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Preface

The Tsinghua International Relations Review was founded in 2017 with the goal of providing an opportunity for students in the International Relations department to experience the process of presenting academic work and practice the peer-review process so many scholars must go through to publish research. As a student-run group, ensuring that the perspectives of young scholars are shared was an important mission for this rendition of the publication. Over the years, TIRR has experimented with new formats, team structures, and online presence, and for this journal we wanted to try and add a personal touch from some of the chosen authors.

Paired with each paper is a short interview sharing the perspectives of the writers on their research process and their hopes for how readers will interpret their analysis. The interviews highlight the strengths of the works and provide better insight on why it was decided for each piece to be published.

The process for putting together an edition of TIRR is a long one. Last year, TIRR completely changed its branding and structure, and this edition serves as a continuation of the vision of past editors. It has not been easy navigating the challenges of running a publication like TIRR, this spring edition came with a great many lessons, but each member of the TIRR team put a significant amount of work in to ensure the smooth process of the journal's publication.

Thank you to the team, to the authors, to the professors who supported this project and submitted the works of their students for consideration. None of this would have been possible without them. I hope you enjoy reading each of the chosen pieces, and I look forward to the future editions to come.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Susan St. Denis".

Susan St. Denis
Editor-in-Chief



The Purpose of Progress

Examining the Ethical Value of Technological Advancement in a Globalized World

Lilah Connell

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Abstract: This article examines the ethical underpinnings of technological progress to argue that it does not constitute a universal value. Drawing on the philosophies of Martin Heidegger and Herbert Marcuse, it explores how technology is not merely a human-controlled tool, but also an emergent force that acts as a framework or orientation shaping our thoughts, actions, and relationships. While technological advancement can be rationally justified by its potential for human improvement, in today's globalized world it often serves the capitalist ends of efficiency, power, and profit. Applying Aristotle's theory of values, this article considers the ethical implications of pursuing modernization, rather than happiness, as the "chief good." This paper concludes that technological progress, when relentlessly pursued without deliberate ethical contemplation, can subvert our critical thought and human purpose, and risks undermining the truly universal values of freedom and autonomy.

Keywords: *Technology, progress, ethics, universal values, globalization, modernization*

Question 1



What inspired you to write this article?

After being introduced to the philosophies of Heidegger and Marcuse in my Ethics in the Era of Globalization course while simultaneously reading headlines warning of the dangers of unchecked AI innovation, I became interested in exploring the ethics of technological progress and the values and forces that drive us to pursue technological advancement even when it carries significant risks to our humanity.



Question 2



Can you explain your main argument in one sentence?

Technological progress is not a universal ethical value because when indiscriminately pursued for purposes of profit, power, and efficiency we risk undermining our own autonomy and valuing the elusive concept of “modernization” above all else.



Question 3



What was the most surprising thing you discovered during your research?

While not a new finding, it has been personally eye-opening for me to consider how technology has become such a dominant force shaping our daily lives and the importance of questioning the ends we are pursuing through technological advancement and whether they align with our views of the human purpose.



Introduction

Technology is rapidly developing and diffusing as we increasingly incorporate it into new aspects of daily life. It has undoubtedly made our lives more convenient and connected, but this progress has not been without drawbacks. It has also increased global competition, deepened inequalities, and exerted pressures to adapt. As we precipitously approach unprecedented and irreversible technological advancements, it is critical to consider the ethics of technological progress, examining how it simultaneously reflects and impacts our humanity and values in today's globalized world. This complex relationship to technology thus begs the question of whether it constitutes a universal ethical value. Understanding the nature and implications of technological progress as an ethical value requires an exploration of the relationship between technology and humanity, and the underlying values and external forces that drive us to pursue technological advancement, perhaps even to our detriment.

Philosophical Underpinnings: Heidegger and Marcuse on Technology & Humanity

Martin Heidegger and Herbert Marcuse describe technology as a framework or rationality that shapes our thoughts, motivations, and interactions. Heidegger argues technology is not merely an instrument or tool used as a means to an end, but rather “a way of revealing” the world to us.^① Its *essence* is an “enframing” orientation that reveals the resources of the world that are available to us and their potential for future application. Technology is thus a powerful framework for positioning humans in nature that imposes a reciprocal controlling relationship. Humans are both controlled by this reductionist view of the world as raw materials, which poses risks to our understanding of our humanity, and are simultaneously also in control of “challenging forth” these raw materials, thereby unlocking their potential for further application.^②

Marcuse understands technology as a “social process” in which humans and social groups play an integral and inseparable role as not only the inventors but also directors of its “application and utilization.”^③ With the increasing mechanization of commodity production, Marcuse argues technology can become an “instrument for control and domination” whereby individuality is subordinated to a capitalist rationality in pursuit of efficiency and profit incentives.^④ What emerges is a new “technological rationalization” in which an individual's performance is evaluated by efficiency and standards of achievement set externally by the technical apparatus. In other words, he suggests that individuals are increasingly becoming incorporated

^① Martin Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology*, trans. William Lovitt (New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1977), 12.

^② *Ibid.*, 15.

^③ Herbert Marcuse, “Some Social Implications of Modern Technology,” *Studies in Philosophy and Social Science* 9, no. 3, (1941): 138.

^④ *Ibid.*, 139.

into this machine as their “liberty is confined to the selection of the most adequate means for reaching a goal which he did not set.”^① The implication of technological progress is therefore a shrinking room for human spontaneity, critical thought, self-reflection, and ultimately subjective freedom and autonomy.

In both these conceptualizations, the relationship between humanity and technology is cyclical, with technology exerting a force on our worldviews, actions, and social relationships just as we aim to control and shape its progression for our rational ends. There is an aspect of mutual reinforcement as well as an inevitability and inescapability in the way Heidegger and Marcuse understand the nature and implications of technology on society. While our rationality leads us to innovate and “feed the [technical] apparatus,” neither philosopher believes technological progress is an intrinsic part of our human nature, despite its historical evolution.^② This sense of inevitability only emerges from our interactions with technology and our application of it to the modern world. It is when technological progress is left unchecked, with no contemplation or reflection on its impacts, that it poses a danger to our humanity and autonomy by reducing our ability, or perhaps even willingness, to question the ends we are pursuing through this perpetual modernization.

Technology & Globalization: An Unreflective Competitive Cycle

Given its rational underpinning, it may seem logical to conclude that technological progress is a highly universal value. This is seemingly supported by the rapid development and prioritization of technology across the globe. There is fierce competition among countries and companies alike for technological edge and the subsequent power it bestows. The sheer amount of resources societies invest in technology alone demonstrates the value we perceive it to have. However, the prevalence and acceptance of technology in our modern world should not indicate its validity as a global and universal value. To understand why technological progress is not, in fact, universally valid, we must explore the cause of its global adoption.

In our current globalized system, we are experiencing what feels like an unfettered, irreversible proliferation of technology. But this is not necessarily the result of careful contemplation or the belief that technology is key to social improvement. Let us take artificial intelligence (AI) as an example. While AI has enormous potential for efficiency, top AI scientists and CEOs have warned of the “risk of extinction” if AI is not treated with the same global priority as pandemics and nuclear war.^③ Concurrently, the media has characterized the international competition surrounding AI development as an “arms race.” In this competitive context, AI

^① *Ibid.*, 142.

^② *Ibid.*, 144.

^③ Center for AI Safety, *Statement on AI Risk* (2023), <https://www.safe.ai/work/statement-on-ai-risk>.

research has progressed rapidly, despite a lack of significant societal demand and widespread concern regarding the technology's implications for our humanity. Our approach to AI development demonstrates how political, economic, and military competition can fuel technological progress potentially at the expense of our rational interests.

This trajectory of AI aligns with Thomas Friedman's analysis of the relationship between globalization and technology. Friedman argues our embrace of technology is largely out of necessity to remain economically competitive in a world in which "almost everyone—either directly or indirectly—feels the pressures, constraints and opportunities to adapt to the democratizations of technology, finance, and information that are at the heart of the globalized system."^① He emphasizes that globalization is not a choice, but rather a reality that cannot be stopped "except at a huge cost to your society and its prospects for growth."^② Countries that fail to adapt to the new system therefore risk being left behind. The cyclical pattern emerges once again. Technology is a key driver of globalization that lowers the barriers to entry in the global marketplace, while simultaneously globalization propels and compels technological innovation.

In portraying globalization as an unstoppable force heavily fueled by and guiding technology, Friedman implies that technological progress is inevitable and beyond human control. This undermines the role humans play in the development and direction of technology emphasized by Heidegger and Marcuse while validating Marcuse's warnings of our incorporation into the "technical apparatus" in which our autonomy becomes limited. However, it is due to a lack of critical reflection that globalization has come to *feel* inevitable. While the adoption of technology itself may be universal, and the pressures to adapt to the globalizing world are likewise universally experienced, in reality we determine the pace and trajectory of globalization. However, the very belief that technology has become an uncontrollable competitive compulsion illustrates the point that the simple fact of its global proliferation does not secure its status as a universal value.

Ethical Evaluation: Modernization as an End in Itself

An analysis of the "ends" of technological progress casts further doubts on its validity as a universal ethical value that can guide us in our determination of good and bad. According to Aristotle, values are means to the highest end or "chief good" of *eudaimonia*. It follows that if technological progress is an ethical value, it should serve as a means to this *eudaimonia* of

^① Thomas L. Friedman, *The Lexus and the Olive Tree* (New York: Anchor Books, 2000), 73.

^② *Ibid.*, 112.

happiness and human flourishing. However, in modern society technological advancement is more often pursued for purposes of power, profit, efficiency, and productivity within a never-ending capitalist M-C-M' cycle.^① In other words, once realized as ends, profits and efficiency are then recycled as instruments to continue modernizing and improving upon our previous technological successes. Put even more simply, there is no “end” to efficiency.^② Within this cycle, it is easy to lose sight of the rational reason behind or higher aim of such technological pursuits. Modernization, rather than happiness, is treated as the chief good. We ought to question this pursuit as modernization does not fulfill the criteria of a “complete” end worth choosing in and of itself “never for the sake of something else” and “without qualification.”^③

This cyclical pattern demonstrates our complex relationship with technology in which technological progress is at times human-centered, driven by our inclinations to innovate and improve upon society, but at other times acts as a constraint on our own free will when we act out of power or profit-driven instincts that blind us from contemplating the ends we are pursuing. It is this inherent, ever-present danger that distinguishes technological progress from the truly universal ethical values of freedom and autonomy.

Conclusion

The philosophical frameworks of Heidegger and Marcuse emphasize how humans and technology reciprocally interact to guide and shape one another. This relationship creates an underlying danger that, left unchecked in the absence of ethical contemplation, our rational pursuit of technological progress risks infringing upon our autonomy. While the prevalence and capitalistic value of technology contribute to an essence of universality, the competitive forces compelling globalization demonstrate its societal acceptance does not equate to ethical value. A further Aristotelian examination of the meaning of universal values reveals the superficial nature of technological progress as it is employed as a means to modernization that lacks a meaningful end or higher aim. As we pursue new technological endeavors, we must constantly evaluate the purpose and price of our progress through deliberate assessment of its impact on our genuine universal values.

^① Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy. Volume I*, trans. from the 3rd German ed. by Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling, ed. Frederick Engels (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1954).

^② Xiaoyang Tang, *Session 6 Lecture* (October 21, 2024).

^③ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. and ed. Roger Crisp (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 10.

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- [5] Marcuse, Herbert. “Some Social Implications of Modern Technology.” *Studies in Philosophy and Social Science* 9, no. 3 (1941): 138–162.
- [6] Marx, Karl. *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy. Volume I*. Translated from the 3rd German edition by Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling. Edited by Frederick Engels. Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1954.
- [7] Tang, Xiaoyang. “Session 6 Lecture.” October 21, 2024.



Economic Cold War

The Case of the United States in Indonesia

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Abstract: While scholarly attention on Cold War operations in Southeast Asia has traditionally focused on overt military interventions in Vietnam and Cambodia, the United States' multifaceted intervention in Indonesia highlights the lesser studied U.S. approach wherein economic policy and ideology served as critical battlefields in Cold War geopolitics. The U.S. successfully curbed communism's spread in Indonesia through three interconnected approaches: supporting the military coup of 1965, providing intelligence and aid to manipulate public sentiment against the Communist Party of Indonesia (PKI), and actively guiding Indonesia's subsequent economic restructuring. Drawing on historical analysis of Indonesia's colonial past, post-independence political landscape, and the rise of the PKI under President Soekarno's protection, the United States' intervention transcended mere political maneuvering to include economic reorientation through the "Berkeley Mafia" – American-educated Indonesian economists who implemented free-market policies aligned with U.S. ideological interests and later replicated in Latin America.

Keywords: *Economic Cold War, economic ideology, Indonesia, United States intervention, anti-communism, Berkeley Mafia, disaster capitalism*

Question 1



What inspired you to write this article?

Growing up in Indonesia, the "Berkeley Mafia" and its synonymity during Indonesia's economic boom inspired me to write this article. I was interested in exploring how the economic ambitions and goals of third-world nations were utilized during the Cold War and decided to take a deep dive into Indonesia's own path with this.



Question 2



What was the most surprising thing you discovered during your research?

Coming across Naomi Klien's *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism* and the coining of the term "disaster capitalism" that describes shocks such as natural disasters, economic crises, civil unrest or wars that served as opportunities to push through radical free-market capitalistic policies and foreign intervention that would otherwise been rejected by the public.



Question 3



What do you hope readers take away from your article?

In hearing about a different perspective on the Cold War, particularly the Economic Cold War that was at play and how educational institutions were intertwined with the domestic economic growth, world politics and international relations at that time



Introduction

The United States' increasing involvement in Southeast Asia during the Cold War was aimed at its concern in curbing the spread of communism. Although the United States had direct military involvement in states such as Vietnam and Cambodia, it also operated on a quieter battlefield, where the fight ranged from shaping ideological sentiment to guiding economic recovery. This 'quieter battlefield' refers to the United States' successful intervention in Indonesia's political transition. This included an attempted U.S.-backed military coup in 1965, provision of intelligence and aid to fuel public unrest against the increasingly influential Communist Party of Indonesia (PKI), and active role in Indonesia's post-coup economic restructuring.

The end of the Second World War and the subsequent beginning of the Cold War brought an ideology race center stage, particularly in Southeast Asia, where many states were newly independent. Indonesia's non-alignment served as its primary foreign policy throughout the Cold War, however, as the 1960s developed, Indonesia's domestic politics shifted with the growth and protection of the PKI under President Soekarno. Concerned about an imminent military coup to overthrow his rule, he edged Indonesia closer to becoming an ally with the communist-led bloc. The result: a United States-sponsored coup that, although failed, paved the way for a military overthrow of President Soekarno's rule and subsequent military and public scapegoat of Indonesia's Communist Party. Under the guidance of U.S. aid and intelligence, this intervention not only curbed the spread of Communism in Southeast Asia, but also paved the way for Indonesia's economic restructuring through the 'Berkley Mafia', which ultimately aligned the country with U.S. strategic interests.

Cold War in Southeast Asia

Following the end of World War 2, Southeast Asia saw a period of nationalistic and decolonization movements across the region. During the Cold War, a large proportion of these nationalistic movements were intertwined with communist or socialist ideology. Although Myanmar remained officially neutral during the Cold War, segments of its population—particularly among the ethnic Chinese minority—expressed support for Maoism and related communist ideologies during the 1960s. This, in turn, contributed to rising anti-Chinese sentiment, traces of which persist in Myanmar today. In Malaysia, an ongoing insurgency led by the Malayan Communist Party and its armed wing fought for independence and a socialist economy with first the British Empire between 1948 and 1960 known as the Malayan Emergency. The conflict subsequently developed with the later established and newly independent Malaysia that continued until 1989.

In Cambodia, following a period of governance first under the monarchy of Kampuchea and then the Khmer Republic, a civil war occurred with the rise of the Communist Party of Kampuchea or Khmer

Rouge, which ruled between 1975 and 1979. In Vietnam, an insurgency led by communist Viet Minh marked the First Indochina War and resulted in a partition of North and South Vietnam in 1954. The subsequent Second Indochina War between 1955 and 1975 resulted in a communist absorption of both states into the Socialist Republic of Vietnam that continues until today. In Laos, a civil war in 1959 saw the establishment of a one-party socialist republic under the People's Revolutionary Party that continues until the present day. In Thailand, a communist insurgency and guerilla war led by the Communist Party of Thailand lasted from 1965 until 1983.^①

All in all, these events collectively highlight the degree to which these domestic ideological, nationalistic movements created concern for the United States and its allies during the Cold War. Multilateral efforts such as the establishment of the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) in 1954 included a defensive alliance between the United States, United Kingdom, Thailand, the Philippines, Pakistan, New Zealand, Australia, and France to prevent the spread of communism in the region, were limited in their effectiveness in curbing the ideological spread domestically and thus, creating an incentive for major powers to either directly or indirectly involve themselves in the domestic affairs of the region.^② These involvements would subsequently be known as the proxy wars of the Cold Wars.

In Indonesia, the PKI rose to become the fourth largest political party in the nation's first legislative election in 1955 and from domestic and international forces fearing its ever-increasing influence in public affairs, intervened and had its members purged and the party banned by 1966.^③ Indonesia marks a unique Southeast Asia case as its unique period of undisputed imperial rule for over three centuries created a nationalistic sentiment that paved the way for the PKI which was conversely under the protection of President Soekarno continuously rose and became a foundational pillar of Indonesia's governmental structure in the 1960s. With this ever-increasing domestic influence, the United States indirectly intervened through a Central Intelligence Agency (CIA)-backed military coup that failed but paved the subsequent domestic turmoil and the opportunity to manipulate public sentiment towards the purging of the PKI and similar leftist organizations and movements.

Indonesia's 300+ Years of Imperial Rule

Although Sultanates and various kingdoms such as the Majapahit, Demak, and Kediri have painted a unified Indonesia under various historical, geographic, and religious backgrounds ranging from Buddhism to Hinduism to Christian missionaries to Islam, Indonesia's vast, diverse, yet united identity throughout the peninsula started with its relations with its Western colonial powers. With the conquest of the Portuguese,

^① Hansson, Eva, Kevin Hewison, and Jim Glassman. 2020. "Legacies of the Cold War in East and Southeast Asia: An Introduction." *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 50 (4): 493–510. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00472336.2020.1758955>.

^② Fenton, Damien. 2012. *To Cage the Red Dragon: SEATO and the Defence of Southeast Asia, 1955-1965*. JSTOR. NUS Press. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv1qv2pf>.

^③ "SEJARAH DAN HASIL PEMILIHAN UMUM 1955." 2023. BADAN KESATUAN BANGSA DAN POLITIK. July 6, 2023. <https://kesbangpol.kapuashulukab.go.id/sejarah-dan-hasil-pemilihan-umum-1955/>.

Spanish, and British Empires in the 16th century over spice and cash crop trade in Indonesia, the eventual dominance over the peninsula by the Dutch would lead Indonesia to a period of over three centuries of imperial rule. First, under the monopoly of the Dutch East India Company or *Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie* and after 1800 as the Dutch East Indies, a formal colony of the Dutch Empire.

Various systems were put in place during this period to ensure the continuous dominance of Dutch rule. Events such as the Batavia massacre of 1740 ensured the alienation and economic divide between the ethnic Chinese minority and the local indigenous population also known as *pribumi*. By doing so, populations were not able to unify. This strategy also fed into the Dutch slavery model that focused on the exploitation and compliance of populations through ethnic division and encouragement of debt-ridden behaviour through the endorsement of gambling dens and red-light districts near areas of settlements.^①

This all would change following the breakout of World War 2 when the Japanese Empire occupied Indonesia and endorsed its movement towards self-governance and the formation of an Indonesian state under the condition that it remain an ally of the Japanese Empire. Key figures would emerge to lead this independence movement, notably Soekarno, who at that time was not only chosen as an official spokesperson for the Japanese Empire in various remote provinces but also was given the chairmanship of the Central Advisory Council that led this independence movement. As Japan's imminent surrender in the Second World War was apparent, President Soekarno took the opportunity to declare Indonesia's independence on August 17, 1945.^②

Fight for Indonesian Independence

With the Proclamation of Independence on August 17, 1945, also came the official establishment of Indonesia's founding state philosophy of *Pancasila*. Its five principles integrated into the state's constitution are as follows: (1) Belief in the one and only God, (2) Just and civilized humanity, (3) The unity of Indonesia, (4) Democracy guided by the inner wisdom in the unanimity arising out of deliberations among representatives, (5) Social justice for all the people of Indonesia.^③ President Soekarno served as the first president of Indonesia during this period known as the Indonesian National Revolution. Adamant about leading the revolution for independence following the redeployment of Dutch and Allied troops from 1945-1949, President Soekarno was also insistent on being a key figure in the formation of Indonesia as a state

^① Hakim, Lukmanul. 2018. "HISTORIOGRAFI MODERN INDONESIA: Dari Sejarah Lama Menuju Sejarah Baru." *Khazanah : Jurnal Sejarah Dan Kebudayaan Islam*, December. <https://doi.org/10.15548/khazanah.v0i0.75>.

^② Kusuma, A. B. 2004. "Lahirnya UUD 1945 : Memuat Salinan Dokumen Otentik Badan Oentoek Menyelidiki Oesaha-Oesaha Persiapan Kemerdekaan / RM. A.B. Kusuma | Perpustakaan Mahkamah Konstitusi." Badan Penerbit Fakultas Hukum Universitas Indonesia. 2004. <https://simpus.mkri.id/opac/detail-opac?id=9546>.

^③ Santoso, M. Agus. 2013. "PERKEMBANGAN KONSTITUSI DI INDONESIA." *Yustisia Jurnal Hukum* 2 (3). <https://doi.org/10.20961/yustisia.v2i3.10168>.

due to his role in not only drafting the philosophy of *Pancasila* but also his pivotal role in announcing the proclamation of independence.^①

By 1949, Indonesia reestablished its independence, and by 1950 it became a unitary republic. However, in 1959, President Soekarno established the autocratic system of “Guided Democracy,” allowing him to lead across all branches of government. Through this framework, President Soekarno positioned Indonesia as a leader of the Non-Aligned Movement, seeking to avoid entanglement with either the Western or Communist blocs. His advocacy for non-alignment was shaped in part by Indonesia’s recent struggle against Dutch attempts to reassert colonial control, which had fueled various domestic movements during the Indonesian National Revolution—including the rise of the PKI, the Communist Party of Indonesia. These developments placed Indonesia at the intersection of Cold War dynamics, drawing the attention of both the Western and Communist blocs. Although Soekarno sought to project neutrality abroad, Indonesia’s internal landscape was increasingly polarized. The growing influence of the PKI after the revolution heightened Cold War anxieties among the United States and its allies, who feared a leftward shift. At home, Soekarno navigated a delicate balance between the PKI and the Armed Forces, a strategy that, while aimed at maintaining domestic stability, only deepened external concerns about Indonesia’s political trajectory. His efforts to uphold neutrality culminated in the 1955 Bandung Conference, which solidified Indonesia’s symbolic leadership among postcolonial Asian and African states.^②

Rise of the Communist Party of Indonesia

Tracing the speedy rise of the PKI, not only in its rise in parliamentary affairs but also in its integration into President Soekarno’s pillars of support that advised his leadership, are crucial in understanding the continuous concern from the United States and its allies in Indonesia’s domestic affairs with the PKI. The PKI marked its inception in 1914 when it started as the Indies Social Democratic Association or *Indische Sociaal-Democratische Vereeniging*. Although initially led by Dutch members through their initiatives of incorporating communist ideals such as opposing colonial rule under a nationalist-religious lens, efforts would attract local populations and eventually enter into Islamic organizations, notably Sarekat Islam, the largest Islamic organization in Indonesia. Initially a group focused on organizing labor unions, and anti-colonial, nationalist sentiment, the party would soon become the largest communist party in the world following the Soviet and Chinese community parties.^③

^① Wandani, Amalia Rizki, and Dinie Anggraeni Dewi. 2021. “Penerapan Pancasila Sebagai Dasar Kehidupan Bermasyarakat.” *De Cive : Jurnal Penelitian Pendidikan Pancasila Dan Kewarganegaraan* 1 (2): 34–39. <https://doi.org/10.56393/decive.v1i2.225>.

^② Fitriani, Evi. 2015. “ASIAN Countries’ Strategies towards the European Union in an Inter-Regionalist Context.” Google Books. 2015. <https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=T3arBwAAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PA127&dq=non-alignment+indonesia&ots=D5fEVwhNzX&sig=-Ny-39LGeu1pU8X7YxMcZSGZ58c>.

^③ Fitriana Rahayu, Nur Siswo Dipurnomo, and Novi Diah Haryanti. 2020. “PERJALANAN PARTAI KOMUNIS INDONESIA (PKI) DALAM NOVELET SRI SUMARAH DAN BAWUK KARYA UMAR KAYAM (KAJIAN SOSIOLOGI

In the wake of the Indonesian National Revolution, the PKI and its grassroots efforts were crucial in military offensives as the party's military units would hold fronts against the return of Dutch troops on the peninsula. Although a failed uprising occurred from August to September of 1948, where party leaders had attempted to declare a Soviet Republic of Indonesia, the party was allowed to continue to exist.^① By the first legislative elections held in 1955, the PKI became the fourth-largest party in the nation, amounting to 16% of the national vote. By 1959, support from the PKI with Sukarno's rule became institutionalized and integrated into a united yet governing autonomy front with the concept of *Nasakom*, a tripartite ideological abbreviation for nationalism, religion, and communism under the guidance of *Pancasila*.^②

By 1962, party leaders were made advisors in Sukarno's cabinet. As Sukarno attempted to balance the rise of the PKI with the interests of the military, nationalist, and Islamic coalitions, concern for Indonesia's domestic affairs became ever-increasing from the United States as Southeast Asia became a more apparent region for proxy wars in the Cold War. By April 1965, President Soekarno endorsed a PKI proposal to establish another branch of the Armed Forces consisting of peasants and workers. Although rejected by the Armed Forces, this marked a high point of Sukarno's growing fear that a military coup would overthrow his rule due to his repeated protection of the PKI's rapid growth. By May 1965, the "Gilchrist Document," a memorandum from the British ambassador to Jakarta, Andrew Gilchrist, addressed to the British Foreign Office, was leaked and hinted at Western collusion, mainly a United States-United Kingdom operation, in Indonesia to overthrow President Soekarno.

As the United States officially labeled the letter as a forged document, the CIA were, in fact, funding and arming movements across the peninsula with the plan to assassinate President Soekarno and other key members of his cabinet.^③ All in all, this justified President Soekarno's public fear of an imminent coup and further shed light on Indonesia's growing role as a place of intervention by the United States and its allies in the Cold War. In his public appearances and speeches following the release of the letter, President Soekarno would continuously warn of a military plot to overthrow him and subsequently declared his intention to commit Indonesia to an anti-imperialist alliance with China and other communist states on the 20th anniversary of Indonesia's independence day.^④

SASTRA)." Seminar Internasional Riksa Bahasa, 640–50.

<http://proceedings.upi.edu/index.php/riksabahasa/article/view/1404>.

^① Van, Maria. 1977. *The Indonesian Maoists*. University of Maryland School of Law.

^② Mustapa, Hasan, and Ihsan Hamid. 2024. "NASAKOM DILEMMA and the POLITICS of ISLAMIC ORGANIZATIONS." *Politea : Jurnal Politik Islam* 7 (1): 1–33. <https://doi.org/10.20414/politea.v7i1.9780>.

^③ "RESEARCH STUDY -- INDONESIA-1965: THE COUP THAT BACKFIRED | CIA FOIA (Foia.cia.gov)." 2023. [Cia.gov](https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/document/00186624). 2023. <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/document/00186624>.

^④ Soekarno. 1965. "Tjapailah Bintang-Bintang Di Langit / (Tahun Berdikari) : Pidato Presiden Sukarno Pada Hari Ulang Tahun Ke 20 Republik Indonesia 17 Agustus 1965 / Indonesia. Departemen Koperasi. Inspektorat Jenderal | Dinas Perpustakaan Dan Arsip Daerah DIY." Dinas Perpustakaan Dan Arsip Daerah DIY. 1965. <https://balaiyanpus.jogjaprovo.go.id/opac/detail-opac?id=139307>.

30 September Movement

A Western intervention eventually occurred as feared by President Soekarno as it became drastically urgent to decouple Indonesia from not only other communist states but also destroy the alliance between the PKI and President Soekarno's pillars of support. Despite the United States' active role in lobbying for Indonesian independence, with the backdrop of the Cold War, ensuring Indonesia's order and compliance was to be done so at any costs over allowing the state to become communist-aligned. Between September 30 and October 1st, 1965, six of Indonesia's top army generals were killed in a failed, attempted coup to overthrow President Soekarno. The collective seized and announced on the Republic of Indonesia's public radio a new Revolutionary Council and that the "30th September Movement" had seized key parts of Jakarta and other cities, various military infrastructures, and the Republic of Indonesia's radio network.

With a majority of the army's leadership absent, Special Forces General Soeharto mobilized his forces and with permission from President Soekarno to restore order and security, seized back control of key areas in the city including the Republic of Indonesia radio station where the G30S had previously announced their revolution. By October 2, 1965, General Soeharto had secured control over the army and its key bases with most mutinied battalions having surrendered or been defeated.^① By October 14, General Soeharto officially became the army's commander and in conjunction with the military's propaganda and religious groups began spreading the narrative that the PKI orchestrated the attempted coup. Although unconfirmed until this day whether this coup was orchestrated by the CIA or an internal conflict within the military, the aftermath resulted in a military and civilian purge of PKI leaders, members, left-leaning organizations, and its sympathizers that continued throughout 1966 all supported by aid and intelligence by the United States and its allies.^②

By March 11, 1966, the Order of Eleventh March, abbreviated as *Supersemar*, was signed by President Soekarno to continuously take whatever measures were deemed necessary to restore order to the chaotic turmoil Indonesia was in, and by the next day, General Soeharto had officially declared the banning of the PKI.^③ As a result of the purge, President Soekarno's hesitancy to decrease his *Nasakom* pillars of support would be overrun by General Soeharto and the military's momentum over driving civilian and religious sentiment against leftist movements. Through *Supersemar*, President Soekarno officially lost the influence of the PKI. With dwindling domestic influence, by March 1967, General Soeharto had

① "The United States President's Commission on CIA Activities within the United States (Rockefeller Commission), 'Summary of Facts: Investigation of CIA Involvement in Plans to Assassinate Foreign Leaders,' June 5, 1975. | National Security Archive." 1975. Nsarchive.gwu.edu. 1975. <https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/document/21512-document-19>.

② Feyandi, Alvindi Mochammad Raka, Fahmi Rizqi Fauzi, and Noufal Muhamad Nugraha. 2024. "Politik Indonesia Masa Kepemimpinan Soekarno." *Gudang Jurnal Multidisiplin Ilmu* 2 (5): 272–76. <https://doi.org/10.59435/gjmi.v2i5.477>.

③ Roosa, John. 2006. "Pretext for Mass Murder: The September 30th Movement and Suharto's Coup d'Etat in Indonesia." The University of Wisconsin Press. 2006. <https://dewey.petra.ac.id/catalog/view/97283>.

maneuvered the People's Consultative Assembly to vote President Soekarno out of power and place General Soeharto as acting president, a position he would then officially hold for over three decades until 1998.^①

Jakarta Method

Vincent Bevins, author of *The Jakarta Method: Washington's Anticommunist Crusade and the Mass Murder Program that Shaped Our World*, models the events that occurred throughout the 30th September Movement to be a brutal covert operation conducted to eliminate members of the PKI and their sympathizers. As victims were tortured, raped, and executed without trial, the Jakarta Method served as a model for other anti-communist campaigns in Southeast Asia and Latin America, for state-sponsored violence and human rights abuses in the mass murder of civilians in the pursuit of the United States and its allies' geopolitical interests during the Cold War. Overall, Bevins' model highlights the degree to which the United States and its allies were willing to destroy the political left and communist movements in Indonesia and how it was further replicated in other genocidal plans implemented by other authoritarian capitalist regimes under the guidance of aid and intelligence from the United States and its allies.

Take for example Operation Condor and its campaign of political repression and state terror that led to the assassination and disappearance of tens of thousands of political opponents. Operation Menu and Freedom were just two of many carpet bomb attempts to prevent North Vietnamese forces from operating in eastern Cambodia while also displacing over a hundred million Cambodian civilians and homes. The Philippine's declaration of martial law under President Ferdinand Marcos against the response of the communist threat posed by the newly founded Communist Party of the Philippines is another example of this style of intervention.^②

Ultimately, Bevin's model, while comprehensive in emphasizing the pattern and nature to which the United States and its allies were willing to perpetrate its exercise of human rights through anti-communist violence and political repression in the pursuit of ideological and geopolitical influence during the Cold War, failed to highlight the degree of intervention from the United States and its allies involvement in rebuilding these states, contributing to its phase in the "economic Cold War".

Economic Cold War

The term "Economic Cold War" aims to address that the Cold War was beyond a political, diplomatic, and military conflict between the two superpowers but also an economic and ideological battle. The economic nature of the Cold War differed from other aspects of the Cold War in that it was an ongoing

^① Defa Akhdan Naufal. 2024. "Supersemar Dan Stabilitas Politik: Analisis Transformasi Kekuasaan Dari Soekarno Ke Soeharto Berdasarkan Perspektif Samuel P. Huntington." *Socius: Jurnal Penelitian Ilmu-Ilmu Sosial* 2 (5). <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.14327837>.

^② Bevins, Vincent. 2020. *The Jakarta Method : Washington's Anticommunist Crusade and the Mass Murder Program That Shaped Our World*. Editorial: New York, Ny: Publicaffairs, Hatchette Book Group.

intervention by forces to shape the economic policies and theories of nations beyond the immediate conflict zone and after armed conflicts. Daniel R. Fusfeld author of *Economics and the Cold War: An Inquiry into the Relationship between Ideology and Theory*, highlighted how both the United States and Soviet Union used economic theory as a form of ideological propaganda in that economic success emphasized the superiority of one system over the other and create another battlefield post-armed intervention.^①

For the United States, in 1949, Harry S. Truman's inaugural speech called for four points that ranged from unfaltering support to the United Nations, encouraging the world's economic recovery, strengthening freedom in nations to its fourth point to "embark on a bold new program for making the benefits of our scientific advances and industrial progress available for the improvement and growth of underdeveloped areas."^② Thus, the Point Four program was founded as a technical assistance program that did not serve as a colonial venture for the developing world, but instead an opportunity to win over public sentiment among the Middle East, Latin America, Asia, and Africa through economic growth and success. The program itself contributed to the education of both the Berkeley Mafia in Indonesia and the Chicago Mafia in Chile, both of which were crucial in rebuilding their economies following the deposition of previous governing leaders. Meanwhile, for the Soviet Union, the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (COMECON) was created in 1949 to cooperate and strengthen the economic relations of states that were increasingly being cut off from markets and suppliers. Beyond becoming a platform to provide aid, this economic alliance of socialist countries ultimately became a model for planning "international division of labor" among the Soviet bloc countries.^③

The United States and the Soviet Union throughout the Cold War ensured not only the economic integration and support of its allies and states of influence in their respective economic models but also played a large role in ensuring the economic education and thought of its states of influence were guided and exposed to either pro-capitalist or pro-socialist viewpoints that fundamentally shaped their understanding, research and economic agendas in the power's respective favors. In other words, economic success ensured loyalty and order to their respective blocs.

Berkely Mafia

With Indonesia as the case example, President Soeharto's authoritarian rule called for a *Orde Baru* or "New Order" for Indonesia. Following tension between Indonesia and the Dutch government following the Indonesian National Revolution, foreign lecturers from the Netherlands that were relied on to teach and

^① Fusfeld, Daniel R. 1998. "Economics and the Cold War: An Inquiry into the Relationship between Ideology and Theory." *Journal of Economic Issues* 32 (2): 505–11. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4227328>.

^② Truman, Harry S. 1949. "The Challenge of International Aid." Truman Library. 1949. <https://www.trumanlibrary.gov/education/presidential-inquiries/challenge-international-aid>.

^③ TIME. 1960. "Foreign News: The Rise of COMECON." TIME. July 4, 1960. <https://time.com/archive/6807105/foreign-news-the-rise-of-comecon/>.

lead Indonesian universities would leave Indonesia. By the mid-1950s, only Sumitro Djojohadikusumo remained who had been the Minister of Trade and Industry as well as the Minister of Finance at the University of Indonesia's Faculty of Economics. As such, selected students within the faculty were chosen to partake in overseas studies at the University of California, Berkeley through the Point Four program.

As their return coincided with President Soeharto's rebuilding of Indonesia into a *Orde Baru*, these selected individuals were appointed technocratic positions in economics and finance within his cabinet who were: Widjojo Nitisastro, Mohammad Sadli, Emil Salim, J. B. Sumarlin, Ali Wardhana, and Dorodjatun Kuntjoro-Jakti. All these individuals were then collectively known as the Berkeley Mafia, a group of technocrats with a foundation of liberal economics able to serve American interests in Indonesia, such as establishing and further promoting free-market capitalism.^① Throughout President Soeharto's *Orde Baru*, the Berkeley Mafia were center at advising economic policies and programs that would stabilize and rehabilitate Indonesia's economy, where continuous efforts were made at deregulation and liberalization of the economy that supported not only President Soeharto's continuous rule but also continuous economic, political and diplomatic alignment with the United States.

A framework that had previously not been introduced to Indonesia but highlights liberal economic policies that had been implemented globally, often in the aftermath of crises, was introduced in Naomi Klien's *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism*. The term "disaster capitalism" coined by Klien highlights that shocks such as natural disasters, economic crises, civil unrest or wars served as opportunities to push through radical free-market capitalistic policies that would otherwise have been rejected by the public. Disaster shocks in this situation became a justification for not only foreign intervention but also multilateral institutions such as the International Monetary Fund and World Bank in drastically structurally altering economic policies and systems. Cases such as Chile following the military coup led by General Pinochet and the introduction of the Chicago Mafia (similarly a group of Chilean economists from the Point Four Program that were educated at the University of Chicago and were given technocratic positions in economics and finance upon their return) in 1973, as well as the United States and its allies' invasion of Iraq in 2003 are referenced. Notwithstanding, Klien's framework is applicable in Indonesia and the Berkeley mafia's case as well, which all the more highlights the pattern of Western intervention and the ever-increasing importance of economic success in cementing order and influence during the Cold War and even after its conclusion.^②

^① PinterPolitik TV. 2022. "Misteri Mafia Berkeley." YouTube. June 10, 2022.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f6lQYKWNkpl>.

^② Klein, Naomi. 2007. *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism*. London: Penguin Books Ltd.

Current Reflection & Implications for Indonesia

Following the Asian Financial Crisis of 1997, Indonesia's eventual economic collapse and bailout by the IMF were further blamed on the Berkeley Mafia due to continuous unchecked capitalism. Yet despite this, both Widjojo Nitisastro and Emil Salim, members of the Berkeley Mafia group, continued to have significant influence, highlighting the foundational ideological and economic seed that the United States and Cold War had planted. Economic success was a crucial driving factor in ensuring the continuous ideological alignment of Indonesia during the Cold War and continues today in our multipolar world. The United States' intervention in Indonesia represents a departure from its direct military engagements elsewhere, revealing an alternative battlefield defined by covert influence and economic restructuring.

Although the strategy initially failed to achieve its desired outcomes, it ultimately provided a model for future U.S. interventions in Latin America and the Middle East and sheds light on the broader contours of the Economic Cold War. The United States' involvement in the military coup in 1965 also highlighted how disaster capitalism can be driven by the provision of intelligence, aid, and manipulation of public unrest at times of crisis. This case of intervention also highlighted that curbing the spread of communism came at no cost for the United States and its allies, with the purging of communist members, sympathizers, and affiliates in Indonesia being necessary in ensuring its active role in the economic restructuring of the state. As Indonesia's case addresses the relationship of economic success in containing alignment during the Cold War, the question now lies if economic success is still sufficient to drive alignment in this multipolar world.

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Crude Realignments

How China's Energy Diversification Redefined Its Partnership with Angola

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Abstract: Sino-Angolan relations, rooted in the oil-for-infrastructure “Angola Model,” was once a cornerstone of China’s African strategy, and Angola served as a model for the success of Chinese influence in the African region. Still, this “marriage of convenience” cooled significantly between 2018 and 2023 and underwent a complex interplay of structural, political, and economic changes. This paper analyses China’s oil import strategy and diversification, RMB-denominated futures to counter Western pricing benchmarks, and decreased reliance on long-term debt-backed oil contracts which drove its shift from Angola. This study examines the factors that led to the change in China's involvement in Angola's oil industry and evaluates implications for future collaboration between the two countries.

Keywords: *Sino-Angolan relations, oil-backed loans, energy security, economic diversification*

Question 1



What inspired you to write this article?

My research began as an investigation into China's so-called 'debt-trap diplomacy' in Africa. However, as I researched deeper I realized this was not focused enough on Chinese Foreign Policy so I changed the plan. This led me to ask: Which African countries bear the heaviest debt burdens to China, and why? Angola emerged as the case study. Not only does it owe China more than any other African nation, but its relationship with Beijing with the creation of the 'Angola Model' was once a cornerstone of China's African strategy and a blueprint for resource-backed infrastructure financing. Yet, between 2018 and 2023, Angolan oil exports to China decreased by 20%, and the bilateral relations began to decrease. I wanted to understand why China's oil strategy changed how it diversified, why Sino-Angola relations cooled, and analyze which specific and general factors made it happen.



Question 2



What was your research process like?

My research process combined qualitative analysis to map the shifting dynamics of Sino-Angolan energy relations. First, I gathered academic literature on China's energy security strategies and Angola's post-2017 governance reforms. Concurrently, I analyzed news archives (e.g., Africa Defense Forum, China Daily, Reuters).



Question 3



If you could continue this research, what would you explore next?

If I could continue this research, I would study China's Petro-Yuan strategies, including the creation of alternative oil settlement mechanisms and its deeper economic integration with oil producers like the Gulf states aim to undermine the petrodollar system, and if current or future collaboration could reshape the global energy finance.



Introduction

Following the Angolan Civil War, China and Angola established strong economic ties, with formal diplomatic relations following on January 12th, 1983, marking nearly four decades of engagement. Current Sino-Angolan relations took shape in the early 2000s, establishing the “Angola Model.”^① Since 2009, China has become Angola’s largest trade partner and the most emblematic economic partner among Portuguese-speaking African countries.^② Following the transition of Portuguese governance to China, Macau maintained its position as a bridge between East and West, rooted in the Portuguese establishment from 500 years prior.^③ The Chinese central government's pragmatism, leveraged the unique characteristics of this Special Administrative Region, facilitated the establishment of the Forum for Economic and Trade Cooperation, also known as the Macau Forum, between China and Portuguese-speaking countries, revitalizing the status of the Portuguese language and culture.

China skillfully utilizes its resources in Africa by concurrently developing similar multi-dimensional strategies. The relationship between China and the Portuguese-speaking African countries (APSC) includes: Angola, Mozambique, Guinea-Bissau, and Cape Verde, is a significant example of China's regional strategy to Africa (Alves, 2008). Angola, being part of the Lusophone world, shares cultural similarity to Macau; this is also part of China’s economic diplomacy in Africa. China has used the Lusophone network that Portugal, the former colonial power, left behind to create an additional connection with these nations through Macau.

Oil cooperation is key to China’s and Angola's strategic partnership, with China investing in Angola in return for oil. Angola was once a top supplier of petroleum to China. Chinese investments are paid with the daily import of thousands of barrels of petroleum. This relationship is sustained by both multilateral and bilateral relations. China’s economic expansion is hampered by weak domestic energy sources, with the petroleum supply a major concern. To fuel its economy China aims to make essential raw materials readily available.^④ In 2016, China imported more than half of Angolan oil exports, comprising 12% of total Chinese petroleum imports.^⑤ Furthermore, Beijing has a strong interest in importing Angolan crude oil, as it meets the requirements of medium-sour refineries, already built to process other domestic energy sources.^⑥ Once a cornerstone of China’s Africa strategy, Angola served as

① Chen, Haojun, Deqin Tao, and Yishu Lu. “Opportunities and Challenges of China and Angola Energy Cooperation in the Context of the Belt and Road Initiative.” *Open Journal of Political Science* 14, no. 01 (2024): 91–110. <https://doi.org/10.4236/ojps.2024.141006>.

② China Daily, “Angola becomes China's largest trade partner in Africa” *China Daily*, September 27, 2009, accessed May 31, 2025, https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/bizchina/2009-09/27/content_8742652.htm.

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④ Begu, Liviu Stelian, Maria Denisa Vasilescu, Larisa Stanila, and Roxana Clodnitchi. “China-Angola Investment Model.” *Sustainability* 10, no. 8 (August 2018): 2936. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su10082936>.

⑤ Ibid.

⑥ Michal Meidan, *China’s Loans for Oil: Asset or Liability?* (Oxford: Oxford Energy, 2018).

a model for success in Chinese influence in the region. However, from 2018 to 2023 there has been a shift in Sino-Angolan relations, a combination of general and specific Angolan factors has progressively undermined the strength of the partnership.

This paper analyses Sino-Angolan relations, and how they evolved during 2018 to 2023, focusing on China's oil import strategy, evolving focus on economic self-interest, risk reduction, control over pricing mechanisms, and China's recalibrated approach towards Angola. This study examines the factors that led to the change in China's involvement in Angola's oil industry and evaluates implications for future collaboration between the two countries. This paper argues that between 2018 and 2023, in the pursuit of energy security, China diversified its oil imports. Its growing reliance on international oil markets, price volatility fears, and a desire for oil pricing control were integral in Chinese decision-making. This, to reduce dependence on Western pricing benchmarks, establish RMB denominated crude oil futures, and diversify oil sources beyond suppliers like Angola.

Literature Review and Methodology

The paper *A Marriage of Convenience on the Rocks? Revisiting the Sino-Angolan Relationship* by de Carvalho, Kopiński, and Taylor offers an examination of the changing Sino-Angolan relationship, with a focus on falling oil prices, and political changes brought about by João Lourenço's administration. The paper argues the "Angola model"—oil-backed credit backed by resources, has grown unsustainable, due to falling oil prices after 2014. Angola's heavy debt exposure to China and aging oil reserves made the country economically vulnerable, souring relations. Furthermore, Lourenço's government sought out alternative financial alliances, e.g. with the IMF, which has stringent transparency criteria, such as breaking opaque agreements signed during the Dos Santos era.^①

However, a gap forms in the paper's handling of African agency in the Sino-Angolan relationship. Although the authors emphasize Angola's strategic shift away from China and its attempts to restructure debt, less attention is paid to whether the country's leadership has changed or has modified its economic structure to lessen its oil reliance. Furthermore, examination of China's involvement in comparable African nations, including Nigeria or Sudan, enhance the paper's focus on oil-backed credit. This comparative examination can provide insight into whether the fall of the Angola model represents a regional trend or an isolated occurrence.

The paper *Angola and China: A Pragmatic Partnership* by Campos and Vines, provides an analysis of the ties between China and Angola, with emphasis on the significance of oil-backed loans and post-conflict rehabilitation. The authors contend that China's financing of infrastructure, especially

^① Carvalho, Paulo de, Dominik Kopiński, and Ian Taylor. "A Marriage of Convenience on the Rocks? Revisiting the Sino-Angolan Relationship." *Africa Spectrum* 57, no. 1 (April 1, 2022): 5–29. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00020397211042384>.

concessional loans from China's EximBank and China International Fund Ltd., was essential to Angola's post-war development.^① The report highlights how the loans enabled large-scale infrastructure projects without having to comply with Western aid conditionalities, which frequently called for increased openness and governance improvements. However, the study lacked a comparative analysis, and limited analysis was done on long-term Chinese infrastructure investment. If addressed, a more comprehensive picture of the changing Sino-Angolan relationship can be understood.

This paper employs a qualitative case study approach to investigate the recalibration of Sino-Angolan relations and their energy relations between 2018 and 2023, focusing on China's adjustment of its reliance on Angolan oil. The methodological approach involves critical document analysis, synthesizing insights from diverse secondary sources, including scholarly literature on the "Angola Model" and energy security, as well as policy documents and reports from organizations such as OPEC and the IEA. While centered on the Sino-Angolan case, the study parses findings within wider trends in China's global energy engagement.

Chinese Oil Companies in Angola and China's Going Out Program

At the start of the 21st Century, China began the "Going Out" program, enticing state-owned businesses to bid for contracts and establish joint ventures overseas.^② The "Going Out" program was the culmination of plans that had been developing for years. Officials understood domestic hydrocarbon demand would outpace supply, making finding external oil and gas sources a top priority. Yet in Africa, particularly Angola, the strategy simultaneously pursued broader geopolitical objectives: expanding China's soft power beyond mere resource control.^③ After the launch of "Going Out", state-owned oil corporations launched an aggressive drive to buy oil and gas acreage abroad. The new approach led to the expansion and consolidation of oil and gas companies' operations in Angola and Latin America, which began as exploratory ventures in the mid-1990s.^④

For almost seven years, national oil companies (NOCs) made investments in Angola as well. They purchased oil and gas assets, engaged in joint ventures for regional development, and provided project financing. However, the 2014 oil price decline led to a cooling off in China's oil and gas investment. Furthermore, an anti-corruption campaign in China made NOCs the focal point of their ire. This created fear that significant foreign investments could draw the notice of anti-corruption authorities,

① Campos, Indira, and Alex Vines. "Angola and China: A Pragmatic Partnership." Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), June 4, 2008. <https://www.csis.org/analysis/angola-and-china-pragmatic-partnership>.

② Brautigam, Deborah. *The Dragon's Gift: The Real Story of China in Africa*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009.

③ Brautigam, Deborah. *The Dragon's Gift: The Real Story of China in Africa*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009.

④ Xu, Jiajun, Xinshun Ru, and Pengcheng Song. "Can a New Model of Infrastructure Financing Mitigate Credit Rationing in Poorly Governed Countries?" *Economic Modelling* 95 (2021): 111–120. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.econmod.2020.12.001>.

further slowing down investment.^① An examination of China's initial large oil and gas investments reveals their origins in Mergers and Acquisitions (M&A).

This strategy is exemplified by China National Petroleum Corporation's (CNPC) in 2005 acquisition of Canadian EnCana's Ecuadorian oil assets for USD 1.42 billion, which secured immediate reserves but exposed critical vulnerabilities.^② In 2007, Ecuadorian President Correa imposed a 99% windfall profits tax retroactively, contravening contractual agreements and transforming CNPC's investment into significant financial losses.^③ The Ecuador case underscores how geopolitical volatility and resource nationalism directly undermined China's early M&A-driven expansion, revealing inadequate risk assessment in sovereign environments. Consequently, such experiences prompted Chinese NOCs to adopt more cautious investment models post-2014, prioritizing fiscal stability over rapid asset accumulation.

Under the “Going Out” program Chinese NOCs established joint ventures with seasoned Western oil companies, acquiring managerial and technical expertise.^④ For example, China's Sinopec partnered with state-owned Sonangol to acquire Angola's high-potential offshore regions. Angola, as China's second-largest oil supplier, became increasingly significant.^⑤ However, debates on Sinopec's Angolan reserve count persist. Alves (2013) argues Sinopec's states 5.2 billion barrels of total reserves are unlikely.^⑥ Only half of Angola's estimated 10.7 billion barrels are likely economically recoverable.^⑦ Following the controversy surrounding Sinopec's alleged overstatement, the Chinese corporation withdrew from a portion of its land in the nation amid declining oil prices, subpar investment outcomes, and bad management.^⑧

^① Downs, Erica. China's National Oil Companies Return to the World Stage: Navigating Anticorruption, Low Oil Prices, and the Belt and Road Initiative. National Bureau of Asian Research, Special Report #68, Asia's Energy Security and China's Belt and Road Initiative, 2017: 1–14.

^② Gao, S., and H. A. Wei. 2009. "Research on Risk Management of Cross-Border M&A in China Petroleum Corporations." In *2009 First International Conference on Information Science and Engineering*, 5073–76. Nanjing, China. doi: 10.1109/ICISE.2009.990.

^③ Ibid.

^④ China Africa Research Initiative. *Chinese Loans to Africa: Recent Trends and Updates*. Washington, DC: Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies, 2022. <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5652847de4b033f56d2bdc29/t/62584cc7e3d4973db9f8f88e/1649936584769/Chinese+Loans+to+Africa+2022.pdf>.

^⑤ Vasquez, Patricia I. "China's Oil and Gas Footprint in Latin America and Africa." *International Development Policy | Revue internationale de politique de développement*, no. 7.1 (2016). Accessed June 19, 2025. <https://journals.openedition.org/poldev/3174?lang=es>. [journals.openedition.org+7journals.openedition.org+7](https://journals.openedition.org/poldev/3174?lang=es)

^⑥ Alves, Ana Cristina. "Chinese economic diplomacy in Africa: the Lusophone strategy." *China returns to Africa: A rising power and a continent embrace* (2008): 69–82. https://ciaotest.cc.columbia.edu/book/cup/0005392/f_0005392_4692.pdf

^⑦ Corkin, Lucy. "After the Boom: Angolas Recurring Oil Challenges in a New Context." Oxford Institute for Energy Studies, May 2017. <https://doi.org/10.26889/9781784670849>.

^⑧ Downs, Erica. China's National Oil Companies Return to the World Stage: Navigating Anticorruption, Low Oil Prices, and the Belt and Road Initiative. National Bureau of Asian Research, Special Report #68, Asia's Energy Security and China's Belt and Road Initiative, 2017: 1–14.

The Shift in Sino-Angolan Relations (2018-2023)

Despite its early successes, Sino-Angolan relations have begun to cool. The first of these challenges happened between 2018 and 2023, when Angola's oil exports to China fell by 20%. Angola has ultimately fallen from China's second-largest oil supplier, to its seventh.^① Furthermore, Angola remains deeply indebted to China, with outstanding loans totaling \$17 billion, approximately 40% of Angola's total debt burden.^② Though this substantial debt has fueled "debt-trap diplomacy" clichés, the case of Angola highlights a more nuanced reality: China have provided debt relief efforts towards Angola and didn't engage into "debt-trap diplomacy."

As of December 2021, the Export-Import Bank of China (EXIM Bank) owed \$4 billion of Angola's recognized debt to China, while the China Development Bank (CDB) owed \$13.6 billion.^③ Additionally, it has taken out loans from the Industrial and Commercial Bank of China (ICBC), the biggest commercial lender in China.^④ In August 2021, Angola was in discussions with China Eximbank for debt alleviation during the final stage of the DSSI. China has halted \$3.9 billion in debt (the entirety of the existing debt service) in Angola, as reported by Jubilee Debt Campaign UK.^⑤

In 2017, Angola's new president, João Lourenço replaced José Eduardo dos Santos who had been in office from 1979 to 2019. Under Eduardo dos Santos, Angola developed its relations with China. The Chinese business community enjoyed strong ties with the previous government. After Lourenço took office, he implemented reforms and increased scrutiny of past contracts.^⑥ As a result, Chinese business must now navigate an unfriendlier environment with greater regulatory oversight, disrupting the previous norms.^⑦ The Chinese businesses community is pessimistic about the future in Angola, believing that the

^① Africa Defense Forum. "As China Buys Less Oil, Angola Struggles to Repay Debt." *Africa Defense Forum*, September 2024. <https://adf-magazine.com/2024/09/as-china-buys-less-oil-angola-struggles-to-repay-debt/>; Usman, Zainab, and Tang Xiaoyang. "How Is China's Economic Transition Affecting Its Relations With Africa?." (2024). <https://carnegieendowment.org/research/2024/05/how-is-chinas-economic-transition-affecting-its-relations-with-africa?lang=en>

^② Africa Defense Forum. "As China Buys Less Oil, Angola Struggles to Repay Debt." *Africa Defense Forum*, September 2024. <https://adf-magazine.com/2024/09/as-china-buys-less-oil-angola-struggles-to-repay-debt/>.

^③ Chatham House. 2022. "The Response to Debt Distress in Africa and the Role of China: 02 Case Studies of Chinese Lending to Africa." Accessed May 31, 2025. <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2022/12/response-debt-distress-africa-and-role-china/02-case-studies-chinese-lending-africa>.

^④ Chatham House. 2022. "The Response to Debt Distress in Africa and the Role of China: 02 Case Studies of Chinese Lending to Africa." Accessed May 31, 2025. <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2022/12/response-debt-distress-africa-and-role-china/02-case-studies-chinese-lending-africa>.

^⑤ China Africa Research Initiative. *China Africa Research Initiative (CARI)*. Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies, Johns Hopkins University. Accessed June 19, 2025. <https://www.saiscari.org>.

^⑥ Paulo de Carvalho, Dominik Kopinski, and Ian Taylor, "A Marriage of Convenience on the Rocks? Revisiting the Sino-Angolan Relationship," *Africa Spectrum* 57, no. 1 (2022): 5-29.

^⑦ Idib.

links of the past will cease. A representative of the provincial chamber of commerce, stated that “the smart companies have left Angola and those who have stayed have lost money.”^①

China's Internal Recalibration

Chinese oil corporations were notorious for paying exorbitant prices for oil assets during their initial growth attempts, frequently to gain long-term access to resources. The most notable example (albeit outside of Africa) was in 2012 with the purchase of Canadian Nexen Energy by China National Offshore Oil Corporation (CNOOC) for \$15.1 billion even though the firm was only allegedly valued at \$6.5 billion.^② Also, China's would overpay for oil (mainly in 2009–2013) as a result of a rush to gain projects combined with a lack of experience in a period of high oil prices and cheaper bank loans.^③

China is unlikely to make similar acquisitions in the future, due to slowing economic development and greater expertise with international energy ventures. China may have felt overexposed in Angola, possibly scaling back its involvement.^④ China appears to have considered past lessons and is now seeking greater diversification and a future with less Angolan oil supply. Moreover, China's economy has shifted away from resource-intensive, export-driven growth and heavy industries (“smokestack manufacturing”), systematically reducing their demand for crude oil.^⑤ This strategic decline aligns with China's pursuit of energy autarky, prioritizing domestic alternatives and renewables to diminish reliance on petrostates.^⑥

China has been moving towards a sustainable consumption-based model that places emphasis on clean energy and services. As they move towards this model, demand for crude oil is bound to fall. Nonetheless, Angola remains a top supplier of Chinese oil, with shipments thinning due to the terms of earlier oil-backed loans, and general debt renegotiations with China. OPEC has also pressured Angola to reduce production, which they seem to have complied with, albeit somewhat bitterly.^⑦

China's decision to reduce crude oil imports from Angola is also related changes in pricing power, supply diversification, and adjustments in the global oil market. To reduce dependency on Western pricing benchmarks (e.g. Brent or WTI), China introduced RMB-denominated crude oil futures, and the Shanghai International Energy Exchange (INE). This reduced Sino-Angolan oil flows, as Angolan

^① Idib.

^② “China, Canada and Oil: A Complicated Calculus – The Diplomat.” Accessed January 7, 2025. <https://thediplomat.com/2012/08/china-canada-and-oil-a-complicated-calculus/>.

^③ In response to the global financial crisis of 2008, Chinese government rolled out a stimulus package of four trillion RMB (about US\$586 billion), which provides state-owned companies with easier access to bank loan. (Mu, 2024:11).

^④ Vines, Alex. “Continuity and Change in Angola: Insights from Modern History.” *International Affairs* 92, no. 5 (September 2016): 1229–37. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2346.12709>.

^⑤ Paulo de Carvalho, Dominik Kopiński, and Ian Taylor, “A marriage of convenience on the rocks? Revisiting the Sino–Angolan relationship,” *Africa Spectrum* 57, no. 1 (2022): 5–29.

^⑥ Dieter and Biedermann, “New Advocacy for Autarky,” 132.

^⑦ Rania El Gamal and Ahmad Ghaddar, “Angola Agrees to Comply Fully with Oil Cuts after OPEC Pressure, Sources Say,” *Reuters*, July 7, 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-oil-opecangola-idUSKBN2481HQ>.

oil relied on Brent crude Pricing, based on USD. Angola's oil exports tend to be bound under long-term agreements linked to debt repayment agreements with China, particularly through the resource-backed lending model. China now seeks flexible and varied energy sources to reduce economic risk.

China's Strategy and Diversification of Oil

China remains the largest importer of petroleum; as a result, it has established commercial relationships with several nations to meet its domestic energy demands. It adopted a diversification strategy aiming to satisfy the short-term demand, while lowering the risk of challenges to its long-term oil supply. The International Energy Agency projects that by 2035, China's foreign energy dependence would reach 80%.^① Therefore, their strategy prioritizes energy security. These strategies involve several factors and cannot be reduced to a single issue. For instance, Ang (2015) performed a comprehensive review and identified 83 energy security strategies for different states.^② In addition, price fluctuations and other global economic variables (such as purchasing power and currency rates), were important. But other significant, and understudied aspects such as infrastructure, social impacts, availability, governance, the environment, and energy efficiency warrant further study.

A favorable global energy environment and the successful execution of energy policy have improved China's energy security. Sun (2014) highlights political unpredictability in oil-exporting nations, arguing that the growing threat of political instability and transportation problems was China's primary source of oil import risk.^③ China is reliant on global oil markets. Effective energy policies are necessary to reduce the risks associated with oil imports to ensure its supply and support long-term economic growth. Diversifying the sources of oil imports is a clear policy goal.^④ According to Stringer (2008), diversification of oil suppliers and energy sources is necessary.^⑤ Energy diversification can lower future oil supply risks, in part because of local carbon mitigation or reduction initiatives to address climate change and tendencies toward green growth.^⑥

^① International Energy Agency (IEA). *World Energy Outlook 2012*. Paris, 2012.

^② Ang, B.W., W.L. Choong, and T.S. Ng. "Energy Security: Definitions, Dimensions and Indexes." *Renewable and Sustainable Energy Reviews* 42 (2015): 1077–93.

^③ Sun, Mei, Cuixia Gao, and Bo Shen. "Quantifying China's Oil Import Risks and the Impact on the National Economy." *2014, Energy Policy*, 67 (n.d.): 605–11.

^④ Lesbirel, S.H. "Diversification and Energy Security Risks: The Japanese Case." *Japanese Journal of Political Science* 5, no. 1 (2004): 1–22. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S146810990400129X>; Vivoda, V. "Diversification of Oil Import Sources and Energy Security: A Key Strategy or an Elusive Objective?" *Energy Policy* 37, no. 11 (2009): 4615–23. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.enpol.2009.06.007>.

^⑤ Stringer, Kevin D. "Energy security: applying a portfolio approach." *Baltic security & defence review* 10 (2008).

^⑥ Moerkerk, Mike van, and Wina Crijns-Graus. "A Comparison of Oil Supply Risks in EU, US, Japan, China and India under Different Climate Scenarios." *Energy Policy* 88 (January 1, 2016): 148–58. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.enpol.2015.10.015>.

China Leading the Oil Import Industry in East Asia

The “Asian premium” is another problem, with consumers of natural gas and oil in Asian nations paying more than customers in North America and Europe.^① East Asian nations may face more risks while importing oil due to a lack of pricing control and associated price discrimination. For instance, China intends to change things by establishing its first crude oil futures market in Shanghai.^② AlKathiri (2017) investigated the potential for allying in Asia to increase pricing power in the global oil market.^③ The concept of energy market integration has been used to generally investigate this issue. Establishing strategic petroleum reserves (SPRs) is undoubtedly a simple method of ensuring adequate energy supply while preventing the detrimental effects that abrupt supply disruptions can have on the economy. In addition to diversification, China implemented RMB-denominated crude oil futures in March 2018 to lower the risk of oil imports.^④

Moreover, Asian nations' low pricing power is one of the main issues they confront in the global oil market, making them more vulnerable to global threats. In 2018, China introduced its first crude oil futures contract and established the Shanghai International Energy Exchange (INE). According to Ji and Zhang (2018), the RMB-denominated contract quickly gained market acceptance, but this is still far from reaching a real international benchmark price.^⑤ China can lead the increase Asian dominance in the global oil pricing system and cooperate with East Asian nations using the INE futures contract as a foundation.

Although this advancement might lessen China's reliance on international oil markets, resulting in decreased interest in fostering ties with African oil-exporting nations such as Angola or Nigeria, it is improbable to influence China's overall strategy in Africa.^⑥ As mentioned before, China's soft power efforts in Africa, like the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), are components of a broader geopolitical plan. These initiatives, though frequently involving financial commitments, support strategic goals, such as enhancing economic connections, political power, and access to resources. China's aim for increased

^① Ji, Qiang, and Dayong Zhang. “China's Crude Oil Futures: Introduction and Some Stylized Facts - ScienceDirect.” *Finance Research Letters* 28 (2019): 376–80.

^② Ibid.

^③ AlKathiri, Nader, Yazeed Al-Rashed, Tilak Doshi, and Frederic H. Murphy. “Asian Premium or North Atlantic Discount: Does Geographical Diversification in Oil Trade Always Impose Costs?” *Energy Economics* 66, no. 3 (July 2017): 372–382. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.eneco.2017.07.005>.

^④ Ji, Qiang, Hai-Ying Zhang, and Dayong Zhang. “The Impact of OPEC on East Asian Oil Import Security: A Multidimensional Analysis.” *Energy Policy* 126 (March 1, 2019): 99–107. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.enpol.2018.11.019>.

^⑤ Ibid.

^⑥ E. Olawale Ogunkola, Abiodun S. Bankole, and Adeolu Adewuyi, *China-Nigeria Economic Relations*, AERC Scoping Studies on China-Africa Economic Relations (Nairobi: African Economic Research Consortium, 2008), mimeo.

influence in the global oil pricing system within Asia, utilizing the INE futures contract as a base, does not diminish its interest to Africa.^①

General Challenges to Sino-Angolan Relations

However, scholars should not overestimate the specific Sino-Angolan factors in the relationship's cooling. There are general factors, beyond the specific, that have also heavily contributed. China's entire foreign policy posture has seen drastic changes since 2020, primarily due to both domestic and international factors, and the Sino-Angolan relationship has served as an unintended casualty. Chinese investment reached its highest point around 2016. Since that time, Chinese lending to African governments has dropped considerably, decreasing from \$28.4 billion in 2016 to \$1.9 billion in 2020, partly because of shifts in domestic Chinese political priorities and partly due to the evident challenges African nations faced in repaying debts.^② For example, one key factor is that Angola has become far less central to Chinese priorities. As China has pivoted towards Russia and Iran, it has seen its access to global energy markets expand, and its reliance on any single supplier has reduced, reducing the overall reliance on Angolan oil.^③

In addition, the BRI has suffered due to unsustainable debt levels, and corruption in Angola.^④ Firstly, China's economic growth has slowed, with growing debt, a second Trump presidency, and declining returns cooling the previously booming economy. Without the once common and abundant surpluses, it is unlikely China will so easily commit capital overseas for projects.^⑤ However, this does not signify a wholesale retreat from global investment. Rather, China is *strategically reallocating* capital toward geoeconomically vital regions, exemplified by its expansion in Latin America. In May 2017, Latin America was officially incorporated into the cooperative framework of the Belt and Road Initiative.^⑥

^①Yu, H. "China's Push for the BRI in a Changing World: Origins and Motivations," in *Understanding China's Belt and Road Initiative*, Asia in Transition, vol. 26 (Singapore: Springer, 2024), https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-99-9633-9_1.

^②Chatham House. 2022. "The Response to Debt Distress in Africa and the Role of China: 02 Case Studies of Chinese Lending to Africa." Accessed May 31, 2025. <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2022/12/response-debt-distress-africa-and-role-china/02-case-studies-chinese-lending-africa>.

^③"Exclusive: China Quietly Increases Purchases of Low-Priced Russian Oil," *Reuters*, May 20, 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/business/energy/exclusive-china-quietly-increases-purchases-low-priced-russian-oil-2022-05-20/>; "China Is Buying the Most Iranian Oil in a Decade, Kpler Says," *Bloomberg*, August 15, 2023, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2023-08-15/china-is-buying-the-most-iranian-oil-in-a-decade-kpler-says>.

^④United States Institute of Peace. *Why China Is Rebooting the Belt and Road Initiative*. October 2023. Accessed December 24, 2024. <https://www.usip.org/publications/2023/10/why-china-rebooting-beltand-road-initiative>.

^⑤Eichengreen, Barry. "China's Slowdown." *KDI Journal of Economic Policy* 46, no. 1 (2024): 1–19. Available at SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=4763028>.

^⑥*China and Latin America's Joint Construction of the Belt and Road: Progress, Challenges, and Prospects*, Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), <https://interpret.csis.org/translations/china-and-latin-americas-joint-construction-of-the-belt-and-road-progress-challenges-and-prospects/>.

Now, 22 nations have officially participated in the BRI – 13 from Central America and the Caribbean, along with nine from South America.^① Secondly, China has seen a rise in tensions in the South China Sea, as its strategic importance and rich resource profile have seemingly invited regional and global challenges. For example, the Philippines has openly resisted China's territorial claims, leading to direct clashes between their vessels.^②

Conclusion

In 2018, Angola signed the “One Belt, One Road (OBOR)” memorandum in Beijing.^③ The OBOR has grown to include more than just conventional infrastructure projects. It now encompasses the Digital Silk Road and the Health Silk Road. Chinese tech leaders like Huawei are building the infrastructure essential for establishing the Digital Silk Road in Africa. In March 2022, Huawei and the Angolan telecom company Unitel finalized a deal for Huawei to supply various green energy solutions for Unitel's operations.^④ While oil continues to be crucial for both China and Angola, their collaboration is slowly extending into wider sectors beyond just energy and infrastructure.

Between 2018 and 2023, Sino-Angolan relations underwent a complex interplay of structural, political, and economic changes, weakening their once-strong alliance. Their relationship relied on oil cooperation, but recent events have forced a recalibration. China's strategic changes and Angola's changing internal environment are the source of this calibration. Furthermore, Angola's importance within China's larger energy security framework has been weakened by the country's diversification of its oil import sources, increased emphasis on pricing control through RMB-denominated crude oil futures, and decreased reliance on long-term, debt-backed oil contracts. China seeks to compromise between the need for long-term energy security from Angola and its goals of price control.

Ultimately, even though the two countries' relationship has cooled, it would be too soon to declare its death. Sino-Angolan relations are likely to continue to change. Further studies could examine how both states handle these changes and whether different forms of collaboration outside of resource-backed loans might surface. China's economic priorities shift toward third and fourth-sector dominance, in sectors such

^① “Brazil-China Partnership: Redefining the Belt and Road Initiative in Latin America,” *The Diplomat*, December 2024, <https://thediplomat.com/2024/12/brazil-china-partnership-redefining-the-belt-and-road-initiative-in-latin-america/>.

^② Kurlantzick, Joshua, and Amelia McGowan. *Why Tensions in the South China Sea Are Bolstering the US-Philippines Alliance*. Council on Foreign Relations, October 2024. Accessed December 24, 2024. <https://www.cfr.org/expert-brief/why-tensions-south-china-sea-are-bolstering-us-philippines-alliance>.

^③ China's Crude Oil Futures: Progress towards a Regional Benchmark,” *Silk Road Portal*, October 13, 2023, accessed May 31, 2025, <https://en.imsilkroad.com/p/317203.html>.

^④ Huawei, “Huawei and Angola Unitel Lead Green Site Energy Digitalization,” *Huawei*, February 25, 2022, accessed May 31, 2025, <https://www.huawei.com/en/news/2022/2/unitel-green-site-energy-digitalization>.

as digital infrastructure, renewable energy and technology services. In this shift, China's diminished reliance on raw material imports may be offset by its necessity to grow high-value industries abroad, generating chances for novel collaboration types.

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Rhetorical Entrapment

Explaining Ukraine's 2024 Offensive Posturing

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Abstract: This paper explores the concept of rhetorical entrapment to explain Ukraine's continued offensive posturing in 2024, despite unfavorable military conditions. Drawing from constructivist and realist theory, it argues that the disparity between rhetorical commitments on the part of allies and actual battlefield conditions create opportunities for weaker states to use entrapment as a strategy to draw more support for themselves. The paper analyzes three of Ukraine's most important political and military moves in 2024, the Kursk Invasion, the Victory Plan, and the use of long-range missiles into Russia, and argues that a consistent strategy of rhetorical entrapment better explains them when compared to other hypotheses. The paper concludes that rhetorical entrapment is a viable and effective strategy for small states to influence outcomes and how they can do it, as well as highlighting the role of asymmetric relations in alliances, the importance of rhetorical commitments by leaders, and their possible consequences.

Keywords: *rhetorical entrapment, alliance asymmetry, Kursk Invasion, Constructivism, Realism*

Question 1



What inspired you to write this article?

Specifically, it was the glaring disparity between the publicity of the Victory Plan and the situation on the battlefield at the time and the ambiguous response by allied leaders that highlighted the problem and impact of previous rethorical commitments to present policy.



Question 2



Can you explain your main argument in one sentence?

Ukraine had a coherent and effective strategy during 2024 to draw the narrative of the Russia-Ukraine War to its favor in allied states' public and elite discourse, and this is a viable strategy for small states.



Question 3



What was the most surprising thing you discovered during your research?

The fact that many commentators considered what I termed "rhetorical entrapment" without naming it as such and focused so much on the symbolism of military and political moves and not the actual situation on the battlefield.



Introduction

President Volodymyr Zelensky strode into the Ukrainian parliament on October 16th, 2024, to unveil his “Victory Plan.” A week earlier, he had toured Europe, and around two weeks before that, he had met with US President Joe Biden and presented this outline for defeating Russia. Moreover, on August 6th, Ukrainian forces invaded Russia and occupied part of Kursk Oblast. On November 11th, Ukraine received permission from the US to use long-range missiles to strike positions inside Russian territory, which it had sought for some time. Without further context, these operations would seem to be those of a state that, if not approaching victory, at least saw it getting closer.

However, facts on the ground during 2024 do not correspond to this picture. The early 2024 Kharkiv offensive, though not a clear-cut success, delivered some substantial territorial gains for Russia.^① By early to mid-year, Russia launched major operations against Chasiv Yar and Toretsk and, most importantly, advances toward the logistically crucial city of Pokrovsk.^② All in all, Russian forces made territorial gains of around 4,168 square kilometers at a high cost of manpower, according to Ukrainian sources.^③ Furthermore, the Western-facing diplomatic front of the war was also bereft of major successes for Ukraine. For instance, Zelensky’s Victory Plan was rhetorically endorsed by the West. However, its operational content (immediate NATO and EU membership, renouncing any Ukrainian possible territorial concessions to end the war, or the joining of anti-air operations by NATO members) was never implemented. The election of Donald Trump as US President was also a major setback for Ukraine’s efforts due to the president-elect’s repeated intentions to force Ukraine into immediate negotiations with Russia, which would likely favor the latter due to the situation on the ground. Finally, Western elite opinion during 2024 had begun to sour on the war due to this exact situation, with coverage highlighting the regaining of the advantage by Russia.

This presents a puzzling picture: why does a small state, with external support, on the defensive engage in offensive military and diplomatic operations?

Existing and Possible Explanations

Due to the recency of these phenomena, there is not yet an academic inquiry or analysis of Ukraine’s moves during 2024. Therefore, existing opinions come in the form of

^① Angelica Evans, Nicole Wolkov, Kateryna Stepanenko, Nate Trotter, William Runkel, and Frederick W. Kagan. *Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, December 31, 2024*. Institute for the Study of War, 2024.

^② Christina Harward, Angelica Evans, Kateryna Stepanenko, and Frederick W. Kagan. *Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, May 4, 2024*. Institute for the Study of War, 2024; Angelica Evans, Christina Harward, Nicole Wolkov, Riley Bailey, Davit Gasparyan, and George Barros. *Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, July 19, 2024*. Institute for the Study of War, 2024.

^③ Angelica Evans, Nicole Wolkov, Kateryna Stepanenko, Nate Trotter, William Runkel, and Frederick W. Kagan. *Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, December 31, 2024*. Institute for the Study of War, 2024.

journalistic or expert commentary. Moreover, none approach the three significant events this paper addresses (“Victory Plan,” Kursk invasion, emphasis on long-range missile attacks on Russia) as a coherent whole, part of a single strategic mindset or approach, but instead give disparate reasons for each.^①

The first general alternative that should be considered is military necessity. While the use of long-range missiles may fall under this consideration, for it allows Ukraine to cripple, to the best of its ability, Russian infrastructure (in particular energy). However, if the Ukrainian strategy were based on military necessity, the unrealistic Victory Plan would not make any sense under it, and neither would the Kursk invasion, which placed some of its best-trained and effective units away from the frontline, in a strategically muted and challenging area to defend. This highlights two aspects: firstly, any explanation must be strategic, that is, explaining all three moves in a coherent way and therefore political; secondly, it must be non-linear, that is, it must explain how it serves Ukraine’s interests while not being as straightforwardly rational as military necessity would be.

Domushkina correctly identifies the mismatches between the “Victory Plan” and reality.^② In addition, she argues that the plan does not appear to be an outline for victory but one on “how to deter further Russian advancement.” Vorobiov shares a similar opinion, further pointing to the non-victory nature of the plan and characterizing it as, first, an appeal to allies and, second, a way to introduce peace through negotiation into an internal public discourse that uniformly rejects it.^③ A significant gap exists here, however. While the disconnect between the name of “victory” and both reality and the actual content of the plan undoubtedly exists, as both scholars point out, absent here is a crucial causal explanation. In essence, why the Plan which, contrary to Vorobiov’s assertion, was first and foremost an external facing initiative and not a call for negotiations (as exemplified by the months of diplomatic efforts around it and the unrealistic demands of the plan itself) is thus framed as one of victory.

The Kursk invasion was initially marketed as a military move. Officials framed it as an offensive military move aimed at damaging the Russian army, capturing soldiers, pushing the range of artillery away from targets inside Ukraine, damaging supply lines, and, last but not most notably at the time, a way to force Russia to divert troops from other, higher-impact, theaters.^④ Furthermore, analysts and, eventually, officials claimed that the occupied territory

^① Furthermore, the literature on small-state escalation is not prolific. See, for example, Jan Angstrom and Magnus Petersson. “Weak Party Escalation: An Underestimated Strategy for Small States?” In *Military Strategy in the 21st Century*, ed. Kersti Larsdotter, Routledge, 2020; Øystein Solvang. “Escalation in Asymmetrical Relations. A Rational Strategy for Weak States?” Master’s Diss., The Arctic University of Norway, 2021. The content of this paper broadly fits with the findings of the literature but is better understood within rhetorical entrapment.

^② Maryna Domushkina. Beyond Deterrence: How Zelensky’s Victory Plan Can Live Up to Its Name. *European Council of Foreign Relations*, 2024.

^③ Mykyta Vorobiov. Zelensky’s Victory Plan and Possible Negotiations. *Center for European Policy Analysis*, 2024.

^④ Dinara Khalilova. “Kursk Operation: What Ukraine Achieved So Far and Potential Future Gains.” *The Kyiv Independent*, August 25, 2024.

and captured troops could serve as bargaining chips in an eventual settlement of the conflict. However, two aspects stand out. Firstly, the military aspects of the invasion could not have been the main explaining factor for most top leaders within the armed forces opposed the operation.^① Secondly, the “bargaining chip” explanation, as far as territory goes, is quite faulty, for it assumes that the party with the advantage, Russia, would sit at the table before it recaptured this territory and the party on the back foot, Ukraine, would hold this territory and would not have any significant impact on the highly consequential eastern front, particularly Donetsk.^② This purported explanation assumes that time would be on the Ukrainian side, which both the battlefield and diplomatic situations disprove.^③

This paper proposes merging constructivist and realist theory through the concept of “rhetorical entrapment” to explain the gaps above. A small state with external support that finds itself losing in an interstate conflict will engage in offensive diplomatic and military moves to (1) force its allies into its discursive position, (2) prevent the emergence and attack the legitimacy of positions arguing for negotiations in allied discourse, and (3) elicit further material support from the change in discursive position.^④ To support this argument, the concept of rhetorical entrapment will be explained, as well as how it builds on previous works and bridges constructivism and realism. Then, evidence of emergent narratives contrary to Ukraine’s interest in Western discourse will be shown. Finally, the paper will explain how each of Ukraine’s three major moves constitutes an attempt at rhetorical entrapment and their effects.

Entrapment and Rhetoric

Entrapment as a concept comes from realist theory, particularly the alliance dilemma. Here, the partner worries about abandonment, while the patron fears entrapment, defined as “a situation in which an ally drags its defender into a war that the defender would otherwise prefer not to fight.”^⑤ The empirical record on entrapment is contested, with some scholars arguing

^① Jammie Dettmer. “Zelenskyy was urged not to invade Kursk. He did it anyway.” *Politico*, 16 September 2024; Matt Murphy, Paul Brown, Olga Robinson, Thomas Spencer, and Alex Murray. “Ukraine front could ‘collapse’ as Russia gains accelerate, experts warn.” *BBC*, 20 November 2024.

^② Other reasons that have been given for the Kursk operation were to challenge Putin’s internal legitimacy, boost Ukrainian morale, damage Russian morale, and challenge the notion of “red lines” said to inhibit Western states from further supporting Ukraine. Andreas Umland. “Ukraine’s Invasion of Russia Could Bring a Quicker End to the War.” *Foreign Policy*, 9 August 2024; Peter Dickinson. “Ukraine’s invasion of Russia is erasing Vladimir Putin’s last red lines.” *Atlantic Council*, 11 August 2024.

^③ Indeed, since the invasion, Russia has managed to recapture around 40% of the initial territorial loss while not having to put on hold the most important parts of its eastern offensive.

^④ A question that remains open, however, is when states in this position will choose rhetorical entrapment as a policy option instead of others. Some possible explanations come to mind: domestic politics making peace less attractive to a leader’s survival, disparity in perceptions of the battlefield’s state between the small state and the patron, or ideological considerations.

^⑤ Alexander Lanoszka. “Tangled Up in Rose? Theories of Alliance, Entrapment and the 2008 Russo-Georgian War,” *Contemporary Security Policy*, 39, no.2 (2018): 234-257.

that it is a challenging event to pinpoint in the historical record because leaders prevent it through alliance design^①, and others point to the flimsy categorization of the former as the reason for the supposed historical absence of entrapment.^② However, much of this research is either framed through the patron's point of view, as in how a patron can avoid entrapment, or through an analytical lens, as in what factors give rise to entrapment. Little attention is given to how the partner can purposefully engage in entrapping behavior to safeguard its interests, even though it is acknowledged that this behavior is possible.^③

In parallel, “rhetorical entrapment” is a constructivist term. However, its original formulation is quite specific: “states [that] have not internalized a norm, can nevertheless feel a need to comply with it due to pressures for legitimation, conformity, and esteem.”^④ Again, studies that use this concept seem to be interested in the structural manifestation of rhetorical entrapment, i.e., how it happens and its effects, rather than how states may operationalize it, and when they do, it is from the perspective of larger states or organizations.^⑤

This paper’s approach differs from both while integrating them. Rhetorical entrapment is not merely a consequence of past normative commitment by the patron but a policy choice of the small state. Past normative commitments are a necessary cause, though not a sufficient one.^⑥ Thus, the above approaches are merged by highlighting the importance of discourse and framing (constructivism) that states can use to achieve their interests (realism). Rhetorical entrapment is a strategy by which a small state seeks to shift allies into a discourse favorable to its interests, preventing the emergence of alternatives and eliciting further support. In the context of this paper, this favorable discourse is that of Ukrainian victory or advantage in the war. This can be done mainly in two ways: direct or indirect. Using the bargaining theory of war, indirect rhetorical entrapment reduces the bargaining range by making peace less likely,

① Tongfi Kim. “Why Alliances Entangle but Seldom Entrap States,” *Security Studies*, 20, no.3 (2011): 350-377.

② Tudor A. Onea. “How to Entrap Your Protector: Reassessing Entrapment in the Light of the Crimean War Crisis,” *Review of International Studies*, (2024): 1-21; Alexander Lanoszka. “Tangled Up”.

③ This can be found, for example, in a classic examination of the alliance dilemma: Glenn H. Snyder. “The Security Dilemma in Alliance Politics,” *World Politics*, 36, no.4 (1984): 461-495.

④ Luke Glanville. “The Limits of Rhetorical Entrapment in a Post-Truth Age,” *Critical Studies on Security*, 7, no.2 (2019): 162-165; The original formulation in International Relations arguably comes from the work of Schimmelfenning. See, for example, Frank Schimmelfenning. “The Community Trap: Liberal Norms, Rhetorical Action, and the Eastern Enlargement of the European Union,” *International Organization*, 55 (2001): 47-80.

⑤ Coincidentally, some of them also deal with Ukraine. Flemming Splidsboel Hansen. “The EU and Ukraine: Rhetorical Entrapment?” *European Security*, 15, no.2 (2006): 115-135; Carlotta Fagioli. “The E vis-à-vis Ukraine: Rhetorical Entrapment?” Master’s Diss., University of Kent, 2013; Tarald Gulseth Berge and Jonathan W. Kuyper. “Rhetorical Entrapment in International Negotiations: A New Pathway and Mechanisms,” *International Political Science Review*, (2024): 1-17.

⑥ The existence of the patron state is necessary. Indeed, research seems to indicate that the less clear and formalized the commitment, the more likely entanglement and entrapment are: Tongfi Kim. “Why Alliances Entangle.” This paper argues that a mismatch between past normative commitment and the actual formal level of the commitment makes rhetorical entrapment more likely and attractive as a policy option for the small state because the formal level places fewer constraints on it, and the normative level presents a credibility risk for the patron.

thus making speaking of it more difficult.^① Direct rhetorical entrapment reduces the bargaining range by forcing favorable discourse, i.e., making speaking of peace more complicated and, therefore, thus making peace less likely.

Ukraine in 2024: Changing the Narrative

A large content analysis to demonstrate the changing attitude of states towards the Ukraine War is outside the scope of this paper. However, a quick look at polling and policy can be revealing enough. Gallup reported a shift during 2024 from a preference for backing Ukraine until victory to an even split between continued, though less ambitious, support and peace, even at the expense of territory.^② Similarly, polls by the European Council on Foreign Relations also showed an evident deterioration of Europeans' expectations and preferences towards the war, though not as marked as in the US.^③ Similar effects were found by other polling.^④

Furthermore, all these reports, particularly those concerned with US efforts, point to the increased reluctance of policymakers other than the executive to continue large-scale support for Ukraine, citing the extended delays in packages during the year. This is further backed up by the polls' finding that the Western public does not think their governments are doing enough to support Ukraine but does not endorse the further extension of aid. Ukraine was, therefore, in a situation where all the necessities of rhetorical entrapment were present, and engaging in such a strategy would be in its interest. It should also be mentioned that this paper is not arguing about the effectiveness of rhetorical entrapment, being general or in this particular case, but arguing that this strategy explains Ukraine's move more comprehensively and coherently.

The Kursk invasion is a perfect example of hybrid rhetorical entrapment, that is, both direct and indirect. Alternative explanations for it have already been discussed and criticized as

^① Bargaining theory has proven to be extremely inadequate in explaining some conflicts due to its assumption that bargaining range must always exist. This leads to incoherent positions, such as asserting that surrender or other actions considered "giving up" is a realistic alternative for the state at a disadvantage. However, bargaining theory is adequate for the case of the Ukraine War because it is known that this range did exist and was close to being realized during the negotiations in Turkey, which produced the Istanbul Communiqué. The many reasons given for Ukraine's withdrawal from the talks when settlement seemed reachable, mainly Western promises of support but also atrocities committed by Russian forces, fit with bargaining theory. For an overview of the Turkey negotiations, see Samuel Charap and Sergey Radchenko. "The Talks that Could Have Ended the War in Ukraine," *Foreign Affairs*, 16, (2024). For bargaining theory and its multiple inadequacies, see David A. Lake. "Two Cheers for Bargaining Theory: Assessing Rationalist Explanations for the Iraq War," *International Security*, 35, no.3 (2010/2011): 7-52.

^② Megan Brennan. "More American Favor Quick End to Russia-Ukraine War." *Gallup*, 2024. Available from: <https://news.gallup.com/poll/654575/americans-favor-quick-end-russia-ukraine-war.aspx>; Mohamed Younis. "American Views on the Ukraine War in 6 Charts." *Gallup*, 2023. Available from: <https://news.gallup.com/poll/513680/american-views-ukraine-war-charts.aspx>

^③ Ivan Krastev and Mark Leonard. "Wars and Elections: How European Leaders Can Maintain Public Support for Ukraine." *European Council on Foreign Relations*, 2024. Available from: <https://ecfr.eu/publication/wars-and-elections-how-european-leaders-can-maintain-public-support-for-ukraine/>

^④ Jon Henley and Luke Harding. "Support for Ukraine 'until it wins' falls sharply in Western Europe, poll finds." *The Guardian*, 2024. Available from: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2024/dec/26/support-for-ukraine-russia-war-yougov-poll-survey>

unlikely. The framework of rhetorical entrapment can explain the now evident military unsoundness of the operation, for its objective here is understood as more purely political, and the faulty nature of the “bargaining chip” hypothesis, for while it may be so in the long term, it was really a short-term operation to change the narrative.^① Kursk represents direct entrapment, for it forces allies to support rhetorically Ukraine’s move or risk losing face; this can be seen in the West’s initial positive reaction to the operation: support and silence about its offensive and unprecedented nature even though they had been kept in the dark about its planning. In this case, an unsound military move proved successful in its political objectives merely by its unexpected and almost contradictory nature, even though it did not constitute a meaningful shift in the battlefield.

Furthermore, it constitutes indirect entrapment by making the terms of the Istanbul Communiqué, the baseline for any future peace negotiation, impossible for Russia to adopt. A key assumption of the terms was the freezing of battlelines (a so-called “ceasefire in place”) which would be domestically impossible for Russia to accept if it involved its own territory. Consequently, it took the possibility of peace negotiations off the table at a critical time when Russia was advancing on the frontlines, and Western opinion was edging towards bargaining.

The “Victory Plan” is an instance of pure and direct rhetorical entrapment and its most apparent manifestation in this case. As mentioned, many analysts point to the phony version of victory presented in the plan but do not explain why Ukraine felt it necessary to market it as such. The lens of rhetorical entrapment explains this phenomenon better: the victory framing is the whole point. Even though Western states did not and do not support the operational aspects of the Victory Plan, they were forced to endorse the notion of victory, that is, continued and active support for Ukraine, due to their previous normative commitments. This, in turn, serves as a rebuttal for any possible initiative toward negotiation or even doubts about said commitment. Morale-boosting and the need for a palatable domestic framing of the plan are also possible explanations and may have indeed played a role. However, both fail to explain the huge diplomatic efforts on the foreign policy side of the equation and muddle the causal logic. Morale-boosting and domestic legitimacy may be intended results of the policy, but rhetorical entrapment is the means to achieve that result. For those effects to take place, what is necessary is rhetorical support for “victory”, i.e. rhetorical entrapment.

Finally, Ukraine’s continued insistence on using long-range missiles in Russian territory is a pure case of indirect rhetorical entrapment. The explanation appealing to military necessity has been considered and partially accepted. Still, the concept of rhetorical entrapment

^① Indeed, some analysts have commented on this possibility of Kursk being a narrative blow more than a military or diplomatic one: Raphael S. Cohen. “Ukraine Needs a New Storyline.” *Rand Corporation*, 2024. Available from: <https://www.rand.org/pubs/commentary/2024/09/ukraine-needs-a-new-storyline.html>

better explains this move as part of a larger and more coherent strategy while also better accounting for the rise in insistence over time. This move reduces the bargaining range by further worsening perceptions between the Russian and Ukrainian sides in the short term, for it introduces a previously absent source of danger and conflict, which alters bargaining terms.

Historical Instances of Rhetorical Entrapment

The concept of rhetorical entrapment and its use as a policy choice by small states is also well-established in the historical record. Therefore, it is worth at least mentioning some instances to support this paper's argument further. Firstly, rhetorical entrapment was evident during the stalemate phase of the Korean War; here, there is ample evidence of Republic of Korea units repeatedly engaging in indirect rhetorical entrapment of fledgling peace talks by, for example, breaking neutral zones and direct rhetorical entrapment by producing and promoting rumors (treated as certainties) of massive atrocities against civilians and POWs on the DPRK and Chinese side.^① Secondly, almost the entirety of the relationship between the Republic of South Vietnam and the US during the two last years of the Vietnam War can be seen through the lens of rhetorical entrapment, albeit a failed attempt at that.^②

Conclusion and Implications

The concept of rhetorical entrapment comprehensively and coherently explains the seeming mismatch between Ukraine's offensive posture, as manifested in three of its most important actions in 2024, and the unfavorable situation on the battlefield. Notably, it fills existing gaps in the literature around it. Furthermore, this paper offers insight into small states' policy choices, agency, and possible behaviors in wartime, which are often overlooked in international security. It presents a vehicle for connecting the also often overlooked communicative aspects of global politics and state behavior — constructivism and realism. This paper also highlights the importance of the form and content of normative commitments that patron states make in wartime toward smaller partners. States that seek to keep their foreign policy options open should be wary of sweeping rhetorical commitments that might eventually give their partner room for rhetorical entrapment.

This is more easily avoidable under more formalized avenues of partnership, making loose ad hoc "alliances" like that between the West and Ukraine more likely to result in rhetorical entrapment and other potentially unstable situations because of the possible disequilibrium between declarations and interests, which are here not mediated by any sort of institutional structure built around the stability of both. However, if leaders seek to circumvent public opinion and domestic political opposition, they can choose to lean into these narratives

^① Brendan James and Noah Kulwin. "Blowback" [podcast]. 2022, Season 3, ep. 8-10.

^② For reasons of space, it is not possible to explore this further. Some particularly revealing examples can be found in Walter Isaacson. *Kissinger: A Biography*. Simon and Schuster, 2013, 234-256, 439-491.

to prevent the emergence of acceptable alternatives. There is nothing inherently negative in the concept of rhetorical entrapment or its effects on patron states. In any case, policymakers should pay attention to the long-term effects of their policy declarations and the possible ways in which state interactions, even among allies, can shape their policy flexibility. Further research is needed into the main limitation of this paper, namely explaining when and why a state may choose rhetorical entrapment as opposed to other possible strategies under otherwise similar conditions.

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Upstream Statecraft

Explaining Variation in China's Transboundary Water Governance Through Security, Energy, and Mutual Benefit

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Abstract: This study examines why China's approach to transboundary river governance varies significantly across four regions by applying two parallel analytical frameworks: security interests and environmental vulnerability. The finding shows that China is more willing to cooperate in bilateral settings where strategic goals align with a single neighboring state. For example, cooperation with Kazakhstan is driven by shared interests in counterterrorism and hydropower development. In contrast, cooperation tends to be passive or minimal in multilateral river basins with overlapping sovereignties, such as the Mekong, and nearly absent in politically sensitive regions with resource-scarce neighbors, as seen in the Brahmaputra dispute with India. On the environmental front, China's level of cooperation is most influenced by the degree of downstream vulnerability, followed by the ecological condition of the shared water bodies. This paper concludes by discussing the prevailing academic trend of securitizing transboundary water governance, arguing that such state-centric frameworks risk oversimplifying localized ecological costs and the role of local governments.

Keywords: *water governance, hydropolitics, transboundary cooperation models, securitization theory*

Introduction

China is the most important upstream country for transboundary water and ecological security in Asia. It has 42 major transboundary watercourses and 110 international rivers and lakes shared with 18 downstream countries along its southwest, northwest, and northeast borders.^① As of 2024, the Asia-Pacific region is still considered relatively water-scarce, with extreme events such as floods and droughts causing significant economic damage.^② This highlights the fact that water resources remain a critical natural resource for nations, while transboundary water resources raise the complex issue of how countries collaborate in governance and distribution. Whether framed purely as an ecological and environmental security issue or securitized within the realm of water diplomacy, transboundary rivers are a vital component of environmental security.

Generally, China's transboundary rivers can be categorized into four major regions based on geographical orientation, as shown in the table below.

Region	Relevant Countries	Major River	Number of Bilateral Treaties
Northeast	Russia, Mongolia, North Korea	Amur, Yalu, Tumen	28
Northwest	Kazakhstan	Irtysh-Ob, Ili	14
Southeast	Thailand, Myanmar, Laos, Vietnam	Mekong River basin	9
Southwest	India, Bangladesh	Yarlung Zangbo-Brahmaputra Basin, Indus, Ganges (GBM)	3

Table 1.1 *Regional division of transboundary rivers in China*^③

Regarding the number and provisions of agreements signed on transboundary water governance, China's approaches, and degrees of engagement in managing transboundary rivers, vary across these four regions. Therefore, the research question of this paper is: *Why does China's level of cooperation with different countries and regions in transboundary water governance differ?*

^① Lei Xie and Jia Shaofeng, *China's International Transboundary Rivers Politics, Security and Diplomacy of Shared Water Resources*, 1st ed, (London: Routledge, 2017).

^② Global Water Partnership, 2024, *UN World Water Development Report*, <https://www.gwp.org/en/GWP-China/about-gwp-china/news-list/2024/un-world-water-development-report-2024-new-stage-of-water-development/> (accessed May 9, 2025).

^③ Lei Xie and Jia Shaofeng, *China's International Transboundary Rivers Politics, Security and Diplomacy of Shared Water Resources*, 1st ed, (London: Routledge, 2017).

The background to this question is twofold. Firstly, China's political system and policy-making process have long been characterized by stability and uniformity, under the leadership of a single party, unlike India, which operates under a cooperative federalism framework. Secondly, the target countries of transboundary river governance are comparable and have entered partnerships with China, such as ASEAN with the Mekong region and BRICS with India. Most of them belong to developing countries or the Global South. Therefore, this paper focuses on what factors have contributed to the differences in the depth and modalities of cooperation between China and different regions, and which factors are more important.

Literature Review

First, the current academic consensus largely acknowledges that China's governance models across the three major regions differ (with most classifications combining the northeastern and northwestern regions for analysis), adopting a perspective that examines levels of institutionalization.

From the perspective of treaty comparison, most transboundary water treaties pertain to water bodies in northern China, where provisions for measures such as "significant harm" and negotiated compensation are more comprehensive and detailed, as exemplified by the *China-Mongolia Agreement (1994)*. Comparatively, in the southwestern region of China, there are almost no formal arrangements (Chen et al. 2013).^① This is also reflected in the treaty count statistics shown in Table 1 (Xie & Shao 2017).^② Regarding the comparison between the two southern regions, China's measures related to river ecological protection, such as water allocation and fish conservation, are more comprehensive in the Mekong River Basin (MRB) (He et al. 2014).^③

In the quantitative study of treaty significance, Wolf (2013) proposed the Basins at Risk (BAR) rating with an event description framework, distinguishing 15 levels of interaction in water governance, ranging from conflict to deep cooperation.^④ Subsequently, Ho (2017) applied this evaluation standard to analyze China's existing treaties and concluded that China's highest level of cooperation is with Kazakhstan, followed by the Mekong countries, while cooperation with India is the lowest.^⑤

^① Huiping Chen, Alistair Rieu-Clarke, and Patricia Wouters, "Exploring China's Transboundary Water Treaty Practice through the Prism of the UN Watercourses Convention," *Water International* 38, no. 2 (2013): 217–30.

^② Lei Xie and Jia Shaofeng, *China's International Transboundary Rivers Politics, Security and Diplomacy of Shared Water Resources*, 1st ed, (London: Routledge, 2017).

^③ Daming He, Ruidong Wu, Yan Feng, Yungang Li, Chengzhi Ding, Wenling Wang, and Douglas W. Yu, "Review: China's Transboundary Waters: New Paradigms for Water and Ecological Security through Applied Ecology," *The Journal of Applied Ecology* 51, no. 5 (2014): 1159–68.

^④ Aaron Wolf, Shira Yoffe, and Mark Giordano, "International Waters: Identifying Basins at Risk," *Water Policy* 5 (2003): 29–60.

^⑤ Selina Ho, "China's Transboundary River Policies towards Kazakhstan: Issue-Linkages and Incentives for Cooperation," *Water International* 42, no. 2 (2017): 142–62.

Secondly, academics have also conducted more regional comparative studies and analyses of the factors affecting China's transboundary water governance strategies, and this paper will sort out two levels:

(1) From a macro level, based on the environmental, economic, and political temperatures, the three causes of water conflict are: environmental pressures on shared water resources, building and operating infrastructure on shared waterways, and boundary issues caused by rivers (Michel 2020).^①

Gleditsch (2006) further quantified the factors by quantitatively analyzing the river dataset, proposing eleven hypotheses, and classifying them into four groups based on the degree of sharing of the river, the scarcity of water resources and the way they are allocated, the geographic region, and the level of development of the country.^② The study contributed two conclusions: 1) the higher the national development factor, the lower the risk of transboundary water conflicts; and 2) the size of the transboundary river basin, i.e., the absolute size of the available resources, constitutes a potential source of conflict, including water-related fisheries, agriculture, industrial production, and urban populations.

(2) From China's perspective, as summarized in Table 2.1, the factors influencing China's transboundary water governance include: upstream and downstream geographical positioning, military and diplomatic relations, and domestic factors, as proactive local governments can promote cooperation in transboundary river governance (Zhang & Li 2018).^③ Regarding domestic factors, some scholars argue that the lack of cooperative governance in hydropower development in the MRB is due to a focus on the economic benefits of hydropower financing and investment (Geheb & Suhardiman 2019).^④

^① David Michel, *Water Conflict Pathways and Peacebuilding Strategies*, *Peaceworks*, no. 164 (Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace, 2020).

^② Nils Petter Gleditsch, Kathryn Furlong, Håvard Hegre, Bethany Lacina, and Taylor Owen, "Conflicts over Shared Rivers: Resource Scarcity or Fuzzy Boundaries?," *Political Geography* 25, no. 4 (2006): 361–82.

^③ Hongzhou Zhang and Mingjiang Li, "A Process-Based Framework to Examine China's Approach to Transboundary Water Management," *International Journal of Water Resources Development* 34, no. 5 (2018): 705–31.

^④ Kim Geheb and Diana Suhardiman, "The Political Ecology of Hydropower in the Mekong River Basin," *Current Opinion in Environmental Sustainability* 37 (2019): 8–13.

Key Factors	Upstream Advantage & Downstream Vulnerability	Military Security	Diplomatic Relations	Domestic Factors
Zhang & Li, 2018	Monglia (Ulungur) Russia (Songhua)	North-Korea (Tumen) vs India (Brahmaputra)		
Ho, 2014		Mekong River Basin vs India (Brahmaputra)		
Geheb & Suhardiman, 2019				Mekong River Basin
Biba, 2014		Kazakhstan (Irtysh and Ili)		
Ho, 2017		Kazakhstan (Irtysh and Ili)		

Table 2.1 Key factors mentioned in the literature

Ho (2014) adopts a more realist perspective, arguing that water governance operates within a broader political context.^① He concludes that the MRB holds greater military significance than the Brahmaputra River, prompting China to establish more cooperative mechanisms in the former. Similarly, the influence of political factors is evident in China's transboundary water cooperation with Kazakhstan (Biba 2014; Ho 2017).^②

In summary, through the literature review, it can be observed that the level of cooperation China has in transboundary water governance, as indicated in Table 1.1, decreases from Northeast to Southwest. Regarding the reasons, existing literature has made comparisons across certain regions and examined the factors listed in Table 2.1. However, the existing literature does not answer all the questions. On one hand, the literature does not reference cases from all regions or compare the degree to which these factors influence decision-making, nor does it assess the relative importance of these factors. On the other hand, most of these analyses are from China's perspective, without considering whether the cooperation attitudes of other countries might influence China's strategies.

^① Selina Ho, "River Politics: China's Policies in the Mekong and the Brahmaputra in Comparative Perspective," *Journal of Contemporary China* 23, no. 85 (2013): 1–20.

^② Sebastian Biba, "China Cooperates with Central Asia over Shared Rivers," *China Dialogue*, 2014, <https://dialogue.eearth/en/energy/6741-china-cooperates-with-central-asia-over-shared-rivers/> (accessed May 9, 2025).; Ho, "China's Transboundary River Policies," 145.

Comparison of Key Factors Affecting Transboundary Water Governance in China

Based on the literature review, this paper aims to discuss which of these factors are more important for China and more likely to facilitate cooperation and what are their priorities?

Firstly, China cooperates on transboundary rivers when it is in its own interest and when it believes it will benefit from the cooperation, which is the highest priority condition affecting cooperation. Beneficial can be defined in two ways: one is when China is located in a small number of downstream transboundary rivers with high ecological vulnerability, where more cooperation agreements and sound mechanisms are conducive to the protection of downstream water quality and quantity; and the other is when China's cooperation with the target country can be mutually beneficial by yielding rewards in terms of, for example, matters of critical national security.

Environmental Concerns

Mongolia is the only upstream country for China's transboundary rivers. The two rivers that flow from Mongolia—namely, the Ulungur River, the main source of Tarim River, and the Oro River, the main source of the Heilong River in northern China—are among the few rivers where China is located downstream. The administrative regions of the Ulungur River primarily involve the western parts of the Xinjiang Autonomous Region and the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region, areas that are relatively arid and water-scarce year-round^①. As a result, China and Mongolia have signed four agreements related to the Ulungur River and other transboundary waters, including China's first water treaty. The agreements specify strict obligations for ecosystem protection and transboundary damage, such as the provision that “any development or use of transboundary waters should not be detrimental” (Art. 4).^②

In contrast, in the case of the Amur River Basin, China shares more transboundary water resources with Russia than with any other country, while the agreement on the rivers' ecological system is not as comprehensive as that between China and Mongolia.^③ While the USSR-China Joint Comprehensive Scheme was established in 1986, and hydrological data was shared, China nevertheless overlooked the joint scheme's review in 2009 and constructed the Hailaer-Dalai Water Transfer Canal at the source of the Amur River.

① 何大明, 李运刚, 和冯彦, “我国国际河流开发与地缘合作挑战”, *地理教育*, no. Z2(2013): 4–6.

② Huiping Chen, Alistair Rieu-Clarke, and Patricia Wouters, “Exploring China's Transboundary Water Treaty Practice through the Prism of the UN Watercourses Convention,” *Water International* 38, no. 2 (2013): 217–30.

③ Eugene Simonov and Eugene Egidarev, “Intergovernmental Cooperation on the Amur River Basin Management in the Twenty-First Century,” *International Journal of Water Resources Development* 34, no. 5 (2017): 771–91.

Security and Diplomatic Factors

Factors in terms of mutual benefits can be summarized as military security and diplomatic relations in Table 2, focusing on groundbreaking energy as well as security-related exchanges that are crucial for China. This can be highlighted by comparing transboundary water cooperation between China-Kazakhstan with China-Myanmar and China-India.

Kazakhstan, as a downstream country, has signed 14 agreements between the two countries as of 2023, starting with the first consultation in 1999, covering topics such as disaster prevention, exchange of hydrological information, water quality, environmental protection, water allocation, and etc.^①The two countries have had a strategic partnership since 2005, but Kazakhstan still maintains a foreign policy based on pragmatic, non-ideological considerations aimed at self-interest and self-protection.^②As a result, Chinese-Kazakhstan cooperation in transboundary waters largely maintains a tone of maintaining close and friendly relations between the two sides.

Kazakhstan's security importance is reflected in its cooperation with China in countering terrorism and maintaining stability on its borders, particularly in the fight against Uyghur separatism in the Xinjiang region.^③Meanwhile, as the world's largest producer of natural uranium, Kazakhstan has huge potential for future cooperation with China in new energy sources of nuclear energy, such as the nearly 50% acquisition of Kazatomprom's subsidiary by CGNPC Mining in 2021, which amounts to the world's largest uranium project in the last decade.^④

The priority and importance of cooperation in the Mekong River Basin have also increased as China has expanded its collaboration with Southeast Asian countries on key cross-border criminal activities, such as telecom network fraud and drug trafficking. In 2024, China, along with Laos, Myanmar, and Thailand, conducted joint exercises aimed at combating illegal activities in the Mekong River Basin.

Previously, the *Mekong River Agreement (1995)*, which includes China, was considered to lack any practical effectiveness, and China had been criticized for building large hydropower stations in the upstream Mekong region, neglecting the impact on downstream communities, and thereby damaging local environments and ecosystems.^⑤After 2015, China

① 郝少英,“中哈跨界河流合作:进程、机遇与深化路径”,《新疆大学学报(哲学社会科学版)》52, no.1 (2024): 63-71.

② Sebastian Biba, “Desecuritization in China's Behavior towards Its Transboundary Rivers: The Mekong River, the Brahmaputra River, and the Irtysh and Ili Rivers,” *Journal of Contemporary China* 23, no. 85 (2013): 21-43.

③ Selina Ho, “China's Transboundary River Policies towards Kazakhstan: Issue-Linkages and Incentives for Cooperation,” *Water International* 42, no. 2 (2017): 142-62.

④ 中国地质调查局,《中广核集团签约哈萨克斯坦奥尔塔雷克公司股权转让交易, 2021, <http://ggmeta.cgs.gov.cn/DepositsNewsCen.aspx?id=2975> (accessed May 9, 2025).

⑤ Evelyn Goh, *Developing the Mekong: Regionalism and Regional Security in China-Southeast Asian Relations*, 1st ed. (London: Routledge, 2007).

has demonstrated a more proactive approach to collaborating with other countries to promote sustainable development in the region. One significant development was the introduction of the Lancang-Mekong Cooperation (LMC) mechanism in 2015, which includes transboundary water governance as well as issues related to navigation security, cross-border drug trafficking, and human trafficking.

However, the MRB has more cooperating countries relative to Kazakhstan, and will involve the ceding of sovereignty by different countries. For example, on the LMC joint patrols, Chinese patrol vessels are not allowed to enter Thai waters during patrols and can only enforce the law in Myanmar and Laos waters.^① After escorting a merchant vessel to the Golden Triangle, the China-Myanmar joint patrols need to be handed over to the Thai Marine Police for an onward escort to Chiang Saen harbor in Thailand. Similarly, the adequacy of sovereign crossings is directly related to the effectiveness of cross-border water security.

Taking the same combined security-energy perspective and looking back at the transboundary water cooperation between China and India, one can see that the level of cooperation between the two countries has declined drastically in the aftermath of the Donglang border standoff, and that China began refusing to share hydrological data on the Brahmaputra River with India in 2017. As India has violated China's sovereignty in Donglang, destroying the mutual trust that the two neighbors used to enjoy, it will be difficult for China to cooperate with India on other issues.^②

Meanwhile, in terms of security strategy, not only has India failed to cooperate with China to help fight separatism in the Tibetan region, but it has also strengthened its hostile stance towards India by supporting the Special Frontier Force, an independent armed force in Tibet, around 2020 and has drawn warnings from China.^③ From 2016 to 2017, actions such as the Indian President's meeting with Dalai Lama, his visit to the disputed border region of Arunachal Pradesh (which is also where the cross-border river between India and China passes through), and the publicizing of the Tibetan flag were more of the opposite signals of cooperation.

① 卢光盛, 张励, '澜沧江—湄公河合作机制与跨境安全治理', *南洋问题研究*, no. 3 (2016): 12–22.

② Y. Zhao, "China Has to Halt River Data Sharing as India Infringes on Sovereignty: Expert," *Global Times*, August 23, 2017, <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1062249.shtml> (accessed May 9, 2025).

③ Sudha Ramachandran, "India's 'Tibet Card' in the Stand-Off with China: More Provocative than Productive," *China Brief* 20, no. 17 (2020).

Thus, summarizing the above comparison, the prioritization of factors affecting China's level of cooperation in water governance is shown in Figure 3.1. The absence of conflict in environmental vulnerability is largely due to the fact that China is basically in the upper reaches of Asia and is a large Asian country, so it is rare for China to provoke disputes upstream because of its own water and ecological scarcity.

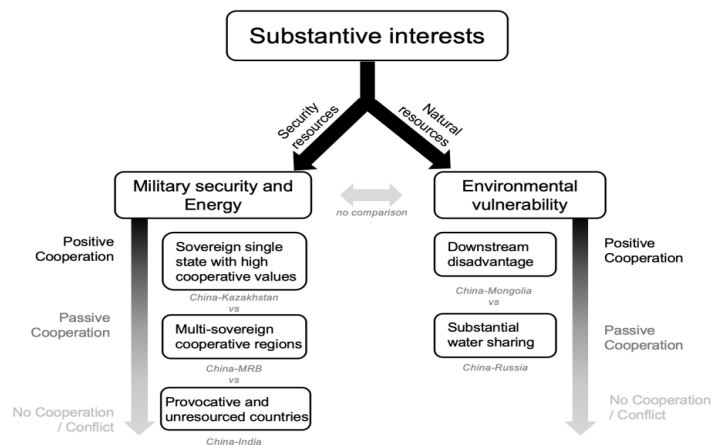


Figure 3.1 Ranking the importance of factors affecting transboundary water governance in China

Securitization of Water

Unsurprisingly, much of the discussion on transboundary water is coupled with a larger political context, and when discussing the differences in transboundary water cooperation between China and different regions, it usually incorporates considerations of more macro-geographic factors or political mutual trust. Thus, some scholars have also argued that transboundary water governance has been securitized.

First of all, securitization, by definition, is closely linked to the power and interests of the state. Securitizing an issue consists of two stages: firstly, actors label an issue as secure, and then the associated security issues are recognized by a specific audience as an existential threat.^① However, securitization brings certain problems. On the one hand, considering transboundary water resources from the perspective of the common interests of nation-states can overlook the real challenges to local survival.^② As a waterway, the river is constructed as a manageable resource, divorced from its wider environmental context and social uses or cultural values.

On the other hand, the securitization of water treats the state as a unit of variable, but ignores the undue influence of competing interests or bureaucratic corruption within the state,

^① 李兴, & 耿捷, “安全化”与“去安全化”:中哈跨界河流合作中的问题与对策, 国外理论动态, 11(2019):115–127.

^② Douglas P. Hill, “Where Hawks Dwell on Water and Bankers Build Power Poles: Transboundary Waters, Environmental Security and the Frontiers of Neo-Liberalism,” *Strategic Analysis* 39, no. 6 (2015): 729–43.

which means that perhaps the roles and outcomes of individuals or parts of organizations are magnified for the state as a whole. Therefore, it has also been argued that water governance should be securitized, and that China's current transboundary water policy focuses on various forms of intermittent cooperation rather than having a holistic strategy (Biba 2013).^①

Conclusion

To summarize, this paper is divided into three main parts to discuss the research question of why China has different levels of cooperation and participation in transboundary water governance. Firstly, the factual background to which this paper refers is based on the fact that transboundary water cooperation in China is more comprehensive and deeper in the North, followed by Southeast Asia, while there is almost no cooperation in South Asia. From the existing literature combining, upstream advantage and downstream vulnerability, military and security cooperation, diplomatic relations, and domestic factors are the four main categories of elements that influence China's strategy.

In the second section, the paper uses case comparisons to rank the importance of the existing factors and the extent to which they can lead to cooperation. China, due to its upstream national advantages, mainly considers whether actions fulfill its own interests in transboundary water governance. In terms of environmental vulnerability, downstream is key to enabling cooperation between China and Mongolia, while the size of the shared basin water resources is less important. From a security perspective, China favors countries that can provide offshore military or anti-crime cooperation for mutual benefit. At the same time, stable and bilateral forms of cooperation are preferred over groups of countries with complex sovereignty. India, on the other hand, as a country with potential border and sovereignty conflicts loses China's mutual trust in more other areas and therefore cooperates the least.

Finally, the paper considers the potential problems of securitizing the topic of water governance, namely that assessing rivers as holistic resources in a highly abstract way may bias the analysis due to the dominance of local governments and the specificity of river basin inhabitants.

^① Sebastian Biba, "Desecuritization in China's Behavior towards Its Transboundary Rivers: The Mekong River, the Brahmaputra River, and the Irtysh and Ili Rivers," *Journal of Contemporary China* 23, no. 85 (2013): 21–43.

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