China and Sustainable Development as a Global Economic Policy

Sustainable development is a concept that has been firmly established by the international community as a shared, global objective. In 2015 the United Nations adopted “Transforming our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”, with 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) explicitly set as a common task. The UN 2030 Agenda follows a series of earlier, multilateral initiatives, to which China has been a very active participant since the 1990s. The concept of sustainable development seeks to reconcile the need for economic growth with the spheres of organization of the society, natural environment and culture in a harmonious and balanced way. This creates demands for the resulting, ongoing economic policy-making and practice at the domestic, as well as at the international level. To that end, this session will include research on the effectiveness and impact of China’s global legal and political initiatives on the promotion and realization of sustainable development objectives.

Chinese Concept of Ecological Civilization and Sustainable Development

In 2013, President Xi Jinping of China made a statement to address the concept of “ecological civilization” at the National People’s Congress. The term was later on added to the revision of China’s Constitution in March 2018. It is an ethical concept and cultural ideology which promotes harmonious co-existence and sustainable development both among people and between nature and humankind. It aims at enriching and deepening the theory of sustainable development, and the construction of ecological civilization coincides with progress of
sustainable development. For instance, following the implementation of its National Sword Campaign, China promptly informed the WTO that it would stop imports of some types of wastes, including textiles and papers, by the end of 2017. The ban on waste imports is part of China’s war against pollution and a symbolic measure for the creation of an ecological civilization. Furthermore, China’s BRI is expected to have momentous implications for its partner countries in a variety of issues, including environment. BRI has the potential to play a transformative role in helping partner countries to build up more sustainable economic models. In addition, in its various legal and economic initiatives China notably strives to integrate the Chinese traditional culture and values into its modern concept of a harmonious and sustainable society. Though the Chinese and Danish (Western) concepts of sustainable development could be arguably ideologically, and historically different, it is worth noting that they show similarities by joining forces on the platform of ecological civilization. The panel will examine the implementations of China’s policy of ecological civilization at the national, regional and global level and reflect on cultural context and implications of the new development pathways between China and Nordic countries in the strive for a cleaner, healthier, more beautiful and sustainable feature.

**Energy, Climate Change, and Health**

Energy production and diversification of energy sources have been prominent foci of China in the last decades. Its energy production and consumption have soared after the 2000s, in parallel to decades-long energy and infrastructure development policies. However, China’s energy activities, partly due to the sheer size of its population and the corresponding energy consumption, has had significant effects on climate change, as well as on health of its citizens. Paradoxically, in addition to China being the world’s largest emitter of greenhouse gases, it is also the largest renewable energy producer. In order to strengthen the implementation of sustainable development in prioritized areas including energy supply, China is formulating operational guidelines for sustainable investment overseas that reflect the principles of the BRI. This session will address Chinese energy policy from a sustainable development perspective.

**Foreign Investment Protection, Sustainable Development and China**

The last few decades have seen a gradual and significant shift in Chinese foreign investment policy. Now party to more than a hundred international investment agreements (IIAs), China has tentatively initiated its BIT program in the early 1980s. However, these instruments, not unlike the rest of the IIA universe, were generally unclear as to whether the interests of foreign investments are not at the expense of the host country’s environment and the health of its citizens. It should also be noted that the global paradigm has shifted from a purely investor-centric focus to an approach increasingly seeking balance between private interests of investors and public interest. This session will look into how China’s developing investment protection regime accommodates and furthers its sustainable development and investment goals.

**China and the Authority of International Economic Courts and Tribunals**

Authority of international courts and tribunals in the context of states and other actors in international law has been an object of topical discussion in recent years. A highly important
stream of research has emerged, empirically investigating the nexus between law and sociology to better understand the influence and authority exercised and enjoyed by international institutions through their adjudicative activities and discourse. China is no exception to the area of influence of international courts. It is also an active proponent of dispute resolution mechanisms, such as the courts and arbitral proceedings designed for the BRI disputes. This session seeks to bring together experts in empirical legal, political and sociological research to assess Chinese interaction with the authority of international courts to understand the two-way influence they assert on one another. The session seeks to examine domestic effects of the influence and authority, which international courts exert in China. It will also discuss how the Chinese political and legal authorities perceive and react to, international law and policy-making.

**UN Sustainable Development Goals and Challenges for Developing Countries Hosting Chinese Investments**

Over the past years China has shifted its profile from being mainly a major recipient of foreign investments (FDI) to a country with remarkable rates of outward direct investment (ODI). Since 2015 the scale of Chinese ODI has exceeded its FDI. The country has adopted ambitious investment strategies targeted regionally (in ASEAN and in African countries) and globally (as the unprecedented in scale BRI). It has been argued that these policies should be compatible with the UN 2030 Agenda SDGs, and the concept of ‘green BRI’ has been advocated. However, implementation of this vision may pose challenges, especially considering that the recipients of Chinese ODI are often developing countries with limited capacities. The session examines this issue and seeks to address such questions as the allocation of responsibility for successful implementation of SDGs, scale of actual application of related measures, remaining reliance on coal projects and the problem of ‘greenwashing’ in BRI investments.

**Food Safety Governance and Sustainable Development**

Food safety is an issue of high importance and subject to constantly evolving policies at national, regional and international level, addressing long existing, as well as newly emerged problems. Attention is also increasingly paid to the linkage between environment, agriculture, health, trade and food, in order to regulate food safety in a systematic way and to promote sustainable development. Recently China has drawn inspirations from overseas experiences to update its food safety governance, while EU has introduced integrated official control to promote environment, animal and plant health as well as regulate their influence on food safety. An exchange of these national and regional experiences can contribute to harmonizing food safety rules at the international level, and thus benefit the promotion of food trade, as well as protection of public health and sustainable development.