and low-carbon development model. China also monitors the implementation of financial support promised by developed countries to developing countries. While the European Union at the conference agreed to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by at least 40 per cent by 2030 compared to 1990, as a form of its commitment to leading global climate action, the European Union refers to the A Clean Planet for All strategy. This strategy will help achieve the vision of net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050. Based on the above facts, it can be seen that China and the European Union have shown each other their ability to direct global climate governance. Although the European Union has more experience in climate change issues, China continues to strive by showing its political commitment, financial assistance and moral persuasion to the international community<sup>67</sup>. This behaviour can undoubtedly shape China's image internationally as a global actor responsible for this climate change problem.

Although China and EU compete for leadership role in global environmental governance, they still open to working together in tackling the problem of climate change. The cooperation between the two was conveyed at the 19th China-EU Summit that they would continue implementing the Paris Agreement and accelerate the clean energy transition<sup>68</sup>. Both have the same

<sup>67</sup> Hilton, I., & Kerr, O.. The Paris Agreement: China's 'New Normal' role in international climate negotiations. *Climate Policy*, 17(1), (2017) 48-58.

<sup>68</sup> European Commission. (2017). EU co-hosts major international climate meeting with Canada and China.

vision regarding environmental problems, namely China with Ecological Civilization during the European Union with the European Green Deal. Both of them emphasized that industrial policies should not worsen environmental conditions. The similarity of perceptions in this vision causes no competition to occur.

Even so, the European Union has the competence as an actor committed to leading the issue of climate change. This commitment has even been seen since the first UNFCCC negotiations and proposed the largest carbon emission reduction target among industrialized countries in the 1997 Kyoto protocol negotiations<sup>69</sup>. However, the role of the European Union in environmental governance is more of a mediator in the issue of climate change. The European Union is transitioning from a 'superpower' on environmental issues to a multilateral actor in climate change politics<sup>70</sup>. It was driven by the failure of the 2009 Copenhagen Convention because the European Union was too ambitious with its policies that required significant changes for other countries. Meanwhile, the Paris Convention in 2015 succeeded in producing a Paris Agreement with mitigation targets that exceeded expectations. The role of the European Union is achieved by actively negotiating the issue of climate change in various forums such as the G20 and making bilateral

15 September.

[https://ec.europa.eu/clima/news/eu-co-hosts-major-international-climate-meeting-canada-and-china\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/clima/news/eu-co-hosts-major-international-climate-meeting-canada-and-china_en)

<sup>69</sup> Oberthür, S., & Roche Kelly, C.. EU leadership in international climate policy: achievements and challenges. *The international spectator*, 43(3), (2008) 35-50.

<sup>70</sup> Oberthür, S., & Groen, L. The European Union and the Paris Agreement: leader, mediator, or bystander?. *Wiley Interdisciplinary Reviews: Climate Change*, 8(1), (2017).

contacts. Based on the facts above, the European Union is indeed an actor that can become a leader but has chosen to transition its role as a mediator in an increasingly multilateral global political environment.

Meanwhile, China, the actor's position, which is also strong, can become a leader in global environmental issues, especially Xi Jinping stated in 19<sup>th</sup> Chinese Communist Party Congress that China is ready to a leadership role in global climate change issues. However, China seems reluctant to take this position because China's position is clearly stated in the UN Climate Change Summit that China is a developing country and is entitled to special treatment based on its status as a developing country, such as getting assistance in mitigating climate change from developed countries because of China's status as a developing country<sup>71</sup>. Many among Chinese elite and general public still emphasize that China is developing country. During Confucius' 2,565th birthday celebrations in 2014, Chinese President Xi Jinping declared that China is still a developing country, and its responsibilities should be commensurate with its status<sup>72</sup>. Xiaoyu Pu<sup>73</sup> argue that China do not want categorize as developed and hegemon countries. First, Chinese officials have a long tradition of opposing

superpower status. Secondly, Chinese elite and general public still emphasize that China is a developing country. Thirdly, Chinese intellectuals and policy makers are ill prepared for China's sudden high profile in global affairs.

China has chosen to maintain its status as the largest developing country in the Common but Differentiated Responsibilities and Respective Capabilities (CBDR-RC) classification. It could be seen when EU has advocated for a Paris Agreement that includes commitments from all parties, it has also advocated for differentiation among countries with respect to their capabilities and responsibilities. However, many countries that previously did not have binding climate mitigation obligations, including India, China, and a number of other countries, maintained their previous structures to the greatest extent possible and emphasized the importance of industrialized countries in terms of ambition and efforts<sup>74</sup>. Based on Franziska Petri & Katja Biedenkopf analysis that China are top contender that challenged the EU in particular ways and promoted specific interpretations of the CBDR principle in the UNFCCC negotiations, were China with 58 statements pertaining to CBDR<sup>75</sup>. China perception as developing country can also be seen in Chinese document titled "Common but Differentiated Responsibilities"<sup>76</sup>. that assert

<sup>71</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China (2019) UN Climate Action Summit: China's Position and Action, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/wjdt\\_665385/2649\\_665393/t1698088.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjdt_665385/2649_665393/t1698088.shtml)

<sup>72</sup> Fish, Isaac Stone (2014) Is China Still a 'Developing' Country? *Foreign Policy* (25 September 2014) <https://foreignpolicy.com/2014/09/25/is-china-still-a-developing-country/>

<sup>73</sup> Pu, Xiaoyu. "Controversial identity of a rising China." *The Chinese Journal of International Politics* 10.2 (2017): 132

<sup>74</sup> Petri, Franziska, and Katja Biedenkopf. "Common but differentiated responsibility in international climate negotiations: the EU and its contenders." *European Union Contested: Foreign Policy in a New Global Context* (2020): 35-54.

<sup>75</sup> Petri & Biedenkopf, 2020, 41

<sup>76</sup> Consulate General of the People's Republic of China in Sydney (2010) Common but Differentiated Responsibilities (30 September 2010)

China as “As a major developing country and CO2 emitter”. The Chinese government persist that China are the biggest developing country from the speech of State Councilor and Foreign Minister Qin Gang at the Opening Ceremony of The Lanting Forum on Chinese Modernization and the World that take place in Shanghai at 21 April 2023<sup>77</sup>.

CBDR-RC classifies the capabilities and responses of various countries related to climate change issues based on the conditions of their countries according to the 1992 UNFCCC treaty<sup>78</sup>. The CBDR-RC difference between developing and developed countries is the commitment of these countries in mitigating climate change. Developed countries are responsible for providing monetary funds to developing countries in mitigating threats to climate change<sup>79</sup>. It can be seen that China does not take the opportunity to become a hegemon in global environmental governance because it does not want to give up its status as a developing country. China wants to perceive itself as the leader in climate governance for the Global South country<sup>80</sup>. Then, China avoided becoming hegemon in global

[http://sydney.china-consulate.gov.cn/eng/zlgdt/202208/t20220825\\_10752661.htm](http://sydney.china-consulate.gov.cn/eng/zlgdt/202208/t20220825_10752661.htm)

<sup>77</sup> Embassy of the People’s Republic of China in the Republic of Kiribati (2023) Chinese Modernization: New Opportunities for the World (21 April 2023) [http://ki.china-embassy.gov.cn/eng/zgyw/202304/t20230424\\_11064369.htm](http://ki.china-embassy.gov.cn/eng/zgyw/202304/t20230424_11064369.htm)

<sup>78</sup> UNFCCC, *United Nation Framework Convention on Climate Change* (1992) <https://unfccc.int/resource/docs/convkp/conveng.pdf>

<sup>79</sup> UNFCCC, *Introduction to Climate Change*, (2021) <https://unfccc.int/topics/climate-finance/the-big-picture/introduction-to-climate-finance/introduction-to-climate-finance>

<sup>80</sup> Qi, Jianfeng Jeffrey, and Peter Dauvergne. "China's rising influence on climate governance: Forging a path for the global South." *Global Environmental Change* 73 (2022)

environmental governance because it did not want to be perceived as hegemon. Instead, it wanted to maintain its status as developing countries, and assert influence as the leader of the Global South.

Besides, China also has domestic history to not institutionalize the idea as a solution to climate problems. One of China's most pressing environmental issues has been the combination of sulphur dioxide (SO<sub>2</sub>) emissions and acid rain. The Chinese government has expressed a great deal of interest in the SO<sub>2</sub> emission trading plan in order to address these issues. Despite the government's enthusiasm, the US government's and other international organizations' full support, and the overall success of the pilot projects in a number of Chinese localities, SO<sub>2</sub> emission trading was never institutionalized in any of the Chinese provinces, making it essentially unavailable<sup>81</sup>.

China carried out what was prearranged and agreed upon. Interestingly, China shows a desire to be a leader but not a hegemon in climate change governance. Because hegemony has negative connotation in the Chinese context<sup>82</sup>. Leadership is seen as "humane authority" rather than hegemony by the Chinese high-ranking officials<sup>83</sup>. Yan Xuetong furthermore explain that idea of ‘humane authority’ (wang) promotes the values of benevolence (ren) and justice (yi) in guiding decision-making<sup>84</sup>. In short, China

<sup>81</sup> Shin, Sangbum. "China's failure of policy innovation: the case of sulphur dioxide emission trading." *Environmental Politics* 22.6 (2013): 918-934.

<sup>82</sup> Pu, 2017, 132

<sup>83</sup> Yan, Xuetong. "From keeping a low profile to striving for achievement." *The Chinese Journal of International Politics* 7.2 (2014): 153-184

<sup>84</sup> Yan, 2018, 8

is against the narrative of hegemony status, but accept the idea of leadership that are based on Chinese characteristic.

Therefore, China and the European Union are in a position not to compete on climate change. This leaves the hegemon's position on the issue of change still unfilled. This dynamic, of course, has implications for the Sino-American rivalry, given that the United States, under the leadership of Joe Biden, intends to return to the Paris Agreement. This certainly could be an opportunity for the United States to fill this hegemonic void, even though the United States has lagged in terms of influence and commitment because China has started to show that it is an excellent power responsible for environmental issues. This is undoubtedly a challenge for the United States when it returns to the Paris Agreement. The United States needs to demonstrate its serious commitment to the international community in global climate governance.

## Conclusion

United States withdrawal from the Paris Agreement became a crisis in global climate governance. The United States is a country that provides a sizable grant and conducts much research related to climate change issues. Of course, this withdrawal caused uneasiness for the international community. The United States cannot be monitored for its behaviour, considering that the United States is one of the largest emitters. Furthermore, this withdrawal will encourage other countries to break their commitments

in the Paris Agreement. Besides, this withdrawal of the United States opens up space for a new hegemon in global climate governance. There are two potential candidates, namely the European Union and China. However, the relationship created between the two is not a competition but cooperation. This phenomenon is unique because no one has filled the position as a leader, even though both have the potential and stated that they are ready to take the lead in tackling the problem of climate change. This choice is, of course, related to the implications of competition between China and the United States. In global climate governance, China's choice is undoubtedly an advantage for the United States to return to being a hegemon in governance. Like the two sides of the coin, it is a challenge for the United States to restore its image as a superpower committed to the issue of climate change.

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