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## China's Role in Global Governance in The Post-COVID-19 Era

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*China's role in global governance system has attracted the attention of the international community since 2008, and academic discussions on China's role have been continuing. With the ongoing global transformation, scholars are increasingly focused on the growing impact of China's status as a major power on the global governance system and the world order. This paper discusses China's role in global governance in the context of post covid-19 from the perspectives of China's regional, international, and global identity. The article argues that China is rising as a regional power, but China's significance in the international community lies between that of a regional power and a global power. However, currently, China still lacks the capability and inclination to assume a leading role in global governance due to inadequate conditions and experience. China's stance on global governance is rooted in the original post-World War II United Nations Charter and China's influence on global governance is constructive and complementary. China's BRI serves as an international public good provided to the international community, especially to the Eurasian states. It holds significant implications for regional and global governance, ultimately contributing to global welfare.*

**Keywords:** Global governance, China's role, regional power, Belt and Road Initiative

Global governance is a process, a process in which the existing global governance system with nation state as its key units is parallel with the emerging governance networks with regions as its key units. The outbreak of Covid-19 pandemic in 2020 has changed the original ecology of international relations, which has been described by Chinese scholars as profound changes unseen in a century. More and more international observers pay attention to China's role in global governance in post covid-19 era. With the deterioration of Sino-US relations and

the continuation of the Russo-Ukraine war in the context of post covid-19 pandemic, China's role in global governance has become a hot topic of international concern, which will be evaluated and analysed in this paper.

Since the concept of global governance was invented and used in UN in 1992, all institutional design and international practice on global governance are basically the production of western countries trying to reshape the world. In the international practice of the transition from the colonial era to the post-colonial era, global governance is an idealized "homogenization" institutional arrangement of the global order by western countries based on the unit of nation-state. Since the end of World War II, the global public goods supply mechanism dominated by western powers has basically satisfied the needs of global institutions such as UN, WB and IMF. This kind of institutional arrangement also formed of the global capitalist market, and after the end of the Cold War, it covered the countries and regions dominated or influenced by the former Soviet Union. However, when global capitalism develops to a certain stage, new systemic crises will emerge. On the one hand, the global industrial structure and supply chain formed under the capital logic of "winner takes all" has exacerbated the unfair distribution among countries and the gap between rich and poor, forming structural contradictions; The willingness and ability to supply public goods of global governance institutions have weakened, and it is difficult for emerging powers to fill this vacancy in the short term. In fact, global governance has been more localized and regionalized since the second half of the 20th century and the interaction of different actors in international politics is more concentrated at the regional level. The supply of regional public goods requires a stable power structure and material Power support, the role of major power in regional governance is indispensable. Therefore, how major powers, regions, play a role through regional mechanisms in the global governance requires more in-depth studies.

This article argues that global governance is still a system of an anarchy world, and that major powers are the most important players in global governance. However, one special power just like China should be analyzed in detail, not only from the reality of international politics, but also from a power's

historical experiences and geo-strategy to discuss. From the perspective of a long historical period, the role of the G2, G7 or G20 in global governance is short-lived. Since the beginning of the 21st century, China's role in global governance gets more and more important. However, most current research works are based on the existing great power theory, and there are not many discussions on the relationship between region and great power in global governance, and the understanding of China's status in global governance is also biased. On the basis of sorting out the existing research literature, starting from the discussion of China's regional identity and global identity, this paper regards the Belt and Road Initiative as China's international practice entering into regional governance and global governance, analyzes China's role in global governance, and believes that China is a prudent global power.

#### **Academic discussion on China's role in global governance**

Since the global financial crisis in 2008, there has been a significant increase in research on global governance transition and China's role (Li, et al., 2015; Jianwei & Weiqing, 2016; Taylor, 2017). In terms of Chinese scholarship, on the one hand, in light of global power shift and China's growing power, some scholars have put forward theories and countermeasures commensurate with China's international status. The representative ones are the international relations theory of "moral realism", the global governance plan of "extensive consultation, joint contribution and shared benefits" (also known as the "China plan") as well as China's "Belt and Road" initiative (Xuetong, 2015; Yuyan, 2016; Lee & Jinghan, 2019). On the other hand, given the gap in theory and practice between domestic governance and international governance, some scholars believe that China should take a prudent attitude in participating in global governance, and they advocate that China's role in global governance should be brought into play through relationalism or multilateralism (Yongnian & Wenxing, 2015; Yaqing, Hongzhou, & Lumin, 2018; Yaqing & Ling, 2018). In terms of international scholarship, European and American scholars, represented by David Shambaugh, Ken Lieberthal, and David M. Lampton, have expressed concern about the unpredictability of China's future. They consider China as a "partial power" and an uncertain role in future global governance (Lieberthal, 2011;

Shambaugh, 2013; Shambaugh, 2018; Kennedy S. , 2017). Scholars such as Martin Jacques and Kishore Mahbubani think positively of China's new role in global governance. Looking at the failures of global governance from a Global South or Asian perspective, these scholars think of China as an emerging force leading global governance, as can be seen in the discussions on G2(US-China) co-governance and BRICS countries (Jinghan & Breslin, 2016; Kirton & Larionova, 2018). The above-mentioned discussions on the relationship between China and global governance have their rationality to some extent. Nevertheless, there are limitations of different disciplinary backgrounds or scholars' positions as well.

### **China's role from a regional power to a global power**

What is China's role in global governance in the post covid-19 era? The first section provides a review of existing literature on China's role in global governance, the following section first examines China's global identity and regional identity in the historical background and realistic dynamics, and then analyzes China's regional and global status.

To start with, it is impossible to separate the three levels of China's internal, regional, and global governance. The significance of global governance for China should be analyzed objectively in three dimensions: China as a country, a regional actor and as a global actor, which contains the historical evolution of the relationship of China internally, China and East Asia, as well as China and the world. To understand the relationship between China and the world, some Chinese scholars use history as an approach to reconstruct China's position in the world. Wang Gungwu, Ge Zhaoguang, and Wang Hui have reconstructed the discourse on "China" from Chinese history, not only tracing the legitimacy of China's way of governance from history, but also placing China in the evolution of the world system since modern times. The discussion of "China" is reconstructed from Chinese history itself, both in terms of the legitimacy of Chinese governance and in terms of the evolution of the world system since modern times (Beng, 2014; Hui, 2017). China is "an 'intermediate country' connecting the past and the future in human history, and a 'bridge country' that bridges the relationship between traditional developed and developing countries. China is at a special stage of social development and has a distinctive

civilizational tradition. China is difficult to fit into a certain 'category', but it needs to be integrated into the whole world" (Jisi, 2013). Historically, the Middle Kingdom was firstly a geographical and conceptual concept, and then a political entity. For a long time, China existed independently in an inland East Asian system of "Chinese frontier" interaction, which "in most cases is not a strategy of active construction, but more embodied in the spontaneous expansion of the openness and demonstration of Chinese culture. This enhanced the stability of the international system in ancient East Asia (Cheng, 2012, p. 22). China's state form had been a continental endogenous dynastic empire until the nineteenth century. Since the Opium Wars, China gradually interacted with the Western world through sea lanes. Since the late nineteenth century, China has ceased to be an endogenous state and China's state governance has been deeply embedded in domestic, regional, and global levels of governance. The interactions and connections between China and East Asia, as well as China and the world, were activated in the second half of the 20th century by the great global changes and material and technological innovations (Buzan & Lawson, 2016). East Asian international relations were transformed from the earlier imperial model to the regional political interaction of a group of heterogeneous countries, With China playing as an important regional power, East Asia has become increasingly important in the global landscape.

Furthermore, China's role in the international community is somewhere between that of a regional power and that of a global power since 2008, China has been playing an increasingly important role in the international community. The international academia mostly explains the rise of China through American scholars' theories such as Paul Kennedy's "Rise and fall of Great Powers" and Graham Allison's "Thucydides's trap". However, both theories are mostly based on Western experience. As such, they fail to do justice to China's development direction and even bring misconceptions (Kennedy P. , 2010; Allison, 2017). The status signals that China gives to the international community are contradictory, on the one hand, it presents the identity of an emerging great power, and on the other hand, it shows the low posture of a vulnerable developing country (Xiaoyu, 2019, p. 100). Such contradictory status signals have made it difficult for the

international community to understand China's foreign policy and have caused a certain degree of anxiety and unease outside of China. Therefore, it is necessary to provide a clear analysis of China's role in the transformation of global governance. The author believes that China should first and foremost be a regional power (an imperial type of regional existence in the early periods). In the process of economic globalization since the second half of the 20th century, China has fully mobilized its resources through its nationwide system, conformed to and adapted to international rules, and thus increased its national power in a short period of time. The rise of China, first and foremost in East Asia, was the result of the reform and opening up policy of the Chinese government and the revival of the "tributary system and the Asian economic circle" connecting China's southeast coast with the outside world (Hamashita, 2013). Korean-American scholar David C. Kang argues that China did not rise suddenly given that China has a long history in East Asia and no other countries in the world has dominated a region for as long as China has done (Kang, 2017). In terms of power, China is indeed a rising global power. However, if positioned as a global power, China does not have a stable global political, economic, and military network, nor does it have the ability to supply institutional public goods on a global scale. China cannot afford to bear the global responsibilities in the reality of international politics. And more China lacks the experience in balancing its status as a great power with its global responsibilities while building a new world order. Since 1978, China has been a participant and contributor to the global governance system dominated by the UN, WTO, WB and so on. Confronting the new global challenges, China should be both a defender and a successor of the existing global order, and an advocate and reformer of new international order. Of course, in the transformation of the global order, China cannot afford to take on global responsibilities beyond its capacity and the "strategic overdraft" in foreign affairs will have a negative impact on the China's future.

### **China's "Belt and Road" Initiative and Global Governance**

"Belt and Road" is the abbreviation of "Silk Road Economic Belt" and "21st Century Maritime Silk Road". In September and October 2013, when China's president Xi Jinping visited Kazakhstan and Indonesia, he proposed to jointly

build the "Silk Road Economic Belt" and the "21st Century Maritime Silk Road" with relevant countries. The construction of the "Belt and Road" is important for China to open up to the outside world under new conditions, and it is an important practical platform for promoting the construction of a community of shared future for mankind. Rooted in the history of the ancient Silk Road, this initiative has inherited and carried forward the Silk Road spirit centered on peace and cooperation, openness and inclusiveness, mutual learning, mutual benefit and win-win results. The "Belt and Road" initiative upholds and follows the principle of extensive consultation, joint contribution and shared benefits, and is committed to achieving policy coordination, facilities connectivity, unimpeded trade, financial integration and people-to-people bonds, which is an initiative of development, cooperation, and openness. The construction of the "Belt and Road" spans different regions, different development stages, and different civilizations and provide public goods jointly created by China's governance and countries along the OROB. In the past 10 years, the Chinese's BRI has received the response and participation of more than 160 countries and international organizations, and "Belt and Road" has appeared in the reports of the United Nations General Assembly and the United Nations Security Council as keywords. The deepening of policy communication between China and related countries, the continuous strengthening of infrastructure connectivity, the continuous improvement of unimpeded trade, the continuous expansion of financial integration, and the continuous promotion of people-to-people bonds will provide more impetus for world economic growth and open up more space for international economic cooperation. Therefore, China's BRI is an important plan for China to participate in global governance, and it is of great significance for developing countries in Eurasia to participate in the global governance system.

China's position in Eurasia is formed naturally and historically. From a geographical perspective, China is located to the east of the Himalayas and the terrain is high in the west and low in the east and adjoins the islands on the west coast of the Pacific Ocean and a natural water area is connected to the Indian Ocean through the waters of the South China Sea around Southeast Asia. The relationship between China and neighboring countries that observers on

international politics pay attention to today is actually the relationship between empires and vassal states, core and peripheral areas in history and China used to be a natural hub of regional connection in Asia in history also. "One Belt and One Road" is a natural extension of the China-centered governance network to the surrounding areas, and it has fundamental significance for optimizing and integrating regional resources and promoting the strategic interact of different countries in the region. Since the China's government put forward BRI in 2013, it has put the "interconnection" of infrastructure in an important position and promoted regional governance with the construction of "roads, belts, corridors, and bridges" as the fulcrum. The digital infrastructure construction, cloud services, and networking technologies promoted by Chinese companies such as Huawei and Alibaba have been recognized by neighboring countries and regions and have played an important role in preventing the covid-19 epidemic. Despite facing the economy downward brought by the covid-19 epidemic, ASEAN has become China's largest trading partner since 2020, which shows that the BRI has achieved in Southeast Asia. However, the current academic discussions on China's "Belt and Road" are mostly at the level of investment, policies and programs, and the actual technical operation and monitoring and evaluation are still insufficient. Regarding BRI, there are also critical voices, for example, western society has constantly questioned where BRI will bring about the "debt trap" and neo-colonialism. Former Chinese Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi pointed out in an interview: "There are some different voices in the world regarding the 'Belt and Road' initiative, which they believe is China's geopolitical tool and may create debt traps for relevant countries. This is clearly subjective and unfair understanding to BRI and it is misunderstanding, misjudgment or even prejudice." This paper believes that the China's BRI should be based on monitoring through a set of digital and intelligent parameters and indicators on public policy systems, which can track the process of regional governance to avoid geo-risks, respond to emergencies, promote good regional governance, and then promote global governance.

### **China's own positioning: a prudent global power**

Today's globalized world is the result of the Industrial Revolution originated from European and American countries. The decline of the global governance system is not only caused by the crisis of global capitalism in the high stage, but also the decline of the world order dominated by western countries. Since 2008, the so-called "centered globalism" is gradually transiting to the "decentered globalism" (Buzan & George, 2015). The Covid-19 pandemic has accelerated this process, and the shock brought about by the transformation of the global order has become more severe. Different regions and countries will temporarily retreat to their own regions, rethink the impacts and threats of economic globalization to their homeland, and re-examine the non-traditional security issues they confront in areas such as hygiene, health and the environment. The global challenges call for new means to deal with it, and the "China's way" is one of the options. However, China has no historical experiences in governing the world outside China, besides, "Chinese experiences" is only applicable to countries or regions with the same historical circumstances as China, and the practices of relevant countries are still in exploring. Positioning China as a global power has been proved to be harmful by the Covid-19 pandemic, due to the fact that apart from economic influence, China currently does not have the qualifications to become a global power in the fields of politics, military, technology and health etc. In addition, the strategic overdraft brought by the world morality and international responsibilities of a global power has been learned from other countries' experiences. As for global governance, the Chinese model is currently confined to the economic field, and there is no mature experience in the political, social, cultural, and other fields. Therefore, China's role in global governance is first of all "glocalization". Rooting in East Asia, based on Asia, and eye on the world is the proper foothold of China in the regional and global governance. The G2 of US-China, BRICS mechanism or the "Belt and Road" Initiative should not be regarded as the top-level design of China's participation in global governance and the overemphasis on China's global role is a vital theme which needs to be discussed in a broader context since the human beings still live in an anarchy world.

In light of the gradual decline of the existing global governance system and the rise of anti-globalization wave triggered by the global Covid-19 pandemic, Chinese scholars have begun to reflect on the effectiveness of global governance. Among them, regional studies have emerged as a pivotal area for theoretical contemplation and international engagement. On the one hand, considering the continued dominance of nation-states in the international system, it is prudent for China to maintain its influence through participation in established international organizations such as the UN, WTO, and IMF, ensuring a smooth and orderly transformation of global governance. On the other hand, REGION is a more flexible social and historical unit than nation-state. As such, it is advisable for China to develop a comprehensive theoretical framework and discourse on regional governance and expand its influence in the international practice of in East Asia and other regions worldwide (McKinney, 2018).

### **Conclusion**

As a rising power, China has become a new player in global governance, however, global governance is a complex system and what China could do is limited. For example, China's role in global governance is still limited in the two events of covid-19 epidemic and Russia-Ukraine war in which the fragility of the global governance system is full exposed at the beginning of the third ten years in the 21<sup>th</sup> century. Therefore, all countries in the world need to assume relevant responsibilities and obligations in global governance. Of course, as a critical power, China can continue to play an important role in the post-epidemic global governance system. First of all, China can continue to play a role in the current global institutions, strive for the right to speak internationally in accordance with existing rules, spread new ideas that can represent the interests of emerging countries, and balance the impact of "neoliberal" values originating in Europe and the United States on global governance, making up the deficiencies of the existing global governance system. Secondly, China must take the initiative to cultivate a governance network from a regional perspective, in which China's authority, leadership and influence could be reflected through regional governance networks as a major power. The Belt and Road Initiative is a new approach to regional governance and how this constructive strategy is compatible with the existing

global governance system dominated by Western countries needs to be promoted in China's international practices and international cooperation.

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