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ANALYSIS OF CHINA'S LEADERSHIP IN ADVANCING TOWARDS GREEN ENERGY TRANSITION IN BRICS

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Abstract

The green energy transition has become a priority agenda in the international community due to the increasing pressures of climate change and global competition. China is one of the significant actors in promoting the green energy transition, particularly through the BRICS. However, despite China's active participation in global energy governance, China still has a continuing dependence on coal, and BRICS is not an environmentally focused forum. The research question is "why is China strategically leading the green energy transition in the BRICS?" This study uses the Moral Realism theory developed by Yan Xuetong from the Realism paradigm. This study uses a qualitative method with a deductive approach conducted in a descriptive-analytical manner. By examining China's role and leadership in promoting the green energy transition in the BRICS, this study provides a deeper understanding of how China's strategic interests, comprehensive power capacity, and political leadership as a rising state shape energy cooperation among developing countries and strengthen its position in an increasingly multipolar global order. The analysis shows that China's push for the green energy transition in the BRICS is a long-term political strategy as a rising state to convert increasing material power into international legitimacy and authority. However, China's leadership is limited by the structural contradiction of the continued use of coal in the domestic energy mix.

Keywords: BRICS, China, Global Leadership, Green Energy Transition, Moral Realism.

INTRODUCTION

Climate change and energy transition issues have a significant influence on global dynamics. Both issues have become major driving forces in shaping policy directions and economic development in various countries. Climate change caused by greenhouse gas emissions from the combustion of fossil fuels creates environmental pressure and broad socio-economic impacts to the world (El Kezazy et al., 2025). Dependence on non-renewable natural resources highlights the urgency of transitioning toward renewable energy. Energy transition has become a global environmental agenda that influences international policies and opens major opportunities for green economic growth. In addition, sustainable technological innovations such as wind turbine development and green hydrogen further strengthen the role of energy transition in shaping a resilient and sustainable future.

As one of the world's major economic powers, China has strategically positioned itself within the global energy politics landscape by utilizing various multilateral platforms to promote its green energy transition commitment (Kong, 2022). This active role became increasingly visible when China sought to fill the leadership gap in global climate governance following the United States' withdrawal from the Paris Agreement in 2025, similar to withdrawal undertaken in 2017 (VOA, 2025). Through various diplomatic initiatives, including intensive engagement within the BRICS, China has strengthen its influence in shaping global energy policy directions (Christoffersen, 2016).

China's energy transition initiatives reflect a dual strategy that focuses more on achieving energy security and economic interests rather than purely climate commitments. Although China has positioned itself as a global leader in renewable energy development and green technology (IEA, 2023a), the country still demonstrates a high dependence on coal as its primary energy source and continues to invest in coal-fired power plant projects both domestically and through the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) scheme (IEA, 2023b). This condition indicates that China's active role in promoting energy transition is not solely rooted in a commitment to sustainability but also represents a strategic effort to balance its global environmental leadership with domestic needs and national economic interests.

BRICS has become a strategic platform for China to strengthen its influence in global energy governance because the forum supports its efforts to lead the green energy transition agenda among developing countries. Through BRICS, China gains diplomatic space that enables cross-country energy policy coordination among developing nations without Western dominance. BRICS energy cooperation, which integrates fossil, renewable, and nuclear energy sources, opens opportunities for China to expand its technological role in clean energy and strengthen strategic partnerships with Russia, India, and Brazil (Oruch et al., 2024). In this context, BRICS serves not only as an economic forum but also as a geopolitical platform that strengthens China's position as a major actor in promoting sustainable development. China encourages the implementation of energy transition policies through research collaboration, infrastructure investment, and ideological exchange via the BRICS Energy Research Cooperation Platform. The expansion of BRICS in 2024 with the accession of Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Egypt further strengthened China's position within the bloc and expanded its influence in promoting the formation of a multipolar global energy order aligned with its strategic vision (Ercan, 2023).

However, behind its ambitions for green leadership, China still faces contradictions in its energy transition efforts. More than 60 percent of China's primary energy consumption still comes from coal, making it both the world's largest producer and consumer of coal (George et al., 2020). This dependence is driven by the abundant availability and low cost of domestic coal. As a result, carbon emissions and pollution from coal-fired power plants remain high, despite the government's implementation of ultra-low emission policies and expansion of renewable investments (George et al., 2020). This situation illustrates the gap between China's ambition to lead the global energy transition and the reality of its structural dependence on coal.

This article consists of five main sections. The first section presents the background, research problem, research significance related to China's green energy leadership in BRICS, and the analytical framework using Yan Xuetong's (2019) Moral Realism theory. The second section forms the core discussion by analyzing in depth China's role and leadership in promoting the green energy transition within the BRICS bloc, including China's position in global energy governance, China's strategic interests in BRICS, and the implications of its green energy leadership for China's perception and position in the global order. The final section presents the conclusions and main findings regarding China's green diplomacy strategy in BRICS as a representation of efforts to build leadership legitimacy.

Research Question

As a global economic power, China has access to various multilateral forums such as the G20 and UN environmental regimes to promote its green energy agenda (Chen, 2020). However, China's chosen to promote energy transition within the BRICS framework, a heterogeneous group not specifically focused on environmental issues, raises strategic questions. This choice becomes even more problematic considering that China remains the world's largest coal consumer and investor (Shen, 2022). While most studies examine China's green energy leadership within the context of Western global forums, the role of BRICS as an alternative arena remains underexplored. The contradiction between green ambitions and dependence on fossil energy forms the following research question: "Why is China strategically leading the green energy transition in the BRICS?"

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review is divided into two categories: China's role in the BRICS governance structure and China's role in global energy governance. Both categories indicate that China consistently seeks to assert its leadership role through multilateral cooperation in both economic and energy sectors. The results of the literature review and categorization indicate a research gap regarding China's strategic role in promoting the green energy transition through BRICS.

Studies on China's role within BRICS show that China occupies a strategic and influential position in shaping the direction and dynamics of cooperation within the bloc. Oropeza García (2015) emphasizes that China's economic expansion and high demand for natural resources became the main catalysts for BRICS synergy, where other member states as the supporting partners for China's industrial growth. Meanwhile, Hooijmaaijers (2019) explains that China uses BRICS as a geopolitical instrument to promote reforms in global economic governance through the establishment of the New Development Bank (NDB) and the Contingent Reserve Arrangement (CRA) as alternatives to Western-dominated international financial institutions. However, differences in interests among BRICS members, particularly with India, remain limiting factors for the effectiveness of China's leadership. On the other hand, Wang (2022) emphasizes that China's leadership within BRICS is facilitative and exemplary, reflected in its ability to direct development and macroeconomic agendas and demonstrate strong compliance with collective commitments. Overall, these studies confirm that BRICS functions as a strategic platform for China to expand its

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global influence and strengthen its position within a more multipolar global governance structure. The literature regarding China's role in green energy demonstrates that China seeks to position itself as a central actor in global energy governance through a combination of diplomacy, technological innovation, and sustainable financing. Girón (2023) explains that China's structural energy transformation is supported by synergy between state intervention and institutional financing, strengthening China's dominance in renewable energy markets, particularly in the solar energy sector and green projects under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). In line with this argument, Li (2015) emphasizes that clean energy development is inseparable from China's national energy security strategy and serves as a diplomatic instrument to strengthen international cooperation in green energy sectors.

Christoffersen (2016) further argues that China's energy leadership is not only domestic but also global, reflected in efforts to build a more inclusive alternative energy order beyond the dominance of Western institutions such as the IEA. However, these efforts occur amid structural contradictions, considering that China remains the world's largest coal producer and that more than 70 percent of its energy consumption still depends on coal, indicating that China's green energy transition is gradual and pragmatic rather than a radical shift away from fossil fuels (Odgaard, 2015). Thus, studies in this category illustrate how China uses its green energy policies as strategic instruments for expanding global influence and strengthening leadership legitimacy in shaping a multipolar and sustainable global energy framework. Overall, the existing literature confirms that although China seeks to present itself as a pioneer of green energy transition and a reformer in global energy governance, its structural dependence on coal remains a dilemma for the consistency of such leadership. This complexity indicates that China's promotion of the green energy agenda is driven not only by environmental commitments but also by strategic considerations aimed at strengthening its legitimacy and geopolitical influence among developing countries.

METHOD

This article employs a qualitative research method with a deductive approach using descriptive-analytical analysis. This method refers to research based on strategies or data collection and analysis that are non-numerical in nature (Lamont, 2015). In this article, the qualitative method is used to collect data from various sources in order to analyze China's strategy in promoting the green energy transition within the BRICS and to understand the motives behind such leadership through the application of the Leadership and Strategic Preferences theory derived from Moral Realism theory. The data sources in this study consist of primary and secondary data collected to analyze China's strategy in the green energy transition within BRICS. Primary data were obtained from official documents issued by the Chinese government and BRICS. Meanwhile, secondary data were collected through an in-depth literature review of academic sources, including books and scientific journals.

The data analysis technique applied in this study is congruence analysis developed by George and Bennet (George & Bennet, 2005). This technique enables researchers to test whether empirical patterns in the data align with predictions generated by the theoretical framework. The analysis process began by identifying concrete manifestations of China's leadership in the green energy transition within BRICS. Subsequently, the researcher systematically evaluated the relationship between these practices and the theory of leadership and strategic preferences rooted in the Moral Realism paradigm. Through this technique, the relationship between the independent variable in the form of China's green energy transition policies and the dependent variable in the form of China's increasing strategic influence within BRICS can be systematically examined.

Analytical Framework

In analyzing this research question, the author employs the Moral Realism theory proposed by Yan Xuetong (2019). This theory is rooted in the Realist paradigm in International Relations studies, which emphasizes that political leadership and morality are crucial determinants in supporting the rise of great powers (Xuetong, 2019). Unlike classical realism, which only focuses on material power (Waltz, 1979), Moral Realism also emphasizes "morality" as a strategic element in gaining recognition for international leadership. Based on this framework, China's ability to promote the green energy transition within the BRICS will be analyzed through two independent variables in the theory, which are comprehensive strength and political leadership.

In Moral Realism, comprehensive strength is an objective variable that determines a country's strategic interests. This variable defines the upper and lower limits of national interests, determining the extent to which a country can pursue its interests according to its capacity of power. In this context, China as a rising power defines its primary interest as the effort to expand international influence. Accordingly, China positions itself as a leader in promoting green energy within BRICS. The increase in China's strength also makes BRICS member states more receptive to its leadership because China's green technology is perceived as part of a collective strategic interest.

Furthermore, the political leadership variable explains the growth or decline of a country's comprehensive strength. Yan emphasizes that political leadership is at the core of political perceptions and acts as a determining factor of material power. Based on this perspective, leaders who are morally and strategically strong are able to accelerate economic, military, and cultural growth while also enhancing a country's attractiveness and credibility in the eyes of domestic and international actors. In the context of BRICS, China's political leadership is reflected in its efforts to frame the green energy transition as both a collective moral responsibility and a development opportunity for Global South countries.

Based on the comprehensive strength variable, Yan classifies China as a rising state due to its significant increase in national power. Economic, technological, military, and political capacity expansion have enabled China to narrow the power gap with the United States as the primary hegemon. As a rising state, China's strategic interests extend beyond regional stability toward achieving system domination by influencing global rules, norms, and institutions. Yan argues that changes in comprehensive strength automatically reshape the definition of strategic interests, meaning that as a country's power increases, its demand for international roles also grows. In this context, China's efforts to promote alternative multilateralism through BRICS represent a concrete manifestation of its system domination interests inherent in its identity as a rising state.

China's leadership character falls into the category of proactive political leadership, a type of leadership that emphasizes the importance of political strategy, national preferences, and institutional capacity in driving changes within the international structure. This category describes a state that is not entirely satisfied with the international status quo but is not aggressive, while maintaining a high level of responsibility for the consequences of its policies. Proactive leadership views politics as the primary determinant factor in national rise and places moral responsibility as the foundation for maintaining stability and strategic credibility. In the context of BRICS, China's leadership in promoting the green energy transition reflects this proactive character, manifested through long-term initiatives aimed at reforming the global order while simultaneously strengthening its legitimate position.

Moral Realism theory explains that China's efforts to promote the green energy transition within BRICS represent an implementation of its role as a rising state seeking to expand its strategic interests toward achieving system domination. This effort is carried out through a proactive leadership style in the green energy transition within BRICS by utilizing its technological strength and industrial capacity. The outcome of this effort enhances China's strategic credibility among developing countries through its political leadership in expanding international influence. Therefore, China's leadership in promoting the green energy transition within BRICS constitutes a long-term strategy aimed at strengthening its international authority.

Operationalization Framework Diagram

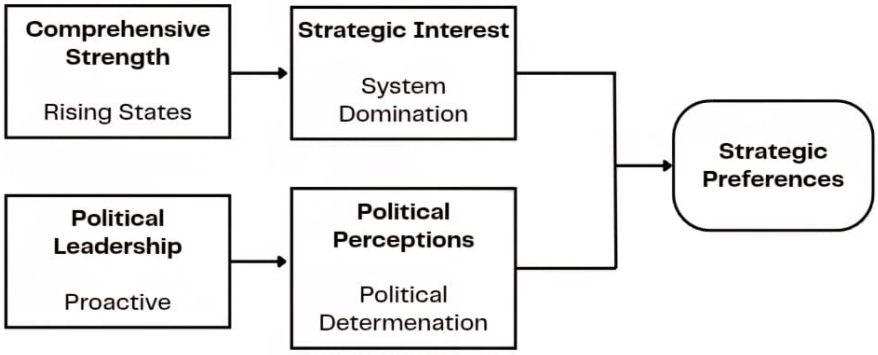


Figure 1. Framework Diagram

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Comprehensive Strength: China's Role in Global Energy Governance

China's position as a rising state, or a country undergoing a transition from a regional power toward a major global actor, faces structural tensions between increasing material capabilities and limited institutional influence. Although China is currently the world's largest coal importer, its position within international energy governance institutions, such as the International Energy Agency, remains limited because these institutions are still dominated by developed countries (Christoffersen, 2016). This condition is commonly experienced by rising states, where their interests and contributions to the global system are significant, yet their normative authority has not been fully recognized. Therefore, China seeks alternative pathways to negotiate its position within the global order, viewing

the existing global energy governance structure as one that does not adequately reflect its practical contributions. Beyond efforts to secure short-term energy interests, China also seeks to build long-term legitimacy through transforming the concept of energy security. Since the 2000s, China has shifted its energy approach from one that was primarily geopolitical and bilateral toward a more active role in global energy governance, particularly on clean energy and climate change issues (He, 2016). This is reflected in China's engagement in non-Western multilateral forums, including BRICS. This shift demonstrates that China, as a rising state, seeks to expand its influence through the provision of global public goods. By promoting the green energy transition, China attempts to project an image of itself as a responsible and constructive actor challenging the dominance of developed countries in the global environmental agenda.

Nevertheless, China's ability to lead global energy governance is also influenced by how it manages its domestic governance structure. Although institutional fragmentation and the significant role of state-owned energy enterprises weaken China's position, they simultaneously create an adaptive model of state capitalism (Kong, 2011). This characteristic also serves as a source of comprehensive strength because it allows the state to coordinate financial resources and policies effectively. The implementation of this approach at the international level is reflected in China's energy investments and cooperation, which aim to adapt to the global order while reshaping energy policies according to its own interests.

Under the leadership of Xi Jinping, China has utilized its dominance in energy markets, particularly through leadership in renewable energy and alternative energy initiatives. China has pursued this strategy to expand its global influence through engagement in various international institutions (Hawkins et al., 2022). This demonstrates that strengthening China's role in global energy governance constitutes a strategy for building structural influence through the energy sector. As a rising state seeking to reduce energy dependency, China is also shifting from being a rule-taker to becoming a rule-shaper in global energy governance, which has long been fragmented and dominated by the West. China's energy leadership therefore as a strategic effort to strengthen global legitimacy and build long-term influence over countries seeking energy and infrastructure support.

Meanwhile, China's energy security problems stem from the long-term imbalance between rapid economic growth and limited domestic energy supplies, particularly oil and gas. This condition has increased China's dependence on imported energy and contributed to vulnerabilities in regional energy stability. Such dependence has become a primary reason for China to integrate energy diversification, energy efficiency, and renewable energy development into its national strategy. These efforts reflect that energy security is also a central aspect of China's role in global energy governance. China simultaneously pursues energy security and sustainable development by positioning itself as an actor capable of linking energy stability, economic growth, and global responsibility within a coherent policy framework.

China has also demonstrated its role in global energy governance through financing energy projects, particularly renewable energy projects, both domestically and internationally through its financial and institutional capacities (Girón, 2025). Through China Development Bank and state-owned energy companies such as State Grid Corporation of China, China has been able to promote the global energy transition in Global South countries (Mohan & Tan-Mullins, 2019). In the context of a rising state, this financing strategy and expansion of energy projects reflect material superiority and the ability to offer an alternative development model that challenges Western dominance. Therefore, China requires a platform to coordinate the green energy transition without Western domination and to build South-South solidarity. In this regard, BRICS constitutes an important bloc in China's strategy to implement its global energy leadership.

1. **China's Interests in Promoting the Green Energy Transition in BRICS**

   China is pushing the green energy transition within BRICS reflects its strategic interests in securing energy and reducing structural vulnerabilities as a country with continuously increasing energy demands. Under the administration of Xi Jinping, China has actively participated in various multilateral forums, including BRICS, as both a diplomatic platform and an important instrument for long-term energy security through cooperation in energy development, especially clean energy (Hawkins et al., 2022). In this context, China's role in promoting the green energy transition within BRICS represents an effort to reduce its dependence on geopolitically vulnerable energy supply routes.

   In addition to energy interests, economic and industrial interests are also central objectives pursued by China through its role in the green energy agenda within BRICS. China has developed structural advantages in renewable energy technologies, particularly in solar, wind, and hydropower, supported by massive production capacities and state financing through development banks and institutional investors (Girón, 2025). BRICS serves as an appropriate platform because it offers a strategic market for the expansion of Chinese green technologies

and energy projects, especially member countries still facing funding and technological gaps. China's dominant role in the green energy transition within BRICS contributes to the expansion of its domestic industrial markets while reinforcing its position as a major actor promoting clean energy solutions in the Global South.

Furthermore, Western dominance in the global order also shapes how China perceives BRICS as an alternative space for reducing normative pressures from global energy institutions. China has developed energy cooperation mechanisms within BRICS based on the preferences and needs of developing countries without the domestic reform pressures that are often imposed by Western institutions (Christoffersen, 2016). However, this mechanism is not intended to create an entirely new energy governance system, but rather to expand China's flexibility in shaping energy cooperation priorities in adaptive and political manner.

Domestically, China faces a sustainable development dilemma. This dilemma, which constitutes part of its national interests, also underlies China's active involvement in the green energy agenda within BRICS. Environmental pressures, high levels of pollution, and limited energy resources have pushed the Chinese government to seek low-carbon development pathways that do not hinder national economic growth (Odgaard, 2015). In this context, green energy cooperation within BRICS enables China to externalize this agenda through overseas investments and projects while simultaneously supporting domestic energy transformation and expanding its economic influence internationally.

Ultimately, China's push for the green energy transition within BRICS reflects strategic interests across multiple sectors, ranging from energy security and national economic expansion to strengthening its geopolitical position among developing countries. BRICS and its derivative instruments, such as the New Development Bank, provide platforms for China to integrate these interests into forms of cooperation that are relatively free from Western influence (Hawkins et al., 2022). Thus, the green energy agenda within BRICS is not merely an environmental policy initiative, but also a political-economic strategy underpinning China's ambition to lead the energy sector in the Global South.

Political Leadership: China's Role within the BRICS Bloc

BRICS is a cooperation forum among developing countries initially consisting of Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa. Over time, BRICS has expanded its membership in Asia, the Middle East, and Africa as part of efforts to strengthen Global South representation in global governance. BRICS originated from informal dialogue and was officially established in June 2009 as a summit institution with independent cooperation mechanisms, including the formation of the New Development Bank and the Contingent Reserve Arrangement (Hooijmaaijers, 2019). The bloc operates as an intergovernmental institution based on consensus and emphasizes the principles of national sovereignty and economic development.

Within the internal structure of BRICS, China occupies a superior and dominant position economically and institutionally compared to other members. China's economic and financial capabilities, along with its status as a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council, place it in a highly influential position within BRICS compared to other member states (Hooijmaaijers, 2019). This imbalance enables China to shape the dialogue agenda by directing BRICS institutional initiatives, even though decisions are formally consensus-based. Thus, China's leadership within BRICS does not manifest as direct hegemony but rather as structural and agenda-setting leadership.

Moreover, China's role within BRICS can also be seen as a reflection of its long-term strategy to build a global order more aligned with the interests of developing countries. China actively promotes development and economic stability issues by initiating and strengthening institutions such as the New Development Bank and the Contingent Reserve Arrangement, which directly reflect China's preferences for long-term development. This is reinforced by China's efforts to shape the operational priorities of BRICS institutions, for example by locating the NDB headquarters in Shanghai and making sustainable development a primary funding focus (Hooijmaaijers, 2019). This demonstrates how China utilizes BRICS as a platform to build alternatives to Western neoliberalism (García, 2015). Within this framework, China positions itself as a driver of strategic direction within the bloc, especially regarding development and South-South cooperation issues.

China's significant influence within BRICS is reflected in how it applies a combination of facilitative and exemplary leadership by consistently prioritizing development and macroeconomic issues. China achieves this by redirecting BRICS deliberations and decisions toward areas aligned with its domestic interests, such as reforming global economic governance. Without imposing hierarchical leadership, China successfully ensures that these issues remain among the top priorities in BRICS discussions and commitments through summit-level deliberation and decision-making mechanisms. However, due to China's strong adherence to issues considered national priorities, its exemplary leadership is unevenly distributed (Wang, 2022). This pattern indicates that China's leadership legitimacy

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within BRICS is built through strategic sectoral leadership, where consensus is constructed without sacrificing Beijing's vital interests.

In the energy and climate agenda, BRICS provides a cooperation framework that enables China to align political leadership with energy transition issues without burdening member states with binding obligations. In the energy agenda, the flexibility of national policies within the BRICS framework is a consequence of China's limitations in substantive leadership on energy and climate issues. Although China effectively directs BRICS deliberation and decision-making on development and macroeconomic matters, its leadership appears weaker on climate change issues, which are important to green energy cooperation (Wang, 2022). Nevertheless, energy cooperation within BRICS remains relatively loose and non-binding, allowing China to promote policy coordination and technological exchange without requiring collective commitments that could constrain its domestic policy space. China continue positioning itself as a driver and facilitator of energy cooperation among developing countries while avoiding a more binding normative leadership role in the international climate agenda.

Overall, China's role within BRICS reflects a political leadership strategy designed to maximize influence in the global order that is still dominated by the West. China does not merely use BRICS as an instrument of direct domination, but rather takes advantage of the bloc's consensus-based structure and minimal legal obligations to combine facilitative and exemplary leadership according to its vital domestic interests. This approach enables China to gain legitimacy as a leader of the Global South without provoking open resistance from BRICS members sensitivity to power imbalances. However, this strategy also demonstrates that China's leadership is incremental and sectoral, being strong in development and political economy issues but more cautious on issues requiring high levels of commitment, such as climate change. Thus, China utilizes the BRICS framework to build alternative leadership influence capable of challenging the existing global governance structure.

1. **The Influence of China's Green Energy Leadership in the Global Governance**

   China's leadership in promoting the green energy transition within BRICS has significant implications for international perceptions of China's role in global governance. Since the mid-2000s, China has gradually attempted to shift its image from a defensive actor to an active contributor and global facilitator, particularly in clean energy and climate change (He, 2016). The BRICS framework enabled China to project green energy leadership without being fully dependent on Western global institutions. This also strengthens perceptions among Global South countries that China is an alternative leader.

   Furthermore, China's green energy leadership within BRICS is grounded in its financial capabilities. This is evident through China's role in the New Development Bank and the expansion of cross-border renewable energy projects (Hawkins et al., 2022). This strategy has shaped perceptions that China is a capable actor in offering concrete solutions to development and energy transition dilemmas, rather than as a challenger within the global order. Thus, through BRICS, China is able to enhance its international legitimacy as a rising power actively contributing to global development.

   The BRICS framework plays an important role in facilitating China's strategic repositioning within the global order. Unlike Western regimes that tend to be normative and binding, BRICS applies principles of policy flexibility based on consensus and respect for national sovereignty. This principle enables China to promote the green energy agenda without bearing the demanding commitments often associated with global climate forums. China has therefore been able to integrate energy leadership with a South-South development approach that is more easily accepted by other BRICS members (Korneeva et al., 2024).

   At the same time, China's active role in promoting renewable energy within BRICS also contributes to norm formation in global governance. The greening of the Belt and Road Initiative demonstrates that China not only adopts global environmental norms but also develops new approaches rooted in flexibility and solidarity among developing countries (Sun & Yu, 2023). This pattern is reflected in BRICS green energy cooperation, which enables China to expand its normative appeal through its role as a bridge between development needs and sustainability projects.

   Therefore, China's leadership in the green energy transition within BRICS represents a strategic mechanism aimed at strengthening its position within an increasingly multipolar global order. Through BRICS, China enhances its financial and institutional influence while shaping international perceptions of itself as a Global South leader capable of integrating development and sustainability simultaneously. The BRICS framework allows China to contribute dominantly to the gradual transformation of global energy and climate governance by implementing a leadership model that is flexible and contextual.

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CONCLUSION

This study shows that China's efforts to promote the green energy transition in BRICS countries are not merely a response to the global climate crisis. Rather, these efforts represent a political strategy aligned with China's long-term interests as a rising power. According to Yan Xuetong's Moral Realism framework, China's green energy initiative reflects the actions of a proactive political leader seeking to transform its comprehensive national strength into international legitimacy and authority. In this context, green energy policies serve as instruments to enhance political support and construct an image of moral leadership.

BRICS was not chosen because it is an effective environmental regime; instead, its flexible structure and consensus-based mechanisms allow China to assume agenda-setting and facilitative leadership roles without adhering to rigid Western standards. Through this framework, China expands both its normative and material influence among developing countries by linking the green energy transition with development agendas and South-South cooperation. Nevertheless, this leadership remains constrained by structural contradictions, particularly China's continued dependence on coal. This demonstrates that China's energy transition is pragmatic and gradual, balancing domestic stability with global ambitions.

Reflectively, this study contributes to the literature on international relations by demonstrating that global leadership can emerge through more contextual and flexible frameworks rather than solely through Western-dominated standards. In this regard, China utilizes BRICS as a platform to articulate a model of global leadership that combines material power, moral legitimacy, and political solidarity within the Global South. Therefore, China's green energy leadership in BRICS is not only focused on environmental issues, but also constitutes a long-term strategy to gradually reshape global energy governance within an increasingly multipolar world order.

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