The *Paris Agreement* and Global Climate Governance:

China's Role and Contribution

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Abstract: The United Nations Climate Change Conference held in Paris in late 2015 is regarded as a milestone in the progress of global climate governance. Adopting the approach of “Intended Nationally Determined Contributions (INDCs) plus Periodic Review”, the *Paris Climate Agreement* reached at the conference has rejuvenated the multilateral negotiation process and established a hybrid governance structure as the basic framework of the post-2020 climate regime. The Agreement also sends a clear and strong signal regarding the sustainable transformation of the world economy. Through low-carbon economic transformation and international climate diplomacy, China played a leadership role in achieving the *Paris Agreement*, which ushered in a new era for the international community to combat climate change. The future of global climate governance will depend on the follow-up measures of all contracting parties, and China should continue to show climate leadership in the post-Paris era.

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The United Nations Climate Change Conference held in Paris in late 2015 is widely regarded as a milestone in the progress of global climate governance. The *Paris Agreement* reached at the conference has established the basic framework of the post-2020 climate regime. As French President Francois Hollande proudly announced at the closing session, "The 12th of December 2015 will go down in the history of the planet. In Paris, we have seen a few revolutions over the last few centuries. But today, this is the most beautiful and peaceful revolution that has just been achieved, a revolution for climate change."¹

What does the *Paris Agreement* mean for the world? What kind of role did China play in achieving the Paris deal? How can China make greater contributions to global climate governance? This article will first trace the evolution of the international climate regime and analyze its development phases as well as dilemmas in combating climate change. It then tries to highlight some breakthroughs in the *Paris Agreement* and their implications for future climate governance. Finally, it explores the role that China played in striking the Paris deal, and gives some recommendations on China's continued efforts in the post-Paris era.

Global Climate Governance: From a Top-Down Model to a Bottom-Up Approach

The human-induced climate change began as an issue discussed only within the scientific community, including at the First World Climate Conference organized by the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) in 1979. It did not attract enough political attention until ten years later when the UN Environmental Programme (UNEP) and WMO initiated the preparation process for negotiations on a framework convention on climate

¹Gwynne Taraska, *The Paris Climate Agreement* (Washington, D.C.: Center for American Progress, December 15, 2015), p. 1, <https://cdn.americanprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/15030725/ParisClimateAgreement.pdf>.

change. Since then, international efforts to combat climate change have been intensified. Judging from the form of the governance structure, the evolution of the international climate regime can be divided into four phases.

The regime-building process started with the emergence of a top-down model represented by the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), which, in spite of its comprehensive and forward-looking recommendations, did not specify any responsibilities for each nation. The UNFCCC set ultimate climate objectives based on climate science rather than political reality. As a typical evidence of the top-down model, Article 4.2 of UNFCCC required developed countries to “return individually or jointly to their 1990 levels these anthropogenic emissions of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases not controlled by the Montreal Protocol.”² Moreover, the UNFCCC laid out basic principles and rules for a new round of climate negotiations to finally work out a protocol in which specific aims and timetables for each developed country would be included.

On March 21, 1994, the UNFCCC came into force, symbolizing the formal establishment of the top-down climate governance model. To make the UNFCCC operational, the First Conference of the Parties of UNFCCC (COP) in 1995 adopted the “Berlin Mandate” to negotiate a new protocol. As a result, the *Kyoto Protocol* was eventually reached at COP 3 in December 1997, which enhanced the top-down nature of the UNFCCC. The *Kyoto Protocol* set quantified targets for emission reduction listed in Annex B for developed countries respectively and collectively. Though developed countries were given some freedom to fulfill their commitments through flexible mechanisms,³ there was no doubt that the *Kyoto Protocol* only prescribed a single kind of international commitment, namely, fixed emission targets for Annex B parties during the 2008–2012 commitment period. In

²United Nations, *United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change*, 1992, p. 12, http://unfccc.int/files/essential_background/background_publications.htmlpdf/application/pdf/conveng.pdf.

³The *Kyoto Protocol* established three flexible mechanisms to help developed countries to attain their emission targets under the Protocol, namely, Emission Trading (ET), Joint Implementation (JI), and Clean Development Mechanism (CDM).

addition, all these targets were economy-wide and subject to detailed international accounting rules, in order to determine whether a party realized its own targets.

Soon after the *Kyoto Protocol* took effect in 2005, the international community set out to draft the post-2012 climate governance arrangement. COP 11 launched a new process to reach an “agreed outcome” to advance the climate regime with a scheduled end at the Copenhagen COP 15 in December 2009. COP 15 did not achieve any agreed outcome except for a politically binding *Copenhagen Accord*, which embraced a fundamentally different architecture from the UNFCCC and *Kyoto Protocol*. The *Copenhagen Accord* allowed each party in Annex B to determine their own post-

2012 emission targets, base year, and accounting rules. Jonathan Pershing, the U.S. deputy special envoy for climate change, called the *Copenhagen Accord* a “paradigm shift” in the long-term path of the UNFCCC negotiations, from top-down designation to country-up delineation of responsibilities.⁴ One year later, the *Cancun Agreement* completely enshrined all the contents of the *Copenhagen Accord*, which largely overturned the top-down climate regime and marked the beginning of a climate governance transformation.

Given the failure of the Copenhagen Climate Conference, developed countries increasingly advocated for a bottom-up model of responsibility sharing in subsequent climate negotiations. Therefore, when the Durban Climate Conference decided to initiate a new round of climate negotiations for the post-2020 arrangement, the majority of developed countries not only required all parties to accept the identical nature of climate commitment under one single international agreement, but also put forward the key notion of “Intended Nationally Determined Contributions (INDCs).”

The Copenhagen Conference in December 2009 marked the beginning of a bottom-up model of global climate governance.

⁴Jane A. Leggett, *A U.S. Chronology of the International Climate Change Negotiations*, CRS Report for Congress, 2011, p. 4, <http://fpc.state.gov/documents/organization/157062.pdf>.

Initially, BASIC countries⁵ and other developing countries strongly opposed the notion, believing it would only serve the interests of developed countries. But with time, they came to accept the proposal and agreed on the adoption of the “Lima Call for Climate Action” that formally required all parties to submit their INDCs. It was thus unsurprising that the bottom-up model of climate governance was built in the Paris Conference characterized with the “INDCs plus Review” approach.

It is no exaggeration to say that the *Paris Agreement* was historic and unprecedented. Nevertheless, some enduring dilemmas still remain in the evolution of the global climate regime since its inception in the late 1980s.

First of all, there is a constant contradiction between the stringency of climate agreements and the ambition of climate commitments. Climate change is typically a public concern, implying a controversy regarding the provision of public goods and free riding.⁶ Driven by national interests, almost all countries would like to shoulder fewer stringent climate responsibilities, which results in two problems in international climate negotiations. For one thing, the more stringent the climate targets are, the less willing each party is to implement these targets. All the nations involved in international climate negotiations are inclined to propose the lowest climate targets they could adopt, thus increasing the possibility of diluting the legal stringency of climate agreements. As a result, the legal nature and ambition of climate agreements could be sacrificed, just as the UNFCCC, *Kyoto Protocol*, *Copenhagen Accord*, and *Paris Agreement* have showcased. In fact, the UNFCCC might be the only climate regime designed in accordance with the progress of climate science, while the subsequent climate agreements were more based on politics and largely ignored new scientific findings. For the other, the loose stringency of climate agreements has led to the prominent gap between commitment and implementation. Both the *Kyoto Protocol* and *Cancun Agreement* have set emission reduction targets for relevant parties. Nonetheless, their legal

⁵BASIC, which stands for Brazil, South Africa, India, and China, is a new climate coalition composed of major developing countries formed on the eve of the UN Climate Change Conference in 2009 whose main aim is to coordinate their negotiating stances on future climate agreements.

⁶Wang Can, Jin Zhugang, and Cai Wenjia, “Incentive to Free Ride in International Climate Cooperation,” *Environmental Economics*, Vol. 4, No. 2 (2013), pp. 88–92.

stringency was weak with very few strict rules to supervise the implementation process. Based on the latest Global Emission Gap Report released by the UNEP, a large emission gap still exists with regard to the 2°C emission reduction target for the whole world.⁷ Meanwhile, for a number of countries, the credibility of implementing current climate commitments stays at a low level.⁸

Second, both the traditional top-down model and the relatively new bottom-up approach might prevent contracting parties from making ambitious climate commitments. The top-down model was once thought of as the best way to combat climate change, with those compulsory emission reduction goals set for each party. However, this model usually requires difficult and tedious domestic ratification processes. A number of countries balked at joining the *Kyoto Protocol* due to the time-consuming domestic procedure for ratification. The United States, then the world's largest greenhouse gas emitter, even decided to withdraw from the Protocol because of congressional opposition. Given the shortcomings of the top-down model, the negotiating parties tried to reverse the current design of climate governance and invented the bottom-up approach. Therefore, more positive elements in subsequent climate agreements were found, which could help overcome existing difficulties. Indeed, the bottom-up model encourages broader participation, yet it is still not easy to guarantee the effectiveness of climate commitments from all parties involved.

Third, developed countries and developing countries have long disagreed on how to share responsibilities based on their current and historical emission volumes. Since the outset of international climate negotiations in the 1980s, distribution of responsibilities among developed and developing countries has been a contentious issue. The world's major greenhouse gas emitters as they have been for centuries, developed countries were

An equitable responsibility-sharing mechanism is yet to be adopted by all nations, developed and developing alike.

⁷UNEP, *The Emissions Gap Report 2015* (Nairobi: United Nations Environment Programme, November 2015).

⁸Alina Averchenkova and Samuela Bassi, *Beyond the Targets: Assessing the Political Credibility of Pledges* (Leeds: Centre for Climate Change Economics and Policy, February 2016).

unsatisfied with the UNFCCC decision that they should take first action in combating climate change while developing countries had no compulsory obligations. Since 1992, developing countries have been requested by developed countries to accept compulsory climate obligations. The overall emission from the four BASIC countries — China, Brazil, India, and South Africa — in 2009 increased 221.6 percent, 22.2 percent, 89.6 percent, and 34.4 percent respectively, compared with the 1997 level when the *Kyoto Protocol* was passed. In the meantime, the GDP per capita of 32 well-performing developing countries exceeded the poorest members of the European Union.⁹ Against this backdrop, it has been agreed upon that both developed and developing nations should make legally binding climate commitments. The question then is how to balance responsibilities among countries with different national circumstances. Doubtless to say, equity will continue to be the core issue in future climate negotiations.

What the *Paris Agreement* Implies for the World

The *Paris Agreement* was a great success compared with previous deals, since it has mobilized broader participation and pledges from a wide range of greenhouse gas emitters. U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry called it a tremendous victory for all on the planet and for future generations.¹⁰ As a framework arrangement for post-2020 climate governance, the *Paris Agreement* indeed contains something substantially different from the past.

For the first time in the history of climate negotiations, the *Paris Agreement* puts all parties, developed and developing countries alike, under one legally binding framework. The international climate regime prior to the *Paris Agreement* usually divided the participating parties into two groups: Annex I (developed) and non-Annex I (developing) countries, whose climate obligations were different in both nature and content. For example, the UNFCCC and *Kyoto Protocol* only set obligations for

⁹Andrei Marcu, "The 2015 Climate Agreement: What's in it for the EU," Center for European Policy Studies, October 17, 2014, p. 4, <https://www.ceps.eu/system/files/CEPS%20Commentary%20Marcu%202015%20Climate%20Agreement.pdf>.

¹⁰G. Ananthakrishnan, "China, Russia, Venezuela and Arab States Support Paris Agreement," *The Hindu*, December 13, 2015, <http://www.thehindu.com/sci-tech/energy-and-environment/cop21-climate-change-summit-at-paris-china-russia-venezuela-and-arab-states-support-paris-agreement/article7983278.ece>.

developed countries. When obligations of developing countries were put on the negotiation agenda, two tracks — namely, AWG-KP and AWG-LCA¹¹ — were initiated to deal with climate commitments for developed and developing countries respectively. Later on, with the establishment of the Ad Hoc Working Group on the Durban Platform for Enhanced Action (ADP) in 2011, three negotiating tracks began to develop in parallel. Due to different commitments from developed and developing countries, there were always some overlapping issues under the three tracks which complicated the climate negotiation process. To streamline the negotiation process, an international agreement that applies to all relevant parties was thus urgently needed.

Featured with the “INDCs plus Periodic Review” approach, the *Paris Agreement* fundamentally changes the traditional climate governance model. As two examples of the top-down approach, the UNFCCC listed a very general objective of “stabilization of greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere at a level that would prevent dangerous anthropogenic interference with the climate system,” while the subsequent *Kyoto Protocol* set a more specific regional target for developed countries in accordance with the aims and principles of UNFCCC. The UNFCCC and *Kyoto Protocol* to some extent ensured the effectiveness of climate efforts from the willing, yet they resulted in inadequate participation of other countries at the same time.

The UN Copenhagen Climate Conference in 2009 also highlighted such a dilemma. Since then, the *Cancun Agreement*, Doha Gateway, and Lima Call for Climate Action have all absorbed bottom-up elements in their design. The *Paris Agreement* further pushes forward the climate objective by aiming to hold the increase in the global temperature to well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels and pursue efforts to limit the temperature to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels, as well as achieve a balance between anthropogenic emissions by sources and removals from sinks of greenhouse gases in the second half of the 21st century. More significantly, the *Paris Agreement* has almost completely adopted the bottom-up model although it still keeps several top-down measures for supervision. Typically, the INDCs were accepted as the major parameter to determine each

¹¹AWG-KP stands for Ad Hoc Working Group on Further Commitments for Annex I Parties under the *Kyoto Protocol*, and AWG-LCA stands for Ad Hoc Working Group on Long-term Cooperative Action under the Convention.

country's climate commitments in the post-2020 era. As a precautionary measure against weak commitments, the mechanism of international review is also adopted by the *Paris Agreement*, which will be conducted every five years from 2023 on.

In addition, great importance has been attached to climate adaptation in the *Paris Agreement*. Mitigation and adaptation have long been two integral parts of international efforts against climate change. However, climate mitigation is usually prioritized over adaptation in the global climate agenda. For instance, the Kyoto targets set for developed countries actually focused on mitigation. In the run-up to Paris, the UN climate conferences held in Doha and Lima significantly lifted their emphasis on adaptation. In Paris, adaptation was formally listed as one of the three goals for future climate regime. The *Paris Agreement* requires all parties to take stock of adaptation efforts every five years as INDCs and achieve a balance between financial resources allocated to mitigation and adaptation. Therefore, adaptation will receive the same level of visibility as mitigation.¹² Meanwhile, items related to adaptation appear independently as Article 7 and 8 in the Agreement, which aim to increase the ability to adapt to the adverse

impacts of climate change and foster climate resilience and low greenhouse gas emissions. Moreover, the *Paris Agreement* recognizes the importance of averting, minimizing, and addressing loss and damage. In this light, adaptation will achieve a more balanced position in the post-2020 climate regime.

As the outcome of the five-year climate negotiation, the *Paris Agreement* has been hailed by many as a landmark deal while some others labeled it as a total hogwash and "epic failure."¹³ These diverging views do

Integrating multiple actors and market forces, the *Paris Agreement* boasts a pragmatic and sustainable approach to combating climate change.

¹²Ralph Bodle, Lena Donat, and Matthias Duwe, "The Paris Agreement: Analysis, Assessment and Outlook," Background paper for the Workshop "Beyond COP21: What Does Paris Mean for Future Climate Policy?" Berlin, January 28, 2016, p. 11, http://ecologic.eu/sites/files/event/2016/ecologic_institute_2016_paris_agreement_assessment.0.pdf.

¹³Jessica Cheam, "Paris Climate Change Agreement: A Game-changer or Epic Failure?" *The China Post*, December 23, 2015, <http://www.chinapost.com.tw/commentary/china-post/special-/2015/12/23/454179/Paris-climate.htm>.

not change the fact that the *Paris Agreement* will have far-reaching implications for future global climate governance.

First, the *Paris Agreement* has rejuvenated the multilateral negotiation process and incorporated climate change into the global political agenda. Many doubts have been cast on the effectiveness of UNFCCC and its multilateral mechanism after nearly three decades of climate negotiation, which grew even stronger after the unsuccessful UN Climate Conference in Copenhagen in 2009. Fortunately, the *Paris Agreement* has helped to change the landscape. The Paris talks were widely seen as “make-or-break” for the UN process and the fruition of the Agreement proves that multilateralism still works for the planet.¹⁴ Furthermore, the *Paris Agreement* opens a new journey for international climate efforts, whose principles such as solidarity, equity, and sustainability will reframe complex issues for human beings and set examples for resolving other global issues.

Second, the hybrid governance structure embodied in the *Paris Agreement* will prevail in the post-2020 climate regime. Among the many innovations made in the Agreement, the new responsibility-sharing model and bottom-up approach will enable countries to make operational commitments based on their own national circumstances. In the meantime, the Agreement establishes a transparency mechanism to supervise the implementation of INDCs and urges all parties to lift their ambitions of INDCs by periodic reviews (top-down approach). With this hybrid approach, the *Paris Agreement* has successfully engaged the United States without having to secure ratification from the U.S. Congress. Some scholars believe that the international community should accept this “ungainly patchwork of formal and informal institutions” as the new normal and make the most of it.¹⁵

Third, the *Paris Agreement* sends a clear, strong, positive and long-term signal for the sustainable transformation of the world economy. The past three decades have witnessed comparatively disappointing achievements on combating climate change. Previous climate agreements failed to fully consider the market approach and incorporate non-governmental actors

¹⁴Fiona Harvey, “Paris Climate Change Agreement: The World’s Greatest Diplomatic Success,” *The Guardian*, December 14, 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2015/dec/13/paris-climate-deal-cop-diplomacy-developing-united-nations>.

¹⁵Joshua Busby, “After Paris: Good Enough Climate Governance,” *Current History*, January 2016, p. 3, http://www.currenthistory.com/Busby_CurrentHistory.pdf.

such as the civil society and business sectors. In comparison, messages are clearly extended from the *Paris Agreement* that transformation towards low-carbon development will be realized in two ways. On the one hand, the global objectives of temperature increase and emission control set in the *Paris Agreement* will help optimize the existing energy mix. To attain all these climate goals proposed by the Agreement, as much as 80 percent of known fossil fuel reserves must remain unexploited and unburned, which means 100 percent of tar sands, 82 percent of coal, 49 percent of gas, and 33 percent of oil must be left undeveloped.¹⁶ The implementation of INDCs means that renewables will make up 78 percent of the power generation source in major economies by 2030.¹⁷ On the other hand, the *Paris Agreement* will also redirect the financial flows into low-carbon investment. More and more countries have committed new financial supports to the Green Climate Fund (GCF) after the Paris Conference, reaching more than \$10 billion in total. Dr. Jim Yong Kim, President of the World Bank, also pledged to increase the Bank's climate financing to as much as \$29 billion annually by 2020.¹⁸ Meanwhile, more than \$5.3 trillion direct and indirect subsidies from different governments to the fossil industries must be reduced.¹⁹

Finally, the *Paris Agreement* will present both opportunities and challenges for the effectiveness of post-2020 international climate efforts. In terms of opportunities, the Agreement encourages more countries to participate in the international climate efforts, including the United States, which will greatly enhance the authority of the future climate regime. Up till now, 195 countries, which account for 95 percent of the world's total emission, have submitted their INDCs. In terms of challenges, although the Agreement facilitates broader participation in the international climate regime, it might also make climate commitments less ambitious. For instance,

¹⁶Hal Rhoades, "COP Out: The Hollow Promise of the Paris Climate Deal," Gaia Foundation, December 16, 2015, http://www.gaiafoundation.org/cop_out_why_the_paris_agreement_is_hollow.

¹⁷Nick Mabey *et al.*, *Judging COP21 Outcomes & What's Next for Climate Action?* Third Environmental Generation (E3G), December 2015, p. 2, judging-cop21-outcome-and-whats-next-for-climate-action.

¹⁸Kim Jim Yong, "Climate Action after Paris," Project Syndicate, December 16, 2015, <https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/paris-climate-accord-further-action-by-jim-yong-kim-2015-12>.

¹⁹Rhoades, "COP Out: The Hollow Promise of the Paris Climate Deal."

the EU's climate-energy target for 2030 seems to be a wise move if taking politics as a benchmark, but it will be far from adequate when taking policy as a benchmark.²⁰ Similarly, to keep global climate change within the internationally agreed limit target of 2°C, the United States needs to strengthen its commitments to ensure its fair share of required actions.²¹ Based on estimation of the current INDCs submitted by 195 countries, the increase of global temperature will likely reach 3°C, casting doubt on the effectiveness of the international climate regime.

China's Leading Role in Achieving the *Paris Agreement*

Since China was projected to be the world's largest greenhouse gas emitter, criticism has been growing over China's role in the climate negotiation, especially during the UN Copenhagen Conference in 2009. Six years later in Paris, China was still faced with mixed international reactions, and some negotiators even criticized China for being a laggard during the first week of the Climate Conference.²² However, when the *Paris Agreement* was finally settled, China received warm applause from the international community as a leader in combating climate change.

China's climate efforts can be traced back to the late 1990s when it began to change its attitude toward the *Kyoto Protocol*. When the Fifth Session of the UNFCCC Conference of the Parties (COP5) was held in Bonn, Germany from October 25 to November 5, 1999, China gave up its objection to the adoption of Kyoto flexible mechanisms in combating climate change. Later, China began to actively take part in these mechanisms and quickly became the largest host country of Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) projects. According to latest statistics from the UNFCCC Secretariat, China ranks No. 1 in registered CDM projects and expected Certified Emission

²⁰Rafael Leal-Arcas and Luigi Carafa, "Road to Paris COP21: Towards Soft Global Governance for Climate Change?," *Renewable Energy Law and Policy Review*, Vol. 5, No. 2 (2014), p. 134.

²¹Don Henry, "How the US's Post-2020 Climate Target Could Fit into a Global Deal," *The Conversation*, April 3, 2015, <http://theconversation.com/how-the-uss-post-2020-climate-target-could-fit-into-a-global-deal-39696>.

²²Pilita Clark, "COP21: China Accused of Blocking Progress at Paris Climate Talks," *Financial Times*, December 8, 2015, <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/2/15be0e10-9dca-11e5-b45d-4812f209f861.html#slide0>.

Reductions (CERs), whose world share is 48.7 percent and 59.8 percent respectively.²³ On November 25, 2009, China's State Council announced that China would reduce its intensity of carbon dioxide emissions per unit of GDP in 2020 by 40 to 45 percent compared with the level of 2005, and it integrated such a target into its 12th Five-Year Plan. Moreover, China also established many climate programs and laws, so as to promote realization of its planned climate targets. Thus China has established quite a comprehensive system in climate mitigation both domestically and internationally.

At the domestic level, China has formulated a blueprint for developing a low-carbon economy, paving the way for its further involvement in international climate talks. China has made remarkable achievements in low-carbon development and set a good example for other countries since the launch of the post-2020 climate negotiation process. By 2014, China's GDP per unit of energy use and greenhouse gas emission per capita had been reduced by 29.9 percent and 33.8 percent respectively compared to the 2005 level.²⁴ And the share of renewables in China's energy mix is expected to increase from 13 percent in 2010 to 26 percent in 2030, which will help save up to 228 billion dollars per year for the Chinese economy.²⁵ As commented by Shamshed Akahtar, UN Under Secretary-General and Executive Secretary of the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, China now leads the world in clean-energy investment, with \$81 billion (£ 54 billion) invested in 2014 alone, and has emerged as a renewable energy innovation and manufacturing powerhouse.²⁶ China also ranks first in the

²³UNFCCC, "Distribution of Expected CERs from Registered Projects by Host Party," http://cdm.unfccc.int/Statistics/Public/files/201606/ExpRed_reg_byHost.pdf; and UNFCCC, "Distribution of Registered Projects by Host Party," http://cdm.unfccc.int/Statistics/Public/files/201606/proj_reg_byHost.pdf.

²⁴Yan Zheng, "Bali Xieding: Zhongguo Canyu Quanguo Qihou Zhili Xinqidian [Paris Agreement: New Starting Point for China's Engagement in Global Climate Governance]," *People's Daily*, December 14, 2015, <http://opinion.people.com.cn/n1/2015/1214/c1003-27923174.html>.

²⁵IRENA, *Renewable Energy Prospects: China, REmap 2030 Analysis* (Abu Dhabi: International Renewable Energy Agency 2014), p. 1.

²⁶Lan Lan, "Praise for China's Role in Paris Agreement," *Telegraph*, December 21, 2015. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/sponsored/china-watch/politics/12055693/praise-for-china.html>.

Global Forest Resources Assessment report in terms of net forestland which increased 1,542 thousand hectares per year during 2010–2015.²⁷ All these statistics indicate that China is transforming itself and preparing for a low-carbon future.

On June 30, 2015, China made a robust commitment of emission reduction by formally submitting its INDCs: to lower carbon dioxide emissions per unit of GDP by 60 to 65 percent from the 2005 level; to increase the share of non-fossil fuels in primary energy consumption to around 20 percent; and to increase the forest stock volume by around 4.5 billion cubic meters based on the 2005 level.²⁸ This ambitious goal marks a significant progress from the business-as-usual (BAU) development for China, which will help slow the rise of global greenhouse gas emissions. Peaking carbon dioxide emissions around 2030 would reduce China's emissions by at least 1.7 Gt, or 14 percent, from the most optimistic BAU scenario.²⁹

At the international level, China's diplomatic efforts have also contributed significantly to the conclusion of the Paris deal. On the one hand, China's "move-first" strategy gave great impetus to the Paris climate negotiation. China and the United States issued two joint announcements on climate change in December 2014 and September 2015, which generated substantial momentum for the Paris Conference. Laurence Tubiana, the French climate negotiator commented at EuroActiv France that, "the announcement was very positive, and very important for the negotiation process: the two largest emitters committing to reduce their emissions, it's simply remarkable."³⁰

On another hand, China has been working tirelessly to narrow differences between different parties. Through bilateral climate

²⁷FAO, *Global Forest Resources Assessment 2015: Desk Reference* (Rome: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 2015), p. 10.

²⁸NDRC, *Enhanced Actions on Climate Change: China's Intended Nationally Determined Contributions* (Beijing: National Development and Reform Commission of China, June 2015), p. 5.

²⁹C2ES, *China's Contribution to the Paris Climate Agreement* (Arlington: Center for Climate and Energy Solutions, July 2015), p. 1, <http://www.c2es.org/docUploads/chinas-contributions-paris-climate-agreement.pdf>.

³⁰Aline Robert, "Laurence Tubiana: 'EU-China Climate Agreement is Conceivable,'" EurActiv.com, January 28, 2015, <http://www.euractiv.com/section/climate-environment/interview/laurence-tubiana-eu-china-climate-agreement-is-conceivable/>.

announcements, China has vastly promoted mutual understandings among negotiating parties.³¹ Meanwhile, China has adopted active and flexible negotiating positions, making every effort to win the support of different parties. To push the post-2020 climate negotiation forward, China no longer contended over the political implications of the “Common but Differentiated Responsibility (CBDR)” principle, but focused on what each party should do in the future climate regime and placed more emphasis on common responsibility rather than differentiated responsibility.³² The deep engagement of China in the run-up to the Paris Conference helped create opportunities for consensus building between developed and developing countries. When attending the Paris Conference, President Xi Jinping joined

China’s economic transformation and proactive climate diplomacy were indispensable to the conclusion of the *Paris Agreement*.

in candid and practical dialogues with other leaders and offered four constructive suggestions for the Paris deal.³³ At the final stage of the Paris climate negotiation, President Xi articulated China’s political will to strike the deal in his communication with U.S. President Barack Obama. The Chinese negotiating team led by Xie Zhenhua and Su Wei also engaged in the Paris negotiation in a responsible, cooperative, and constructive way.

³¹Bilateral Climate Announcements between China and major negotiating parties include: “U.S.-China Joint Presidential Statement on Climate Change” (September 25, 2015), “U.S.-China Joint Announcement on Climate Change” (November 12, 2014), “Joint Statement on Climate Change between the Government of PRC and the Government of the Federation Republic of Brazil” (May 19, 2015), “Joint Statement on Climate Change between India and China” (May 15, 2015), “China and France’s Joint Presidential Statement on Climate Change” (November 2, 2015), “UK/PRC Joint Climate Change Statement” (June 17, 2014), and “EU-China Joint Statement on Climate Change” (June 29, 2015).

³²Bin Zhang, “Qihou Tanpan: Zhongguo Lichang Weibian [Climate Negotiation: China’s Stance Slightly Changed],” *Economics Observer*, December 8, 2014, <http://www.eeo.com.cn/2014/1205/269681.shtml>.

³³The four suggestions can be summarized as “Four Should’s”: First, The *Paris Agreement* should help meet the goals of the UNFCCC and chart the course for green development; second, the Agreement should help galvanize global efforts and encourage broad participation; third, the Agreement should help increase input of resources to ensure actions on climate change; and fourth, the Agreement should accommodate the national conditions of various countries and lay emphasis on practical results.

Moreover, President Xi pledged at the UN Sustainable Development Summit in September 2015 to set up an Assistance Fund for South-South Cooperation, to support other developing countries to implement the post-2015 development agenda. Later at the opening ceremony of the Paris Climate Conference, President Xi further declared that "China will launch cooperation projects to set up ten pilot low-carbon industrial parks and start 100 mitigation and adaptation programs in other developing countries and provide them with 1,000 training opportunities on climate change."³⁴

In sum, China has played a leading role in the successful conclusion of the *Paris Agreement*. As Mr. Xie Zhenhua, China's Special Representative for Climate Change put it, "China's constructive role started at the Copenhagen summit six years ago, which some thought was a failure, and many people later recognized and praised our contributions."³⁵

Conclusion

As Chinese President Xi Jinping observed, the Paris Conference was not the finishing line but a new starting point. The *Paris Agreement* has ushered in a new era for the international community to combat climate change. On April 22, 2016, Earth Day, representatives from 175 countries gathered at the UN headquarters in New York to sign the *Paris Agreement*, which paved the way for its early implementation. Then what should be the next steps? The most important one for now is that all contracting parties should guarantee in-time domestic ratification of the Agreement and propose detailed and viable action plans. In the long run, nations have to maintain their political momentum to aim for more ambitious INDCs.

With regard to China's future role, it should definitely continue to show leadership by taking concrete climate actions in the post-Paris era. Vice-Premier Zhang Gaoli has declared that China will finish all legal

³⁴Xi Jinping, "Work Together to Build a Win-Win, Equitable and Balanced Governance Mechanism on Climate Change," Speech at the Opening Ceremony of The Paris Conference on Climate Change, Paris, November 30, 2015, http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/topics_665678/xjpfpgcxqhbhldhdjbbwnfjxgsfwbfnyhnsbzczhzltfh/t1321560.shtml.

³⁵Li Jing, "Paris Climate Talks: China Goes from Back Foot to Big Leap Forward in Negotiations," *South China Morning Post*, December 13, 2015, <http://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy-defence/article/1890963/paris-climate-talks-china-goes-back-foot-big-leap>.

procedures before the G20 Hangzhou Summit in September 2016. As further steps, China needs to integrate its most updated climate commitments into the 13th Five-Year Plan and other policy plans. In the meantime, China should also be actively engaged in climate negotiations under the Ad Hoc Working Group on the *Paris Agreement*, trying to make those ambiguous or undecided items increasingly clear and enforceable. During the process, it is of great importance that China should keep pushing developed countries to improve their INDCs and quicken their domestic ratification process.