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China brings certainty to changing global climate order

Global climate governance is entering a period of transition: The old order is rapidly unraveling, while a new framework is gradually taking shape. The 30th Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, held in Belém, Brazil, in 2025, was the first such gathering to take place without official participation by the United States. Even so, delegates adopted the Belém Political Package and made substantive progress. The outcome reaffirmed multilateral cooperation as the principal avenue for climate governance and laid an institutional foundation for the full implementation of the Paris Agreement on Climate Change over the coming decade.

Amid this uncertainty, China is bringing a measure of stability and momentum to global climate governance—upholding multilateralism through concrete action, anchoring expectations in coherent long-term commitments, driving down costs through large-scale industrial development, and enabling broader emissions reductions through inclusive cooperation.

China injects conceptual certainty into global climate governance by firmly upholding multilateralism through the vision of building a community with a shared future for humanity and the Global Governance Initiative. Working within the framework of the Paris Agreement,

it helped secure provisions opposing unilateral measures in the conference's outcome documents while also supporting the development of a just-transition working mechanism. This brings employment protection, social equity, and industrial transformation more firmly into the institutional framework of climate governance.

China's joint launch of the Open Coalition on Compliance Carbon Markets with the European Union and Brazil also signals a shift from following carbon-market rules to actively shaping global carbon-pricing governance. Complementing this initiative, China is advancing the standardized development and large-scale rollout of zero-carbon industrial parks, building an integrated system of standards encompassing carbon accounting, the use of renewable electricity, circular production, and carbon-management platforms, while developing demonstration projects that can be replicated and scaled up.

At the institutional level, China's targets for peak carbon emissions and carbon neutrality have driven the steady improvement of mechanisms for green and low-carbon development. Since President Xi Jinping announced the country's "dual carbon" goals at the 75th Session of the UN General Assembly in September 2020, China has established a "1+N" policy framework for achieving them.

Now comprising more than 130 policy documents, this institutional architecture covers all major areas of economic and social development, including energy, transportation, technology, and finance. By providing industry and technological innovators with a clear, predictable long-term policy environment, the framework has helped foster the world's largest green industrial ecosystem.

China's green and low-carbon development is also moving beyond a purely techno-economic paradigm. Institution-building translates medium- and long-term emissions commitments into near-term rules and incentives, while consistent policy signals shape how markets assess future costs and returns. In this way, China is bringing greater institutional certainty to global climate governance.

At the technological level, China is reshaping the economics of global emissions reduction through green productive forces. For more than a decade, it has been the world's largest investor in and producer of clean energy, as well as the leading force behind falling green-technology costs. By the end of 2025, China's installed renewable power capacity had approached 2.34 billion kilowatts, accounting for roughly 60% of its total installed power-generation capacity.

Renewables overtook thermal power for the first time in history, allowing China to meet its original 2030 renewable-energy capacity target ahead of schedule and cementing its position as the principal driver of global renewable-energy expansion.

The global spillover effects of China's green productive forces extend beyond exports of finished products to the international diffusion of production equipment and technical standards. The massive scale of Chinese manufacturing, combined with continuous innovation, has placed clean-energy costs on a more predictable downward trajectory, reducing the volatility that once characterized the sector. This has substantially lowered the risks and discount rates associated with low-carbon transitions worldwide and fundamentally altered developing countries' expectations about access to clean energy.

In international cooperation, China has sought to break the zero-sum logic of climate governance by linking climate action to shared development. Under the framework of South-South cooperation on cli-

mate change, it has provided and mobilized more than 177 billion yuan (roughly US\$26 billion) in project funding for developing countries since 2016. China has signed 54 climate-cooperation documents with 42 countries, conducted more than 300 capacity-building programs, and trained over 10,000 officials and technical personnel from more than 120 developing countries. The significance of this model extends well beyond the scale of its financial support: By coupling climate cooperation with industrial development and cultivating countries' own capacities, it has opened a "development-oriented" path distinct from traditional approaches to aid.

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A wind farm in Yumen, Jiuquan, northwest China's Gansu Province, which provides sustained clean power support for the construction of a 10-million-kilowatt wind power base and the implementation of low-carbon development strategies along the Hexi Corridor. Photo: IC PHOTO



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Expanding the self: Chinese art of growing within relationships

As a subdiscipline of sociology, family sociology has long taken the family and kinship as its principal objects of study. Although this naturally entails studying individuals within families, the field has traditionally concentrated on meso-level questions such as family relations, structure, functions, change, and culture.

Over the past two decades, rapid social change and the broadening scope of social science research have brought new issues to the fore, including the gendered division of labor within families, motherhood and child-rearing, eldercare, and the allocation of family resources.

The individual has come more clearly into focus, as seen in growing attention to the rights and interests of women and older adults. Yet the conception of personhood underlying much of this research remains narrow and one-dimensional. Family members are often cast primarily as rational actors whose interests and needs

take precedence, while their desire for emotional connection, altruism, and other sources of meaning and value is overlooked.

If family sociology aims to promote individual well-being and harmonious relationships within families, it must move beyond this one-sided understanding of the human and recover a more authentic, holistic conception of personhood. While human beings differ in myriad ways, they are also shaped, to some extent, by many similar values and beliefs. For contemporary Chinese people, the traditional Confucian pursuit of "expanding the self" remains a major cultural influence on individual perceptions and behavior.

What makes the concept of *ji*, or the self, distinctive, and why is it particularly well suited to describing the self in Chinese society? The ancient Chinese dictionary *Shuowen Jiezi* (*Discussing Writing and Explaining Characters*) defines *ji* as the "center" (*zhonggong*). To think of oneself is thus to establish

a central point—and inevitably to consider how other people, events, and things relate to it. In this sense, the Chinese conception of *ji* is not that of a fixed, isolated individual. It describes a reflexive process that begins with the self and reaches outward to other people, society, and even the world.

Moreover, in Chinese thought, the self has long been understood as possessing both the capacity and the impulse to embrace others and the external world. The maturity of the self lies not in drawing rigid boundaries or defending a private domain, but in continually enlarging one's mind—growing and finding fulfillment through interactions with others and the ethical practices of everyday life.

This outward movement begins in the reflexive awareness inherent in every individual self. Drawing on this inner order, which is fundamental to their sense of existence, people construct their own lifeworlds. Depending on the historical setting and particular

circumstances, this reflective orientation rooted in *ji* may produce different models of personhood. Yet the fundamental Confucian approach to self-cultivation—expanding the openness and inclusiveness of individual life through the "expansion of the self"—remains at the heart of this cultural tradition.

Understanding *ji* as a central concept in Chinese culture helps explain the new possibilities it offers to contemporary Chinese family sociology. Its reflexivity, inclusiveness, and openness do not preclude diverse values or life experiences. On the contrary, *ji* can encompass both traditional and modern experiences while pointing toward a conception of the person as inherently reflective and capable of continual growth.

Taking *ji* as a point of departure, theoretical exploration in family sociology needs to further integrate Chinese and Western traditions while developing new approaches. In practical terms, family problems are shaped by external circumstances, social

institutions, and historical conditions, but also by individual attitudes, states of mind, and behavior. The spirit of modernity took shape around modes of life among strangers and therefore tends to understand social relations through the lens of individual rights and obligations. This perspective was transformative in defending rights and safeguarding equality and freedom, yet it also has certain limitations. By contrast, long-standing virtues in Chinese culture—including tolerance, clarity of mind, and self-restraint—can offer valuable intellectual and practical insights if they are freed from normative interpretations that reduce them to externally imposed norms and reconnected with the "expansion of the self," with its emphasis on cultivating the mind.

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