

SECTION 2: THE CHINA MODEL: RETURN OF THE MIDDLE KINGDOM

Key Findings

- The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) seeks to revise the international order to be more amenable to its own interests and authoritarian governance system. It desires for other countries not only to acquiesce to its prerogatives but also to acknowledge what it perceives as China's rightful place at the top of a new hierarchical world order.
- The CCP's ambitions for global preeminence have been consistent throughout its existence: every CCP leader since Mao Zedong has proclaimed the Party would ultimately prove the superiority of its Marxist-Leninist system over the rest of the world. Under General Secretary of the CCP Xi Jinping, the Chinese government has become more aggressive in pursuing its interests and promoting its model internationally.
- The CCP aims to establish an international system in which Beijing can freely influence the behavior and access the markets of other countries while constraining the ability of others to influence its behavior or access markets it controls. The "community of common human destiny," the CCP's proposed alternative global governance system, is explicitly based on historical Chinese traditions and presumes Beijing and the illiberal norms and institutions it favors should be the primary forces guiding globalization.
- The CCP has attempted to use the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic to promote itself as a responsible and benevolent global leader and to prove that its model of governance is superior to liberal democracy. Thus far, it appears Beijing has not changed many minds, if any. Countries already skeptical of the CCP's intentions argue it failed to contain the virus where it originated and withheld information until it was too late to avoid a global pandemic. Countries already predisposed to view Beijing favorably have praised its pandemic response.
- The Chinese government's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is both a blueprint and a testbed for establishing a Sinocentric world order. The initiative has no membership protocols or formal rules but is based on informal agreements and a network of bilateral deals with China as the hub and other countries as the spokes. This framework lets Beijing act arbitrarily and dictate terms as the stronger party.
- The CCP seeks to coopt established international governance institutions by increasing its leadership and functionary positions within these institutions and rewriting the norms by

which they operate to align with China's model of international relations. Within these institutions, the Party builds coalitions that support China in the UN and portray its political priorities as supported by international consensus.

- In some cases, Beijing bypasses the existing system by creating alternative international institutions it can influence from the start. Where possible, it excludes the United States and European powers from these institutions, and in some cases the United States chooses not to participate.
- The Chinese government views technical standards as a policy tool to advance its economic and geopolitical interests. It has systematically tried to expand its influence in international standards-setting organizations by installing Chinese nationals in key leadership and functionary positions and pushing standards backed by its industrial policies.

Recommendations

The Commission recommends:

- Congress hold hearings to consider the creation of an interagency executive Committee on Technical Standards that would be responsible for coordinating U.S. government policy and priorities on international standards. This Committee would consist of high-level political appointees from executive departments with equities relating to international technical standards, including the Department of Commerce, the Department of State, the Department of Defense, the Department of Energy, the Office of Science and Technology Policy, and other agencies or government stakeholders with relevant jurisdiction. The Committee's mandate would be to ensure common purpose and coordination within the executive branch on international standards. Specifically, the Committee would:
 - Identify the technical standards with the greatest potential impact on American national security and economic competitiveness;
 - Coordinate government efforts relating to those standards;
 - Act as a liaison between government, academia, and the private sector to coordinate and enhance joint efforts in relation to standards;
 - Manage outreach to counterpart agencies among U.S. allies and partners;
 - Set funding priorities and recommendations to Congress; and
 - Produce annual reports to Congress on the status of technical standards issues and their impact on U.S. national security and economic competitiveness.

Introduction

Beijing seeks to use its growing power to change the international order; ultimately legitimizing its repressive governance system; expanding its economic, security, and political interests; and restoring China to what it views as its rightful place at the center of the

world. Beijing's authoritarian, single-party governance model combines an unorthodox version of Marxism-Leninism, elements from China's philosophical traditions, and a deep-seated national chauvinism. In the CCP's ideal international order, this system would be not just accepted but also universally acknowledged as a superior alternative to democracy. These ambitions are longstanding among Chinese leaders and will likely last beyond the current leadership of General Secretary Xi. For these reasons, the CCP sees itself as engaged in a fundamentally ideological and antagonistic clash of systems with democratic countries and the norms and values undergirding the existing international system. As China's power has grown, the CCP has increasingly sought not only to stamp out the influence of liberal or universal values within China but also to proactively undermine these values and their spread worldwide.

China's BRI* serves as a testbed and forms the relational and economic blueprint for this ambition, weaponizing globalization to create a commercial and political order centered around and dependent on China. Rather than replace the entire existing architecture of international governance organizations to institute this vision, the CCP seeks to coopt elements of the UN-centric international governance system to advocate for its interests and also establish a range of China-led alternative institutions. In systematically expanding its influence in technical standards-setting organizations, Beijing is positioning itself to corner emerging markets and shape the norms underpinning how these technologies are developed and deployed. These efforts, which the CCP believes can succeed due to China's increased economic power, aim to establish an alternative international system favoring its centralized authoritarian power over the constraints of the current rules-based international order. In this system, other countries will not only acquiesce to Beijing's prerogatives but also acknowledge what it perceives as China's rightful place at the top of a new hierarchical world order.

This section addresses the CCP's political characteristics that motivate it to change the international system and its methods for achieving this transformation; its preferred alternative international system and attempts to export aspects of its governance; its use of technical standards to achieve its geopolitical goals; and the implications for the United States. It draws on the testimony prepared for the Commission's March 2020 hearing, "A 'China Model?' Beijing's Promotion of Alternative Global Norms and Standards," the subsequent April roundtable of the same name, open source research and analysis, and consultations with outside experts.

Reshaping the International Order

The CCP seeks to change the international system by bending global governance institutions and norms to better conform to its own interests and authoritarian governance system. As a Marxist-Leninist party, the CCP views itself as an enlightened politi-

*BRI is an economic and foreign policy project designed to finance and build infrastructure and connectivity around the world. Launched in 2013 with an initial focus on Eurasia and the Indo-Pacific region, BRI has now expanded to include economic corridors or passages on all continents, as well as in the Arctic, outer space, healthcare, and the digital domain. For more background on BRI, see "Belt and Road Initiative," in U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, *2018 Annual Report to Congress*, November 2018, 259–303.

cal vanguard uniquely equipped to render “scientific judgments”* about China’s domestic governance system as well as the trend of world history. It is for this reason the CCP believes it will succeed in restoring China to its perceived historical greatness.¹ Moreover, the CCP seeks global respect and recognition for its model of “socialism with Chinese characteristics.” The CCP seeks to revise the international system and the norms underpinning it to view this model as not just acceptable but laudable and superior to liberal democracy. To this end, the CCP hopes to leverage the support of developing countries to reproduce its normative approach not in a sphere of contiguous geographic influence but rather in countries around the world willing to respect and defer to China’s primacy.²

The CCP believes the United States established the current international system to benefit its own material interests and that the Party is now strong enough to create a system of its choice.³ This includes the freedom to break its own rules when it likes, such as its longstanding official policy of “noninterference” in other countries’ internal affairs.[†]⁴ Displacing the United States and the liberal rules-based order it has led since World War II is therefore a prerequisite for the CCP to achieve its goal. Contrary to the liberal order’s basis in rule of law, the CCP rejects the authority of rules or norms to constrain its behavior while also rejecting the idea that it should change its governance system, which relies on censorship and political repression, to comport with the democratic world’s expectations.⁵ As a corollary, Beijing signals to other countries with authoritarian inclinations that they also need not meet these expectations. In recent years, Beijing has become increasingly transparent in its ambitions to export key elements of its own governance system, such as technologically enabled surveillance and censorship and the legitimacy of one-party rule by the CCP. The Chinese government also seeks to popularize internationally the norm that power, not rules-based accountability, is a legitimate basis for political authority locally and globally, as per then Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi’s 2010 assertion that “China is a big country, and other countries are small countries, and that is just a fact.”⁶

*The CCP believes it is uniquely capable of interpreting world developments in an objective “scientific” manner and formulating its strategy to leverage them, first and foremost to promote and protect its own power. During his address at the CCP’s 19th National Congress in October 2017, General Secretary Xi exhorted the Party to “undertake theoretical analysis and produce policy guidance” on developing and reforming the CCP’s governance in response to and in anticipation of changes occurring both within and without China. This process, according to the CCP, is at the core of its supposed unique ability to capitalize on global events. Daniel Tobin, written testimony for U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, *Hearing on A “China Model?” Beijing’s Promotion of Alternative Norms and Standards*, March 13, 2020, 5, 21; Xi Jinping, *Secure a Decisive Victory in Building a Moderately Prosperous Society in All Respects and Strive for the Great Success of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era*, October 18, 2017.

† Despite this official policy, Beijing has repeatedly attempted to coerce other governments into awarding 5G and other telecommunications equipment contracts to Huawei, threatening them with consequences to their bilateral and trade relations with China if they refuse. At the same time, foreign companies consistently face market barriers selling into China. Laura Hughes and Helen Warrell, “China Envoy Warns of ‘Consequences’ if Britain Rejects Huawei,” *Financial Times*, July 6, 2020; Jamie Fullerton, “Chinese Ambassador ‘Threatens to Withdraw Trade Deal with Faroe Islands’ in Huawei 5G Row,” *Telegraph*, December 11, 2019; U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, *2019 Annual Report to Congress*, November 2019, 10, 43–44; *Xinhua*, “Chinese FM Refutes U.S. Allegations, Stresses Adherence to Non-Interference Policy,” September 27, 2018.

Socialism with Chinese Characteristics: Domestic Model, Global Implications

The CCP views its Marxist-Leninist political model as providing the basis for “scientifically” interpreting trends and pursuing international relations and directing China’s efforts to increase its comprehensive national power.*⁷ Beijing has labeled its governance system “socialism with Chinese characteristics” and declared it the best model for developing China’s strength due to the specific attributes of the country, with the ultimate goal of proving to the world that this methodical approach is superior to any other. This supposedly scientific aspect is a core component of the CCP’s ideology, according to General Secretary Xi, who argued in 2013 that socialism with Chinese characteristics “is socialism and not any other kind of -ism; [the CCP] cannot discard the fundamental principle of scientific socialism, or else it would no longer be socialism.”⁸ According to Daniel Tobin, member of the China studies faculty at the National Intelligence University, there is no static “plan in a box” to which the leadership refers as it reforms its policies; rather, the CCP dynamically reassesses circumstances and calibrates its tactics relative to its capabilities and its long-term goal to increase China’s power.⁹ In the CCP’s lexicon, “reform” refers not to liberalizing economic policy, much less its political system, but rather to adapting to changing circumstances and fine-tuning its governance—always with the CCP firmly in control as the vanguard—in pursuit of “un-ceasing improvement.”¹⁰

The CCP believes adhering to this path has rescued China from the collapse of its power in the 19th and early 20th centuries, allowing it to first “stand up” and then “grow rich” before finally “growing strong.”¹¹ According to General Secretary Xi, this course of events has proven “the historical inevitability of the CCP’s leadership of China.”¹² Under this allegedly scientific framework, Mr. Tobin argues, the Party views dissent against its judgment by individuals or groups not as legitimate expression but as sabotage of the state’s unimpeachably correct nation-building effort.¹³ For example, in September 2020 General Secretary Xi rejected foreign criticism of the CCP’s policies in Xinjiang, calling his government’s ongoing campaign to indoctrinate and transform Uyghurs and other Muslims into loyal cadres “totally correct.”¹⁴ Every CCP leader since Mao Zedong has proclaimed the Party would ultimately prove the supe-

*Huang Shuofeng, a researcher at the PLA Academy of Military Science who later held the rank of senior colonel, developed the concept of “comprehensive national power” that CCP leadership adopted in the early 1990s. Although the idea of an aggregate measurement for national strength had already been explored by multiple thinkers outside of China, Huang considered his formulation a new and distinct contribution to the field. Comprehensive national power is an aggregate measure of a country’s material strength, latent potential, and international influence, illustrating that country’s ability to survive, develop, and coordinate its internal and external relations. According to Huang, a measurement of comprehensive national power is constructed through the holistic assessment of a country’s geographic, political, economic, technological, military, diplomatic, cultural, and other characteristics. In February 1990, *People’s Daily* covered an interview with Huang detailing the concept and its significance. This coverage in the Party’s official paper, combined with Deng Xiaoping’s featuring of the term during his famed “Southern Tour” in 1992, likely indicated the CCP’s official adoption of the concept. See Ming Zhang, “China’s Military Great Leap Forward?” *Georgetown Journal of International Affairs* 2:1 (2001): 97–104, 100. Deng Xiaoping, “Deng Xiaoping’s Remarks on the Southern Tour (邓小平南巡讲话),” January 18–February 21, 1992. Translation; Lu Mu, “Year of the Horse New Spring Conversation on National Power—Interviewing Chinese Comprehensive National Power Research Worker Huang Shuofeng (马年新春话国力——访我国综合国力研究工作黄硕风),” *People’s Daily*, February 26, 1990. Translation.

riority of its system over capitalism, according to Mr. Tobin’s testimony to the Commission, which requires the Party to wage a battle for moral legitimacy on the international stage.¹⁵

Under General Secretary Xi, the CCP has more explicitly transitioned its narrative to building China into a great power in the eyes of other countries, requiring the Party to actively shape the international order. Anthony Saich, Director of the Ash Center for Democratic Governance and Innovation at Harvard University, testified to the Commission in September 2020 that at the 2018 Central Conference on Work Relating to Foreign Affairs the CCP assessed that global conditions had become more receptive to China’s rise and to the decline of democratic countries, strengthening its resolve to pursue its core interests on the international stage even more assertively.¹⁶ As General Secretary Xi pointed out in 2018, the CCP’s victory in the Chinese civil war was merely the prologue of a longer story. To reach the climax of this drama, he argued, China must “not only be good at breaking an old world, but become good at building a new world.”¹⁷

A New Middle Kingdom on the World Stage

Reclaiming what Chinese leaders view as China’s rightful place, the “Middle Kingdom”* at the center of world affairs, would fulfill the CCP’s promise to the Chinese people to restore their past glory—a key pillar of the Party’s legitimacy.¹⁸ Beijing’s ambition places China at the top of the international order, able to freely exploit the markets, resources, and networks of others. At the same time, Beijing seeks to constrain the ability of others to influence its behavior or access what it controls. Andrew Scobell, Senior Political Scientist at the RAND Corporation, testified to the Commission in September 2020 that CCP elites believe Beijing must “ruthlessly [battle] to monopolize international markets” in order to win a zero-sum competition with other countries and foreign corporations to acquire control over a fixed amount of natural resources.¹⁹ The Chinese government’s conduct in international commerce already reflects this inclination: the CCP seeks to maintain access to the international markets, technology, and intellectual property (IP) on which China’s growth still depends while limiting other countries’ access to its own market.²⁰

Simultaneously, Beijing’s reaction to international criticism of its behavior increasingly expands on its refusal to tolerate criticism domestically, and it uses economic coercion to force others to defer to its preferences. For example, after then Houston Rockets general manager Daryl Morey tweeted in support of Hong Kong prodemocracy activists in October 2019, the Chinese government severely restricted the National Basketball Association’s business in China, demanded the team “correct [Mr. Morey’s] error,” and reportedly even demanded that the league fire him.²¹ Chinese state television did not resume broadcasting the league’s games until October 2020 (for

*“Middle kingdom” is the literal translation of the Chinese word for “China.” The Qing Dynasty first used this phrase to refer to China in an official legal document in 1689, and the Republic of China adopted it as its short-form name in 1912, followed by the People’s Republic of China in 1949. The most widely accepted interpretation of this phrase is that China sees itself as the center of global culture and civilization that others seek to emulate. Wee Kek Koon, “How China Got Its Name, and What Chinese Call the Country,” *South China Morning Post*, October 5, 2016.

more on Beijing's crackdown on Hong Kong protesters and imposition of a new security law for the territory, see Chapter 5, "Hong Kong").²²

Contrary to the post-World War II international system, the CCP desires a new framework that requires other countries to defer to its own economic, security, and political interests, creating a dynamic in which China's power and interests take precedence over rules. This system would not be value driven in the sense that the liberal rules-based order privileges individual human rights; rather, it would prioritize collective growth and countries' right to make decisions based on their alleged "particular" circumstances as long as they do not impact Beijing's interests.²³ Also key to the CCP's model is the goal of legitimizing the use of coercion to interfere in other countries' politics and to engineer consent for its policies, contrary to accepted practice and its own claims of noninterference.²⁴ Nadège Rolland, an expert at the National Bureau of Asian Research, testified to the Commission that the CCP seeks "anti-ideological" changes that simply erode the normative influence of the current system.²⁵ The result will create space for the CCP's belief in "might makes right" to gain ground over rules-based norms, effectively creating a new norm.

General Secretary Xi has advocated for a new global governance concept that would institutionalize China's preeminence. He has echoed Mao Zedong's call for China to "stand tall in the forest of nations," and according to Mr. Tobin he desires "nothing less than preeminent status within the global order."²⁶ At the CCP's 19th National Congress in October 2017, General Secretary Xi vowed national rejuvenation would see China become "a global leader in terms of comprehensive national power and international influence."²⁷ Since General Secretary Xi took power, the CCP has increasingly promoted the "community of common human destiny,"* a concept for a new international community influenced by historical Chinese traditions and underpinned by an organizing vision that offers to unite the whole world, despite its differences, under the CCP's harmonizing influence.

It is through the "community of common human destiny" that the CCP will finally secure what General Secretary Xi has called "the ultimate demise of capitalism and the ultimate victory of socialism," and he has ordered CCP cadres to be faithful and to be prepared to make sacrifices to achieve this goal.²⁸ Ms. Rolland testified to the Commission that the "community of common human destiny" signifies General Secretary Xi's rejection of the idea that liberal democracy is the pinnacle of human society.²⁹ It also makes the case that other countries should join it in rejecting the liberal democracy-dominated international order because this China-centric governance system presents an equally if not more viable option and will not expect them to liberalize or protect human rights.³⁰

Mr. Tobin testified to the Commission that the only difference between the ambitions of Hu Jintao, the previous CCP general secretary, and Xi Jinping is their assessment of China's strength and

*This phrase is variously translated by Chinese and foreign sources as "community of common human destiny" or "community of shared future for mankind." See the textbox below for more on this concept. Nadège Rolland, "China's Vision for a New World Order," *National Bureau of Asian Research*, January 2020, 36–37.

capabilities, presaging the current view that the CCP should use its economic strength to increase its international influence.³¹ Then General Secretary Hu, who advocated for a “harmonious world” that resembled a less assertive proposal for the “community of common human destiny,” called for Chinese officials to use economic interdependence to increase China’s international clout. He argued in a 2004 speech to Chinese diplomats that the CCP must exploit the interconnected nature of political and economic diplomacy to protect China’s political and economic security simultaneously, using their mutually reinforcing relationship to “improve China’s international status and influence.”³²

The “Community of Common Human Destiny”: China-Centric Global Governance

Beijing’s ideological framework for its global leadership ambitions is loosely drawn from what both CCP officials and Chinese academics view as China’s rich philosophical and historical traditions combined with elements of the CCP’s Marxist-Leninist system. Regardless of specific terminology, the highest levels of CCP leadership explicitly endorse basing modern Chinese governance on its ancient heritage.³³ The “community of common human destiny,” a term then General Secretary Hu used as early as 2012 but which General Secretary Xi has refined and increasingly tied to Beijing’s global leadership ambitions, evokes the concept of *tianxia*, or “everything under heaven.”³⁴ *Tianxia* is a term to describe the historical view* of a hierarchical international system characterized not by rules and borders but by China’s central role and the moral authority of the leaders in Beijing over other power centers, which complements the CCP’s Marxist-Leninist view of itself as the elite vanguard.³⁵

As a proposed global governance concept, the “community of common human destiny” is based on the assumption that China’s development and the world’s development are interdependent and that the Party should be the primary force guiding this symbiosis.³⁶ A 2018 state-backed study of CCP strategy published by Fudan University describes the “community of common human destiny” as “the contemporary Chinese Marxist cultural form of China moving toward and leading the world” and as China’s post-19th National Party Congress “global cultural strategy.”³⁷ According to the State Council Information Office, the “community of common human destiny” is “at the core” of BRI, General Secretary Xi’s signature foreign policy initiative to finance and build infrastructure around the world, indicating it is bound to Beijing’s growing international ambition.³⁸

*The term is literally Chinese for “everything under heaven,” in reference to the emperor holding the mandate of heaven, and everything else falling under his authority. The concept of *tianxia* was first proposed during the Zhou dynasty (roughly 1046–221 BCE), and its Confucian emphasis on hierarchy remained a “powerful influence” on China’s view of itself throughout China’s dynastic history, according to Australian scholar Richard Rigby. It still holds currency in political thought through China’s later Republican and current Communist eras and is deeply connected to the idea of the “Middle Kingdom.” Richard Rigby, “*Tianxia* 天下,” *China Story*, 2013.

The Party Seeks Greater “Discourse Power” to Set the International Agenda

The CCP seeks to use its increased material power to augment what it calls its “discourse power,” or the ability to actively shape the discourse of others so that international narratives both praise the CCP and refrain from threatening it, just as domestic Chinese narratives do.³⁹ According to a May 2018 *People’s Daily* article, the main advantage the CCP has in strengthening its discourse power is its economic prowess and “orderly model of development,” which China can hold up as an example to other countries.⁴⁰ Crucially, Beijing is not advocating simply for its perspective to be more influential, but rather for it to be effectively the only perspective that matters, as is the case within China. The CCP’s discourse power depends on its ability to make international narratives converge with its own, drowning out or silencing dissenting narratives.⁴¹ For example, Chinese officials frequently urge other countries to refrain from criticizing China and to adopt the “correct” or “proper” view of China and their relationship with it.⁴²

Beijing’s proposal of its model as an alternative for developing countries is distinct from the old Maoist strategy of fomenting global revolution, but it is nevertheless a form of export.* In his testimony to the Commission, David Shullman, senior advisor at the International Republican Institute, suggested it may be more useful to describe the CCP’s activities as “popularizing” authoritarian governance, lending support to governments that are suspicious of universal values or accountability.⁴³ The CCP’s strategy purports to build consensus for the changes it seeks by offering aspects of authoritarian-enabling governance to foreign governments and providing technological and political support for those that adopt these methods.⁴⁴ For example, to market aspects of the CCP’s governance in Africa, the International Department of the CCP, which cultivates relationships with foreign political parties as part of Beijing’s drive to bring global governance more in line with its own vision,† has established academies in both China and Africa.⁴⁵ These academies train African cadres in issues including public opinion management, targeted poverty alleviation, and how CCP committees operate.⁴⁶ The International Department’s efforts demonstrate a desire to inculcate CCP narratives, suppress criticism of the CCP, and teach participants to emulate the CCP’s governance goals and structure

* Under Mao, beginning in the 1940s the CCP supported guerilla warfare against colonial powers and extolled the virtues of its Communist system, but the CCP’s current export of its model is of a different type entirely. Julia Lovell, “Mao’s Global Legacy of Revolution and Bloodshed,” *Wall Street Journal*, October 4, 2019.

† The International Department has targeted members of U.S. political parties as well. For example, then Deputy Minister of the International Department Liu Jieyi and other Chinese officials participated in the Fourth High-Level Meeting between Chinese and American Political Parties in 2011, which both Republican and Democratic officials attended. In December 2017, the Republican National Committee treasurer gave a speech at the International Department’s High-Level World Political Parties praising the CCP’s proposal for a “community of common human destiny,” according to Xinhua. Xinhua, “Xi Jinping Attends the Opening Ceremony of the High-level Dialogue between the Chinese Communist Party and World Political Parties and Deliver the Keynote Speech” (习近平出席中国共产党与世界政党高层对话会开幕式并发表主旨讲话), December 1, 2017. Translation. http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/leaders/2017-12/01/c_1122045499.htm; Embassy of the People’s Republic of China in the United States of America, “The Fourth High-Level Dialogue between Chinese and American Political Parties Held in Washington” (第四届中美政党高层对话在华盛顿举行), December 12, 2011. Translation. <http://www.china-embassy.org/chn/gdxw/t1885906.htm>.

(for more on the International Department's engagement with African governments, see Chapter 1, Section 3, "China's Strategic Aims in Africa").*⁴⁷

The International Department has relationships with over 600 political parties in more than 160 countries, and since 2013 it has sent high-level briefing teams to countries all around the world to explain CCP policies and the advantages of Beijing's approach to governance.⁴⁸ In July 2019, the department hosted a symposium in Baku for over 120 Azerbaijani politicians, think tank staff, and media representatives to extoll the virtues of Xi Jinping Thought, and in November 2019 for the same reason it hosted a forum in Nanchang with at least 300 attendees representing more than 50 foreign political parties from over 60 countries.⁴⁹ Yun Sun, an expert at the Stimson Center, testified to the Commission that even if this training does not always persuade other governments to adopt elements of the China model, it is clear Beijing is intent on pursuing strategic ideological goals in marketing its model.⁵⁰ In other words, the Party is "marketing and selling [its model] to consumers abroad," as senior fellow and director for Asia studies at the Council on Foreign Relations Elizabeth Economy testified to the Commission, but it is also determined to force consent for its priorities where necessary.⁵¹

Beijing Offers "Chinese Wisdom" to the World

The CCP's narrative of China's national rejuvenation promises to increase its material power and strengthen its moral leadership. At the 19th Party Congress in 2017, General Secretary Xi proclaimed the CCP offered "Chinese wisdom" to other countries, "a new option for other countries and nations who want to speed up their development while preserving their independence."⁵² Crucially, in this context, national rejuvenation would not merely achieve geopolitical objectives of attaining power but also redress grievances from what Chinese leaders call the "century of humiliation,"[†] which Beijing believes robbed it of its rightful global leadership.⁵³ According to Australian National University scholars Michael Clarke, Jennifer S. Hunt, and Matthew Sussex, General Secretary Xi's emphasis on the moral narrative of China's national rejuvenation most gravely threatens the international order due to its assertion that Chinese civilization offers a superior development model to the rest of the world.⁵⁴ Raising just this question of the CCP's intent to shift the paradigm of morality in the international system, in 2019 Chinese State Councillor Yang Jiechi argued China must "transform" existing

*For more on the CCP's political training in Africa, see U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, *Hearing on China's Strategic Aims in Africa*, May 8, 2020; and Will Green, Leyton Nelson, and Brittny Washington, "China's Engagement with Africa: Foundations for an Alternative Governance Regime," *U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission*, May 1, 2020.

†Chinese leaders describe the period between the Qing Dynasty's (1636–1911) defeat at the hands of the British during the first Opium War (1839–1842) and the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949 as China's "century of humiliation." They attribute China's humiliation specifically to a series of military defeats by European powers, Russia, and Japan. The phrase disregards a number of domestic governance challenges that contributed to the erosion of the Qing Dynasty, including a series of uprisings during the late 19th century, as well as fractious infighting between regional elites and warlords that prevented unification of Republican China in the first part of the 20th century. Alison Kaufman, "The 'Century of Humiliation,' Then and Now: Chinese Perceptions of the International Order," *Pacific Focus* 25:1 (April 2010): 1–33, 1–2; Jonathan Spence, *The Search for Modern China*, 2nd Ed., W. W. Norton and Company, 1999, 141–143, 152–191, 267–270.

global governance concepts and “seize the commanding heights of international morality and justice.”⁵⁵

Beijing Leverages COVID-19 Crisis to Promote Its Model

Beijing has tried to use the COVID-19 pandemic to promote itself as a responsible and benevolent global leader and to prove that its model of governance is superior to liberal democracy.⁵⁶ According to Josep Borrell, the European Union’s (EU)’s chief diplomat, Beijing has stoked “a battle of narratives,” hypocritically arguing its system is better positioned to mobilize in response to such a crisis even though the Chinese government failed to contain the virus in the first place.⁵⁷ For example, in March the official CCP propaganda organ *People’s Daily* claimed the Party’s epidemic response had proven it is “by far the political party with the strongest governance capability in human history.”⁵⁸ Beijing has also falsely portrayed its sales of often substandard medical equipment as humanitarian aid while reportedly requiring recipient countries such as Poland and Germany to praise the superiority of China’s epidemic response model.⁵⁹ Overall, Beijing has sought to capitalize on the chaos in other countries to further secure supply chains, attract overseas investment, and entrench market dominance, opportunistically exploiting a global crisis it triggered to benefit its own ambitions.⁶⁰

Beijing has seized the opportunity to tout the virtues of its China-centric vision of international order and claimed its success shows the wisdom of its governance model. In its international pandemic response, Beijing has emphasized its so-called “Health Silk Road,” a rhetorical component of BRI focused on health cooperation.⁶¹ State Councilor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi argued in April that the Chinese government’s international and domestic pandemic response had “won high recognition from the international community” due to its speed, scope, efficacy, and ability to build international consensus.⁶² Most importantly, according to State Councilor and Foreign Minister Wang, Beijing’s success in coordinating the international pandemic response was “a telling testament to China’s role as a responsible major country and its commitment to building [a ‘community of common human destiny’].”⁶³

The CCP’s disinformation and attempts to market its expertise surrounding the global pandemic have changed some perceptions of the Chinese government for the worse and hardened preexisting negative perceptions in others. For example, after downplaying concerns about the Chinese government’s intentions for months, British Prime Minister Boris Johnson reportedly decided in May 2020 to eliminate Huawei’s role in the UK’s 5G buildout in part as a result of the Chinese government’s handling of the outbreak.⁶⁴ Beijing’s portrayal of itself as a responsible leader tackling a global crisis was marred by its adoption of aggressive new “Russian-style” political warfare based on disinformation, or what is known as active measures, to deflect scrutiny from the SARS-CoV-2 novel coronavirus’s* origins.⁶⁵ The CCP’s self-congratulatory propaganda and aggressive spreading of offensive conspiracies and attacks on foreign counter-

*The official name of the novel coronavirus responsible for the pandemic is “severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2,” which is abbreviated SARS-CoV-2. COVID-19 is the name of the disease caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus. World Health Organization, “Naming the Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) and the Virus That Causes It,” 2020.

parts by China's so-called "wolf warrior" diplomats have hardened negative views and resentment of Beijing in many countries (for more on China's "wolf warrior" diplomacy, see Chapter 3, Section 1, "Year in Review: Security, Politics, and Foreign Affairs").⁶⁶

In Europe, a major target of China's pandemic propaganda, the acceptance of the European Commission's official view that China is a "systemic rival" has become more widespread as a result of China's actions during the pandemic.⁶⁷ According to the German Marshall Fund's Alliance for Securing Democracy, rather than sending aid where it was needed most in Europe, Chinese pandemic assistance prioritized shaping recipients' perception of Beijing.⁶⁸ Lucrezia Poggetti at the Mercator Institute for China Studies (MERICS) pointed out that Italian Foreign Minister Luigi di Maio, who had orchestrated Italy's accession to BRI and was arguably predisposed to favor China, highlighted arrivals of aid from China but not from the United States, disproportionately giving the impression that only China had sent aid, helping to further this agenda of perception shaping.⁶⁹ The New York Times reported that many Italians dismissed China's gestures as hollow, however, given that it was selling rather than donating masks, respirators, and other medical equipment to Italy.⁷⁰ Italians also expressed anger that Beijing prioritized Chinese citizens in Italy.⁷¹ Beijing's aggressive attempts to control the pandemic narrative prompted the EU to criticize the CCP's disinformation as "targeted influence operations" that aggravated Europeans in national governments, media, and the public.⁷² For example, in April French President Emmanuel Macron, previously ambivalent but not hostile toward China, doubted China had actually been more successful in its response than Western countries. He also described General Secretary Xi as "hegemonic" and as trying to rebuild an empire.⁷³ Europe is still intent on pursuing economic opportunities in China, but it is increasingly wary of the danger China's state capitalist economy poses to European prosperity and security.⁷⁴

Coopting Multilateral Institutions to Build a Sinocentric World Order

The CCP aims to change the international system without dismantling the current architecture of international governance institutions. Rather, it intends to rewrite the norms by which existing institutions operate to align with China's model of international relations. As Dr. Economy testified to the Commission, "If the norms subvert the institutions, you begin to develop a different system."⁷⁵ At the same time, Beijing seeks to circumvent organizations like the UN by establishing what Sun Jinsheng, vice president of China Foreign Affairs University, describes as institutions Beijing can influence from their outset.⁷⁶ While Beijing's foreign policy under

*By June 2020, the U.S. Agency for International Development had provided Italy approximately \$50 million of health, humanitarian, and economic assistance. According to the State Department, by that time the United States had provided more than \$12 billion in global assistance that will benefit the international pandemic response, including \$1.2 billion in foreign assistance from the State Department and the U.S. Agency for International Development. U.S. State Department, *UPDATE: The United States Continues to Lead the Global Response to COVID-19*, June 18, 2020; U.S. Department of State, *U.S. Assistance to Italy*, April 11, 2020.

†Professor Sun lists the Silk Road Forum, the China-Central and Eastern European States Summit (called the "16+1" and later "17+1"), and the China-Latin America Forum, among other examples, as institutions initiated by Beijing that will follow its agenda. Sun Jisheng, "Shaping and Promoting China's International Discourse Power Path" (中国国际话语权的塑造与提升路径), *Chinese Academy of Social Sciences Institute of World Economics and Politics*, April 10, 2019.

General Secretary Xi has been more assertive, exercising international influence through control of multilateral organizations has been a pillar of Chinese leaders' diplomacy since the 1990s.*

Subverting the International Order from Within

The CCP's goal of transforming international governance places particular importance on bringing the UN system more in line with its preferences. According to the Chinese State Council's 2019 foreign policy white paper, the UN is "at the core of the global governance system."⁷⁷ In other words, according to Melanie Hart, a China expert at the Center for American Progress, China's call to transform global governance is really a call to change the UN system to bring it more in line with Beijing's principles.⁷⁸ For this reason, the 2018 U.S. National Defense Strategy concludes China is intent on "undermining the international order from within the system by exploiting its benefits while... undercutting its principles."⁷⁹

Beijing has sought to bring international law and the UN's definition of human rights more in line with its own interests by decreasing emphasis on individual rights. China is the second-largest donor to the UN after the United States: it provides 12 percent of the UN's total budget, up from 1 percent 20 years ago.⁸⁰ The CCP seeks to use this as leverage to reduce funding for human rights-related functions such as human rights officers in peacekeeping missions.⁸¹ Chinese diplomats successfully ensured the passage of related resolutions in the UN Human Rights Council, including one in 2017 calling for balancing human rights with economic development needs and another in 2018 acknowledging that human rights standards may vary based on countries' "national and regional particularities."⁸²

Beijing has also sought to use UN legal instruments for its own gain, contrary to their intended purpose. For example, according to international law expert Jonathan G. Odom, instead of using the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea to prevent foreign commercial activity in waters near China's coast, Beijing uses its interpretation of the treaty to prevent foreign military vessels from operating in waters near its coast at all.⁸³ Thus, according to Commander Odom, Beijing seeks both to exploit the instrumental aspects of international law and to normalize weaponizing it for ends it was never meant to achieve.⁸⁴ China's successful retention in August 2020 of

Translation. Qtd. in Nadège Rolland, "China's Vision for a New World Order," *National Bureau of Asian Research*, January 2020, 45.

*General Secretary Jiang Zemin viewed multilateral institutions as a mechanism for China to pursue interests it could not achieve bilaterally. In 2004, then General Secretary Hu Jintao declared "multilateral platforms are the stage" for China's foreign policy objectives, a dictum General Secretary Xi has incorporated into his Belt and Road vision of "great power diplomacy with Chinese characteristics" and recast as the basis for China-led fora and BRI. Daniel Tobin, oral testimony for U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, *Roundtable on a "China Model?": Beijing's Promotion of Alternative Norms and Institutions*, April 27, 2020, 217; Su Ge, "General Secretary Xi Jinping's Diplomatic Thought Leads Great Power Diplomacy with Chinese Characteristics" (习近平总书记外交思想领航中国特色大国外交), *People's Tribune*, September 24, 2017. Translation. http://www.csis.org.cn/chinese/2017-09/28/content_40031024.htm; Lü Hong et al., "Global Coverage Review of Taking Comrade Xi Jinping as General Secretary of the Party Central Committee to Realize Great Power Diplomacy with Chinese Characteristics" (以习近平同志为总书记的党中央实现中国特色大国外交全球覆盖述评), *People's Daily*, January 26, 2016. Translation. <http://cpc.people.com.cn/n1/2016/0126/c64094-28083872.html>; Zhang Jiang, "China Moves toward Grand Diplomacy (Current Trends in Focus)" (中国走向“大外交”(时事聚焦)), *People's Daily*, February 8, 2011. Translation. http://paper.people.com.cn/rmrbhwb/html/2011-02/08/content_740513.htm.

a judge’s seat on the International Tribunal on the Law of the Sea, the international body responsible for adjudicating disputes related to the Convention, will help it to continue advocating for these interpretations of international law.⁸⁵

In addition to revising UN norms, Beijing exploits its influence over UN organizations to promote specific Chinese foreign policy objectives, contrary to both the spirit and the letter of how the UN was intended to operate. Officials from China currently hold director-generalships of four out of 15 UN specialized agencies, more than those from any other country (see Table 1).⁸⁶ Chinese nationals in UN leadership positions violate UN standards of conduct and leverage the institutions they lead to promote China’s political objectives, such as policies concerning Taiwan, industrial development, and technological standards.⁸⁷ Chinese nationals also hold numerous other influential senior posts.⁸⁸ According Dr. Hart, “Beijing leverages those individuals to coopt the institution and push narrow Chinese political objectives.”⁸⁹ This behavior directly contradicts UN professional guidelines. According to the UN’s Standards of Conduct for the International Civil Service, international civil servants should prioritize their organizations’ interests over their own countries’ interests, be loyal to the whole UN system rather than just to the organizations in which they serve, and remain independent of any outside authority.⁹⁰ According to these rules, “It cannot be too strongly stressed that international civil servants are not... representatives of Governments or other entities, nor are they proponents of their policies.”⁹¹

Table 1: UN Special Agency Leadership

Organization	Leadership Nationality	Expected End of Current Term
Food and Agriculture Organization	Chinese	Jun. 2023
International Civil Aviation Organization	Chinese	Oct. 2022
International Fund for Agricultural Development	Togolese	Feb. 2021
International Labour Organization	British	Nov. 2021
International Maritime Organization	South Korean	Nov. 2022
International Monetary Fund	Bulgarian	Nov. 2022
International Telecommunications Union	Chinese	Nov. 2022
United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization	French	Oct. 2021
United Nations Industrial Development Organization	Chinese	Nov. 2021
Universal Postal Union	Kenyan	Dec. 2020
World Bank Group	U.S.	Apr. 2024
World Health Organization	Ethiopian	May 2022
World Intellectual Property Organization	Singaporean	May 2026

Table 1: UN Special Agency Leadership—Continued

Organization	Leadership Nationality	Expected End of Current Term
World Meteorological Organization	Finnish	Dec. 2023
World Tourism Organization	Georgian	Dec. 2021

Source: Various.⁹²

UN Agencies Bow to the CCP on Taiwan: The World Health Organization and International Civil Aviation Organization

In early 2020, with the COVID-19 pandemic spreading around the world, Beijing exerted pressure on the World Health Organization (WHO) to suppress information about the outbreak within China's borders and ensure Taiwan remained marginalized from international coordination, despite directly increasing the risk to global health as a result.⁹³ The CCP has an ally in current WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, who has praised China's growing trade with Africa and reiterated support for Beijing's "One China" principle since his election.⁹⁴ Since the emergence of the novel coronavirus in late 2019, as a result of the CCP's pressure the WHO consistently ignored Taiwan's requests for information about the virus and refused to facilitate Taipei's attempts to share its own findings with the international community.⁹⁵

Despite being isolated from international coordination, Taiwan rapidly implemented a government response and by the end of January had developed a four-hour test, isolated two separate strains of the virus, and effectively delayed and contained community transmission.⁹⁶ Even while Chinese officials intentionally concealed the extent of China's domestic outbreak, Dr. Tedros praised the Chinese government's transparency and the effectiveness of its response while ignoring Taiwan's efforts.⁹⁷

Beijing's attack on Taiwan continued at the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO). In the early spring of 2020, the official Twitter account of the ICAO began blocking users who mentioned Taiwan, including congressional staff, journalists, and other analysts, demonstrating deference to Beijing's efforts to isolate Taiwan.⁹⁸ Fang Liu, a Chinese government official, has led the ICAO since 2015. Under her leadership, the ICAO's marginalization of Taipei increased.⁹⁹ The ICAO misrepresented Taiwan's past engagement with the organization in its official statements in response to this censorship campaign and demanded some social media users effectively perform "self-criticisms" in order to be unblocked.¹⁰⁰ Representatives from the U.S. Congress and State Department officials expressed concern that this apparent policy violated UN and ICAO principles and demonstrated the effectiveness of Beijing's efforts to coerce international organizations into obeying its demands.¹⁰¹ As of September 2020, according to an informal survey of affected Twitter users, more than two dozen still appeared to be blocked by the ICAO.¹⁰²

Promoting a Sinocentric Order through Alternative Institutions

Beyond molding the existing framework of international organizations to better suit its interests, Beijing seeks to exercise influence through China-led alternative organizations and initiatives. First among these is BRI, which Professor Heng Wang of the University of New South Wales law faculty terms “quasi-multilateral.”¹⁰³ Rather than a multistakeholder forum that parallels other international organizations, BRI is a unifying schema for China’s strategy to shape global bilateral and multilateral development activities.¹⁰⁴ In providing a framework for centering global trade flows and political and cultural exchange around China, BRI is increasingly both a testbed and a blueprint for the “community of common human destiny.”¹⁰⁵

Complementing BRI, and in many cases predating it, Beijing has also launched numerous regional organizations that allow China to position itself as a leader unconstrained by the United States and other developed democracies.¹⁰⁶ For example, the triennial Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC), first held in 2000, provides Beijing a single venue to engage with its African partners on economic, cultural, and military issues, without mediation by or competition from other countries.¹⁰⁷ It has attempted to create similar dynamics through other fora, such as the China-Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC), discussed below. Through both BRI and China’s regional organizations, Beijing is able to circumvent established multilateral institutions and promote its alternative vision of global governance norms. Beijing’s strategy focuses on framing its alternative institutions as complementary to rather than in competition with existing organizations while increasingly displacing their functions.

BRI: A Hub-and-Spokes Global Governance System

BRI provides a unifying framework for Beijing’s bilateral and multilateral activities, allowing China to export elements of its domestic governance model and weaken existing international organizations while creating an integrated economic and geopolitical order under China’s leadership.* The ultimate aspiration for BRI is a realization of the Sinocentric model of international relations envisioned in the CCP’s “community of common human destiny.”¹⁰⁸ To achieve this, BRI’s remit has expanded beyond financial and economic integration to encompass new diplomatic strategies, military cooperation, and cultural exchanges aiming to extend Beijing’s ideological influence and ability to shape perceptions of China internationally.¹⁰⁹ Rather than developing a set of institutions and rules to support BRI, Beijing has designed the initiative to allow maximum flexibility so it can dictate terms on an ad hoc basis and choose to conform to international agreements when it suits its interests but ignore them in other cases.¹¹⁰

*This section focuses on Beijing’s geopolitical motivations in establishing and promoting BRI and BRI’s place within China’s envisioned model of the international system. A core objective in its launch was also sustaining China’s pace of economic development through building future export markets and driving growth in China’s less developed inland border provinces. For more background on BRI, see “Belt and Road Initiative” in U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, *2018 Annual Report to Congress*, November 2018, 259–303.

BRI as the Blueprint for the “Community of Common Human Destiny”

The “community of common destiny” has been embedded in General Secretary Xi’s objectives for BRI from the start and has grown in scope and ambition since BRI’s launch in 2013.*¹¹¹ Originally centered on Eurasia and Southeast Asia, BRI has now been extended to encompass Africa and Latin America and the Caribbean. At a state-to-state level, BRI’s amorphous institutional mechanisms lay the groundwork for a Sinocentric international system in which Beijing is unconstrained by formal rules and procedures.

In place of formal treaties and legally binding arrangements, BRI has no membership protocols and is based on informal agreements and partnerships, many executed through the Belt and Road Forum and China’s regional organizations, discussed in the next section.¹¹² The CCP hopes to leverage these partnerships to “expand its circle of friends,” aiming to foster alignment and reception of authoritarian norms in nondemocratic countries and countries disaffected by globalization.¹¹³

Below the state-to-state level, numerous exchange initiatives under the banner of BRI bring foreign officials, executives, journalists, academics, and other groups to China in what the CCP calls people-to-people exchanges and what Professor Sun calls “home-based diplomacy.”¹¹⁴ Taken together, these exchanges form a vehicle for Beijing to promote its official narrative and export elements of its domestic governance model. People-to-people exchanges include training programs, such as programs that bring journalists from developing countries to China in order to foster a pro-China media abroad, or party-to-party capacity building in internet censorship techniques and use of China’s surveillance technology exports.¹¹⁵

“Home-based diplomacy” includes international fora hosted within China, allowing Beijing “more control over participating foreign countries’ willingness to endorse and sign on to Chinese ideas and norms.”¹¹⁶ Ms. Rolland cited China’s South-South Human Rights Forum, a biennial gathering organized by China’s State Council Information Office and Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as a key example.¹¹⁷ Over 300 representatives from 70 countries attended the December 2017 forum, which concluded by adopting a declaration emphasizing that countries should foster human rights based on their own national conditions—language China frequently uses to defend its own human rights record and promote an alternative to universal values.¹¹⁸

Popularizing Elements of the China Model through BRI

Where a Sinocentric world order is the end vision for BRI, in present-day implementation the initiative serves as a catchall to absorb both China’s existing bilateral activities and China-led regional organizations. By design, BRI’s amorphous setup allows it the flexibility to fit these diverse projects within organizations like the

* BRI initially included two economic corridors focused on connecting Eurasia to China. The southerly Maritime Silk Road runs through Southeast Asia, the Indian Ocean, and the Middle East. The northerly overland Silk Road Economic Belt traces the historic Silk Road through Central Asia and the Middle East to Europe. BRI has now expanded to include economic corridors, or passages, on all continents except Antarctica, as well as in the Arctic and outer space. Nadège Rolland, “A Concise Guide to the Belt and Road Initiative,” *National Bureau of Asian Research*, April 19, 2019.

UN or frameworks like the WTO when it serves China's interests. For instance, at the April 2019 Belt and Road Forum, UN Secretary General António Guterres gave a speech praising BRI and claiming the pillars of BRI* were "intrinsically linked to the [UN's] 17 Sustainable Development Goals."¹¹⁹ As Professor Heng summarizes, "China is proactive in relation to only selected aspects of the BRI (e.g., dispute settlement, trade and investment facilitation and promotion, intellectual property, technical standards, e-commerce) and passive in relation to other more sensitive aspects (such as governance, debt sustainability, labor, other social impacts)."¹²⁰ In effect, Beijing is leveraging international agreements selectively to extend elements of China's domestic business environment, resulting in debt-driven infrastructure investment, support for state-owned enterprises (SOEs), absence of transparency, poor labor standards, and poor environmental practices.¹²¹

While Beijing presents BRI as a platform for mutually beneficial trade and investment, in practice the initiative is effectively "a sea of bilateral deals" that allow China to build export markets for its SOEs and create a network of countries indebted to state-run banks.¹²² China Development Bank, a state-run policy bank,† had alone financed \$190 billion for BRI projects between BRI's founding in 2013 and March 2019.¹²³ By contrast, as of March 2020 China's multilateral development bank, the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), had invested only \$12 billion from its founding in 2015 to March 2020.¹²⁴ Whereas China can lend unconstrained by financial sustainability considerations and other governance standards through its own policy banks, the AIIB counted 82 members as of July 2020 and is subject to governance constraints modeled on those of the World Bank.¹²⁵

According to the State-Owned Assets Supervision and Administration Commission (SASAC), central Chinese SOEs were involved in 3,116 BRI projects by the end of October 2018.‡ Though these projects have been conducted under the banner of BRI, the initiative simply formalizes tactics China had been using to secure markets and resources and build political influence abroad for decades before launching BRI. It also enables China to inflate the impact of disparate trade, investment, and lending by presenting it as a coordinated, state-level effort. In 2013, the year the Chinese government launched BRI, China Development Bank and the Export-Import Bank of China's combined outbound loan balance totaled \$368.6 billion.¹²⁶

*The pillars are "policy coordination, facilities connectivity, unimpeded trade, financial integration, and people-to-people exchanges." António Guterres, "Remarks at the Opening Ceremony of the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation," *United Nations*, April 26, 2019.

†China has three national state-owned policy banks, China Development Bank, Export-Import Bank of China, and Agricultural Development Bank of China, that lend to advance government policy objectives and are not subject to the capital adequacy constraints and loan loss provisions of commercial banks. China Development Bank and Exim Bank both have extensive loan portfolios of international projects. Though policy banks have a mandate to advance state priorities, the state is a majority shareholder in nearly all commercial banks within China and also gives them political guidance. For more information on China's banking sector, see Virgil Bisio, "China's Banking Sector Risks and Implications for the United States," *U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission*, May 27, 2020.

‡Studies by the World Bank and the Reconnecting Asia Project at the Center for Strategic and International Studies have found that procurement and tender processes for BRI projects are highly opaque, and that Chinese firms are awarded contracts far more often when projects are funded by a Chinese source than when they are not. Testimony from Tania Ghossein et al., "Public Procurement in the Belt and Road Initiative," *MTI Global Practice Discussion Paper* No. 10 (December 2018), 1, 6.

Importantly, China has not signed onto the standards of responsible development finance agreed to by other major creditor nations and participants in multilateral banks.* Among other provisions, these standards prohibit requiring collateral for development loans. By contrast, Chinese banks require collateral for roughly 60 percent of their loans to developing countries.¹²⁷ This allows China, as a creditor, to address potential defaults on an ad hoc basis, often negotiating settlement terms that grant it further influence over the debtor's economy or territory. Beijing prefers acting bilaterally because it can be the stronger negotiating party, dictate terms, and flout international norms to achieve its objectives without institutional constraints.¹²⁸ For instance, China's relationship with Tajikistan, which owes more than half of its \$2.8 billion external debt to China,[†] exemplifies a pattern of deepening economic dependency on and concessions to China.¹²⁹ In 2019, Tajikistan reportedly granted China mining rights to silver deposits on especially favorable terms to pay down debt to China, and modified foreign investment restrictions to raise capital by selling off strategic national assets, clearing the way for a Chinese firm to acquire a stake in the country's largest aluminum plant.¹³⁰

Many BRI projects have proven to be financially unsustainable, prompting international backlash.¹³¹ A 2018 study by the Center for Global Development found that 23 of 68 BRI countries‡ were highly vulnerable to debt distress if they borrowed internationally to fund BRI projects.¹³² Based on announced BRI projects, the authors concluded that of these 23, eight countries are at particular risk of debt sustainability problems due to the likely loan volumes necessary to fund the projects.§ Moody's Analytics notes that of the 130 countries that had signed BRI agreements as of June 2019, only 25 percent had an investment-grade sovereign credit rating; 43 percent had junk bond status and 32 percent were not rated.¹³³

The COVID-19 pandemic has likely rendered some BRI projects nonviable, compounding potential financial duress.¹³⁴ In June 2020,

*China is only an observer in the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and has not agreed to the OECD's framework for sustainable debt. It is not a member of the Paris Club, an international organization of creditor nations that coordinate sustainable frameworks for resolving payment difficulties among debtor nations, although it attends some Paris Club meetings as an ad hoc participant. *Nikkei*, "China Is a Major Global Lender; It Should Act Like One," May 22, 2019; OECD Trade and Agricultural Directorate Trade Committee Working Party on Export Credits and Credit Guarantees, *Recommendation of the Council on Sustainable Lending Practices and Officially Supported Export Credits*, June 8, 2018; Isabella Massa, "Export Finance Activities by the Chinese Government," *Policy Department for Directorate B of the EU Parliament Directorate General for External Policies of the Union*, September 23, 2011.

†The rate of Tajikistan's dependence on China has also grown rapidly. Between 2007 to 2016, 80 percent of the country's increase in external debt was held by China. John Hurley et al., "Examining the Debt Implications of the Belt and Road Initiative from a Policy Perspective," *Center for Global Development*, March 2018, 18.

‡The study examined 68 countries that China claimed were part of BRI as of the first Belt and Road Forum in May 2017. By October 2019, China's main economic planning agency, the National Development and Reform Commission, claimed China had signed BRI Cooperation Agreements with 137 countries. *Xinhua*, "China Has Signed 197 'Belt and Road' Cooperation Documents with 137 Countries and 30 International Organizations" (中国已与137个国家、30个国际组织签署197份"一带一路"合作文件), November 15, 2019. Translation; James Griffith, "Just What Is This One Belt, One Road Thing Anyway?" *CNN*, May 11, 2017.

§The eight countries include Djibouti, Kyrgyzstan, Laos, Maldives, Montenegro, Mongolia, Pakistan, and Tajikistan. Each country has a public debt to GDP ratio of above 60 percent, except Tajikistan. With the exception of Pakistan and Montenegro, Chinese institutions would hold over half of these countries' external debt given projected BRI-related lending. The authors of the study constructed projected BRI lending pipelines based on publicly available data on announced BRI projects. John Hurley et al., "Examining the Debt Implications of the Belt and Road Initiative from a Policy Perspective," *Center for Global Development*, March 2018, 8, 11–12.

China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs acknowledged 50 to 60 percent of BRI projects were impacted by the pandemic, 20 percent of them "seriously."¹³⁵ Opaque debt to Chinese financial institutions can further undermine these countries' creditworthiness from the perspective of other international lenders. In testimony before the Commission, Andrew Small, Senior Transatlantic Fellow with the German Marshall Fund, noted that private lenders are reluctant to extend loans to developing countries without clarity on the terms and volume of their debt to China, and are wary borrowers will use new lines of credit simply to pay back Chinese lenders.¹³⁶

Chinese firms have readily ignored labor, governance, and other social impacts in BRI projects, allowing Chinese firms to do business in countries other firms and organizations would not approach, and to underbid or outmaneuver vendors bound by higher standards. While Chinese firms' use of Chinese workers has drawn criticism and caused tension in countries hosting BRI projects, this overshadows an equally egregious issue: in some instances Chinese firms are able to bid low in part because they impose forced-labor conditions on an overseas Chinese workforce.¹³⁷ Aaron Halegua and Jerome A. Cohen, both of the New York University School of Law's U.S.-Asia Law Institute, detail a pattern of overseas Chinese workers paying hefty recruitment fees, working unpaid for months in abhorrent conditions, and sometimes being cheated out of promised wages by their employers.¹³⁸ In one non-BRI example, Chinese laborers working in Chinese government facilities in New York for a private Chinese firm, Chinese Liaoning Rilun Construction, were forced by the firm's U.S. head of operations, Dan Zhong, to work on private projects benefiting him personally.¹³⁹ Another case occurred in the BRI-affiliated construction of a casino in the U.S. territory Saipan, in which trafficked Chinese laborers were forced to work in unsafe conditions.¹⁴⁰

Beijing pays lip service to international agreements when they advance or safeguard its interests. Beijing respects international agreements for dispute settlement, trade and investment facilitation and promotion, IP agreements, technical standards, and e-commerce as applicable to BRI.¹⁴¹ These existing features of the international economic order help open markets to Chinese firms and protect their assets and investments.

A Proliferation of Regional Organizations

While BRI encapsulates China's overall blueprint for the international order, the Chinese government relies on the extensive use of regional fora to advance specific foreign policy objectives and realign regional dynamics in its favor.¹⁴² These fora provide Beijing a platform to tailor messaging, promote their regional approach, and further bilateral ties, coopting local institutions and individuals to advance the CCP's policy objectives as though they were local initiatives (see text box "Attempting to Displace ASEAN with the Lancang-Mekong Cooperation Mechanism").¹⁴³ Many of these fora take on a "China+" format, such as the China-Central and Eastern European States Summit (17+1, formerly 16+1) established between China and Balkan, Baltic, and Central and Eastern European states in 2012. Beijing has now established "China+" partnerships cover-

ing the majority of every continent except North America and Antarctica.¹⁴⁴ It also routinely leverages regional ties as voting blocs: from 1972* to 2009, African states supported China in defeating 11 attempts to criticize China's human rights record.¹⁴⁵ In June 2019, China's favored candidate to lead the UN Food and Agriculture Organization won comfortably with 108 out of 191 votes after China forgave \$78 million of debt owed by Cameroon and a candidate from Cameroon backed by the African Union dropped out of the race.¹⁴⁶

Common Approaches in China's Regional Engagement

Although Beijing's strategy is regionally tailored to adapt both to local political considerations and within the broader scheme of its global diplomatic strategy, its approach has a few common characteristics across organizations:

- *Beijing assigns each region a role in supporting China's development:* Beijing frames its relations with specific regions according to the roles it envisions for them in the "community of common human destiny." The Chinese government's white papers on relations with Africa and Latin America and the Caribbean apply this language in describing advancement of China's economic, political, and security objectives, such as resource exploration, holding increased military exchanges, and deepening extradition cooperation.[†]¹⁴⁷ This trend notably attempts to establish the relevance of China's economic development experience and governance model to all developing countries, in contrast to previous Chinese leaders' assertions that Chinese socialism was uniquely suited to China's particular circumstances.¹⁴⁸ For instance, China's 2015 white paper on its policy toward Africa articulates a clear China-inspired model for African countries' political governance and economic development, urging China's closest African partners to promote state-led development across the continent. It emphasizes the advantages of China's legal system, media landscape, and science and technological capabilities. The white paper also urges African countries to work with China to establish global governance institutions with greater representation for developing countries. Lastly, China's most recent white papers on both Africa and Latin America seek to distinguish Beijing's diplomacy from that of the United States, stressing nonintervention and other countries' right "to choose their own paths of development."¹⁴⁹
- *China is a "one-stop shop" for development practices:* Beijing uses regional dialogues to present what Joshua Eisenman, associate professor at the University of Notre Dame, calls an irresistible "comprehensive package."¹⁵⁰ Economic diplomacy is consistently the central priority, but party-to-party trainings, cultural or educational exchanges, and security cooperation may be combined into one broad dialogue, making cooperation with

* Beijing was able to replace Taipei as the government representing China in the UN in 1972 with 26 votes from African countries, or more than a third of countries supporting the resolution. Yun Sun, "Africa in China's Foreign Policy," *Brookings Institution*, April 2014, 4.

† China also releases white papers on topics such as foreign aid that follow a similar pattern. *Xinhua*, "China's Policy Paper on Latin America and the Caribbean," November 24, 2016; *Xinhua*, "China's Second Africa Policy Paper," December 5, 2015; State Council Information Office, *White Paper on China's Foreign Aid (2014)*, July 10, 2014.

Beijing seem “irresistible.”¹⁵¹ Criticism of BRI has also prompted Beijing to seek more ways to shape other countries’ domestic discourse on China directly or indirectly.¹⁵² People-to-people exchanges discussed in the previous section, such as programs to train foreign journalists and researchers in China, are the centerpiece of this evolving strategy.¹⁵³

- *Beijing establishes strong partnerships as regional bulwarks:* Beijing builds regional engagement by first establishing a handful of strong ties to countries regarded as regional leaders, then leveraging connections with these countries as a springboard to launch multilateral initiatives.¹⁵⁴ For instance, in Africa during the 2000s Beijing initially prioritized developing partnerships with South Africa and Egypt as mid-sized powers before seeking engagement with other countries.*¹⁵⁵
- *Beijing uses bilateral engagement to leverage its relative power:* Bilateral deals remain the predominant feature of China’s diplomacy, and regional fora can serve as an overture for this or even as an arena in which countries compete against one another for Chinese investment.¹⁵⁶ After China initially established the 16+1 framework (now 17+1, described below) in Europe, for instance, Hungary, Serbia, the Czech Republic, and Poland all competed with one another to advance different bilateral approaches with Beijing, aiming to establish themselves as regional leaders in China-EU relations.¹⁵⁷ Beijing’s investments in 17+1 countries ultimately were meager and centered on infrastructure construction rather than the greenfield investment Central European countries hoped to negotiate, which would have created longer-term employment and industrial productivity gains.¹⁵⁸

Several key China-led organizations in which Beijing applies this characteristic approach are detailed below. First among these is China’s original regional organization, FOCAC, through which Beijing has attained significant access to Africa’s natural resources, established broad export markets for Chinese firms, and convinced some African countries to sever diplomatic ties with Taipei in favor of Beijing.† The success of FOCAC has inspired Beijing to use it as a template for multilateral engagement in other regions.

China-led fora have in some cases proven to be less effective platforms for carrying out Beijing’s objectives when interests of member countries are not aligned. For instance, India and Pakistan’s accession to the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) raises

*This does not necessarily reflect the current-day importance of Beijing’s relationship with these countries. It counts Ethiopia among its first-tier (“comprehensive strategic cooperative”) partners, but South Africa and Egypt are only second-tier (or “comprehensive strategic”) partners. Paul Nantulya, written testimony for U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, *Hearing on China’s Military Power Projection and U.S. National Interests*, February 20, 2020, 3.

†When China established FOCAC in 2000, 49 of 54 African countries recognized China. Since 2000, four more have switched diplomatic recognition: Burkina Faso (2018), Chad (2006), Malawi (2007), and São Tomé and Príncipe (2016). The Gambia switched from China to Taiwan in 1995, then severed ties with Taiwan in 2013 and recognized China in 2016. Eswatini is now the only African country that recognizes Taiwan. Rob Schmidt, “Taiwan Loses 2 More Allies to China and Scrambles Jets to Track Chinese Bomber Drills,” *NPR*, May 25, 2018; Mike Ives, “A Small African Nation Severs Ties with Taiwan, and Beijing Applauds,” *New York Times*, December 22, 2016; Austin Ramzy, “China Resumes Diplomatic Relations with Gambia, Shutting Out Taiwan,” *New York Times*, March 18, 2016; Yun Sun, “Africa in China’s Foreign Policy,” *Brookings Institution*, April 2014, 5.

the organization's international status, but their joint participation could undermine China's ability to use the organization to push its foreign policy goals because the two rivals share little in the way of security objectives.¹⁵⁹ In June 2018 at its first SCO forum after joining the organization, India refused to endorse BRI, claiming a BRI project for Pakistan in the disputed area of Kashmir threatened its territorial sovereignty.¹⁶⁰

Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC): Established in 2000 by China and its African partners, the triennial FOCAC provides Beijing with a single venue to engage with 53 out of 54 African countries and shape the narrative of Chinese engagement with Africa.*¹⁶¹ In covering economic cooperation, cultural exchanges, and military cooperation, the forum follows Beijing's tactic of presenting a comprehensive package that inflates the importance of China's diplomacy.¹⁶² U.S. investment stock in Africa has consistently exceeded that of China,† but Beijing has been able to leverage its pledges of \$60 billion in loans and investment on the continent to portray an outsized impression of Chinese engagement.¹⁶³

FOCAC serves as a framework for China to engage African countries multilaterally via other formats, such as establishing research institutes to promote a Sinocentric vision in the foreign policy of African countries.¹⁶⁴ Paul Nantulya, an expert at the National Defense University, testified to the Commission that General Secretary Xi's inaugural speech at one such institute reflects Beijing's shift from "non-interference" to increasing involvement in shaping "how Africa's political systems operate, including the security sector"¹⁶⁵ (for more on FOCAC and China's interests in Africa, see Chapter 1, Section 3, "China's Strategic Aims in Africa").

China-Central and Eastern European States Summit (17+1): Originally established in 2012 as the 16+1, the forum expanded when Greece joined in 2019, though Greece has served as an effective surrogate for Beijing's interests in Europe since at least 2015.‡¹⁶⁶ The 17+1 serves mostly as a vehicle for Beijing to forge bilateral BRI deals with Balkan, Baltic, and Central and Eastern European countries.§ Deepening political and economic ties with Eu-

* Fifty-three of 54 African countries attended the seventh and most recent forum in September 2018, with only Eswatini not present. Yun Sun, "China's 2018 Financial Commitments to Africa: Adjustment and Recalibration," *Brookings Institution*, September 5, 2018.

† Investment stock refers to the total cumulative volume of long-term investments in which the investor has a significant degree of influence (e.g., a greater than 10 percent share of voting rights in a corporation) on the management of an enterprise, as distinguished from passive "portfolio investment." Flow refers to net change over a given time period. As of 2018, the latest year for which data is available, U.S. foreign direct investment stock in Africa totaled \$47.8 billion versus \$46.1 billion for China, marking the closest China has come to eclipsing the United States. China-Africa Research Initiative, "Data: Chinese Investment in Africa," *John Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies*, February 2020; United Nations, "UNCTAD Training Manual on Statistics for FDI and the Operations of TNCs Volume 1: FDI Flows and Stocks," 2009, 35.

‡ China invested heavily in Greek assets at several points when its EU creditors imposed financial austerity measures on it following the Eurozone Crisis. Following the election of Alexis Tsipras as prime minister in January 2015, Athens and Beijing announced an "upgrading of relations" and Prime Minister Tsipras acknowledged Greece's role as "China's gateway into Europe." Jason Horowitz and Liz Alderman, "Chastised by E.U., a Resentful Greece Embraces China's Cash and Interests," *New York Times*, August 26, 2017.

§ The original 16 members include Albania, Bosnia, Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, North Macedonia (then Macedonia), Montenegro, Poland, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, and Slovenia, 11 of which are EU member states. The remaining five are seeking EU membership. Dusan Stojanovic, "China's Spreading Influence in Eastern Europe Worries West," *Associated Press*, April 10, 2019.

ropean countries with more populist and less liberal regimes have enabled Beijing to fracture the cohesive EU stance toward China.¹⁶⁷ In 2016, Hungary and Greece attempted to block a critical reference to China in an EU statement on The Hague Tribunal's South China Sea ruling.¹⁶⁸ The next year, Hungary broke EU consensus by refusing to sign a letter denouncing Beijing's torture of detained human rights lawyers, while Greece blocked an EU statement criticizing China's human rights record.¹⁶⁹

The 17+1 has prompted wariness from Brussels, particularly for undermining a common EU policy toward China. In March 2019, the European Commission labeled China a "systemic rival" and exhorted EU member countries to maintain a unified approach to China, citing engagement bilaterally or through the 17+1 framework as particular areas of concern.¹⁷⁰

China-Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC): Like FOCAC, China has used CELAC as a single venue to promote economic engagement, military cooperation, and people-to-people exchanges.*¹⁷¹ China-CELAC, which includes 33 Latin American and Caribbean countries and China, was established in 2015. Compared to China's success in FOCAC, lack of consensus among CELAC members has hampered some of Beijing's efforts. At the second Ministerial Meeting of China-CELAC in January 2018, CELAC did not endorse BRI, though a joint plan of action recognized BRI's economic opportunities and pledged to deepen regional connectivity with China.¹⁷² Consequently, Beijing still relies on other multilateral approaches, such as participation in multilateral development finance or ad hoc fora, to advance its interests in the region.¹⁷³

Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO): Unlike the other organizations profiled here, SCO is primarily a security rather than an economic group and is heavily influenced but not directly led by China.¹⁷⁴ Founded by China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan in 2001,† the organization added both Pakistan and India at its June 2017 summit.¹⁷⁵ In SCO's initial decade, China was a principal political and economic force driving the organization and used it to ensure security cooperation and diplomatic support from its Central Asian neighbors in preventing unrest in its northwest Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region.¹⁷⁶ In the past ten years, China's ability to advance its economic objectives within SCO has been limited by Russia's view of former Soviet states as falling within its sphere of influence, as well by as Central Asian members' skepticism toward Chinese investment.¹⁷⁷ In seeking to expand the organization's focus from border demilitarization and counterterrorism to enhancing economic cooperation,

*CELAC is a multilateral forum that Latin American and Caribbean states established in 2011 in the Declaration of Caracas exclusively for those countries. CELAC states use the forum to engage with a number of other states and organizations in addition to China, including Russia, South Korea, the EU, and the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf. CELAC International, "Community of Latin American and Caribbean States XXI."

†The SCO was preceded by the Shanghai Five, a group established in 1996 between China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan mainly covering military activity along China's border. The Shanghai Five added Uzbekistan and announced the creation of the SCO in 2001. *Diplomat*, "The Shanghai Cooperation Organization: A Vehicle for Cooperation or Competition?" June 21, 2019; Eleanor Albert, "The Shanghai Cooperation Organization," *Council on Foreign Relations*, October 14, 2015; *Xinhua*, "History of Development of SCO," June 12, 2006.

China attempted to use SCO as a platform for BRI to subsume Russia's stagnant regional Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU).¹⁷⁸ While acknowledging that BRI and the EAEU have compatible goals, Russian President Vladimir Putin sidestepped relegating EAEU to a subordinate regional project within the broader BRI framework.¹⁷⁹ Neither China nor Russia has managed to expand its Central Asian energy networks under the aegis of SCO, though both have realized energy projects outside the organization.¹⁸⁰

Asia Infrastructure Development Bank (AIIB): In 2015, Beijing established the AIIB, a multilateral development bank intended principally to finance Asian Belt and Road projects. Financially, the AIIB has been a small player: it had only invested \$12 billion as of March 2020, a small fraction of \$339 billion in BRI lending extended by Chinese policy banks between 2013 and April 2019.¹⁸¹ Creation of the AIIB nonetheless presents an image of China as a responsible global stakeholder.¹⁸² As Jonathan Hillman, senior fellow and director of the Reconnecting Asia Project at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, argued in testimony to the Commission, the establishment of AIIB furthers the narrative of China as an ascendant power and leader among developing countries, even as the AIIB leans heavily on established multilateral development banks for governance practices and operational support.¹⁸³

Attempting to Displace ASEAN with the Lancang-Mekong Cooperation Mechanism

To establish influence in Southeast Asia at the expense of ASEAN, Beijing is rapidly expanding the remit of an organization ostensibly established to coordinate management of the Mekong River's water resources, according to testimony provided to the Commission by Bradley Murg, assistant professor of political science and Asian studies at Seattle Pacific University.*¹⁸⁴ Established in 2016, the Lancang-Mekong Cooperation (LMC) mechanism aims to displace other rival institutions not through overt competition, but rather by attempting to appear complementary. The scope of the LMC is even modelled on ASEAN's "three pillars": Political and Security Community, Economic Community, and Social Cultural Community.¹⁸⁵ The LMC also displaces regional coordination on Mekong River management through the Mekong River Commission, a successor to the U.S.-led Mekong Committee that China rendered ineffective through refusal to participate.¹⁸⁶

Central to Beijing's tactics is creating the impression that initiatives conducted under the banner of the LMC are the outcome of organic cooperation (rather than directed by China) while leveraging the LMC to become increasingly entrenched in local institutions. One such example is the Global Center for Mekong Studies (GCMS), a think tank network launched in parallel with

*The LMC mechanism includes Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand, and Vietnam. It was founded through the Sanya Declaration, an agreement Beijing had worked toward with member countries the preceding year to address mounting tensions over regional management of the Mekong River's water resources (e.g., damming, drought prevention, and river ecology). *Sanya Declaration of the First Lancang-Mekong Cooperation (LMC) Leaders' Meeting*, March 3, 2016.

Attempting to Displace ASEAN with the Lancang-Mekong Cooperation Mechanism—*Continued*

the establishment of national LMC secretariats in 2018.¹⁸⁷ GCMS national centers coordinate with government organizations in their respective countries and court prominent individuals to build legitimacy, while programming follows Beijing's priorities. In particular, Beijing is using the GCMS to steer the narrative on China in academic, government, and civil society circles within member countries.¹⁸⁸

Dr. Murg believes the LMC mechanism could serve as a testbed for coopting local institutions, particularly along BRI.¹⁸⁹ According to Dr. Murg's written testimony to the Commission, the LMC's response to the COVID-19 pandemic in February 2020 was emblematic of Beijing's approach and goals for the organization: the LMC duplicated ASEAN's efforts without coordination, following instructions on public health efforts from Beijing without input from other countries, while State Councilor and Foreign Minister Wang depicted the response as locally led and stressed local partnerships when introducing the pandemic response initiative in Vientiane.¹⁹⁰ In August 2020, Premier Li Keqiang promised LMC countries priority access to a COVID-19 vaccine once China has developed one and announced China would set up a dedicated public health program under the LMC.¹⁹¹

Beijing Uses Technical Standards to Advance an Alternative Technological Order

Achieving leadership in technologies that will define the 21st century is a distinguishing feature of Beijing's industrial and foreign policies.¹⁹² Dominance of technical standards underpinning information and communications technologies (ICT) and other emerging fields is integral to Beijing's ambitions, both to secure global markets for Chinese firms and to shape the norms and values for how emerging technologies are deployed (for a taxonomy of technical standards, see Addendum I: "What Is a Technical Standard?").¹⁹³

Beijing's approach to exporting China's technical standards threatens to disrupt the international technology landscape. In treating technical standards as a tool of industrial policy and market access, China's export of standards parallels China's model for the global economy: Beijing aims to assert privileged access to foreign markets and IP for Chinese firms while controlling access to its domestic market and shielding domestic companies from having to abide by the rules of the international economy. Similarly, in setting the standards, Beijing seeks to cultivate export markets for Chinese technology and freely make use of foreign technology while maintaining a closed domestic standards-setting environment.

Beijing's behavior in international standards-setting organizations follows patterns observed in other multilateral fora. Namely, Beijing is installing Chinese nationals or individuals sympathetic to Beijing's interests in key leadership positions to undermine and revise institutional norms in alignment with its own agenda. Its participation violates the spirit of these organizations, making them

less effective for other members and in some cases deliberately attempting to undermine U.S. technological leadership.

Technical Standards as a Policy Tool

In contrast to the United States, where technical standards are developed by industry in response to commercial need and adopted by consensus, Chinese state agencies formulate standards and use them to advance industrial and foreign policy objectives. Historically, Beijing has prioritized developing mandatory and unique domestic technical standards as a barrier to foreign firms' market entry and to help grow domestic industry. Now, it is also coordinating industrial policy and diplomatic strategy to expand its influence in international standards-making bodies, both to increase adoption of Chinese technology abroad and to influence norms for how technology is applied.¹⁹⁴ The goal of increasing participation in international standards-setting bodies is written explicitly into China's 2017 Standardization Law, and will likely be extended into a comprehensive strategy in the China Standards 2035 plan, a draft 15-year plan not yet released to the public. The China Standards 2035 plan will outline China's nation-level objectives in standardization much like "Made in China 2025" did for emerging technology.¹⁹⁵

A Walled Garden: China's Domestic Standards Environment

Following China's WTO accession in 2001, the Chinese government initially sought both to limit adoption of foreign standards and to institute alternative compulsory (as opposed to voluntary) domestic standards.*¹⁹⁶ The former reduced licensing fees Chinese firms needed to pay foreign IP holders, while the latter served as a market access barrier to protect domestic industry from foreign competition. While this was a domestic policy, China's systematic infringement or evasion of standard-essential patents (SEPs), or IP requisite for codifying a common standard, has had a chilling effect on U.S. companies. If U.S. SEP holders do not anticipate a return on their IP because Chinese firms are evading patents, they have less incentive to develop SEPs and to advocate for their adoption as international standards.¹⁹⁷ Given that standards-making is driven by the private sector in the United States, this trend threatens U.S. influence on the evolution of technology, particularly in competition with a country that seeks to promote standards as a matter of coordinated industrial policy and heavily subsidizes corporate research and development.¹⁹⁸

Some economists have argued that respect for IP in China will increase as Chinese firms' SEP portfolios grow. In practice, however, Chinese policymakers are more interested in using IP as a tool of achieving national priorities than in allowing individual companies to derive economic benefits from IP. Notably, the composition of patent holders in China includes more academics, interested in advancing their research careers through patenting, but fewer enterprises seeking to protect or license their IP.¹⁹⁹ In short, China's policymakers are not seeking to develop an economic structure like

*The use of conflicting technical standards when widely adopted international standards exist constitutes a technical barrier to trade under China's WTO obligations. World Trade Organization, "Technical Barriers to Trade," *WTO Agreement Series*, 20.

the United States, where companies are incentivized to innovate on the basis of substantial gains from leading-edge IP. As Chinese technology firms increasingly compete with U.S. firms that rely on licensing revenues from patent portfolios, Chinese firms' emphasis on goods sales and comparatively low IP revenues may undermine competing U.S. firms' business model.

Changes in China's domestic standards-setting system since 2015 have addressed some concerns that unique domestic standards, as well as the domestic standards drafting process, form a market access barrier.²⁰⁰ Foreign firms report improved access to technical committees within Chinese standards-setting organizations and more involvement of enterprises (both Chinese and foreign) in standards development, though the Standardization Administration of China and the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology still maintain firm control.²⁰¹ U.S. industry organizations, such as the U.S.-China Business Council, credit China's greater participation in international standards-making bodies as encouraging adoption of international best practices domestically, particularly in facilitating sound procedures for vetting new standards proposals.²⁰² Nonetheless, protectionist application of standards remains a chief market access concern in technologies for which China's government has set guidelines to improve domestic producers' market share at the expense of foreign firms, such as manufacturing telecommunications equipment and medical devices.²⁰³ More broadly, China's standards-making landscape is fragmented and difficult for foreign companies to navigate.²⁰⁴

China's Attempts to Dominate International Standards-Setting Organizations

Where most standards-making body participants represent their corporate members' interests, the Chinese government coordinates participation by Chinese companies to advance national policy objectives. China's 2006 National Medium- and Long-Term Plan for Science and Technology Development explicitly set international promotion of Chinese technical standards as a goal of Chinese industrial policy.²⁰⁵ By 2010, a coordinated policy to increase China's presence in various international standards-making bodies had achieved noticeable successes, including by increasing the number of Chinese nationals in leadership positions within these organizations.

From virtually no leadership presence in the three largest standards-setting organizations prior to 2006, China now leads 64 out of roughly 740 technical committees and subcommittees it participates in under the International Standards Organization (ISO), compared to 104 for the United States.²⁰⁶ China leads 11 out of 186 technical committees and subcommittees in the International Electrotechnical Commission (IEC), compared to 26 out of the 170 for the United States.²⁰⁷ China is tied with Germany for participating in the most technical committees and subcommittees of any country, at 186, compared to 169 for the United States.²⁰⁸ Within the three study groups in the International Telecommunications Union (ITU) most focused on networked technologies, China holds more than a third of rapporteurs,* the functionary position in charge of manag-

*The ratio includes both rapporteurs and associate rapporteurs. These three study groups include Future Networks, Security, and IoT [Internet of Things] Smart Cities. Gary Fishman,

ing committee workflow.²⁰⁹ The director general of the ITU, a UN agency, is Zhao Houlin, a Chinese national who began his second four-year term in 2019 (see Addendum II: “Leadership in International Technical Standards-Making Organizations” for more details on the differences between various standards-setting organizations, how they operate, and China’s influence within them).²¹⁰

Common standards allow different products to work together seamlessly and enable firms to sell across national boundaries, in turn allowing consumers greater choice. Countries and companies participating in standards-setting organizations with genuine intent to put forward the best technical solutions further this beneficial cycle, but Beijing’s approach deliberately betrays this spirit. At a minimum, it impinges on the efficacy of international standards-making, and in some cases Chinese delegations manipulate the procedures of standards-making bodies.

Within various organizations, Beijing has sought to undermine U.S. technological leadership and gain an advantage for Chinese companies and to advance authoritarian norms in setting standards for sensitive technologies like facial recognition in video surveillance. Furthermore, the Chinese government’s involvement in dictating policy priorities for standards development may lead to setting ill-conceived standards before technology is mature, hampering long-term innovation.

Several patterns of China’s participation in international standards-setting bodies are of note:

- *Coordinating Chinese firms’ votes:* The Chinese government requires Chinese firms to vote as a bloc for Chinese nationals seeking leadership positions in standards-setting organizations or for proposals that favor adoption of Chinese standards, regardless of technical merit. Within the 3rd Generation Partnership Project (3GPP),* Chinese firms all changed their votes to favor a proposal by Huawei after initial results showed many firms favored a compromise solution combining Huawei’s proposal with a different standard favored by U.S. chip designer Qualcomm.²¹¹ The founder of Lenovo faced tremendous public scorn in China for initially voting in favor of Qualcomm’s proposal, even after changing his vote to favor Huawei in the final round.²¹²
- *The bounty system:* To incentivize individuals and firms to propose more standards and raise the overall number of Chinese standards adopted in international organizations, various Chinese government agencies, academic institutions, or industry associations may offer monetary awards or other professional recognition for successfully adopted proposals. For instance, ChemChina, a large SOE, offers several annual research awards of \$56,500 (renminbi [RMB] 400,000) for research that either makes clear technical contributions to the company or contributes to international standards; a second tier of prizes pays only half as much for research that contributes to China’s

²⁰⁹ITU-I Rapporteur and Editor Tutorial,” *International Telecommunication Union*, October 2012.

²¹⁰*3GPP is a consortium of regional telecommunications standards-making bodies that develop the technical standards for 5G wireless technology.

domestic standards.*²¹³ Generally, the bounty system is more of a nuisance than a threat to U.S. economic interests, as it has led to standards-making bodies being flooded with low-quality proposals that other countries quickly reject.²¹⁴ Some incentive programs, however, such as grants administered by the Ministry of Science and Technology, align with sectors targeted by Chinese industrial policy.²¹⁵ Additionally, Chinese policy incentivizes academics to further China's editorial presence in engineering journals that influence international deliberation on technical standards, such as those published by the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers (IEEE), an international standards-setting organization that also houses numerous trade publications and academic journals.[†]²¹⁶ These editorial positions are separate from technical committees that set standards, but give Chinese entities more voice in the direction of future engineering research that will shape how standards-setting efforts evolve.[‡]

- *Splitting proposals to inflate Chinese contributions:* In order to increase their total contributions§ to standards-making bodies, Chinese participants often divide a proposed technical standard into multiple proposals that only advance one substantive technical solution. For instance, the Standardization Administration of China has issued separate standards for quality versus technical requirements for fingerprints, an area covered by a single standard under development within ISO and the IEC's biometrics subcommittee.²¹⁷ For bodies like 3GPP, this behavior allows the Chinese delegation to claim it is leading 5G development simply because it has submitted a greater number of total proposals, even if many are frivolous compared to U.S. proposals. More importantly, it floods the standards-making process, diluting an organization's ability to focus on important issues and

*Unless noted otherwise, this section uses the following exchange rate throughout: \$1 = RMB 7.08.

†These incentives dovetail with a broader program to improve the international footprint of China's science and technology publications by bringing reputable overseas publishers to China to launch academic journals. A 2016 Action plan specifically provided up to \$3.7 million (RMB 25 million) a year for three years to top academic publishers, including IEEE, to establish journals in China. China Association for Science and Technology Net, "Publish the Dream of a Powerful Country and Boost Scientific and Technological Innovation: A Summary of the Development of Chinese Science and Technology Journals (刊载强国梦想 助力科技创新 —— 中国科技期刊发展综述)," November 10, 2018. Translation, <https://www.sciping.com/22219.html>; Wang Enge, ed., *Bluebook of China Science and Technology Publication Development* (2017) 中国科技期刊发展蓝皮书(2017), Science Press, 2018, 44. Translation, <http://www.castcs.org.cn/l/cms/www/201805/24105303r5g2.pdf>.

‡According to Carl Cargill, a former principal scientist at Adobe Systems, an important stage of the standardization process before any standards proposals begin are the "pre-conceptualization" and "conceptualization" stages, where a company tries to define a clearly bounded problem that needs to be solved, such as defining a standard for streaming video in web applications. Journals like those published by IEEE can play a part in shaping this preliminary discussion on what industry problems should be addressed through standardization by scoping the technical problems and offering prototypes. This research can influence the direction that technical committees may later take when submitting proposals. Charles Schmidt, "Best Practices for Technical Standard Creation," *MITRE Corporation*, April 2017, vii, 3–4; Carl F. Cargill, "Why Standardization Efforts Fail," *Journal of Electronic Publishing* 14:1 (Summer 2011).

§Most standards-setting organizations are contribution driven, meaning the agenda for a working group in most standards-setting organizations is determined by the proposals delegates contribute, though generally aspects of many different submissions will be combined and modified into one published standard. Some organizations may more actively attempt to guide the direction of contributions or solicit contributions that tackle a specific technology area. Ken Krechmer, "Market Driven Standardization: Everyone Can Win," *Standards Engineering* 52: 4 (July/August 2000), 15–19.

advantaging China's often large and coordinated delegations, which can devote more participants to decisions on different topics while other delegations are stretched thin.²¹⁸ For instance, prior to a meeting to determine 5G standards in March 2018, Swedish internet communications firm Ericsson expressed concern that Huawei was at an unfair advantage because it was flooding the agenda and sending 40 delegates compared to only 25 from Ericsson.*²¹⁹

- *Leveraging diplomatic influence:* In the ITU, China has advanced its economic and geopolitical agenda by garnering support from countries heavily dependent on Chinese investment, particularly on matters of internet governance and the jurisdiction of international standards-setting bodies.²²⁰ Chiefly, China has used the UN and the ITU to advance its vision of “cybersovereignty,” or that cyberspace is a sovereign domain countries should govern in accordance with their domestic laws (see “China’s Vision of Cybersovereignty Challenges a Free and Open Internet”). In 2015, the ITU established a smart cities working group carved out of areas covered under ITU members who are the recipients of Chinese smart cities systems,† while other countries, including the United States, objected on the basis that the technology was immature or covered by existing standards-making processes.²²¹ In contrast, consensus-based organizations like ISO and the IEC rejected Chinese proposals to launch a smart cities working group because the technology is immature. China has used the platform extensively to promote its own technologies. Since 2017, Chinese organizations have participated in 246 submissions for standards in the ITU’s smart cities study group, compared to 108 for the next-largest contributing country, South Korea, and only 35 for the United States.²²²

China’s Vision of Cybersovereignty Challenges a Free and Open Internet

Under China’s cybersovereignty model, data and networks would constitute sovereign territory within individual countries’ jurisdictions, to be governed according to local laws.²²³ This model of the internet is directly in contrast to the free and open multistakeholder platform championed by the United States and other democracies. China’s Cyberspace Administration has invoked the logic of nationally bounded cyberspace to justify limiting the exercise of free speech and personal privacy in China, and to resist the efforts by the United States and other countries to apply in-

*As of early 2017, Huawei had submitted 234 proposed standards to 3GPP, the most of any participant, followed by Ericsson with 214 proposals. At the March 2018 meeting, Ericsson was able to broker a compromise with Huawei capping the number of proposed standards that could be reviewed in a meeting, though it was still more than the company believed reasonable. Newley Purnell and Stu Wu, “China’s Huawei Is Determined to Lead the Way on 5G despite U.S. Concerns,” *Wall Street Journal*, March 30, 2018.

†Smart cities systems employ networked technologies like cameras, sensors, and location devices to collect a wide variety of data for urban management, including traffic flow, energy usage, and crime. China has used smart cities technology to expand its surveillance and repression capabilities. For more on China’s smart cities technology exports, see Katherine Atha et al., “China’s Smart Cities Development,” *SOSI’s Special Programs Division* (prepared for the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission), April 29, 2020.

China's Vision of Cybersovereignty Challenges a Free and Open Internet—Continued

ternational law to the internet.²²⁴ The model has provided other authoritarian-leaning countries, such as Russia, with a template for using the internet and related technologies as a tool for surveillance and social repression.²²⁵

China has used the UN and the ITU, respectively, to promote both the overarching vision of centrally controlled, nationally bounded internet as well as an alternative technical architecture to undergird such a system. On the normative side, in 2015 China advocated for enshrining cybersovereignty in a series of documents defining global internet policies and frameworks, aligning with Russia, Cuba, and a group of 134 developing countries. China ultimately dropped the proposed language owing to strong resistance from developed countries led by the United States, but the final documents approved by the UN General Assembly allowed a greater role for state management of the internet.²²⁶ With China and Russia's backing, the UN later passed a resolution ostensibly to combat cybercrime that would make it easier for countries to coordinate political repression across borders in November 2019.²²⁷

On the technical side, in March 2020 the Financial Times reported that Huawei had proposed an alternative standard for the internet protocol* by which countries would govern a national internet.²²⁸ Under the model, internet service providers would have complete oversight and control over every device connected to the internet through their service.²²⁹ This would effectively rebuild the technical architecture of the internet to support centralized enforcement and top-down control of information flows within a single country's cyberspace.²³⁰

Even as China's government claims sovereignty over China's domestic cyberspace, China's data governance regime asserts extraterritorial jurisdiction over data and internet activity outside of China. China's draft Data Security Law, released July 2020, grants Chinese law enforcement power to access data and regulate, investigate, and prosecute data controllers located outside of China that harm "the national security, the public interest, or the law interests of [Chinese] citizens or organizations."²³¹ "National security" is undefined in the law, but Chinese authorities may interpret it expansively in application.²³² Notably the law applies equally to Hong Kong and Macau, further eroding Hong Kong's separate legal system. (For more discussion of the CCP's violation of the "one country, two systems" framework, see Chapter 5: "Hong Kong").²³³ China's Anti-Terrorism Law, enacted in 2015, similarly requires internet service providers and platforms to provide surveillance access to any and all data concerning Chinese nationals, even if they are located outside of the country.²³⁴

*An internet protocol is the information architecture, standards, and policies underlying how individuals connect to the internet. See Lawrence E. Strickling, "United States Government's Internet Protocol Numbering Principles," *National Telecommunications and Information Administration*, December 3, 2012.

Circumventing International Standards-Setting Organizations

As with its participation in international governance organizations, China is trying to increase its influence and stature within international standards-setting bodies while simultaneously working outside of them to promote adoption of Chinese technology. Both efforts undermine the efficacy of international standards-setting bodies and erode their normative influence while furthering adoption of Chinese technology (and potential long-term commitment to Chinese technical standards) in emerging markets.

Recent Chinese policy explicitly encourages promoting the adoption of Chinese technical standards as a goal of diplomatic engagement, effectively circumventing standards-making institutions.²³⁵ Even without formal adoption of Chinese technical standards, importing primarily Chinese equipment can result in a de facto commitment to Chinese technical standards, especially for economies in which Chinese products dominate the market or China is a major export destination.²³⁶ A key part of the National Development and Reform Commission's strategy to export Chinese standards along BRI is to encourage construction of "demonstration projects" that showcase Chinese standards across sectors, including agriculture, industry, and services.²³⁷ For example, China has used diplomatic agreements and demonstration projects to promote Chinese agricultural standards in Southeast Asian countries. At the second Belt and Road Forum in May 2019, China signed a cooperation agreement on pesticides with nine countries, including five Southeast Asian countries.* A 2019 proposal from China's Ministry of Agriculture described the agreement as "using pesticides as a breakthrough to promote [cooperation] with Southeast Asian countries on standards for veterinary drugs, agricultural machinery, processing for high quality produce, and other materials."²³⁸ In September 2020, Chinese state-owned media reported the provincial standards organization in China's southern Guangxi autonomous region had established nearly 5,000 acres of agricultural standardization demonstration areas in Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, and Myanmar as part of BRI.²³⁹ The projects had led to formulation of 20 technical standards, as well as training 700 managers, technicians, and horticulturalists.²⁴⁰

Andrew Polk, partner at research consultancy Trivium China, suggests some of China's short-term losses on infrastructure investments in BRI countries may yield dividends if they create long-term dependence on technology adherent to Chinese standards.²⁴¹ Chinese firms' cultivation of export markets via BRI also follows this trend: aggressive marketing of ICT infrastructure within BRI countries by Chinese firms like Huawei and ZTE, often supported by loans from Chinese policy banks, has occurred in tandem with China advocating for standards to govern such systems in the ITU.[†]²⁴²

*The countries include Bangladesh, Cambodia, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, the Philippines, Thailand, Sri Lanka, and Vietnam. *Xinhua*, "List of Achievements of the Second 'Belt and Road' International Cooperation Summit Forum, (第二届'一带一路'国际合作高峰论坛成果清单)," April 28, 2019. Translation.

†In the 2017–2020 ITU study period, Huawei and ZTE have authored or coauthored 25 proposed standards in the Internet of Things (IoT) working group and 40 proposed standards in the Smart Cities working group as of June 2020, compared to 35 total by the United States, International Telecommunications Union Study Group 20, "Contributions—Study Period 2017," March 24, 2020.

China's ability to export a unique set of standards for critical communications and transportation infrastructure could have dual-use implications, potentially improving Beijing's ability to project military force outside China's borders.²⁴³ Under China's program of military-civil fusion, the National Defense Transportation Law and several other regulations on standards require civilian industry standards to support defense sector requirements in key projects, and in some cases provide government subsidies to absorb the cost where doing so is not commercially advantageous.²⁴⁴ For instance, analysts for the People's Liberation Army (PLA) have flagged commercial port infrastructure standards as far below those required to provide logistical support to the PLA Navy in cold chain storage, cargo terminal size, refueling capacity, and other standards.²⁴⁵

Exports of Chinese communications infrastructure could allow the PLA to access or control this infrastructure after it has been deployed in other countries or to deny adversaries access in the event of conflict. China's State Administration for Market Regulation, the PLA services' respective equipment departments, and other agencies coordinate to oversee the unification of industry and commercial standards with military requirements.²⁴⁶ A 2018 article in the market regulator's agency journal *China Standardization* encouraged the PLA to exploit Chinese commercial firms' access to international markets to improve the PLA's modernization and compatibility with international systems.²⁴⁷

Implications for the United States

Beijing's long-standing ambitions are designed to undermine and ultimately displace the United States as a global leader. These goals enjoy broad support within the CCP and are expected to persist beyond General Secretary Xi. A China-centric order replacing the current U.S.-led rules-based order could have profound effects on global security, freedom, and prosperity.²⁴⁸ Statements by General Secretary Xi suggest this new China-led order would redefine the very concept of sovereignty. In a speech to the Central Military Commission in November 2015, he claimed the global governance system is undergoing a "profound revolution [and] the international balance of power is undergoing the most revolutionary change in recent times," declaring this "a great change to the international system [that has existed] since the Treaty of Westphalia."²⁴⁹ According to General Secretary Xi, the Westphalian system, which cemented the norm of state sovereignty in 1648, was only "a limited international configuration established by various European countries" without the input of other regions.²⁵⁰ Therefore, he argued, the recent, rapid growth in the strength of developing countries—and implicitly that of China in particular—presented an opportunity to reexamine the international system.²⁵¹

The international norm of sovereignty determines that with very few exceptions, states are inviolable as individuals, but the "community of common human destiny" seeks to replace this system with a theory of international relations purporting to treat the world as a single integrated society under Beijing's guidance. Just as Beijing's interpretation of human rights prioritizes collective development over the rights of individuals, the "community of common hu-

man destiny” would subsume the agency and interests of individual countries to the goal of collective harmony on China’s terms.²⁵² If the CCP succeeds in normalizing its views of governance, individual rights, and economic exchanges, the result could fundamentally undermine these rights in a large swath of countries (including the United States and its allies and partners) and intensify the United States and democratic countries’ current ideological competition with the CCP.

Beijing’s popularization of undemocratic norms may not result in countries uniformly adopting the CCP’s political system, but it is increasingly clear that authoritarian-leaning regimes look to China for guidance. Repressive governments have used expertise gained from Beijing to more effectively censor and surveil their populace. If governments around the world accept the CCP-promoted notion that authoritarianism is not just acceptable but superior to democracy, repressive governments may become increasingly emboldened to abandon even the superficial trappings of rule of law, encouraging corruption and repression while eroding transparent governance globally. Moreover, the Chinese government’s promotion of alternative nation-based internet protocols presents the risk of cutting off access to information crucial to participatory government. Controlling, limiting, and censoring information strengthens authoritarian regimes and silences critics and opposition.

Beijing’s efforts to expand influence in international standards-setting organizations threaten to distort the international standards ecosystem and disadvantage U.S. firms by undermining the principles of market economics. Even where Chinese firms do not rival U.S. firms’ technological capabilities, greater Chinese influence in international standards could allow inferior technologies to become dominant. De facto adoption of Chinese standards, driven by Chinese firms’ exports along BRI, could also put U.S. firms in the position of having to adapt to Chinese technical standards (and pay licensing fees to Chinese firms) to access other markets. In some technological domains, especially ICT, China’s dominance may also enhance security concerns.

China faces a steep learning curve in its efforts to establish a new hierarchical global order, but its approach is deliberate and adaptive. Moreover, while the CCP’s vision is far from Mao Zedong’s ambitions to export violent revolution and establish China-inspired regimes worldwide, the Party has never abandoned its goal of fundamentally revising the international system. The eventual impact of these efforts could erode global governance norms and U.S. leadership and influence within already weakened institutions. Underestimating Beijing’s intent based on its current capabilities risks delaying a response until it is already too late to preserve the liberal international order that has allowed the unprecedented flourishing of human life and freedoms for the last three-quarters of a century.

Addendum I: What Is a Technical Standard?

Technical standards are design features or product specifications that allow different products to work together seamlessly regardless of where they were made or which firm made them.²⁵³ These standards are called interoperability standards, compatibility standards, or interface standards (see Table 2: Types of Standards). Technical standards work effectively when they are invisible to the product user.²⁵⁴

Table 2: Types of Standards

Type of Standard	Definition	Examples	U.S. Governing Organization(s)
Interoperability, Compatibility, or Interface	Design features or product specifications that allow different products to work together seamlessly	Compatible plugs and electrical outlets Wireless telecommunications (e.g., 5G)	Led by nongovernment industry representatives like the American National Standards Institute (ANSI) with guidance from the U.S. Department of Commerce's National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST)
Health, Safety, and Environmental Standards	Requirements that ensure products are safe to use or consume, meet a minimum clinical threshold in delivering promised health benefits, or do not cause harm to the environment	Health: minimum performance criteria for medical devices Safety: uniform fire hydrant hose connections Environmental: vehicle emission standards	Food and Drug Administration, Environmental Protection Agency, etc., in conjunction with NIST
Measurements and Metrology	Standardized units of measurements are a prerequisite for design specifications and were the earliest work of many standards-making bodies	Weight (pound), volume (gallon), and distance (miles) An amp, an ohm, and a volt in electricity measurement	NIST
Conformity Assessments Tests and Benchmarking	Conformity and assessment tests verify that a product complies with standards. Benchmarks establish repeatable tests to evaluate the performance of a technology, often for new fields	Conformity assessment: tests certifying imports into the EU comply with EU safety standards Benchmark: a set of pictures for gauging the accuracy of an image-recognition algorithm	NIST

Table 2: Types of Standards—Continued

Type of Standard	Definition	Examples	U.S. Governing Organization(s)
De Facto	Voluntary standards that arise by industry consensus because of widespread use and acceptance, but without formal adoption	Google's open source software library of machine learning tools, TensorFlow, is used by other institutions all over the world	Not governed

Source: Casey P. Grant, "Putting Safety First: A Look from Yesterday to Tomorrow on the Building of Our Safety Infrastructure," in Mary Jo DiBernardo et al., eds., *NIST Centennial Standards Symposium - Standards in the Global Economy: Past, Present and Future*, 2002, 71–72.

In the United States, domestic technical standards are often developed by nongovernmental organizations like the American National Standards Institute (ANSI) or industry consortia. These standards are consensus based, and the organizations and consortia leading the standards-making process serve to convene a dialogue between various stakeholders in the outcome of a standards formulation process.²⁵⁵ Technical standards agreed upon by organization or consortium members are voluntary—no law or regulation requires producers to follow them—but widespread adoption can make them a prerequisite for market entrance.²⁵⁶ Organizations like ANSI also represent U.S. commercial interests in international standards-making bodies.²⁵⁷

While standards-making is industry led in the United States, government is also an active participant in formulating standards primarily ensuring consumer welfare and facilitating, rather than guiding, commercial development. The National Institute for Standards and Technology (NIST) establishes testing standards and measurements, while agencies like the Food and Drug Administration and the Environmental Protection Agency develop safety, health, and environmental standards, often in coordination with NIST and the private sector.²⁵⁸ These standards may be codified into regulation for sectors like food standards or medical device standards. In other cases, NIST helps advance new benchmarks and performance criteria for emerging technologies, for instance by hosting robotics competitions to determine current industry or academic capabilities.²⁵⁹

Addendum II: Leadership in International Technical Standards-Making Organizations

Numerous international standards-making bodies have formed to coordinate development of technical standards suitable for application across global economies (Tables 3, 4, and 6 briefly describe the three largest). These organizations facilitate agreement in design specifications for complex technologies like wireless telecommunications, where lack of international consensus would require producers to conduct substantial additional research, development, and design to optimize new models for each market with different standards.²⁶⁰

While the particulars of each organization vary, the three largest organizations each follow a similar hierarchical structure. Technical committees are responsible for entire sectors (e.g., telecommunications). In turn, they oversee subcommittees that lead the standards-setting agenda for specific industries or applications (e.g., streaming internet video). Within subcommittees, working groups typically draft actual standards (e.g., developing a video encoding format, such as MPEG).²⁶¹ These three organizations take one of two forms to ratify standards.

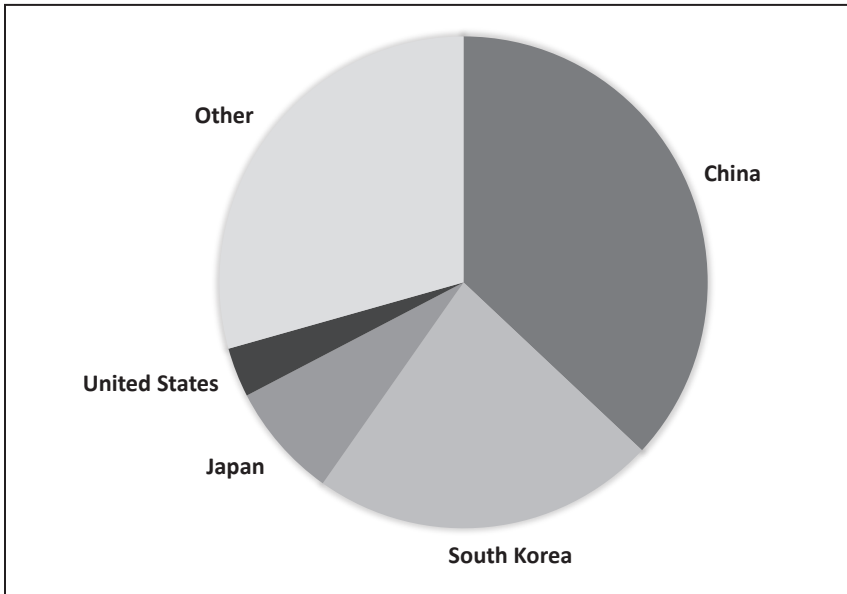
In parliamentary or “treaty-based” organizations like the ITU, each member or participant votes on whether to adopt standards proposals put before the technical committee, subcommittee, or working group.²⁶² In consensus-based organizations like ISO and the IEC, proposals are vetted among members and revised as a group before going to vote if enough members agree a proposal is sound and should go to vote after the vetting stage (see Table 3: Current Leadership in the ITU).²⁶³ Beijing is able to wield much greater influence in parliamentary organizations, where it can leverage political influence among other countries.

Table 3: Current Leadership in the ITU

Name	Organizational Style	Remit and Examples of Committees	China’s Participation and Leadership vs. the United States
International Telecommunications Union (ITU)	Parliamentary	The ITU is a UN agency that promulgates telecommunications and radio standards to member countries. For some technologies, such as 5G, it adopts standards developed by other more qualified organizations—3GPP in the case of 5G.	China is participating in 40 percent of ITU telecommunications technical groups for standards in formulation versus 5 percent for the United States. Within 3GPP, China is participating in 27 percent of specifications groups versus 23 percent for the United States. China’s involvement outstrips its global market share.

Source: Various.²⁶⁴

Figure 1: Rapporteurs in Select ITU Study Groups: Future Networks, Security, and Internet of Things Smart Cities, 2020*



Source: Various.²⁶⁵

Table 4: Current Leadership in the ISO

Name	Organizational Style	Remit and Examples of Committees	China's Participation and Leadership vs. the United States
International Standards Organization (ISO)	Consensus-based	ISO is the largest international standards-making body and issues standards on everything from biotechnology to cutlery. ISO and the IEC jointly issue some standards. For information technology, they convene Joint Technical Committee 1 on which Subcommittee 42 oversees artificial intelligence standards.	As of 2020, the United States held the second-most secretariats (behind Germany), the key position leading technical committees and subcommittees. China held the sixth-most secretariats. The U.S. share has declined steadily since 2008, while China's share has tripled in the same period. China leads ISO in technical committee and subcommittee participation, while the United States ranks 17th.

Source: Various.²⁶⁶

* Rapporteurs manage committee workflow in the ITU. The figure includes both rapporteurs and associate rapporteurs. These three study groups provide a picture of China's influence in telecommunications standards. Gary Fishman, "ITU-I Rapporteur and Editor Tutorial," *International Telecommunication Union*, October 2012.

Table 5: Share of ISO Technical Committee Secretariats Held by Select Members, 2020

Country	Number of Secretariats	Percent of Subset	Country	Number of Secretariats	Percent of Subset
Germany	133	23%	Japan	76	13%
United States	105	18%	China	63	11%
France	77	14%	Italy	21	4%
United Kingdom	76	13%	South Korea	19	3%

Source: International Standards Organization, "Members."

Table 6: Current Leadership International in the IEC

Name	Organizational Style	Remit and Examples of Committees	China's Participation and Leadership vs. the United States
International Electro-technical Committee (IEC)	Consensus-based	In contrast to ISO, the IEC issues standards exclusively for products that use electricity	Similar to ISO, China trails the influence of the United States and Germany in leadership positions, but it has grown steadily from a minimal presence in the IEC prior to 2006. Notably, China is tied with Germany for participation in the most technical committees and subcommittees (at 183). The United States is involved in 170.

Source: International Electrotechnical Commission, "Who We Are."

Table 7. Share of IEC Technical Committee Secretariats Held by Select Members, 2020

Country	Number of Secretariats	Percent of Subset	Country	Number of Secretariats	Percent of Subset
Germany	36	22%	United Kingdom	20	12%
United States	26	16%	Italy	13	8%
Japan	24	15%	China	11	7%
France	22	14%	South Korea	10	6%

Source: International Electrotechnical Commission, "Who We Are."

ENDNOTES FOR SECTION 2

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