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China's New Multilateral Institutions: A Framework and Research Agenda

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As China has risen to the status of a global power, it has taken the lead in fostering several new multilateral institutional initiatives. Some of these are formal intergovernmental organizations; others are informal clubs, forums, or platforms. Collectively, these acts of institutional creation suggest that China is no longer content to “join” the existing global order but is constructing its own multilateral infrastructure. What do such institutions mean for global governance? This article provides a framework for studying such multilateral institutions and sketches an emerging research agenda. First, it provides a systematic empirical overview of China's participation in the creation of multilateral institutions between 1990 and 2017. Second, it develops analytical categories for describing types of new institutions based on their relationships with incumbent institutions. Central to this typology is (1) whether new multilateral institutions' governance functions are additive or rivalrous to those of existing ones, and (2) whether they promote congruent or distinct social purposes. Based on these characteristics, new multilateral institutions may be complementary, divergent, substitutive, or competing. Third, it considers the implications of China's multilateral institution-building for global governance in the context of an international power shift.

A medida que China ha ido adquiriendo la condición de potencia mundial, ha asumido el mando de promover varias iniciativas nuevas relacionadas con las instituciones multilaterales. Algunas de estas son organizaciones intergubernamentales formales, mientras que otras son clubes, foros o plataformas informales. En conjunto, estos actos de creación institucional sugieren que China ya no está interesada en «unirse» al orden mundial actual, sino que está construyendo su propia infraestructura multilateral. ¿Qué implican dichas instituciones para la gobernabilidad mundial? Este artículo ofrece un marco para el estudio de dichas instituciones multilaterales y describe brevemente un programa de investigación emergente. En primer lugar, ofrece una visión general empírica y sistemática de la participación de China en la creación de instituciones multilaterales entre 1990 y 2017. En segundo lugar, desarrolla categorías analíticas para describir los tipos de nuevas instituciones en función de sus relaciones con las instituciones vigentes. Un aspecto clave de esta tipología es (1) si las funciones de gobernabilidad de las nuevas instituciones multilaterales se adhieren o se oponen a las de las existentes y (2) si promueven propósitos sociales congruentes o distintos. En función de estas características, las nuevas instituciones multilaterales pueden ser complementarias, divergentes, sustitutivas o competidoras. En tercer lugar, se analizan las consecuencias de la creación de instituciones multilaterales por parte de

China para la gobernabilidad mundial en el contexto de un cambio de poder internacional.

En s'élevant au rang de puissance mondiale, la Chine a pris la main dans l'encouragement de plusieurs nouvelles initiatives institutionnelles multilatérales. Certaines d'entre elles concernent des organisations intergouvernementales, et d'autres concernent plutôt des plateformes, forums ou clubs informels. Collectivement, ces actes de création institutionnelle suggèrent que la Chine ne contente plus de « rejoindre » l'ordre mondial existant, mais qu'elle construit sa propre infrastructure multilatérale. Que signifient de telles institutions pour la gouvernance mondiale ? Cet article propose un cadre pour l'étude de telles institutions multilatérales et esquisse un programme de recherche émergent. Il commence par fournir une présentation empirique systématique de la participation de la Chine dans la création d'institutions multilatérales entre 1990 et 2017. Il développe ensuite des catégories analytiques permettant de décrire les types de nouvelles institutions en se basant sur leurs relations avec les institutions en place. Pour cette typologie, deux questions centrales consistent à se demander (1) si les fonctions de gouvernance des nouvelles institutions multilatérales s'ajoutent ou rivalisent avec celles des institutions existantes, et (2) si elles promeuvent des objectifs sociaux congruents ou distincts. Sur la base de ces caractéristiques, les nouvelles institutions multilatérales peuvent être complémentaires, divergentes, substitutives ou concurrentes. Enfin, cet article prend en considération les implications de la construction d'institutions multilatérales de la Chine pour la gouvernance mondiale dans le contexte du changement des puissances mondiales.

Keywords: China, global governance, multilateral institutions

Palabras clave: China, gobernabilidad mundial, instituciones multilaterales

Mots clés: Chine, gouvernance mondiale, institutions multilaterales

Introduction

In recent years, the Chinese government has engaged in a host of multilateral institutional creation efforts. Flagship examples include the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), the BRICS' New Development Bank (NDB), and negotiations for a Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP). Less prominent initiatives include the Boao Forum for Asia, the Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia (CICA), and the South-South Human Rights Forum. It is widely recognized that the rise of China to the status of a world power has potentially wide-ranging implications for global governance—the institutions and processes by which trans-boundary phenomena are governed in the absence of a world state (Rosenau 1992; Weiss and Wilkinson 2014; Zürn 2018). The creation of new multilateral institutions is perhaps the most palpable sign that China is no longer content to “join” the existing global order but is interested in fostering its own. For Oliver Stuenkel, “rising powers—led by China—are quietly crafting the initial building blocks of a so-called ‘parallel order’ that will initially complement, and one day possibly challenge, today's international institutions” (2016a, 10).

In light of China's growing weight in world politics, Chinese-led multilateralism and institutional innovation have been met in some quarters with apprehension. The United States' Obama administration strongly opposed the creation of the AIIB, lobbied its allies to shun the institution, and complained of “constant

accommodation” of China (Dyer and Parker 2015). Likewise, long before Donald Trump complained about China's trade policies, Barack Obama noted that “China wants to write the rules for the world's fastest-growing region. Why would we let that happen? We should write those rules” (Schlesinger, Obe, and Magnier 2015). Others have described China's institution-building efforts as a “shadow foreign policy” out to challenge the established international order via the creation of “parallel structures” (Heilmann et al. 2014), and there has been an interest in whether a parallel, China-centric international order is emerging (Barma et al. 2009).

At the same time, the determinants and effects of international institutional proliferation have become a core issue of study in international relations. Multilateralism and international institutions have proliferated vigorously since 1945, leading to an increasingly institutionalized environment beyond the nation-state (Boli and Thomas 1997; Goldstein et al. 2000; Ikenberry 2001; Zürn 2018). In this context, fruitful scholarship has emerged on topics such as “regime complexity” (Raustiala and Victor 2004; Alter and Meunier 2009; Drezner 2009), “institutional proliferation” (Mansfield 1998; Raustiala 2013), “fragmentation” (International Law Commission 2006; Biermann et al. 2009), “overlapping institutions” (Busch 2007; Urpelainen and Van de Graaf 2014), “institutional balancing” (He 2014; Yuan 2018), “counter-institutionalization” (Zürn 2018, 170–94), and “contested multilateralism” (Morse and Keohane 2014). This research agenda has focused on the reasons that states strategically opt for creating a new multilateral institution when one already exists in a given issue area, and what the consequences are for rule-guided cooperation more broadly.

The purpose of this article is to bring together these policy-oriented and theory-driven research strands to sketch an emerging research agenda on China's new multilateral institutions. Its first goal is empirical, seeking to identify the cases of Chinese multilateral institution-building between 1990 and 2017 and to derive descriptive insights about the institutional form of China's new initiatives. The second goal is conceptual. It seeks to develop concepts adequate to describe the types of relationships that can emerge between new and established multilateral institutions, depending on whether new institutions add to or detract from the governance functions of existing institutions, and whether they promote congruent or distinct social purposes. The article develops a typology of these relationships and illustrates it with examples of China's institutions. A key argument underpinning the typology is that alone the act of creating a new institution alongside established ones tells us little about a new institution's relationship to existing ones or its role in global governance. Rather, this depends on the *kind* of institution that is created and namely whether it is complementary, substitutive, divergent, or competitive in relation to established institutions. This differs from some existing accounts. For Julia Morse and Robert Keohane, competitive regime creation *by definition* involves “conflict between the rules, institutionalized practices, or missions of two different institutions” (2014, 387). Likewise, Michael Zürn assumes that “[b]y establishing a new institution alongside an existing one in the same issue area, dissatisfied actors challenge the governance authority of the existing institution” (2018, 173). As I argue conceptually and illustrate empirically, new multilateral institutions initiated by China or any other actor need not always challenge existing ones. Moreover, where rivalry does exist, it can take different forms.

This article proceeds as follows. First, it provides an empirical survey of the multilateral institutions that have been created with China's participation between 1990 and 2017 and offers some empirical observations about their institutional characteristics. Second, it develops a typology for conceptualizing the relationships that can exist between new and incumbent institutions and illustrates the typology using examples of China's institution-building. Third, it discusses the implications of China's new multilateral institutions for global governance, both in power-distributive and normative terms. The conclusion outlines lessons learnt and some outstanding issues for future research.

China's New Multilateral Institutions

Many scholars have noted that the Chinese government has in recent years taken on a more active role in multilateral institutions and sought to bring them more closely into line with China's expanding global interests (Wang and Rosenau 2009; Kent 2013; Shambaugh 2013, 99–123; Tang 2018; Johnston 2019). Understandably, interest in the implications of China's rise for global governance has grown apace (Foot and Walter 2011; Chan, Lee, and Chan 2012; Wuthnow, Li, and Qi 2012; Wang and French 2013; Kastner, Pearson, and Rector 2016). Much of the existing literature focuses on China's engagement with existing multilateral institutions and is centrally concerned with the extent to which China can be characterized as seeking to change the institutional status quo (Shambaugh 2001; Johnston 2003, 2019; Huiyun 2009; Kahler 2010; Chan, Hu, and He 2018).

Increasingly, however, scholars are examining China's efforts to shape global governance not only by joining and reforming existing institutions, but also by creating new ones. Researchers at the Berlin-based Mercator Institute for China Studies have drawn attention to a wide range of Chinese initiatives that were seen as seeking “a realignment of the international order through establishing parallel structures to a wide range of international institutions” (Heilmann et al. 2014). Others such as James Paradise (2016) and Oliver Stuenkel (2016a) have examined the construction of what they term “parallel institutions” by China and other emerging powers, particularly the BRICS. Some understand China's interest in creating new institutions as a form of “institutional balancing” to increase its security relative to the United States (He 2014, 2019; Yuan 2018). Among China's multilateral initiatives, the creation of the AIIB in 2014 has attracted special attention (De Jonge 2017; Hameiri and Jones 2018; Radavoi and Bian 2018; Wang 2018; Horta 2019; Stephen and Skidmore 2019; Wilson 2019).

Beyond headline-grabbing cases such as the AIIB, how active has China actually been at creating new multilateral institutions? In order to gain a comprehensive overview of China's recent multilateral institution-building, we surveyed multilateral institutions created in the period 1990 to 2017 in which China has had a leading role or been a founding member.¹ Multilateral institutions have been understood in different ways in the literature (Keohane 1990; Caporaso 1992; Ruggie 1992; Duffield 2007). To be included in our coding, three conditions needed to be met. We needed to identify (1) a formal or informal entity with explicitly shared expectations concerning goals, (2) involving more than two states as “members,” and (3) with China as a founding member. By this understanding, multilateral institutions encompass formal IGOs (Pevehouse, Nordstrom, and Warnke 2004), informal IGOs (Vabulas and Snidal 2013), and looser forms of association such as forums, clubs, and platforms where explicitly shared expectations concerning goals could be identified (such as founding documents or collective communiqués). While there may be valid analytical reasons to ignore informal institutions or to consider them a separate class of phenomena, it would be a mistake to conflate institutional formality with importance in world politics. Informal institutions can take on important governance functions and often serve as the starting points for later institutional formalization (Vabulas and Snidal 2013; Abbott and Faude 2020), while many formal IGOs barely fulfill their goals, living on only as “zombie” organizations (Gray 2018). We, therefore, included all identifiable institutions regardless of their level of formality, while acknowledging that some of the coded institutions do not qualify as autonomous “institutions” in a strict sense.

We gathered data from three sources: the *Yearbook of International Organizations* of the Union of International Associations (Union of International Associations 2019), the results of a news article search using *Lexis Nexis Academic*, and secondary literature. Our efforts resulted in the overview provided by Table 1 organized

¹ I gratefully acknowledge research assistance provided by Johannes Scherzinger.

Table 1. China's New Multilateral Institutions, 1990-2017

Name	China's role	Secretariat location	Issue area	Description	Year
APSCO	Founding member	Beijing	Technology	IGO that deepens air and space cooperation among eight Asian states. The first MOU was signed in 1992. The IGO was inaugurated in 2008.	1992
APLMF	Founding member	NA	Economy	International forum of legal metrology authorities from economies in the Asia-Pacific to promote international trade by harmonizing legal metrology.	1994
SCO	Founding member	Beijing	Security	Began as an informal grouping in 1996, since 2003 a formal IGO to promote security collaboration among its members.	1996
INBAR	Founding member	Beijing	Economy	IGO that uses bamboo and rattan to further sustainable development and poverty reduction in Asia.	1997
APT	Founding member	NA	Multiple	Informal cooperation forum between the ten ASEAN members plus China, Japan, and Republic of Korea.	1997
CICA	Founding member	Almaty	Security	Summit series involving intergovernmental conferences on security, since 2002 including a permanent secretariat.	1999
FOCAC	Leading role	NA	Multiple	Summit series involving ministerial conferences every three years between African nations and China.	2000
Boao Forum	Leading role	Boao, China	Multiple	Non-profit transnational organization created by twenty-nine countries to support annual economic summits for Asia, modeled on the World Economic Forum.	2001
ACD	Founding member	Kuwait City	Multiple	Series of intergovernmental summits to build an "Asian Community" including a Provisional Secretariat in 2013.	2002
China-Arab States Cooperation Forum	Leading role	NA	Multiple	Formal dialogue forum between China and member states of the Arab League with biennial summits.	2004
CCETCF	Leading role	NA	Economy	China-initiated series of ministerial meetings between China and Caribbean countries to enhance economic and trade cooperation. Initiated in 2004, ministerial meetings took place in 2005, 2007, and 2011.	2005

Table 1. Continued

Name	China's role	Secretariat location	Issue area	Description	Year
BRICS	Leading role	NA	Multiple	Annual summit and numerous working groups to support cooperation between Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa (joined 2010)	2009
Cooperation between China and Central and Eastern European Countries (17 + 1, formerly 16 + 1) World Internet Conference	Leading role	NA	Economy	Annual summit between China and sixteen central and eastern European countries. Known initially as 16 + 1, it became 17 + 1 with Greece's entry in 2019.	2012
China-CELAC Forum	Leading role	Wuzhen, China	Technology	Annual conference and technology expo hosted by the Cyberspace Administration of China and the People's Government of Zhejiang Province on Internet issues.	2014
Lancang Mekong Cooperation Framework	Leading role	NA	Multiple	Platform for intergovernmental dialogue between China and member states of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States, with triennial ministerial meetings.	2015
NDB	Founding member	Beijing	Economy	Cooperative platform initiated by China with Mekong riparian countries (Myanmar, Laos, Thailand, Cambodia, and Vietnam).	2016
AIIB	Leading role	Beijing	Economy	Multilateral development bank to promote infrastructure and sustainable development in the member countries.	2015
AMRO	Founding member	Singapore	Economy	Multilateral development bank to support infrastructure development in Asia.	2016
Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation	Leading role	Beijing	Economy	A formal IGO that serves as a macroeconomic surveillance monitor of the CMM (a currency swap arrangement), International political and economic forum hosted by China in support of the Belt Road Initiative launched in 2013 (then known as One Belt, One Road).	2017
South-South Human Rights Forum	Leading role	NA	Human rights	International forum on "South-South Human Rights Development" organized by the State Council Information Office and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of China. Repeated in December 2019.	2017

chronologically. While we cannot be certain that the table is exhaustive, we believe it is the most comprehensive to date.

As Table 1 indicates, over the last two decades China has been involved in the creation of a wide range of formal and informal multilateral institutions in its region and beyond.² This is consistent with the finding that in comparison to other world regions, Asia stands out as the only region where the number of IGOs has continued to increase since the end of the Cold War (Pevehouse et al. 2020, 4–5). And yet, to focus only on formal IGOs would result in a highly truncated picture of China's efforts at influencing global governance via multilateral institutions. Surveying the nature and development of China's creation of new institutions in the last decades, a number of empirical observations can be made.

Variation in Degree of Institutional Formality

China's multilateral institutions vary greatly in their level of formality. Some qualify as formal IGOs created by international legal treaties and involving the creation of international secretariats. The Asia-Pacific Space Cooperation Organization (APSCO) (since 2008), the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) (since 2003), as well as multilateral development banks such as the AIIB and the NDB belong to this group. Others only qualify as loose forums and platforms lacking in independent secretariats or task centralization. The institutions at this end of the formality spectrum would qualify at most as “informal” intergovernmental organizations (IGOs), defined as entities which contain explicitly shared expectations about purpose, explicitly associated state members, and regular meetings, but which lack the trappings of formal IGOs such as a headquarters or independent secretariats (Vabulas and Snidal 2013, 197). The BRICS forum provides a prominent example. While BRIC foreign ministers first met as a group in 2006, this informal club of major emerging economies met for the first time at heads of government level in 2009 (for overviews, see Stuenkel 2013; Chin 2015; Cooper 2016). In addition to the annual leaders' summit, the BRICS format has grown to encompass foreign ministers' summits, intergovernmental national security meetings, a BRICS Business Forum, and (since June 2017) a BRICS Political Parties, Think Tanks, and Civil Society Organizations Forum. In this format, the BRICS summits have come to resemble the Group of Seven (G7) summits of major industrialized countries.

Other examples are institutionally even looser: In 2001, China and the representatives of several other countries initiated the Boao Forum for Asia, a non-profit foundation registered in China for annual gatherings of governmental, business, and academic elites from Asia and abroad (Boao Forum for Asia 2001). It is modeled as an Asian answer to the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland. China has also advanced its own positions in the area of internet governance by creating the annual Wuzhen-based “World Internet Conference,” a multi-stakeholder forum for internet policy and technology hosted by the Cyberspace Administration of China and the People's Government of Zhejiang Province. The forum was inaugurated in 2014 and is used by the Chinese government to project its leadership ambitions alongside Chinese internet corporations such as Huawei and Alibaba (Shen 2016). Due to their dependence on the Chinese government and weak organizational independence, such initiatives stretch traditional understandings of multilateral institutions (Keohane 1990; Ruggie 1992). Nonetheless, we have included such initiatives because they display explicitly shared expectations concerning goals, involve multiple states as “members,” and are clearly intended to influence global governance.

² Currently (September 2020), China is also negotiating two multilateral trade agreements: the trilateral China-Japan-Korea FTA, and the RCEP, a so-called “mega-regional” FTA designed to encompass the ten ASEAN member countries and their existing FTA partners (Australia, China, India, Japan, Korea, and New Zealand). India withdrew in November 2019.

Variation in Membership Criteria

China's multilateral institutions also display a variety of different membership criteria. Some institutions, such as the AIIB or the International Network for Bamboo and Rattan (INBAR), are open to practically all states. Others are clearly “club” institutions that deliberately seek to avoid universality (Stephen and Stephen 2020), such as BRICS and the NDB. Many are organized on a regional basis, such as the intergovernmental Asia Cooperation Dialogue (ACD), the SCO, and CICA. It is important to note that the least formalized institutions also lack clear memberships and there is little distinction between membership and participation. Examples include the World Internet Conference and the South-South Human Rights Forum, an international forum on human rights organized by the State Council Information Office and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Such platforms have vague goals, loose affiliations, and are organized by Chinese governmental agencies. They have little in common with the membership criteria of formal IGOs and may better be understood as a form of “bazaar governance,” providing little more than focal points where participants can set up their “stalls” and market themselves as legitimate actors in a given domain (Depledge and Dodds 2017, 150). Although it would be easy to dismiss such platforms as mere simulacra of multilateral institutions, they have come to play an important role in agenda-setting and social networking within global governance.

Expanding Geographical Scope

The transition of China from a regional to a global power is reflected in the expanding geographic scope of its multilateral initiatives. Five of the six multilateral institutions that can be traced to the 1990s have a regional focus on Asia. It was in the following decade that China-led multilateralism first started to look beyond the Asian neighborhood. This period was characterized by the creation of new inter-regional forums and dialogue platforms. One of the earliest took place in Beijing in October 2000 with the inaugural Forum on China–Africa Cooperation (FOCAC), attended by ministers from over forty African countries (Sohn 2012, 81). This model of triennial hub-and-spokes consultations has since been replicated in other world regions: in 2004, the first meeting of the China–Arab States Cooperation Forum convened in Cairo (Jalal 2014; Yao 2014);³ in 2005, the China–Caribbean Economic and Trade Cooperation Forum (CCETCF) was convened; in 2012, China launched the forum on Cooperation between China and Central and Eastern European Countries (known as 16 + 1) (Musabelliu 2017); in January 2015, the Forum of China and Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (China–CELAC Forum) was launched in Beijing (Yu 2015);⁴ and in March 2016, the first leaders’ summit of the Lancang–Mekong Cooperation Forum was held in Sanya, Hainan Province.

The creation of the BRICS format in 2009 marked the beginning of a more global phase of Chinese multilateralism, which fed into the establishment of the NDB in 2015. This was followed up with the creation of the AIIB in 2016, and the first Belt and Road Forum, potentially open to all countries of the world (Broz et al. 2020, 5), in 2017. While the focus on Chinese multilateralism remains on Asia, it has an increasingly global scope.

³ In an apparent example of reactive institution building by an established power, in 2012 an inaugural United States–Gulf Cooperation Council Strategic Forum (SCF) was established.

⁴ The launch of the China–CELAC Forum puts the future of the China–Caribbean Economic and Trade Cooperation Forum into doubt, but China has signalled a commitment to maintain it nonetheless (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of China 2016).

Increasing Formalization

Alongside the proliferation of numerous informal forums, China has also increasingly turned to the creation of new formal multilateral organizations. Key here are multilateral economic institutions that replicate policy functions of the International Monetary Fund and the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, in which China is still under-represented.

China had already been involved in the early 2000s in the Chiang Mai Initiative (2000–2010), a series of bilateral currency swap arrangements and repurchase agreement facilities concluded after the Asian Financial Crisis in 1997 (Lipsky 2003; Biziwick, Cattaneo, and Fryer 2015, 12–13). In March 2010, this was consolidated into a multilateral arrangement (Chiang Mai Initiative Multilateralisation, CMIM) and accompanied in 2011 by the creation of the ASEAN + 3 Macroeconomic Research Office (AMRO) to conduct macroeconomic surveillance and support the CMIM's implementation (Sussangkarn 2011; Henning 2017). The latter started as a limited company but was subsequently transformed into an IGO in February 2016 (Sussangkarn 2011; Henning 2017). This and other “regional financial arrangements” (Henning 2017) are often seen as steps toward an Asian IMF (Grimes 2011). They may also encroach on the role of the Executives’ Meeting of East Asia-Pacific Central Banks (EMEAP) as an informal forum for central bank cooperation.

At their Fortaleza Summit in July 2014, the BRICS countries also signed a treaty establishing a Contingent Reserve Arrangement with a reserve pool of US\$ 100 billion, designed as a pool of credit for BRICS states to access in times of short-term balance of payments pressures, although it appears to be of primarily symbolic value (Biziwick et al. 2015; Henning 2017, 102). This was accompanied by the signing of the Agreement establishing the NDB with the stated purpose of funding infrastructure and development projects in BRICS and other emerging and developing countries. At approximately the same time, China began promoting the creation of the AIIB, which opened for business in January 2016.⁵

Growing Chinese Leadership

China's role in the creation of new institutions has evolved from acting as a co-founder and participant to more frequently taking on the role of initiator and host. The initial phases of China's regional multilateral diplomacy focused on greater engagement with existing institutions, most notably ASEAN (ASEAN Plus Three and the ASEAN Regional Forum) and the East Asian Summit (Stubbs 2002; Hund 2003; Breslin 2008). In 1997, China was one of several countries to take part in the creation of the ASEAN Plus Three (APT) framework together with Japan and the Republic of Korea (Evans 2003; Foot 2020). In 2002, China was one of the eighteen founding members of the intergovernmental ACD, which was initially proposed by Thailand (Bunyavejchewin and Nimmannorrawong 2017). China was also a co-participant, rather than an institutional driver, in the creation of what have become two of China's most significant multilateral security institutions: the SCO and CICA.

Over time, however, China has more frequently taken on a leading role in multilateral institutional creation, demonstrating that any fears China previously had of being “ganged-up on” by smaller powers has vanished (Yuan 2001; Breslin 2010,

⁵ In addition, China took several concrete steps to promote the renminbi as an international currency. This includes: (1) the Cross-Border Inter-Bank Payments System (CIPS) for international payments denominated in renminbi (Borst 2016), designed to reduce transaction costs of international trading in renminbi and alleviating compatibility issues between the global Brussels-based SWIFT network and China's own China National Advanced Payment System; (2) China UnionPay as a global credit card facility (Weinland and Wildau 2017); (3) the credit ratings agency Universal Credit Rating Group, a collaboration between Dagong Global Credit Rating Company in China, founded by the People's Bank of China and the State Economic and Trade Commission of China, RusRating JSC, a credit rating agency authorized by Russia's Central Bank, and Egan-Jones Ratings Company, a US-based private company.

718–27; Shambaugh 2013, 95–105). This is visible in China's creation of China-centered regional forums. The first meeting of FOCAC in 2000 was followed up in April 2002 by the “Procedures on the Follow-up Mechanism of China–Africa Cooperation Forum,” which initiated the rule of triennial FOCAC summits held alternately in China and an African country. Since then, the model of China-centered regional forums has been replicated in several world regions including the Middle East (the China–Arab States Cooperation Forum), the Caribbean (CCETCF), Europe (17 + 1), and Latin America (China–CELAC Forum).

Such forums often go far beyond ritualized summits to include a wide array of trans-governmental and nongovernmental links. To take but one example: the China–CELAC Forum includes an Agricultural Ministers’ Forum, a Scientific and Technological Innovation Forum, a China–CELAC Political Parties Forum, an Infrastructure Cooperation Forum, a Young Political Leaders’ Forum, a Think Tanks Forum, a Business Summit, a People-to-People Friendship Forum, a China–CELAC Legal Forum, and a China–CELAC Local Governments Cooperation Forum (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of China 2016). Reportedly, twice as many African heads of government attended the third FOCAC meeting in 2018 than attended the UN General Assembly in the same year (Dahir 2018). A key feature of China's regional forums is what Injoo Sohn refers to as “bi-multilateralism”: “one major power (China) interacts with a multiplicity of states” (Sohn 2012, 82). Such “hub and spokes” informal forums may challenge the nonhierarchical connotations of multilateralism and appear to allow China significant room to set the agenda.⁶

It is also notable that Chinese leadership is visible not just in the creation of new institutions but also in China's growing role within them. The origins of APSCO can be traced to a Memorandum of Understanding signed in 1992, but China played a central role in its transformation into a formal IGO in 2008, with Beijing as the secretariat's headquarters. Chinese leadership in the institutional evolution of the SCO has also been pronounced, providing the impetus for the charter and secretariat of the SCO, the SCO Regional Anti-terrorism Structure, and the SCO Business Council and Interbank Consortium (Yuan 2010, 861; Sohn 2012, 90). Like the SCO, CICA also began in Central Asia in the late 1990s and was first proposed by the government of Kazakhstan at the United Nations in 1992. Over time, China and Russia have assumed central roles (Mu 2014).

The Chinese government also retains a high level of control over many of its multilateral institutions. In its inter-regional forums, China plays the role of host, and secretariats, where they exist, are embedded in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of China and related Chinese ministries. However, Chinese control features also in the most formal of IGOs: in the SCO, China and Russia are the largest funders, and China is the host country of the secretariat. With the creation of the AIIB in 2016, China has also acquired, for the first time, a uniquely privileged position within an essentially global institution. Even in a multilateral organization such as BRICS, which privileges the equality of all members, China was able to secure Shanghai as the location of the NDB secretariat. Chinese multilateralism is often as Chinese as it is truly multilateral.

Finally, China's clearest bid for global leadership has come in the form of the Belt Road Initiative (BRI) (initially known as One Belt, One Road). It is under the auspices of the BRI that the Chinese government has now held two global summits styled as the Belt and Road Forum, replicating the “bi-multilateral” format of its regional forums. The first was held in Beijing in May 2017 and was attended by twenty-nine heads of state or government and high-level representatives from at least fifty-six countries (Broz et al. 2020, 18). A second was held in April 2019.

⁶ There are also reports of China recently taking steps to create a China-Southern Europe Forum (Ekman 2016).

Four Types of New Institutions

While most observers see China's new multilateral institutions as an important development in Chinese foreign policy with significant implications for international order, there is little agreement on what these implications are. Does China's interest in multilateralism and willingness to construct new institutions indicate support for a rules-based, institutionalized international order (Ikenberry 2009; Johnston 2019; Mazarr et al. 2017; Stephen and Zürn 2019) or is it a sign of dissatisfaction with the institutional status quo and a revisionist agenda for global governance (Barma et al. 2009; Heilmann et al. 2014; Mearsheimer 2019)? Are they examples of “competitive regime creation” designed to challenge incumbent institutions (Morse and Keohane 2014) or are they rather complementary additions to the institutional landscape which ultimately deepen global governance (Zürn 2018, 13–14)?

The argument pursued here is that while such dichotomous categories are rhetorically attractive, they have difficulties accommodating the more differentiated reality of institutional creation. There are several distinct roles that new multilateral institutions can play in relation to existing ones. To capture these relationships, this section develops a typology that is based on two key dimensions of global governance: the distribution of governance functions in a given policy field, and the social purposes that governance serves.⁷ The categories for these relationships are inspired by Gretchen Helmke and Steven Levitsky's (2004) seminal study of the role of informal institutions in comparative politics as well as previous research on varieties of contestation in global governance (Kruck and Zangl 2020; Stephen and Zürn 2019). In developing the typology, I also draw on insights from two literatures in international relations: the first on institutional proliferation and interinstitutional political strategies and the second on the normative and cultural content of international order.

The Distribution of Governance Functions

The role of a new multilateral institution in global governance depends, firstly, on the degree to which its governance functions are additive or rivalrous to those of existing institutions within a given domain. Does a new institution challenge and erode, or add to and complement, the roles of established institutions? Quite simply, this dimension answers the question: is the relationship of governance functions between new and incumbent institutions positive- or zero-sum?

On the one hand, the expansion of cross-border interactions and collective action problems associated with globalization suggests that the relationship of new and incumbent institutions is by no means necessarily zero-sum. New multilateral institutions may emerge to cover the emergence of novel governance problems not currently addressed by existing institutions. Institutions whose governance functions exist in a positive-sum relationship to existing ones provide novel governance functions by extending international governance to new areas, covering new issues, or involving new actors. The creation of such institutions would be explicable within the bounds of traditional functionalist regime theory (Keohane 1984; Martin 1992). The creation of these types of institutions is indicative of *additive* change in global governance (Holsti 1998, 8) and an expansion and deepening of the global governance system (Zürn 2018, 13–14).

On the other hand, as new institutions are created, established institutions may lose out (Morse and Keohane 2014, 385). New multilateral institutions may encroach on the governance functions and organizational resources of existing institutions (Gehring and Faude 2014). The deliberate creation of new rivalrous

⁷ It is important to note that I am not using these dimensions to refer to actors' motivations in new institution building, but in relation to interinstitutional relationships (compare, e.g., Kreuder-Sonnen and Zangl 2016). Of course, these two phenomena may be closely related empirically.

institutions may be thought of as “counter-institutionalization” in the sense of using or creating international institutions in order to weaken or challenge others (Zürn 2018, 172). This form of institutional proliferation has garnered significant recent theoretical attention because it appears to challenge the assumptions of functionalist regime theory, for which the creation of a new institution on terrain already occupied by an existing one appears puzzling (Alter and Meunier 2009; Jupille et al. 2013; Urpelainen and Van de Graaf 2014). New institutions that are rivalrous to existing ones compete for the same members, govern the same issues, and struggle to attract the same institutional resources (Hofmann 2011). In *extremis*, this can lead to the outcompeting of one institution by the other. The outcompeting of one institution by another, either by completely poaching its policy functions or monopolizing the relevant organizational resources, could lead to institutional *replacement* (Cottrell 2009; Holsti 1998, 7–8).

Social Purpose

The second dimension concerns the degree to which new multilateral institutions diverge from the social purposes of established institutions. The social purpose of a multilateral institution refers to its basic objectives and normative underpinnings (Ruggie 1982, 380–82; Barnett and Finnemore 1999, 708; Cox 2001, 53).⁸ It is comparable to Peter Hall's notion of a policy paradigm, understood as “a framework of ideas and standards that specifies not only the goals of policy and the kind of instruments that can be used to attain them, but also the very nature of the problems they are meant to be addressing” (Hall 1993, 271). In his seminal study, John Ruggie (1982, 380–82) made the fundamental point that while a focus on the distribution of power might tell us much about the structure and form of international order, it does not tell us very much about change in its cultural or normative content: “power and purpose do not necessarily covary” (Ruggie 1982, 384). For example, while Ruggie largely agreed with the proposition that the distribution of capabilities underpinning international economic regimes had changed rapidly since the end of the Second World War, he identified a continuity at the level of social purpose, which he termed “embedded liberalism.” Applied to the creation of new multilateral institutions, this implies that while new institutions may alter the distribution of governance functions in a given area, it does not necessarily imply a change in the basic goals and principles. To assess this, we need to examine the institutions’ social purposes: “as long as [social] purpose is held constant, there is no reason to suppose that the *normative framework* of regimes must change as well” (Ruggie 1982, 348, emphasis in original). Social purpose will be visible in institutions’ substantive goals and the principles underlying them, including implicit ones, and in how the participants in a given institution narrate and understand the institution’s goals and rationales. This dimension of the typology addresses the question: do new multilateral institutions embody different goals and principles than established institutions in a given area, or not?

The distinction between the distribution of governance functions and social purpose is critical for understanding whether and how China's new multilateral institutions will contribute to normative or distributive change in an international order. New institutions may copy and reproduce the social purposes of existing ones. Alternatively, they may embrace social purposes that differ to a greater or lesser degree.⁹ For example, in the 1960s, the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT)

⁸ While Ruggie’s use of the term “social purpose” is foundational (1982), as Baker points out (2018, 297), he never explicitly defined the concept. My definition is designed to be compatible with Ruggie’s usage as well as operationalizable.

⁹ As an anonymous reviewer of this article noted, “the category into which a particular institution falls is relative to which existing institution is the reference point.” Because it is possible that there already exist institutions pursuing different social purposes, the relationship between a new institution and the different incumbents may vary.

and the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) were both international institutions in the same policy field, yet they embodied differing principles and differing goals with respect to international trade, with the UNCTAD providing a key institution in developing countries' push for a New International Economic Order. The fact that changes in the distribution of governance functions do not necessarily co-vary with changes in social purpose provides the basis for the typology below. The purpose of such a typology is to foster analytical clarity and structure new pathways for further research (Bailey 2005; Collier, Laporte, and Seawright 2008). Below, these categories are illustrated using examples drawn from China's new institutions.

Complementary Institutions

New multilateral institutions are *complementary* when they perform new, additional governance functions in a way that is congruent with the social purposes of existing institutions. Complementary institutions expand international governance to new areas, issues, and actors, and do so based on goals and principles congruent with those of existing institutions. If China's new multilateral institutions are of the complementary type, China's rise could spell a deepening and consolidation of existing patterns of global governance. The creation of complementary institutions would be a sensible choice for an actor satisfied with the basic direction of existing institutions but who wishes to expand governance to new areas using additional resources.

Some of the earlier multilateral institutions that China was involved in creating correspond most closely to the complementary type. To take one example, the Asia-Pacific Legal Metrology Forum (APLMF) performs an important task in the functioning of international trade in the Asia-Pacific region by coordinating national authorities in setting standards for accurate and consistent units of measurement. This highly technical work solves a basic coordination problem between national legal metrology authorities. While the International Organization of Legal Metrology was established and has been active at the global level since 1955, similar organizations have proliferated at regional levels, such as the Inter-American Metrology System in 1979 and the Western European Legal Metrology Cooperation (WELMEC) in 1990. The creation of the APLMF in 1992 essentially extended these initiatives to the Asia-Pacific for the first time, a region of rapidly expanding international trade. The organization shares the same social purpose of facilitating international commerce through technical standardization, but expands it to a previously comparatively under-institutionalized economic region. As such, the APLMF appears largely complementary to pre-existing institutions.

The APT group between the ten ASEAN members, China, Japan, and the Republic of Korea also displays the characteristics of a complementary institution. It created a new format for cooperation in East Asia while being nested within the existing ASEAN framework and principles. Such examples highlight that not all new multilateral institutions challenge or compete with existing ones. Some may even complement and enhance them (de Búrca 2016).

Divergent Institutions

The concept of *divergent* institutions describes cases in which a new institution exists in a positive-sum relationship to the governance functions of existing institutions, but does so in a way that promotes a different social purpose. In the case of divergent institutions, there is no direct competition with existing institutions for members and resources, but there is a divergence of goals and normative principles. Divergent institutions are likely to be set up by actors who identify new governance tasks not currently performed by existing institutions and wish to address them in alternative ways.

Governance Functions	Additive	Rivalrous
Social Purpose		
Congruent	Complementary	Substitutive
Distinct	Divergent	Competing

Figure 1. Types of relationships between new and incumbent institutions.
Source: draws on (Helmke and Levitsky 2004, 728).

Of China's new multilateral institutions, the clearest candidates for the status of divergent institutions appear to be the regional security organizations of the SCO and CICA. These institutions' governance functions are additive rather than rivalrous to existing institutions: at the time of their institutional development, the Central Asian and Eurasian space was still lacking a coherent regional security architecture, especially one that encompassed both Russia, as the successor state of the Soviet Union, and China, as the major ascending power. Both the SCO and CICA can be seen as mechanisms to "fill in gaps" of existing multilateral institutions.¹⁰ At the same time, several analysts see these institutions as rooted in a social purpose that diverges significantly from established security institutions. While, over time, values of democracy and human rights have been increasingly visible in institutions such as NATO and even the UN Security Council (Heupel and Zürn 2017), both the SCO and CICA are associated with an approach to security collaboration that rejects interference in domestic affairs while promoting common efforts to stabilize domestic political regimes. Rooted in the security dilemmas of autocratic regimes, for Thomas Ambrosio (2008), the SCO embodies a new set of values for governing security relations in Eurasia, which operates in opposition to the principles of democratization and human rights. "As such, the "Shanghai Spirit" may be a sign of things to come as autocratic leaders become bolder in their rejection of Western democratic norms and are willing to work together to ensure regime survival" (Ambrosio 2008, 1322). In particular, Ambrosio sees the SCO as promoting two key principles. The first, "stability," has the goal of preempting domestic political disruption, including via domestic democratic movements or external "democracy promotion." The second, "diversity," challenges the notion that domestic governance arrangements are the legitimate subject of international concern and rejects the notion that democratic status has normative content at the international level. Likewise, according to Alison Bailes, the SCO "explicitly rejects both European ("Western") and global norms of human rights, political liberties, good governance in general, and the right and duty both of states and international institutions to intervene in other states' internal abuses" (Bailes 2007, 16). As the memberships of the SCO and CICA have grown to encompass around half of the global population, the creation of these divergent institutions suggests the potential for the development of a divergent normative security order in Eurasia.

Substitutive Institutions

The right-hand side of Figure 1 describes multilateral institutions that take on a rivalrous governance relationship to existing institutions. Such institutions compete with existing institutions for governance functions, membership, and resources. They may erode or ultimately even supplant the role of established institutions.

¹⁰ Although their mandates are very different, there may be some rivalry in governance functions between the SCO and the Russia-led Collective Security Treaty Organization, at least from the perspectives of the Central Asian Republics (Cabestan 2013, 427–28).

Substitutive institutions do this in a way that is nonetheless still congruent with the social purpose embedded in existing institutions. The concept of substitutive institutions corresponds to what John Ikenberry and Darren Lim describe as “external innovation”: creating a new institution that “would not purport to operate under or promote substantively different rules and practices, but rather—to use an economic analogy—be a new entrant within the competitive institutional marketplace” (2017, 8).

The creation of substitutive multilateral institutions would be an attractive option for actors who are content with the substantive goals and principles of existing institutions but who are nonetheless dissatisfied with their procedural and distributive features. Substitutive institutional creation highlights that even actors who are essentially satisfied with the function and form of existing institutions may engage in the costs of new institutional creation in order to increase their own influence and prestige relative to rivals.¹¹ This may be rooted in clear decision-making inequalities in existing institutions—think of weighted voting structures, for example—or more broadly as part of broader political rivalries in which prestige gains may be seen to outweigh the functional inefficiencies of creating a duplicative institution. The primary goal of substitutive institutions is to realize a “redistribution of authority in a regime complex” (Morse and Keohane 2014, 408).

China's creation of the APSCO maps closely onto the substitutive institutional type. APSCO is a Chinese-led initiative that promotes collaboration in peaceful applications of space science and technology among Asia-Pacific countries to foster social and economic development, albeit with only eight members.¹² The treaty constitutive of APSCO was signed in 2005 and it became operational as an IGO in 2008. China constitutes the driving force behind APSCO, which is likely to play a more central role in internationalizing Chinese space technologies (such as the BeiDou Navigation Satellite System) now that China has also launched its Belt and Road Space Information Corridor initiative (Nie 2019). The APSCO appears to have been modeled on the European Space Agency, regarded as the most successful model for regional space cooperation, and it adopts many of its goals and structures, such as the “fair return” principle for the awarding of contracts (Nie 2019). It is also committed to the widely established norm of the peaceful utilization of space (APSCO 2018).

APSCO was launched in a context in which a relatively successful multilateral organization already existed with the same or a very similar purpose: the Asia-Pacific Regional Space Agency Forum (APRSAF), initiated by Japan in 1993. APRSAF has attracted participation from institutions from many countries and IGOs, including countries with major space programs, such as India, the Republic of Korea, the United States, and the Republic of China (Taiwan).¹³ Japan has used the APRSAF to engage in technology transfer programs such as the Sentinel-Asia initiative, using Japanese and US American satellite technologies (Suzuki 2012, 249). This duplication of governance functions does not appear to be a coincidence. According to Kazuto Suzuki, “The rivalry between APRSAF and APSCO is stimulating both Japan and China to use these organizations as vehicles for exercising their leadership” (Suzuki 2012, 258). Moreover, China is engaged in a rivalry over space technology with the United States, which has used export control restrictions *de facto* to exclude China from the international space market (Suzuki 2012). Japan and China appear to use the APRSAF and APSCO, respectively, as multilateral mechanisms to seek competitive advantages in space technology and activities.

¹¹ I thank an anonymous reviewer for helping me to clarify this point.

¹² Bangladesh, China, Iran, Mongolia, Pakistan, Peru, and Thailand.

¹³ One indication of the politics involved is that the Republic of China is listed, on the APRSAF website, as simply “Taiwan,” which would undoubtedly not be possible in a setting involving the People’s Republic of China.

The combination of rivalry over governance functions with similarities of social purposes is illustrative of substitutive institution-building. A similar story has been told by John Ikenberry and Darren Lim (2017) about China's sponsorship of the AIIB, which they see as altering the "institutional balance of power" with other multilateral development banks, but as largely consistent with existing norms (about which see below). Oliver Stuenkel (2016b, 1) also sees the BRICS countries' institutions primarily as "a tool to enhance their capacity to gain privileges of leadership, and slowly reduce the United States' institutional centrality," rather than representing any departure from existing principles and norms. If this analysis holds, these new institutions would play a substitutive role in global governance.

Competing Institutions

The final theorized type is *competing* institutions. In contrast to substitutive institutions, competing (or competitive) institutions challenge *both* the governance roles *and* the purposes of existing institutions. In extreme cases, a rivalrous, potentially zero-sum relationship develops between the new institution and incumbents, and the new institution pursues goals that are substantively at-odds, or even antithetical, to those of incumbent institutions. This produces strong inter-institutional competition and starkly divergent social purposes. The creation of competing multilateral institutions would be a rational approach for actors that are dissatisfied *both* with their level of influence in existing institutions *and* their substantive goals. The creation of competing institutions is likely to reflect a dissatisfaction with the rules and principles of the existing institutions governing a given domain and would be consistent with a counter-hegemonic or "revisionist" strategy in global governance (Cooley et al. 2019; Drezner 2019).

In looking at China's new multilateral institutions, it is currently hard to identify cases that fulfill the characteristics of competing institutions definitively. Many of China's multilateral initiatives have sought to fill in gaps left by existing institutions, are consistent with established social purposes, or both. The most likely candidates for competitive status are likely to be platforms such as the World Internet Conference or the South-South Human Rights Forum, which are perhaps not coincidentally also the least formalized and least clearly multilateral of China's new institutions. Both institutions enter into a global policy field already covered by existing institutions, and their social purposes appear to differ quite strongly from those of established institutions. The World Internet Conference has been used by Chinese functionaries to promulgate their preferred norm of "cyber sovereignty," which emphasizes the primacy of national regulators over web content and providers (Xiao 2019, 62; see also Mueller 2019); while the South-South Human Rights Forum has issued a Beijing Declaration emphasizing the "right to development" as the primary human right and the primacy of national sovereignty over human rights (South-South Human Rights Forum 2017). In both cases, such platforms duplicate the governance functions of existing institutions while hinting at promoting social purposes that appear incompatible with at least some existing institutions.

In addition, there are signs that some of China's more formal multilateral institutions contain competitive elements, and that these may become more salient over time, especially in the context of increasing geopolitical and ideological tensions with the United States. Although it is still the subject of significant debate, there are signs that the new multilateral development banks (NDB and AIIB) at least partly display characteristics of competing institutions.

Take the AIIB. Chinese representatives have been at pains to present the AIIB as a complementary, rather than a competing, institution in relation to existing banks such as the Asian Development Bank and the World Bank. The AIIB anchors "close collaboration with other multilateral and bilateral development institutions" in Article 1 of its Articles of Agreement, and the first president of the AIIB has also

spoken about the bank as wanting to partner, rather than compete, with the United States and its institutions (Stephen and Skidmore 2019, 74–82). After it became operational, the AIIB quickly entered into Memoranda of Understanding with the World Bank and Asian Development Bank, adopted textually similar environmental, social, and governance policies (Radavoi and Bian 2018), and engaged in lending in collaboration with existing banks (Hameiri and Jones 2018).

At the same time, the construction of a new multilateral development bank with China as the leading member has the clear potential to “effect a redistribution of authority within the field of multilateral development financing” (Stephen and Skidmore 2019, 77). First, while pledging new and additional resources for infrastructure-led financing in Asia, the AIIB clearly encroaches upon the policy tasks of existing, US-oriented institutions, and provides both China and borrowing countries with alternative institutional options, increasing their bargaining leverage. As Ikenberry and Lim suggest, “Greater formal authority sourced in both existing and new institutions will inevitably come at the expense of the power of the United States and its partners to control this policy domain” (2017, 13). In the future, the AIIB plans increasingly to move away from co-financing with existing banks and has identified the long-term aim of becoming a “go-to institution for providing infrastructure financing solutions in and to client countries” (AIIB 2018, §1). This will likely heighten inter-institutional competition for loans provision, introducing a zero-sum element to the distribution of governance functions between new and established banks.

In addition, there are indications that the AIIB *may* depart significantly from the substantive goals and normative principles of established development banks. Critics already see the environmental, social, and governance policies of the AIIB as textually similar to those of established banks but operationally weak, smuggling in the Chinese concept of non-interference and threatening to erode the lending standards of existing institutions (Radavoi and Bian 2018; Horta 2019). The AIIB may also contribute to the legitimization of China's infrastructure-heavy path of economic development that “sees poverty reduction as a result of development, rather than the other way around” (Stephen and Skidmore 2019, 90). This is not to say that the AIIB can be seen today as a competing institution that directly threatens the role and purpose of existing multilateral development banks. However, it does suggest that even China's highly formalized multilateral institutions contain features that correspond to the competitive type, which may also develop over time.

Clearer cases of the creation of competing institutions can be identified in other contexts, which also indicate how difficult it can be to succeed. The Bolivarian Alliance for the Americas (ALBA) was seen by several observers as a blueprint for an alternative social purpose to established institutions such as the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR), representing some kind of post-capitalist, post-liberal form of regional integration (Escobar 2010; Riggirozzi and Tussie 2012; Chodor and McCarthy-Jones 2013). Another example would be the attempt of developing countries to contest the norms and authority of the GATT and the Bretton Woods institutions by setting up the UNCTAD (Taylor and Smith 2007). UNCTAD would become a key institutional antagonist in developing countries' campaign for a New International Economic Order, which sought to revise the basic principles and norms of the international economy, albeit unsuccessfully (Cox 1979; Krasner 1985). By challenging both the social purpose and the political authority of established institutions, these “counter-hegemonic” institutions conform more clearly to the competitive type, against which China's new multilateral institutions can be compared.

Finally, it is important to note that the relationships between new and established institutions can change over time. Additive institutions may become more rivalrous over time or rival institutions may become more accommodating. Likewise, the

social purposes of new and established institutions could diverge or converge over time. In this way, complementary institutions may become substitutive ones, divergent institutions could become competing ones, and so on. In particular, the role of China-led multilateral institutions may also shift in a more competitive direction if China's power continues to rise and its incentives to conform to the norms and practices of existing institutions recede. The strategic nature of action in international politics forbids us from drawing direct inferences about (future) intentions from (current) behavior (Frieden 1999). However, for realists such as Nicholas Khoo and Michael Smith, "China is just practicing common sense and behaving itself until it is a more consolidated and powerful entity" (Khoo and Smith 2005, 203). From this perspective, as China's power grows, China-led multilateralism may become more rivalrous to existing institutions and pursue increasingly divergent social purposes. This is an important note of caution about projecting findings about existing institutional relationships into the future. At the same time, the evolving shape of China's multilateral institutions is likely to be contingent, especially on changes in domestic political coalitions and foreign policy doctrines, in China but also in other countries (Legro 2007). Much will depend on how China and its multilateral institutions are perceived by the (primarily Western) beneficiaries of existing institutions and the political reactions this inspires.¹⁴

Effects of China's Multilateral Institutions on Global Governance

In creating new multilateral institutions, China has clearly become a significant contributor to institutional proliferation. This increases the "complexity" of global governance, understood as the coexistence of partially overlapping and parallel international institutions lacking hierarchical coordination (Alter and Meunier 2009, 13; Raustiala and Victor 2004, 279). But what consequences will these organizations have for global governance? Drawing on existing rationalist and constructivist theory, this section considers the possible effects of China's institutions, first for the power-distributive dimension of global governance, and then for its normative content.

Power-Distributive Effects

China's multilateral organizations come with political and distributive effects.

First, the construction of substitutive and competing institutions will, by definition, have implications for the international distribution of political authority. Substitutive and competing institutions will compete with existing institutions for members, mandates, organizational resources, and legitimacy. Yet even complementary and divergent institutions can give rise to redistributive effects if they benefit from differential institutional growth (Streeck and Thelen 2005, 23). In this way, even if China's multilateral initiatives provide new and additional governance functions and resources, their relative significance for global governance could grow over time. China stands to be the major beneficiary.

Second, multilateral institution-building by China is likely to improve China's exit options from established institutions and convey it greater bargaining power to seek their reform (Lipsky 2015; Zangl et al. 2016; Chen and Liu 2018). China's track record of institutional creation strengthens its ability to make credible threats in the context of institutional reform and may increase the incentives for established powers to co-opt China into existing institutions by making concessions (Kruck and Zangl 2019). This assumes, however, that established powers are able to anticipate the negative consequences of blocking reform and will rationally judge that these outweigh the uncertainties involved in granting China a greater role in existing

¹⁴ I thank an anonymous reviewer for emphasizing this point.

institutions. If these preconditions are not met, the cultivation of exit options by dissatisfied states may ironically reinforce the status quo in established institutions. If the most dissatisfied members of an organization choose exit over voice, spurs to reform may evaporate and entrenched coalitions can reinforce their positions, albeit in a diminished institution (Hirschman 1970). The story of the reform of the Bretton Woods institutions can be interpreted in this light. The theoretical implication is that whether multilateral institution-building facilitates or hinders the reform of established institutions may depend on additional context conditions.

Third, the emergence of greater institutional choice in the domain of service-providing institutions is likely to favor net service takers over net service providers. For example, the creation of APSCO as a potential *substitute* for the APRSAF in the area of space cooperation may benefit states seeking greater access to the benefits of space technology. According to Kazuto Suzuki, “Countries which have high ambitions for developing space capabilities now have easier access to high technology and possible international cooperation with experienced partners, and thus it can be said that this rivalry shall not be regarded as a space race, but as a healthy competition for providing public goods for the region” (2012, 258). Similarly, the creation of the NDB and the AIIB may benefit governments of recipient countries by granting them greater institutional choice and bargaining power over lenders. The implication is that many countries and actors are likely to see China’s multilateral institutions as an opportunity rather than a threat.

Normative Effects

Changes in distributional patterns alone do not change the nature of the international system. The more decisive question concerns the impact that China’s multilateral institutions may have on the practices and constitutive principles of global governance (Kosłowski and Kratochwil 1994). Whether intentionally or not, many theorists insist that countries transfer elements of their domestic systems to the global level (Van der Pijl 1998; De Nevers 2007; Hopf 2013; Kupchan 2014). Do China’s institutions add up to a coherent normative challenge in global governance or even the externalization of China’s domestic order?

Some observers do see China’s approach to global governance as promoting new and alternative principles for multilateralism. For example, the concept of a “*harmonious world*,” which first appeared under the Premiership of Hu Jintao, has been seen as an alternative to the notions of “good governance” espoused by Western governments and established international organizations (Wang and Rosenau 2009, 17–22). This notion contests the normative status of ideas such as market competition, human rights, democracy, transparency, accountability, and the rule of law, and focuses instead on the values of the “democratization of international relations” (implying the termination of Western political dominance), shared prosperity between global North and South (implying the erosion of Western economic dominance), diversity and tolerance (contesting the claimed normative superiority of liberal democracy), and peaceful resolution of international conflict (contesting the normative status of military alliances). The notion of a “harmonious world” as an animating normative principle for global governance is one means by which the Chinese government has sought to legitimate its domestic order and growing international influence (see also Guo and Blanchard 2008).

More recently under the premiership of Xi Jinping, a panoply of alternative concepts has been developed as leitmotifs to guide Chinese foreign policy under a more assertive and aspirational leadership. These include the “new type of Great Power relations” (Hao 2015; Zeng and Breslin 2016), “*tianxia*” (all-under-heaven) (Callahan 2008; Carlson 2011; Dreyer 2015), the “China Dream” (Wang 2014; Callahan 2016a), “community of shared destiny” (Callahan 2016b), and the “Belt Road Initiative” (originally “one belt, one road”) (Ferdinand 2016; Nordin and

Weissmann 2018; Tang 2018; Kawashima 2019). Such concepts build upon other recurring tropes of Chinese foreign policy, such as the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, non-intervention in domestic affairs, peaceful settlement of disputes, and “win-win cooperation” (Russian Federation and People's Republic of China 2016).

Divining what such ideas mean for global governance is not simple; each of these concepts is notable for its vagueness, capaciousness, and flexibility. Nonetheless, there is some evidence of China deploying such concepts as foundational principles for the multilateral organizations it initiates. Nie (2019) suggests that notions of “mutual benefit” and “win-win” cooperation underpin the framing of the APSCO Charter, while similar language is used in the Charter of the SCO (Article 2). Perhaps most obvious is China's convening of the South-South Human Rights Forum, whose first meeting was framed by Beijing around the theme of “Building a Community of Shared Future for Humanity: New Opportunities for South-South Human Rights Development.” The forum's “Beijing Declaration,” issued in the name of all forum participants, reiterated several longstanding Chinese positions on the human rights regime, emphasizing the importance of “national conditions,” declaring the right to subsistence and the right to development to be “the primary basic human rights,” and identifying respect for national sovereignty as the “basic governing norm” of human rights (South-South Human Rights Forum 2017).

However, China's attempts to “upload” its preferred normative vision to multilateral institutions, even its own, are not always successful. For example, while Xi Jinping initially promoted the idea of an AIIB under the principles of win-win cooperation (ASEAN-China Centre 2013), this has not been reflected in official discourses of the AIIB. The World Internet Conference offers an even clearer example. At the first meeting in 2014, attendees awoke on the last day to find copies of a “Wuzhen Declaration” pushed under their hotel room doors, which repeated key Chinese talking points on internet governance. Upon the objections of several attendees, it was not officially promulgated (Wall Street Journal 2014).

The clumsiness of such attempts at normative entrepreneurialism point toward the difficulty for China in using multilateral formats to promote normative change, let alone an alternative ideology to aspire for global hegemony (Allan, Vucetic, and Hopf 2018). This probably reflects the ideological incoherence of contemporary Chinese society, with its awkward mix of Maoist terminology, Dengist pragmatism, and increasing appeals to classical Chinese thought (Holbig 2013; Madsen 2014; Brown and Bērziņa-Čerenkova 2018). More likely is that China's institutions will contribute to normative change simply by avoiding the overtly liberal ideas present in existing institutions that link states' international legitimacy to their domestic affairs (Zhang 2011, 2016).

Conclusion

Over the last three decades, China has been involved in the creation of at least twenty new multilateral initiatives, ranging from loose informal forums to formal IGOs, and involving countries from every world region. Moreover, China has increasingly taken the lead in initiating and designing these institutions. Rather than constituting a rare exception, multilateral institution-building constitutes a key tool in China's multilateral diplomacy. This paper has provided an empirical overview of China's multilateral initiatives and advanced a typology by which to understand the variety of relationships they can develop with incumbent institutions. Several findings emerge which have implications for empirical studies of Chinese multilateralism and literature on institutional proliferation.

First, generalizable statements about the type, motivations, and effects of China's new institutions must cope with strong variation. Some of China's multilateral initiatives, such as the APLMF or APT, appear largely complementary to the

institutional status quo. These institutions fill in governance gaps and pursue similar social purposes to existing institutions. Other institutions, such as the World Internet Conference and the South-South Human Rights Forum, are indicative of deeper conflicts over fundamental normative principles. Moreover, the capacity for institutions to change and develop over time indicates that their relationships to incumbent institutions can also evolve, especially in response to reactions by incumbent institutions. In the same way that it is difficult to talk of a single Chinese approach to an undifferentiated “world order” (Johnston 2019; Stephen and Zürn 2019), it is also difficult to place all of China's new institutions in the same box.

It follows, secondly, that not all of China's acts of institutional creation can be captured by existing categories such as “competitive regime creation” (Morse and Keohane 2014) or “counter-institutionalization” (Zürn 2018, 173). Like all additions to the international institutional landscape, China's new multilateral institutions may take on more or less rivalrous relationships with existing ones, and they may or may not pursue substantively different social purposes. This article has not attempted to formulate statements regarding the conditions under which new institutions will be of one or the other type. However, recognizing this variation in the creation of new institutions is a precondition for theoretical accounts of it.

Third, it is clear that new multilateral institutions should not be seen simply as exit options to incumbent organizations. Rather, the Chinese government continues to pursue its interests in established institutions even while building new ones. New institutions strengthen China's hand by legitimating its preferences and improving its bargaining power in established institutions. This challenges the view that institutional creation is a “last resort” strategy that is pursued only when the use of existing ones and forum shopping are exhausted as options (Jupille, Mattli, and Snidal 2013, 28).

Fourth, the relatively low cost of creating informal forums and hosting multilateral conferences in comparison to the creation of formal IGOs suggests that institutional creation may be less rare than commonly assumed (Abbott and Faude 2020). The creation of new IGOs should be seen as one end of a continuum of multilateral options by which China and other states may engage in multilateral institution-building. Literature on institutional proliferation ought to avoid equating of institutional formality with substantive significance and recognize the role of less formalized multilateral mechanisms by which actors attempt to influence global governance (Vabulas and Snidal 2013; Depledge and Dodds 2017; Onderco 2019). Many of China's multilateral initiatives are only weakly institutionalized and reserve a defining role for China in their operations and format. Some may be rightly regarded as mere simulacra of multilateral institutions—Potemkin villages in the countryside of global governance. Yet such institutions need to be identified, studied, and evaluated before they can be dismissed.

Future research will also have to consider not only how new institutions relate to established ones, but also how new institutions interact with each other. Do China's multilateral initiatives add up to a coherent institutional order, organized around coherent principles and operating in coherent ways? Or do they emerge in a patchwork manner in response to specific features of the established institutional order, relieving pressures for its reform and resulting in a symbiosis of Western-centered and Sinocentric institutional orders? Are new institutions reflective of a potential future Chinese hegemony? An important point of comparison (and contrast) could be the Cold War rivalry, which saw the United States and Soviet Union develop parallel institutional orders around alternative social purposes. The historical role of rival international institutional orders may become more analytically compelling if global rivalries between the United States and China intensify.

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