



ASIA PROGRAM

XXII CHINA ANALYSIS GROUP MEETING

REPORT XXII, YEAR IV

APRIL 20, 2021

Online discussion panel via Zoom

HOW CHINA REGARDS ITS FUTURE IN THE WORLD



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The Brazilian Center for International Relations (CEBRI) is an independent think tank that contributes to establishing an international agenda for Brazil. For the last twenty three years, the institution has engaged in promoting pluralistic and proposal-oriented debates on the international landscape and Brazilian foreign policy.

CEBRI prioritizes themes with the greatest potential to leverage the international insertion of Brazil into the global economy, proposing pragmatic solutions for the formulation of public policies. CEBRI's work was recognized by the University of Pennsylvania's top global think tank ranking, which considered the institution the 2nd best think tank in South and Central America in 2020.

The Asia Program is one of the twelve regional and thematic programs currently operating at CEBRI. The Program is coordinated by CEBRI's Trustee Anna Jaguaribe, CEBRI's International Advisory Board member Ambassador Marcos Caramuru, and by the Senior Fellow Phillip Yang. External experts can be invited to participate in *ad hoc* activities, projects, and seminars, according to the Program's agenda.

ASIA PROGRAM

The Program promotes a systematic monitoring of matters relevant to international relations and Brazilian development, particularly those related to China. Special attention has been given to monitoring the ongoing economic reforms and political transformations in China, considering their global effects and impacts in Latin America and Brazil. This continuous examination allows CEBRI to provide information and analysis to its members, partners and to the Brazilian government, contributing to the construction of Brazil's strategic position towards China, as well as helping increase knowledge about China within Brazilian society.

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Trustee at the Brazilian Center for International Relations (CEBRI), Director of the Institute for Brazil-China Studies (IBRACH), Sociologist with a PhD from the New York University and post-graduated at the École Pratique des Hautes Études. She lived and researched in China from 1998 to 2003. She worked at the United Nations in New York, was a consultant at UNCTAD in Geneva, and a Professor at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro (UFRJ).



INTERNATIONAL BOARD

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Member of the International Advisory Board of the Brazilian Center for International Relations (CEBRI), Brazil's Former Ambassador to the People's Republic of China, Consul General in Shanghai, Ambassador of Brazil to Malaysia, President of the Financial Activities Control Council (Coaf), Secretary of International Affairs at the Ministry of Finance and Executive Director of the World Bank. He was also a partner and manager at KEMU Consultoria. He has a degree from the Rio Branco Institute (IRBr) and a degree in Administration from the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro (UFRJ).



SENIOR FELLOW

Philip Yang

Philip Yang is the founder of Urbem, an institution dedicated to the structuring of urban projects. He holds a Master's degree in Public Administration from Harvard Kennedy School. He was a diplomat in Brazil's foreign service between 1992 and 2002, having served in Geneva, Beijing, and Washington. He is/was a board member in the following institutions: MIT Corporation Visiting Committee of the Department of Urban Planning (2012-2016); Arq.Futuro, one of the main spaces for debate on architecture and urbanism in Brazil; the Symphonic Orchestra of the State of São Paulo (OSESP); the City Council of São Paulo Municipality (2013-2016); the Rio de Janeiro City Council (2013-2016); and the Harvard University Brazil Office Advisory Group.

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REPORT XXII, YEAR IV

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HOW CHINA REGARDS ITS FUTURE IN THE WORLD

Report by: Kamila Aben Athar

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Introduction

By Marcos Caramuru

The world emerging from the pandemic will face old and new challenges. Most countries, big and small, will be focused on their own internal reality, stimulating investments, dealing with the huge deficits they had to incur to fight the virus and assist companies and individuals. Recovery will not be uniform. Mature economies are expected to recover faster than emerging markets and developing economies in general. New items have emerged: how to deal with future epidemic risks, how to assist least developed countries to protect their people, how to rebuild or reinforce world linkages.

At the same time, current international issues with high priority in the international agenda such as climate change, for example, will require a great deal of international dialogue and a stronger capacity to produce broad consensus.

A new Administration in the United States initiated last January. The new Administration is, at this stage, starting to make its international strategy known. It seems that the idea of containing the emergency of China is a key part of the strategy, while there is also space for a positive US-China bilateral agenda. China, by its turn, approved in March a new five-year plan, preparing the grounds for advances in technology development, economic openness and a more determined international presence.

A scenario of competition and co-operation seems to be what the world can expect from China-US future relations. Every country will be affected if the two giants do not find the right balance in their relations. Understanding fully their individual strategy and vision is of essence.

The purpose of the 20th April CEBRI's webinar was to discuss China's positioning in the world ahead. We focused on China's international concerns and objectives, how China approaches international relations in a world in need of a process of reorganization. How can we interpret the Chinese declarations

after the recent Anchorage meeting, what can be expected from China in the short and long term strategy, how China regards its relations with Europe, East Asian countries, with emerging markets and the least advanced countries, what will be the future engagement of China with its recent initiatives, such as the Belt and Road Initiative.

Guiding Questions

To help us analyze these complex and dynamic issues, at its 22nd Meeting, the China Analysis Group proposes three themes and questions to our speakers and audience:

1. What is China's vision for itself and the world? What can be expected from China in its short and long-term strategy?

2. How can we interpret the Chinese declarations after the recent Anchorage meeting? How does China approach international relations in a world in process of reorganization?

3. How China regards its relations with Europe, East Asian countries, emerging markets, and the least advanced countries? How to assist least developed economies to protect their people, how to rebuild or reinforce world linkages? What will be the future engagement of China with its recent initiatives, such as the Belt and Road Initiative?

XXII Meeting Report

1. What is China's vision for itself and the world? What can be expected from China in its short and long-term strategy?

According to participants, China has a strategic vision about itself and the world. During China's opening process, the promotion of international cooperation was successful, especially in the economic field with its integration into the World Trade Organization. Over the last two decades, China has become the world's second largest economy and an important development partner to several countries.

Participants stressed that there are misunderstandings about the nature of today's world system. Structured after the Second World War, it was not built by one or two superpowers; instead, it was built on a spirit of cooperation among major powers. China acknowledges this and focuses its external strategy on the continuum of the globalization and its opening up to the world. At the same time, China does not emphasize that the current and future orders are going to be Western or American, but rather an international and multipolar arrangement, based on a humane community of shared future.

As regards domestic policy, while recognizing the gap between ideal and reality, China has a basic commitment to human rights, addressing issues on rights against murder, torture, slavery, genocide, and other relevant areas. For instance, basic human rights such as the right to not be poor and to have access to basic material welfare are crucial to China's self-understanding. It is also noticeable its commitment to democracy in terms of promoting the participation of the Chinese population in politics at some level, in a different format from the West.

Participants highlighted that one key ideal in the formation of Chinese politics is political meritocracy, based on a political system that selects and

promotes public officials with superior ability and virtue. In Western countries, meritocracy is often associated with civil services, while in China, there is no distinction between civil servant and political leader. Therefore, all officials and leaders must go through a meritocratic process so as to move up to the top of the political hierarchy. To achieve that, a second ideal is essential, which is the need of having a complex bureaucratic system to ensure that this meritocratic ideal can be implemented.

In China's socialist system, an important task of public officials – and a measure of their merit – is to serve the people. This virtue is central to socialism, as well as to Confucianism. Poverty reduction is imperative from a governmental and Confucian standpoint, since the strive for basic material necessities halts the propensity to become virtuous or to take care of others. Thus, the first task of the Chinese government is to give people basic material necessities to reduce poverty. It has been estimated that 800 million people have been lifted out of poverty in China.

Some participants emphasized that there is a sense of optimism about the role of artificial intelligence in China's future. China might face a dangerous situation of getting older before getting richer, due to the one-child policy, which has made the labor force in productive age to decrease fast. Because of this, some Chinese manufactories are moving to the Southeast Asia. In this sense, AI is viewed as a way of resolving China's problems, allowing China to be both older and richer, and it is considered to be central to China's future in the next years.

On China's short and medium-term goals, the United States and its Western allies see the rising nationalism and the increasing confidence of China as a potential foreign coercion or aggression. However, participants stressed that China still strives for a non-hostile international order. An example is the recent Chinese diplomatic overtures, such as the State Counselor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi's trip to Middle East. There, he encountered with his Southeast Asian counterparts in Fujian, China, and also held online discussions with U.S. former President Donald Trump, German Chancellor Angela Merkel, and French President Emmanuel Macron. Hence, China's first goal is to strengthen its goodwill approach in diplomacy and continue to be a leading partner among Western partners, especially in the climate change and biodiversity agendas.

Participants also discussed possible roles of the recently launched dual circulation strategy. China's second goal is to reduce its dependence on foreign technologies markets, functioning as a major market and manufacturing

base for foreign firms and consumers. In doing so, China maintains a leverage in increasing tax relations dealings with Western businesses. For example, Google, Facebook or other U.S. social media enterprises have potential to obtain benefits from Chinese markets. In allowing these companies to expand their businesses in China, the Chinese government can lobby them to stand aside with China during uncertain and turbulent bilateral relations with the United States.

A third goal is to double down its overseas influence campaign and try an offensive beyond its borders to preempt future encirclement from a part of the West. Participants clarified that, although the current situation does not constitute a “new Cold War”, it is clear that there are parallel universes between Washington and Beijing in terms of the technology standards and social governance approaches. Part of the decoupling has been taking place and, in order to push back against U.S. newly formed aggressiveness and uncertainty, China aims to take measures to preempt future encirclements initiated by the United States.

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2. How can we interpret the Chinese declarations after the recent Anchorage meeting? How does China approach international relations in a world in process of reorganization?

Regarding China-U.S. relations and the United States' leadership, participants mentioned that there are shortcomings in Washington's understandings of itself and the world. While it is understandable the desire to maintain its leadership role internationally, the United States should not overlook that the post-Second World War order was based on inclusiveness, cooperation, and diversity. Therefore, today's world should not be seen as a post-Cold War moment, often called "the American moment".

Moreover, the United States has an outdated sense of security, and still holds to the idea of "America First" or American exceptionalism, which is considered to be not suitable for the international community. The U.S. economy still plays an important role for world growth; however, its major recent initiatives are mainly focused on domestic agenda, sometimes at the cost of others' economic interests, which makes the United States less reliable and unpredictable to its economic partners.

Likewise, the United States' foreign policy presents weaknesses. The first is the value of ideology-oriented policy, which makes the international market and the world economy more fragmented. The second is the lack of continuity, with the example between the Trump and Biden administrations, which gives unclear ideas on what will be the next government choices.

Participants pinpointed that China is still working to maintain and stabilize its relationship with the United States, because it believes that, without coordination and cooperation among major powers, the United Nations system and other international arrangements cannot function properly. During the current pandemic period, China has made clear efforts to develop a vaccine and to ensure the necessary supply of vaccines to the overseas market, becoming a reliable and stable supplier and also a consumer for the global economy, with the domestic market almost fully open for imports. China tries to maintain its engagement with the United States at the top leaders' level, organizing talks on different subjects. These examples show China's

commitment to the international agenda, especially in areas such as public health and climate change issues.

Another challenge mentioned by participants is the United States making room for China, especially in the East Asian region. China wants to fill the voids created by the past four years of Trump Administration, during which the US economic and soft power declined. Unlike the United States and other countries with a missionary zeal, China does not want to export its values by force. The idea of China invading other countries to promote its political vision is foreign to the Chinese political culture. China is aware that peace is important to its internal development and to create better ties with the world. For this purpose, China aims to continue emphasizing its commitment to multilateralism and to the United Nations as the center of the international system. China is the biggest beneficiary of the post-World War II international institutions order. The country does not desire to up-end the current system, but rather develop a fine-tuned system where China sits beside the table to decide some rules of the game instead of just listening to and abiding by the rules and norms set by the United States.

However, there might be potential traps ahead for China. First, the China-Iran recent 25-year deal could have hardships in its development, because of Middle East's uncertainties. Participants highlighted that China should avoid an all-in approach and the establishment of long-term deals. Second, China's attempts to soften its image in the world by doing goodwill approaches, such as the vaccine diplomacy, might be in danger of being overshadowed or drawn by disproportionate countermeasures. Third, internal issues, such as the transformation of the economic growth model and the deficiency of cutting-edge technologies, are shortcomings and drawbacks in the way of China's future. If the country aims to become a modernized socialist country by 2035 or 2050, it must break through in technological development and the foundational science and technology.

According to participants, the biggest lesson China has learned in the past two years of trade and tech wars and increasing hostility with the United States is that it is not strategic to rely upon the previously assumed friendly international environment. China aims to be more self-sufficient, self-dependent, and that is why the country puts premium importance in domestic markets, not only consumer markets, but also the manufacturing capability. Looking back to China's investments in previous years, particularly in developing economies, China desires to expand its influence and economic interest and draw

friendship from Southern governments. However, this could draw the same level of controversy and backlash.

Due to the economic impacts of the pandemic, the second lesson is China being more cautious in doing investments. One example is the China Exim Bank and the Chinese Development Bank (CDB) policies, which are the biggest loan issuers for Chinese overseas projects. For the past two years, they have been more hesitant to approve uncontrolled loans to developing markets. Both banks doubled down their internal audit, risk control analysis, and loans insurance.

With the international environment becoming more hostile and less friendly to Chinese investments, the third lesson is that China must forge an independent or semi-independent monetary system. With the internationalization of Renminbi, China aims to be the first government to launch or issue a digital currency: the digital Renminbi. This represents the Chinese attempt to reduce the attack from an U.S. dollar-dominated international currency system by circumventing in restrictions and coercions wielded by the U.S. dollar hegemony.

Lastly, participants pinpointed that the decline of the United States is part of China's view of the world. However, this is a relative decline, it results from a natural process of development potential, population level, political institutions, and religion. Thus, all countries, including China and the United States, should adapt themselves to this new reality.

There are common values between China and the United States. However, especially in the West, there is a view that there is only one morally legitimate way of selecting political leaders – and that is by democratic elections – and countries that do not use that system are somehow fundamentally illegitimate. China has a different political culture and it is important to allow an openness for morally legitimate pluralism when it comes to thinking of what is the best way of selecting political leaders based on the country's political culture, national conditions, and history.

The most challenging situation is today's world is setting a certain level of anarchy. There is no government to take care of the power competition among rising and establishing powers. This makes the world more difficult to manage, especially with the unstable existing arrangements, with different divergences and convergences for the Western Allies system. Although some Western powers aspire to achieve strategic autonomy, there are no successful models

to follow. When talking about confrontation, it is important to remember that these countries are nuclear powers and there is no formula to control the level and escalation of conflicts. Therefore, countries should be pragmatic and realistic and focus on the diplomatic ways to solve this power transition rather than prevent the rise of other nations.

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3. How China regards its relations with Europe, East Asian countries, emerging markets, and the least advanced countries? How to assist least developed economies to protect their people, how to rebuild or reinforce world linkages? What will be the future engagement of China with its recent initiatives, such as the Belt and Road Initiative?

According to participants, due to the United States' changing and shifting approach to its relationship with China, the rest of the world faces the dilemma of choosing sides, which can be already observed in a higher degree in Latin America, East Asia, and Europe, and in a lower degree in Africa. In the case of Europe, as a capable and international player, it has its own dilemma to choose to coordinate the relationship with China and the United States. However, China has enhanced its engagement with the region. Current agreements on energy security and trade established within the European Union and with China, as well as with Middle Eastern countries, have been criticized by Washington. This resulted in the European Union searching to expand its cooperation with China on climate change, Iran's nuclear issue, how to avoid financial and technological sanctions from the United States, and how the European Union can better understand China's contribution to Europe's economic and health concerns.

Nevertheless, the growing level of Chinese investments in Eastern Europe countries has been seen as a challenge to the European Union's leadership. Also, China is determined to defend its core and national interests, including taboo topics such as Xinjiang, Hong Kong and South China Sea, manifested in China's latest countermeasures against the United States' allies and Western partners. In doing so, China sacrifices its short-term economic interests and undermines the recently signed China-EU bilateral investment treaty. By imposing sanctions, the chances of the deal being successful decrease. Thus, more dialogue is needed for China and European countries. Participants stressed that it is strategic for both to maintain a constructive and cooperative relationship, since it might also bring the United States into the right track of international cooperation.

China has also attached importance to engage with other regional players, such as Brazil and Iran. Moreover, China will continue to support multilateral arrangements, such as G-20, BRICS, and even the QUAD, depending on how this defines itself in the future.

About China's ties with other countries outside East Asia, participants mentioned that there is an official ideal of win-win cooperation, in which China promotes arrangements that are beneficial to both China and other countries. In practice, this ideal was true in China's past, with the tributary system functioning with the participation of smaller countries paying tribute to China and the country reciprocating with economic and security benefits. However, because China is more powerful, it is wrongly presumed that the country is morally superior. Thus, for win-win arrangements in the future, China should adopt a position of humility when dealing with other countries and should be willing to learn from them.

Concerning the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), China's political views are mainly with surrounding countries, with focus on the economic partnership based on win-win cooperation, mutually beneficial in an instrumental sense. The country has adjusted the project to make it financially more viable, environmentally more sustainable, and operationally more compatible. However, there are challenges regarding the future of the project. During the Second Summit of the BRI, China had acutely realized the controversy surrounding its labor and environmental standards, as well as the potential damage to local communities. Due to the pandemic, China is lacking in funds to support projects. In order to make a BRI 2.0 version more sustainable and workable, participants stressed that China must think twice before going all in on pushing ahead its projects. Also, there is recognition that by being instrumentally beneficial to countries, the project is not very stable, because once there is a change in the relations, they might break down. So there is a need for a stronger form of reciprocity based on shared values, mutual interests, common vision of good, especially with its neighboring countries, where there is already common Confucian culture.

Lastly, the power projection evidenced by the Confucius Institute includes headwinds over previous years. Some U.S. and Australian higher educational institutions have cancelled their cooperation with Confucian Institutes. There is a growing feeling that the Chinese government became aggressive and started using Confucian Institutes as a springboard to propagate communist ideologies. The idea of having China acting as an exporter of the communist

system in neighboring countries goes back to 1950s and 1960s, with the creation of ASEAN to contain the spread of communism in Southeast Asia. Therefore, there is a vivid memory and China must think carefully before moving forward with the institutes and the cultural aggressiveness.

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Attachments

Biographies



Anna Jaguaribe

Trustee at the Brazilian Center for International Relations (CEBRI). Director of the Institute for Brazil-China Studies (IBRACH). Sociologist with a PhD from New York University and post-graduated at the *École Pratique des Hautes Études*. She lived and researched in China from 1998 to 2003. She worked at the United Nations in New York, was a consultant at UNCTAD in Geneva and a Professor at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro (UFRJ).



Marcos Caramuru

Member of the International Advisory Board of the Brazilian Center for International Relations (CEBRI). Brazil's Former Ambassador to the People's Republic of China, Consul General in Shanghai, Ambassador of Brazil to Malaysia, President of the Financial Activities Control Council (Coaf), Secretary of International Affairs at the Ministry of Finance and Executive Director of the World Bank. He was also a partner and manager at KEMU Consultoria. He has a degree from the Rio Branco Institute (IRBr) and a degree in Administration from the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro (UFRJ).



Daniel Bell

Dean of the School of Political Science and Public Administration at Shandong University (Qingdao). In 2018, he was awarded the Huilin Prize and was honored as a "Cultural Leader" by the World Economic Forum. In 2019 he was awarded the Special Book Award of China. His books include *The China Model* (Princeton, 2015). His latest book (co-authored with Wang Pei) is *Just Hierarchy* (Princeton, 2020). He was educated at McGill University and Oxford University.



Niu Haibin

Senior research fellow and deputy director of Institute for Foreign Policy Studies at Shanghai Institutes for International Studies (SIIS). He is also Deputy Secretary-General of Chinese Association for Latin American Studies. He received his Ph.D. in International Relations at Fudan University in 2006. His research focuses on Latin America, China's foreign policy, and BRICS.



Shan Huang

Deputy Managing Editor and Editorial Board Member of Beijing-based Caixin Media, the Chinese equivalent of the Economist. He is in charge of Caixin's foreign desk, with 15 years of experience in reporting on Chinese domestic economic & political situations, its external relations with focus on Chinese economic diplomacy.

XXII Meeting Participants

The meeting had **193** attendees, including representatives from the government, companies, banks, third sector and academic institutions, who joined the event either via Zoom or the YouTube live stream.



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