

Abstract

As the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB or the Bank) enters its second decade in early 2026, this dissertation analyzes its founding, development, and the drivers of its lending and membership growth, focusing on the interplay between Chinese strategic interests and multilateral safeguards. Using a dataset spanning 2016–2024, I employ a two-stage empirical approach to separate the factors influencing loan selection from those determining allocation amounts. The findings reveal a bifurcated logic: Loan selection exhibits a “supplementary” pattern—trade integration with China and lower levels of democracy boost approval odds—while allocation follows a “remedial” logic, with smaller loans for close diplomatic partners and countries deeply indebted to China. The analysis further highlights a strategic “division of labor” between the AIIB and China’s bilateral lending channels under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), with the Bank exercising greater caution toward lower-income, less democratic BRI participants. Finally, the results indicate a temporal shift toward a more pragmatic, trade-oriented focus following the COVID-19 pandemic.

Complementing the lending analysis, this study conducts a two-cohort quantitative examination of membership expansion. It uses a cross-sectional dataset for prospective founding members (2015) and a country-year panel dataset for prospective non-founding members (2016–2024). The findings identify a stage-dependent dynamic that parallels the AIIB’s evolution from a negotiated institution to an operational lender with an observable track record. Specifically, founding membership (2015) followed a dual logic of “supply-side credibility”—enlisting financially sound economies to ensure the Bank’s fundraising viability—and “regional identity,” securing the participation of regional countries to fulfill its 75% regional capital requirement. In contrast, post-establishment membership (2016–2024) exhibited a markedly different trajectory, driven by China-centered economic embeddedness and “performance-based diffusion” tied to the Bank’s observable operational track record.

A synthesis of these findings reveals that the AIIB operates not merely as a static hybrid born of the founding compromise between Chinese statecraft and multilateral safeguards, but as an “adaptive institution” that dynamically navigates between Chinese strategic preferences and the imperatives of multilateral legitimacy across different institutional levels. This dissertation provides a robust analytical framework for understanding the Bank’s first decade. By illuminating the multi-level and temporal nature of the Bank’s adaptive balancing act, the study offers a crucial lens for assessing how rising powers may reshape global economic governance in the 21st century.