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CONCEPTUAL FOUNDATIONS OF THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA'S INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE POLICY

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Abstract. The People's Republic of China is a major actor in global international development assistance. This article analyses white papers and other official documents related to China's international development assistance policy. Through detailed examination, the objectives, principles, and priority areas are identified, highlighting contemporary trend which is shifting from the terms "aid" and "donor – recipient relationships" to "partnership" and "international development co-operation". It is concluded that China actively employs development assistance as a tool in its foreign policy, enabling it to achieve national goals, increase its political and economic influence in the international arena, strengthen the legitimacy of its actions, and promote the Belt and road initiative and the construction of a global community of shared future.

Keywords: People's Republic of China; international development assistance; official development assistance; regulatory framework; White paper; Belt and road initiative; global community of shared future.

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КОНЦЕПТУАЛЬНЫЕ ОСНОВЫ ПОЛИТИКИ СОДЕЙСТВИЯ МЕЖДУНАРОДНОМУ РАЗВИТИЮ КИТАЙСКОЙ НАРОДНОЙ РЕСПУБЛИКИ

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Аннотация. Китайская Народная Республика существенно содействует международному развитию в глобальном масштабе. Проанализированы белые книги и другие документы Китая, посвященные политике страны в рассматриваемой области. На основе их детального изучения выявлены главные цели, принципы и приоритетные направления содействия международному развитию, отражены современные тенденции замены термина «помощь» термином «партнерство» и переход от отношений *донор – реципиент* к международному сотрудничеству в целях развития. Автор приходит к выводу о том, что Китай активно использует содействие развитию как инструмент в своей внешней политике. Такой подход обеспечивает государству достижение национальных целей, наращивание политического и экономического влияния на международной арене, укрепление легитимности действий и позволяет продвигать инициативу «Один пояс, один путь» и концепцию глобального сообщества общего будущего.

Ключевые слова: Китайская Народная Республика; содействие международному развитию; официальная помощь развитию; нормативная база; Белая книга; инициатива «Один пояс, один путь»; глобальное сообщество общего будущего.

The People's Republic of China is a major actor in global international development assistance. Since the beginning of the 21st century, especially in the wake of the global financial crisis of 2008–2009, China's significance in the world economy has increased, with a more active foreign policy and stronger international positions. China's substantial economic and political potential has allowed it to deploy a wide range of tools for international development assistance. China has particularly focused on Asian, African, and Latin American countries, demonstrating political affinity with developing nations while continuing to position itself as a developing country.

This article aims to analyse the regulatory framework of China's international development assistance policy. To this end, relevant white papers (2011, 2014, 2021) and other policy documents released by Chinese government agencies were reviewed. Scholarly works by Chinese, Russian, and Western authors informed this research.

Chinese author Huang Meito asserts that development assistance policy is multifaceted, encompassing development aid provided on a bilateral or multilateral basis, either as grants or concessional loans [1]. Ma Xue highlights that China emphasises experience-sharing based on equality and reciprocal benefit in its foreign aid [2]. Examining the regulatory framework and mechanisms of China's assistance, particularly in Africa, Wang Xinying notes significant developments and innovations in foreign aid policy, both theoretically and practically, since 2021 [3]. A. A. Mardashev argues that China has strengthened the conceptual, legal, institutional, instrumental, and resource bases of its external assistance and become a key donor in international development [4]. D. A. Degterev, Li Yan, and A. A. Trusova observe that China's assistance activities are regulated by normative legal acts of the State Council of the People's Republic of China (hereinafter – State Council),

Ministry of Commerce of the People's Republic of China, Ministry of Finance of the People's Republic of China, and other departments [5]. V. G. Baranovskii, Yu. D. Kvashnin, and N. V. Toganova, in their analysis of China's aid policy, note that the country places significant emphasis on political and image considerations [6]. According to V. L. Nezhdanov, the White paper of 2021 places special emphasis on the cultural and philosophical origins of China's aid practices [7]. J. F. Copper highlights that Western countries and certain international organisations offer critical assessments of China's aid policy, noting that the country, with its substantial resources, has established its own rules [8]. According to J. F. Copper, China shows significant interest in providing aid and investments for various infrastructure projects in countries facing substantial obstacles and risks. R. Schwarz and M. Rudyak claim that China views the provision of official development assistance as a responsibility of developed countries [9]. In contrast, China uses the broader term “development cooperation” to advance the Belt and road initiative (BRI) and the Global development initiative.

Content analysis and a comparative approach were employed to investigate the conceptual foundations of China's international development cooperation.

International development assistance is an integral part of China's foreign policy. This foreign policy tool facilitates the achievement of diplomatic objectives, such as maintaining friendly relations with recipient countries, supporting their efforts to preserve territorial integrity and national sovereignty, promoting global and regional stability and security, strengthening China's position on the international stage and in the global economy, ensuring border security, and creating a favourable external environment for domestic reforms [4]. D. D. Trinidad argues that three aspects define the nature of China's philosophy on international

development assistance: the aid management system, state-civil society relationship, and internal economic changes [10, p. 22]. According to D. D. Trinidad, aid serves as an instrument of China's economic diplomacy, enabling the successful resolution of economic and political challenges.

China implements its development aid based on the five principles of peaceful coexistence, proposed by premier Zhou Enlai during negotiations with the Indian delegation on 31 December 1953. These principles include mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, mutual non-aggression, non-interference in each other's internal affairs, equality and mutual benefit, and peaceful coexistence. They formed the basis of the ten principles proposed at the Bandung conference in 1955, also known as the South – South cooperation principles. In brief, these principles encompass respect for partners' sovereignty, the absence of political conditions, a focus on mutual benefit and cooperation, and the promotion of economic development. China has consistently adhered to them in its policy towards developing countries [5]. Furthermore, China has incorporated these principles into its policy documents on development assistance.

Notably, China is not a member of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development and its Development Assistance Committee. This allows China to make independent decisions, set priority areas, and gives it a great degree of latitude in implementing its international development assistance policy.

China's approach to international development is conceptually grounded in white papers and policy directives issued by the State Council. To date, the State Council has released three white papers on this subject in October 2011, 2014, and 2021.

The 2011 document articulated the core tenets of China's foreign aid policy, emphasising following components:

- continuous support for recipient states in enhancing their capacity for self-reliant development;
- absence of political conditions for the provision of assistance;
- commitment to equality, mutual benefit, and collaborative development;
- tailoring aid to the specific needs of recipient countries;
- ongoing improvement of foreign aid delivery, innovation, and management system reform¹.

The document details primary financial instruments for foreign aid: grants, interest-free loans, and concessional loans. They address the specifics of implementing projects for human resource development, technical

cooperation, in-kind assistance, and the provision of emergency humanitarian aid.

The White paper of 2011 identified various forms of foreign aid, including comprehensive infrastructure and industrial projects, providing goods and materials, technical cooperation, and human resource development. Additionally, it encompasses the deployment of medical teams abroad, emergency humanitarian assistance, volunteer programmes in foreign countries, and debt relief.

The White paper of 2011 presents in full detail the key positions, basic principles, and main provisions of China's foreign aid policy, as acknowledged by Wang Xinying. It further addresses aspects such as aid delivery methods, funding sources, and management mechanisms. Crucially, it underscores that China's foreign aid is not an isolated policy tool but is closely linked with other aspects of foreign policy, as well as trade and investment [3, p. 127].

In July 2014, the State Council published another White paper titled "China's foreign aid"², consisting of five chapters: "Development of foreign aid", "Assistance in improving living standards", "Promoting economic and social development", "Foreign aid in the context of regional cooperation mechanisms", and "International cooperation". The publication was partly driven by the launch of the BRI, which also sought to refine global development and governance. Subsequently, the BRI has evolved to advance China's geo-economic and geopolitical aspirations.

By proposing a new framework for enhancing international cooperation, China aimed to nurture partnerships with a greater number of countries. This framework underlined the imperative of addressing infrastructural disparities that impede the growth of trade and economic ties at both regional and global levels. Moreover, it was envisaged that the BRI would be a means for progressively elevating the foreign policy priorities of Chinese companies within the objectives of international development assistance [6, p. 159, 170].

According to the 2014 document, China endeavours to make a significant contribution to foreign aid, directing substantial efforts to improve living conditions worldwide, promote economic and social development in recipient countries, provide assistance within the framework of regional cooperation mechanisms, and actively participate in international exchanges and cooperation in the realm of international development assistance. It is noted that China's strengthened position on the international stage and expanded financial capabilities have enabled it to engage more actively in aid programmes executed by international organisations, exchange experiences, and analyse the outcomes of practical cooperation on development assistance issues.

¹China's foreign aid [Electronic resource]. URL: https://english.www.gov.cn/archive/white_paper/2014/09/09/content281474986284620.htm (date of access: 15.10.2024).

²China's foreign aid [Electronic resource]. URL: https://english.www.gov.cn/archive/white_paper/2014/08/23/content_281474982986592.htm (date of access: 15.10.2024).

On 10 January 2021, the State Council information office released a new White paper titled “China’s international development cooperation in the new era”. While retaining core provisions from preceding documents, the 2021 version reflected the evolving political landscape and processes at the turn of the 2010s and 2020s. These included the COVID-19 pandemic and the robust financing of infrastructure projects under the BRI. The title of the White paper reflects contemporary trend in China’s foreign policy, which is shifting from the terms “aid” and “donor – recipient relationships” to “partnership” and “international development cooperation”. It appears that the adjustment in terminology was also linked to China’s desire to distance itself from commercial associations, demonstrate its commitment to socio-economic development, and affirm its dedication to the UN sustainable development goals. Furthermore, changes in international development assistance policy were prompted by increased criticism from Western countries regarding the growing debt dependency on China as a result of participation in the BRI and the implementation of numerous and diverse infrastructure projects.

The White paper of 2021 formulated the concept “international development cooperation” and provided the following definition: “International development cooperation means China’s bilateral and multilateral efforts within the framework of South – South cooperation, aimed at promoting economic and social development through the provision of foreign aid, humanitarian assistance, and other means”³. This definition highlights the transformation of China’s approach to aid policy: whereas previously funds were primarily allocated within the context of bilateral relations, the country has now increasingly utilised multilateral platforms.

This document comprises eight chapters: “China’s cooperation in international development based on the concept of a global community of shared future”, “Achieving new progress in international development cooperation”, “Enhancing international cooperation under the Belt and road initiative”, “Contribution to the UN 2030 Agenda for sustainable development”, “Joint response to global humanitarian challenges”, “Supporting endogenous growth in developing countries”, “Strengthening international exchanges and triangular cooperation”, and “Prospects for China’s international development cooperation”.

The White paper of 2011 underscores that the creation of a global community with a common destiny constitutes the overarching goal of China’s international development cooperation in the new era. China continues to expand the scope of its international partnerships, aiming to bridge the North – South divide by prioritising the least developed countries in Asia and Africa, as well as other developing nations participating

in the BRI. The document highlights that South – South cooperation remains central to China’s policy on promoting international development.

The new principles outlined in the White paper of 2021 include conducting development cooperation based on the five principles of peaceful coexistence, fulfilling development commitments in alignment with China’s growing national strength, focusing on improving the livelihoods and development of partner countries according to their specific needs, sharing expertise and technology, training local skilled personnel, implementing effective cooperation in diverse forms, ensuring the sustainability and efficiency of Chinese aid projects, fostering exchanges and mutual learning, and seizing new opportunities in response to domestic and global changes. Notably, the final three principles appear for the first time in such a document, reflecting advancements in the governance mechanisms underpinning China’s development assistance.

A key innovation is the Chinese leadership’s decision to allow recipient countries to manage projects independently, provided they have appropriate legal and regulatory frameworks in place. Previously, the Chinese government oversaw project design, tendering processes, and implementation monitoring.

The White paper of 2021 notes that China engages in development cooperation and contributes to infrastructure, trade, finance, and people-to-people exchanges based on the specific needs of individual countries. This approach creates opportunities and space for successful collaboration. According to the document, China seeks to assist developing countries in enhancing their capacity for self-reliant development by increasing targeted assistance through human resource development and technical cooperation.

The White paper of 2021 further asserts that China is an active proponent of global partnerships for development. It engages in dialogue and exchanges with international institutions and bilateral donors to explore and implement triangular cooperation using an open and pragmatic approach. Prior to the publication of this third iteration of the White paper, the concept of “triangular cooperation” had not been explicitly addressed in China’s official documents on international development assistance.

The document highlights China’s active engagement in multilateral development initiatives through the South – South Cooperation Fund, including with various international organisations (UNDP, UN WFP, UNHCR, UNICEF, WHO, and ICRC), and non-governmental entities. This collaborative approach has enabled China to implement development programmes across diverse sectors, such as food aid, disaster recovery, refugee assistance, and maternal and child health in countries across Asia, Africa, and Latin America.

³China’s international development cooperation in the new era [Electronic resource]. URL: https://english.www.gov.cn/archive/whitepaper/202101/10/content_WS5ffa6bbbc6d0f72576943922.html (date of access: 10.10.2024).

China views multilateral development cooperation as a vital tool for achieving national objectives, enhancing its political and economic influence, strengthening the legitimacy of its actions, and improving the effectiveness of its development aid. In turn, multilateral organisations have shown significant interest in cooperating with China to secure its financial support.

The White paper of 2021 emphasises that China will continue to provide comprehensive support for international cooperation, adhere to the concept of a global community of shared future, and act based on the principles of justice and mutual respect. According to the document, China's approach to foreign aid is evolving in alignment with contemporary demands, undergoing a transformation towards international development cooperation. This evolution signifies a transition into a new phase of international engagement, characterised by innovative practices and significant milestones.

The White paper of 2021 highlights China's role as a leading development partner. It notes that in April 2018, the China International Development Cooperation Agency was established under the State Council to enhance the planning and coordination of international development cooperation efforts. China has improved mechanisms for monitoring foreign aid projects to enhance their quality, formulated clear rules and regulations for project management, and refined mechanisms for the allocation of financial resources.

The document notes that China intends to fulfil its international commitments in accordance with its national capabilities and reserves the right to independently determine the volume of funds allocated to achieve international development goals. According to the document, China adheres to the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities and regards North – South cooperation as the primary channel for international development cooperation, with South – South cooperation as a complement. China urges developed countries to promptly and fully honour their official development assistance commitments, providing greater support to developing nations. White paper of 2021 articulates a commitment to respecting national sovereignty, non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries, and refraining from making political demands.

China has steadily expanded and modernised its legal and regulatory framework for international en-

gagement. On 28 June 2023, the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress promulgated the law on international relations⁴. This law systematises the ideas and concepts put forward by Xi Jinping in the realm of foreign policy. Notably, Art. 27 of the document is dedicated to the implementation of foreign aid and the provision of international development assistance. According to the document, China provides foreign aid through diverse means, encompassing economic, technical, material, personnel, managerial, and other forms of support, aiming to promote the economic and social development of developing countries, enhance their capacity for self-reliance, and foster international development cooperation.

The White paper of 26 September 2023 titled "A global community of shared future: China's proposals and actions"⁵, emphasises China's dedication to an independent and peaceful foreign policy aimed at maintaining global peace and promoting shared development. The document also advocates for enhanced coordination among major economies for development, policy continuity, consistency and sustainability, and stronger global development partnerships for greater equality and balance, improved multilateral development cooperation to leverage synergies, and expedited implementation of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for sustainable development.

Promoting international development remains a key priority of China's foreign policy. An examination of China's legal and regulatory framework reveals the development of a unique international assistance model, drawing upon the best practices of multilateral organisations and incorporating specific aid delivery mechanisms. This evolving assistance framework demonstrates China's proactive engagement in fostering partnerships with nations across Africa, Asia, and Latin America, predicated on mutual respect and reciprocal learning. This strategy aims to deepen understanding and trust while concurrently promoting its political philosophy.

Support from developing countries for building a global community of shared future and their participation in the BRI facilitates China's pursuit of its foreign economic and political goals, enhances its international standing, and garners support from both partner states and international bodies.

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