

Conference on China and Global Sustainability Transition

Bath, 24-25 June 2025

Venue: Guildhall, High St, Bath BA1 5AW

None of today's planetary crises can be tackled without China's involvement. In less than three decades, China has moved from a low-income country to a rising global power, especially since the launch of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in 2013. But China's role in global sustainability governance seems contradictory and divisive. On one hand, China has been the world's largest greenhouse emitter for the last fifteen years and has financed many fossil fuel projects across the Global South. On the other hand, China has been a global powerhouse of green industries and has made important contributions to accelerating energy transition around the world. In various fora, the Chinese government has shown its aspiration to become a global leader on environmental and green development cooperation by, for instance, promoting investments in clean technologies such as renewables. At the same time, China's overseas engagement strategy is changing, with, for example, projects becoming smaller in size and less dependent on state financing. These developments have large implications for the global effort to tackle the world's pressing sustainability challenges. As such, there is an urgent need to better understand the ongoing evolution of "Global China" and its potential future trajectories, as well as the potential to engage with China for developing effective global governance for sustainable development.

However, understanding and interacting with China and various Chinese stakeholders and counterparts has become increasingly challenging. In many countries – particularly the Global North – interactions with China have been significantly constrained under claims of threat to national security, and discussions on China are too often politicised rather than evidence-based. Growing tensions between China and the US have further exacerbated this trend over the last few years and the second Trump administration is likely to take an even more hostile position against China and pressure US allies to decouple with China.

In this context, objective and constructive conversations about China and its global influence, which recognise complexity and nuance, are all the more important. The Bath 2025 conference will gather leading experts on China and sustainability from academia, civil society, and governments from both the Global North and South to discuss opportunities and challenges to engage China for accelerating global sustainability transition. We aim to build a strong global academic-policy network for overcoming barriers to understanding China and to chart constructive paths to cooperation between China and the rest of the world for sustainable development. This 1.5-day conference will consist of keynote speakers, several thematic roundtables on China's changing influence on global sustainability governance, and interactive group discussions to gather opinions from all participants. The conference will be held under the Chatham House Rule.