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## China's Role in Global Transition Processes to Sustainability — A Role Theoretical Approach

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### Summary

The transition to sustainability is a global project, and without China as an active supporter coping with this challenge will be impossible for the international community. The necessity to involve China is exemplified by the case of greenhouse gases (GHGs): the country is already responsible for about 28 percent of global emissions. In recent years the United Nations has increasingly urged the Chinese government to assume a more active and responsible role in international climate policy — a request to which China has complied by adopting a proactive role during the 2015 Paris World Climate Summit and beyond. However, there are plenty of expectations placed on China as an international actor both by other states as well as by domestic stakeholders. They encompass a wide spectrum of, in parts, incompatible political, economic, social, and ecological issues. The dichotomy that exists in the sustainability-related expectations molding China's self-conception and behavior originates particularly in two factual conditions: first, the country's role as a substantial driver of the global economy and, second, its additional need to further spur economic development in its own less developed domestic regions. Using a role theoretical approach, the article seeks to examine the parameters that influence China's space for thought and action in the global transition process. The aim is to contribute to the existing body of research on the relationship between structure and actors in politics during the course of sustainability transitions. It thus strives to present an additional perspective on the potentials, limits, and motivations of nation-states to either promote a sustainability-related transition process or to remain on a conventional, unsustainable path.

**Keywords:** China, climate protection, sustainable development, economic growth, G20, role theory

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