

ROUTLEDGE HANDBOOK ON GLOBAL CHINA

Edited by Maximilian Mayer, Emilian Kavalski, Marina Rudyak and Xin Zhang

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INTRODUCTION

Global China: New Approaches to Research on China in the World

*Maximilian Mayer, Emilian Kavalski,
Marina Rudyak and Xin Zhang*

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INTRODUCTION

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Introduction

What is “Global China”? The question might appear tautological to some; in fact, it has been quite some time since the proclamation that “China is everywhere” (Benhod 2006) became the go-to shorthand for policy and scholarly punditry on Beijing’s global outreach. Today, no one appears to doubt that China is a key international actor that can affect processes and outcomes from Mekong to the Moon. In the aftermath of “Going out” and the “Belt and Road Initiative,” Chinese investments and infrastructural ventures are mushrooming not only in the most remote corners of the world but even eyeing the depths of outer space. China is the biggest trade partner for the majority of economies world-wide. At the same time, China’s influence is spreading both within established international organizations such as the United Nations (UN) system and regional fora, as well as institutions established by Beijing – all this, while Chinese military capabilities are growing rapidly. The notion of Global China, however, does not refer merely to the growing prestige, material effects and international agency of the People’s Republic of China (PRC). Instead, the claim of the contributions to this collection is that Global China reflects complex phenomena that precede, converge with, respond to, and trouble the effects and agency associated with the dynamics of “China’s rise.” Undoubtedly, the attention to China’s growing power, as well as whether and how the country challenges the “rules-based liberal international order” (Ikenberry 2018, Johnston 2019, Shambaugh 2013, Weiss and Wallace 2021), remain important topics for research. But this volume critically scrutinizes the limitations of such an endeavor, suggesting an alternative research agenda.

Conflicting accounts and oscillating viewpoints indicate that our understanding of the magnitude of China’s global impact remains contested. Observers emphasize with anxiety, on the one hand, that China is becoming a superpower that challenges US hegemony and undermines the influence of the locales lumped together under the label of “the West” – both of which, until very recently, were considered the pivot of power, global standards and influence in world politics (Brown 2023, Garlick 2023, Ikenberry 2008, Moldicz 2022, Foot 2021, Pillsbury 2015). Indeed, an emboldened Chinese leadership has gained increasing confidence. Beijing’s growing desire to fashion international relations has been

reinforced by the self-assured leadership of Xi Jinping. The growing assertiveness of China's domestic and international strategies bears the stamp of Xi's influence over the policy-making process (Zhao 2023). Contra Shambaugh (2013, 2020: 4), the issue of whether China is a "partial power" appears to be resolved. As a recent study asserts, "China has emerged as a truly global actor, affecting every region and every major issue area [...] China is increasingly and self-consciously global in its political reach" (Chhabra et al. 2021: 1).

On the other hand, pundits have recently voiced concerns with the potentially dangerous implications of a "peaking China" (Beckley and Brands 2022, Erickson and Collins 2021). Prior to China's economic downturn in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, the established purview was that it is the complex interaction between the upheavals marking the post-Cold War international system and China's ability to maintain consistent levels of economic growth that have allowed Beijing to continuously grow its capacities and navigate with confidence the turbulent currents of world affairs. This has become particularly conspicuous in the wake of the deepening economic, social and political crises across Europe and North America during the first decade of the 2000s. These dynamics have led some commentators to expect that China's leaders may be compelled to act quickly to achieve unification with Taiwan and to radically reconfigure the East Asian regional order before current power advantages evaporate.

In this context, it needs to be acknowledged that the notion of Global China entails an encounter not only with different views on China's global roles and influence, but also an acknowledgement of the diverse and heterogeneous manifestations of Chinese agency. The attention to trade figures, infrastructural investments and geopolitical rivalry associated with China's "rise" do seem to offer a very limited account of the phenomenon of Global China; in fact, their narrowness tends to befuddle its explanation and understanding. In addressing this "deficit of understanding" (Rudolph and Szonyi 2018: 2), this volume's examination of the notion and practices of Global China seeks to provoke thoughtful assessments of the quandaries, puzzles and paradoxes underpinning the contingent and multifarious ways in which Chinese global and planetary agency and responses to it reconfigure our understanding and explanation of global life in new, unexpected and interesting ways. For instance, the image of "China" has been localized in domestic political struggles from Fiji to Finland, which oftentimes has little to do with the actions and developments in the People's Republic of China.

Enriching the existing analytical toolkit and perspectives, this collection aims to offer a much-needed exploration to advance understandings of the full range of dynamics underpinning the notion and practices of Global China. The contemporary debate about the growing power of a rising China – or, in contrast, dangers of its imminent decline – which dominates most conversations on Beijing's outreach, has reached an impasse. And an analytical reset is urgently required as policy and theoretical concerns have intensified. The question "Does China matter?" (Buzan and Foot 2004) must be replaced with "How does it matter globally?" Indeed, a growing urgency to better understand the multidirectional and multidimensional facets of China's global influence is evident not only in the ways in which various governments around the world have responded to China's impact, but also because Chinese foreign policy initiatives are now animating new narratives, registers and debates from the local to the global scales (Schuman et al. 2023). Articulations of democracy, development policy, connectivity, digital sovereignty, infrastructural statecraft and a multiplicity of other essential international conversations are – as demonstrated by the

contributions to this collection – in one way or another, intimately affected by, or entangled with, China’s global activities.

This volume, therefore, not only embarks on making sense of the patterns, ideas, puzzles and practices that are integral to the phenomenon of Global China, but also draws attention to five crucial perspectival shifts for research design and questions:

- First, the concept of Global China suggests to shift the focus away from analyzing China as “opening to the world,” its “socialization” or “integration” into the global system to an understanding that views China – historically and presently – as constituted by and constituting the global.
- Second, a Global China perspective does not start with the assumption that a dominant China imposes its will on other international actors, especially those in the Global South, but instead acknowledges local agency and complex local-Chinese interactions and the multiple ways in which Chinese actors, investments and ideas are being localized around the world with diverse outcomes and in the context of different reactions from its interlocutors.
- Third, the concept of Global China complements the attention on China as a technologically expansionist power towards the conspicuous observation that Chinese ingenuity and agency is a key factor in addressing existential global environmental and social challenges and creating new possibilities along emergent global technological frontiers both in the Global South and North.
- Fourth, the encounter with Global China shifts the focus away from modernization as a Western-led Euro-Atlantic story towards the understanding that “Easternization” might come with a fundamental reconstitution of modernities and the underlying social, cultural, economic, educational and political patterns defining global life.
- Fifth, the framework of Global China offers a timely look at China’s rise, not merely as a plethora of geo-economic and geopolitical changes. New methodical approaches and analytical frameworks are engendered to introduce novel and more nuanced perspectives and interpretations of the current and likely future trajectories of the PRC in world politics, and their attendant resonance in multiple locales, contexts and sectors.

In what follows, we critically discuss the crucial binaries that underpin research on China’s rise. We then review the traps and fallacies of knowledge production about China. We briefly introduce all the chapters and the thematic sections of the volume, before summarizing and contextualizing the key findings from the wide range of contributions.

Beyond Binary Premises

The theoretical and conceptual discussions of Global China undertaken by contributors to this collection allow us to make several clarifications that arise from the underlying commitments and assumptions of the volume. To fully explore the above-mentioned shifts of perspective enabled by a Global China approach several assumptions are crucial. Firstly, there is a need to recognize that world affairs have entered a historical period *after* the rise of China (cf. Breslin 2021). We argue that China should no longer be considered an *emerging* or *rising* power – even if large parts of China may still be at developing country levels. It is significant for international relations to recognize that China has *risen* and is again a

global actor. While this viewpoint can imply a change of perspectives, some changes are more obvious than others. Two illustrations may suffice. For one, as the Chinese economy was once shaped by Western-led globalization, it is now a major force in co-shaping a post-Western globalization (Johnston and Rudyak 2017). For another, as Foot (2021) proposes, China's narrative strategy reverses Woodrow Wilson's famous dictum. For the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), the imperative perhaps is to shape a world "unsafe for democracy."

The conceptual efforts to make sense of Chinese global agency and its impacts are still scattered and in need of a synthesis (Pan and Kavalski 2022). In an effort to sustain and foster those and other efforts, the Global China perspective espoused by this volume takes issue with the friend/foe binary that infects critically the study of China. The suggestion is that Global China is meaningful both as a phenomenon and as a point of departure for critical theoretical reflections. Accounting for its complexity and analyzing its key facets requires overcoming entrenched ontological, epistemic and normative viewpoints. Subsequently, we are convinced that conceptualizing China's agency solely in terms of national security, geoeconomics competition or state-centric geopolitical consideration gives rise to a number of fallacies that should be actively avoided.

Thus, the contributions to this volume add to the development of nuanced (if more complicated) perspectives capable of capturing the simultaneous positioning of China's outreach along an interaction continuum of partnership, competition, rivalry and many more types of relationships – as well as registers of sociality and coproduction – which go to the heart of the notion and practices of Global China. By implication, there is no such thing as *the* theory of Global China, but a multiplicity of analytical takes on the variety of experiences and phenomena enfolded under the label of Global China.

Such an approach to the concept and practices of Global China challenges two dominant preoccupations that rely on a binary perspective: (1) The idea of China's socialization and integration into the existing institutional arrangements of the international order, which is often referred to as the liberal empire, liberal Western world order or multilateral rules-based order; and (2) The notion of China becoming a revisionist power that utilizes its growing power and resources to alter or even "sinicize" the patterns of the global order. These assumptions not only confirm the normative naiveté of Eurocentric master narratives, but also reflect the concept of "sinological Orientalism" pointed out by Vukovich (2013), which portrays China's development as a question of assimilation. By reframing the discussion in this manner, this approach not only challenges the limited perspective that sees China's role solely in terms of either integration or revisionism, but also recognizes the complexity and plurality of China's engagement with the regional and global order, moving beyond simplistic categorizations (Loke 2021, Goh 2019) while acknowledging the diversity of experiences and narratives within China itself.

Moreover, our concern with binaries highlights the problematic nature of Eurocentric master narratives such as the "standard of civilization" and underscores the need for a more nuanced understanding of China's development. The idea of socialization is not only deeply orientalist, but also reduces China's modernization to a mere variant of Western modernization. Scholars have, in contrast, long pointed out that modernity is plural, and that it is useful to speak of multiple modernities, especially with regard to non-Western societies (Buzan and Lawson 2020, Denison 2017, Lee 2020, Sachsenmaier et al. 2002). The tendency – both inside and outside China – to view China's modernization through a

single narrow lens reduces its rich and diverse history and culture to a singular process of inevitable assimilation or the permanence of a threatening difference.

[The] new orientalism is part of a neo-colonial or imperialist project: not just the production of knowledge about an “area” but the would-be management and administration of the area for economic, political, and cultural-symbolic benefit. But whereas orientalism in Said turned upon a posited, essential *difference* between Orient and Occident [...], the new form turns upon *sameness* or more specifically, upon China’s *becoming sameness*. China is seen as in a process of haltingly but inevitably becoming-the-same as “us”: open, liberal, modern, free. Put another way, “China” is understood as becoming *generally equivalent* to the West.

(Vukovich 2013: 1)

As China’s sameness could not have been substantiated, it is important to remember that the idea of socialization used to be influential among the first generation of May Fourth Movement intellectuals. It came in the form of a scathing deficit analysis of China’s culture, institutions and people. Their “Chinese Occidentalism” advocated a radical departure from traditions. China, as leaders of the May Fourth Movement claimed, needed to assimilate Western practices to transform its backward “national character.” The debate about China’s “national character” has returned in various waves and variations related to shifting ideological and cultural currents ever since (cf. Li 2022). Nonetheless, the struggle with the question of China’s socialization or assimilation remains a foundational matter. Arguably, its latest iteration – with a clear distancing effort – is reflected in the CCP’s emphasis on “socialism with Chinese characteristics” since the 1980s and subsequent series of key concepts with the modifier “with Chinese characteristics.” Additionally, Chinese social media discourses not only reproduce official binaries, but also engage with ideas originating from the reactionary fringes of Western political discourse, including anti-wokism and gendered nationalism (Zhang 2020).

The Global China perspectives also reject another problematic premise that underpins the notion of socialization. The false presumption that China would somehow come from the outside and is in need to be connected. On that issue, the historical reality is clear. China always was an integral part of global politics and has never been external to it. To quote the Chinese philosopher Zhao Tingyang: “There is no outside of the globalization process” (Zhao 2021: 1) and, hence, all kinds of Chinese actors are part of various global connections and processes, not least the multiple infrastructures of global capitalism (Dirlik 2017). To deny that, especially with respect to the present, means to ignore the ever-deepening network-based logic of globalization that ties us all together (Callahan 2012: 51). Crucially, this observation is not only highly relevant with respect to the present, but strongly relates to China’s global economic history. Indeed, historically speaking, China’s economy has been closely connected with other regions of the world (Hung 2015, Mayer and Kavalski 2024).

Hence, the mere recognition of China’s independent existence within the global arena is insufficient. Instead, approaching China from a global perspective emphasizes the vital importance of perceiving its deep entanglement with “global histories, processes, phenomena, and trends” (Franceschini and Loubere 2022: 6). In other words, China should not be examined as an isolated entity, but rather as a dynamic component intricately

interconnected with, and co-constitutive of, the rest of the world. Failing to recognize how much Chinese investors, banks, construction, manufacturing and trading companies are part of global production and supply chains, and the immense capacity they possess for learning and creative agency to ensure iterative adaptation to a changing global environment, leads to selective claims about both China's domestic policy choices and their global impacts (Ang 2018).

An illustrative example of such systemic blind spots is the widespread criticism in the Euro-Atlantic public sphere that China is destroying African forest reserves – without acknowledging the growing demand for affordable furniture by European and North-American consumers as a key driver of deforestation (Anthony 2018: 11, Cudworth et al. 2018: 277). The same could be said for Chinese rare earth mining and refining, a large share of which ends up in communications technologies such as smartphones and laptop computers, the majority of which cater to the demands of Western consumers. Consequently, the contributions to this volume argue that comprehending the diverse enmeshments and interactions of China within the global system necessitates a relational perspective that acknowledges the fluid nature of sociopolitical entities (Franceschini and Loubere 2022: 6).

“Othering” China furnishes yet another binary premise with a long history and lasting consequences. As Michel Foucault (1973: xix) acknowledged, China has been positioned as the ultimate other to Western intellectual imagination, or what he called “heterotopia” – a place so disturbing that its difference “undermines language.” China thus becomes “the Other country” not merely because of its location on the opposite end of the Eurasian landmass, but also because it represents “a culture entirely devoted to the ordering of space, but one that does not distribute the multiplicity of existing things into any of the categories that make it possible for us to name, speak, and think” (Foucault 1973: xix, Kavalski 2018: 67). The practices of othering China are typically associated with the discourses of socialization. Classical tropes include labelling China as “yellow peril,” a “cuddly panda,” or a “fire-breathing dragon.” Such exotic tropes and the stereotypes that they engender have a long history in public imaginations and policy narratives. While tropes of othering may often remain dormant, they can be reactivated at any point in time. For instance, the COVID-19 pandemic was accompanied by the increase in racially-motivated violence against people of Chinese and “Asian” backgrounds (Ooi and D’Arcangelis 2017, Li and Nicholson 2021, Moldicz 2023).

Amplified by the rising systemic competition between the US and China, the democracy/autocracy distinction has become another influential contemporary manifestation of such othering. As a result, both research designs and policy punditry often tend to frame China as the authoritarian other. While this certainly does address legitimate concerns, an analysis of Chinese information and communication technology in particular that employs (almost) exclusively the lens of “authoritarian tech” bears the danger of overemphasizing the potential export of authoritarian models by Chinese tech companies and overlooking or downplaying other important uses of technology (see Dimitrov, this volume, Arsène, this volume, Creemers, this volume). By being attentive to this inherent contradiction we want to caution against forms of “digital orientalism” (Mayer 2020) or “sino-technophobia” (Mahoney 2023, Mahoney, this volume), which may unnecessarily or unintendedly intensify the ongoing “systemic rivalry” between authoritarian and liberal democratic systems; in particular, as we are conscious of the fact that Western governments and platform companies, too, contribute to the global proliferation of surveillance practices (including their

export to non-democracies) underwritten by the globalization of surveillance capitalism (cf. Lin 2023).

These and other conceptual binaries plague research on China and continue to have longstanding effects on the selection of cases, frameworks, methodologies and puzzles. It is therefore critical to scrutinize them amid the heated current academic and political debates on China. Doing so also enables scholars to be transparent about the purposes for which they theorize and explore Global China (cf. Cox 1981: 128). To argue against the binary premises enshrined in much of the “China’s rise” literature is to reject foregone conclusions of nearly naturalized antagonism between a reified “China” and the “West.” It is, thus, important to make the reproduction of binaries itself an object of inquiry.

Scrutinizing Knowledge Production on China

In what ways do we understand and analyze China differently through the notion of Global China? What is the set of (alternative) analytical propositions associated with and prompted by the notion and practices of Global China? Different ways of understanding the same phenomena are linked to practices and techniques of knowledge production. As demonstrated by the contributions to this volume, adopting a Global China perspective does not always necessitate the development of new conceptual frameworks and theoretical perspectives; yet, it requires openness and curiosity to recognize the productive opportunities for innovative “rethinking” and imaginative theoretical reflection provided by China’s “rise” (Nordin et al. 2019, Pan and Kavalski 2018). At the level of academic knowledge production, certain theoretical concepts and terms associated with China have become pervasive in ways that can be detrimental to analysis. The process of tracing the multiple dynamics of Global China simultaneously interrogates dominant views and reveals knowledge traps that need to be addressed in the study of China.

Trap of Great Power Reductionism

Great power reductionism is a tendency that appears to be especially widespread in North-American scholarship on China. Adopting a geopolitical lens, this approach portrays China and its growing influence as an attempt at changing the frameworks of the international order. Indeed, theoretical frameworks, such as “power transition theory” (Chan, this volume), “offensive realism” and the notion of the “Thucydides trap,” which frame China’s rise as the single most relevant political question, have also been adapted to this new transition. China has, accordingly, assumed the status of a revisionist power, as the perceived Chinese attempt to establish its own hegemony – first in East Asia and then in the rest of the world – challenges US preponderance and the world order that rests on an unquestioned US hegemonic position (Allison 2015, Mearsheimer 2021, Walton and Kavalski 2017). This view is prevalent among US policy-making elites. It is supported by a bipartisan agreement across both houses of the US Congress. The view also has its mirror image among Chinese strategic thinkers. Chinese commentators and scholars echo such great power reductionism by stressing the “Cold War mentality” that increasingly dominates international affairs and policy-making (Yan 2020). Without a doubt there is an interlocked dynamic of mutual negative perceptions at work that is, unsurprisingly, a product of, and driving force for, a security dilemma that has trapped China and the US into a spiral of growing mistrust.

The key caveat of the Global China perspective is that the reality of these dangerous dynamics – including the intensification of territorial disputes in the South China Sea and the deterioration of Sino-US relations – should not preclude the study of other crucial relationships and dynamics. Viewing China solely through the lens of impending geopolitical confrontations and hegemonic struggles for power furnishes a framework far too narrow to capture the complexity of China's entanglements. It also makes China appear far more formidable than it actually is. In fact, China's power and influence remain uneven and limited. Breslin (2017: 13) calls for a “more nuanced, disaggregated view” that distinguishes between different arenas, policy areas and levels at which China exercises power. For example, scholars working on technological standards or China's neighborhood relations point out that even with growing technological capabilities and massive infrastructure investments, China still faces significant pushback and needs to expend substantial resources on negotiating because of the persistent agency of other actors, including corporations, organizations and small states (cf. Cho and Kavalski 2015, Murton and Lord 2020). Franceschini and Loubere (2022: 1–2) note that “unique constellations of actors – from multinational companies to middle powers – have cleverly navigated for sometimes greater freedom of maneuver amid China's growing influence.” In short, the analytical and policy fixation on the US-China rivalry occludes the complexity of “power” in global life and the multiplicity of asymmetric and hierarchical relations.

Territorial Trap and Methodological Nationalism

Often, the study of China falls inadvertently into a territorial trap. It reproduces the idea that the country's territorial boundaries could coincide with the analytical conceptualization of its operations and sovereignty (cf. Agnew 2010). The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has, for instance, challenged the simplified notion of China as a state with hard-core sovereigntist attitudes. Indeed, as Narins and Agnew (2020: 810) argue, the “absence of an official Chinese government BRI map promotes a ‘useful fuzziness’ with regards to Chinese leaders, business people and ordinary citizens being open to crafting a new, as of yet undefined, geopolitical identity in the future.” Several chapters of this volume (Flock and Meyer-Clement, Mierzejewski and Rudakowska, Chen, Thomas) stress the importance of subnational actors such as cities and provinces for China's geoeconomic trajectories and commercial entanglements. Pan and Zhao (in this volume) also emphasize the role of multiple stakeholders and agencies:

China's rise represents a process of its holographic transition and global entanglements, it is the world that has made what China is today and will continue to be essential to what China will become tomorrow. Understandings of China based on the “territorial China” approach are no longer, if they ever were, adequate and are likely to distort more than they enlighten.

(Pan and Zhao, this volume)

Lee (2017: xiii) also has proposed to approach “global China as a subject of sociological inquiry.” The present volume takes inspiration from this literature. We follow the boundary-transgressing insights from Lee's research on the operation of different forms of Chinese capital in African countries, as it has a more general relevance:

China casts an outsize shadow on many different arenas of world development, challenging the field of China studies to abandon its methodological nationalism so as to catch up with China's transformation into a global force. Global China is taking myriad forms, ranging from foreign direct investment, labor export, and multilateral financial institutions for building cross-regional infrastructure to the globalization of Chinese civil society organizations, creation of global media networks, and global joint ventures in higher education, to name just a few examples.

(Lee 2017: xiii)

Another crucial way to think beyond the territorial trap is to follow closely how Chinese political and intellectual elites understand China's territoriality and spatial relations with its regions and the global systems. Arguably, Chinese strategists are no longer trapped in "oriental sinology" (cf. Vukovich 2013). In the context of Global China, one may further work with different conceptions: China in the world, China with the world, China onto the world, etc. Knowledge production within China reflects these developments, resulting in changing and partially conflictive and partially mixed epistemic categories of different world order conceptions and China's place in it (see Callahan, this volume). On the one hand, the rise of a Chinese school of International Relations (IR) can be seen as an instance of reproducing the territorial trap ingrained in IR knowledge production while missing the opportunity to go beyond the fixation with national sovereignty. On the other hand, the field of Chinese Area Studies is experiencing growing attention, promising perhaps broader and more open-ended perspectives. Within China, there is a clear acknowledgment of a significant knowledge gap about the world, especially the demand and supply of policy knowledge about the parts of the world within which Chinese actors are involved. Indeed, Country and Area Studies (区域国别学) have recently been elevated to a "Tier One" discipline within the Chinese academic system. However, recent official narratives on self-confidence in its own "socialist path, theory, institutions, culture" and the emphasis on establishing and promoting its own "indigenous knowledge regime" also raises questions about whether these practices, through China's becoming global, are part of the "global study of China" or should be treated as the subject of the global study of China.

Cultural Trap: Civilizational Essentialism

The complication of established norms and practices of the "international" through the reclamation of lost heritage and local sources of wisdom and learning have become defining features of the phenomenon of Global China. It has been the alleged "shift to the East" in world affairs as a result of the material (and not only) effects of China's rise that seem to have wedged political and epistemic space for the proliferation of post-Western and global IR perspectives. Yet, it is the very practices of celebration of plurality and the multiplicity of traditions that have also reiterated ossified binaries and divisions along putative civilizational lines. In fact, it might appear paradoxical to some that the reference to "civilization" has been embraced by both external and Chinese commentators in their endeavors to frame the content and dynamics of Global China as either leading to global confrontations or harmony (Acharya 2020, Kavalski 2016).

On the one hand, external observers oftentimes read China's global footprint through the essentialized lens of its hoary Sinocentric tributary system embedded in the Confucian cultural, political and economic practices of a unique (and uniquely) "civilizational state"

(cf. Perdue 2015). David Kang's work has become emblematic of such an essentializing account of the "Confucian international order" in which the "Sinicized states" of East Asia were treated "benevolently" by "China", while "plentiful violence" was meted out to the nomads refusing to play by the cultural expectations of the "Confucian worldview" (Kang 2010: 593). Equally obligingly, Henry Kissinger (2011: 5–7) reifies such essentialism in his observation that "each period of disunity [in Chinese history] was viewed as an aberration ... After each collapse, the Chinese state reconstituted itself as if by some immutable law of nature."

On the other hand, aspirations for renewal through a nostalgic conflation between the one-party regime of the CCP and a glorious past ruptured by the "century of humiliation" (百年国耻) have led Chinese pundits to advance a highly selective and nationalized memory of the Middle Kingdom in the service of Beijing's "community of shared future" (人类命运共同体) that has most recently been embodied in its Global Civilization Initiative. As a result, China's increasing display of exceptionalism has been noted by a number of studies (Ho 2014, Zhang 2013, Cai 2019). For instance, a number of Chinese scholars have narrated such civilizational exceptionalism by pointing to "the traditional values of China – harmony and peacefulness – [that] have all inherited the traditional virtues of the country and have been carried forward by the contemporary Chinese government" (Yan et al. 2018: 1951). For Liu Mingfu, a former People's Liberation Army (PLA) colonel and a prominent public intellectual, such "return to tradition" in Chinese policy reveals that unlike the West, whose international relations promote "tyranny" (霸道), Beijing's outreach is distinguished by "benevolent rule" (王道). This leads Liu to conclude that "the Chinese 'race' is the 'most excellent race,' the 'superior race,' that is 'even better than the white race'" (quoted in Horesh and Kavalski 2014: 22).

Culturalist/civilizational discourses began with the nationalist modernizers who, aiming at the construction of a modern nation already during the decline of the Qing dynasty, carefully selected Confucian notions to define China's "national essence" (国粹) (Zarrow 2020). Subsequently, essentializing discourses about the "character" of the Chinese nation became a central aspect of Chinese strategic thinking returning periodically to the forefront of various Chinese debates about China's place in world order. While the Hu Jintao-Wen Jiabao administration (2002–2012) made Confucian ideas a crucial plank of China's foreign policy (Cao 2007), under President Xi, the party-state, more than ever before, promoted the appraisal of ancient heritage and ideologically emphasized China's "spiritual civility" (精神文明). Such an ambitious program entails not only crucial effort to reclaim global recognition as a cultural and political center lost throughout the century of humiliation (Benabdallah 2021, Carrai 2021, Kavalski 2021, Winter 2019), but also the party-state's aim of achieving an "organic integration" of Marxism with Chinese characteristics and Chinese traditional cultural heritage (Mayer and Pawlik 2023, Kavalski 2022) – a syncretic approach in line with many earlier attempts to define China's place in the world order (Callahan, this volume).

This civilizational trap of "Chineseness" congeals into common narrative strategies for encoding hegemony through the discourses of a "China solution" (中国方案) to global problems (Shih 2022). The "nostalgic futurology" of this "Sino-speak" (Callahan 2012) seeks to "naturalize China's new place [at the center of world politics] within a shifting global time-space" (Mayer 2018: 1235). The instrumental use of collective memory and history by both external and Chinese commentators simultaneously shapes and contains representations of Global China "in a way that is fixed and fixated" (Carrai 2021: 23).

As Mustapha Kamal Pasha (2007) suggests, despite their appeal to universalism, such essentialist claims reveal the inextricable nexus between knowledge claims and their authorization within discrete spatial, socio-economic, cultural and temporal boundaries. By zooming in selectively on specific traumas, triumphs and/or amnesias, these accounts amplify the imprint of particular locales, historical contexts and political mentalities. As such, civilizational essentialism responds to changing constellations and relations of power “either in the name of civilizing purpose or civilizational insecurity” through the strategic narratives of self-enclosure – namely, the naturalization of otherness due to the fixity of cultural differences and “the absence of significant contact between civilizations and the possibility of mutuality, learning, mimicry, or synthesis” (Pasha 2007: 63–69). In contrast, Hwang (in this volume: 89) argues that the Chinese School of IR should make use of essentialism “as a strategy adopted in specific situations to achieve the purpose of resistance.” It is thus “not permanent but is specific to the situation of non-Western voices needing to be heard on the global stage. As a result, the Chinese School as strategic essentialism can be seen as a means for mobilization of struggle, but it cannot be fixed, sanctified or axiomatized.”

While such essentializing discursive patterns are easily discernible in the accounts of both external and Chinese observers, the question that remains to be answered by such civilizational representations of Global China is whether their Sinocentric exceptionalism can accommodate both the historical narratives of China’s partners (alongside their own aspirations for the future through a nostalgic rectification of the past) and the multiplicity of China’s histories (Callahan 2012, Wang 2019). For instance, the comparison with the historical example of the “American Dream” whose civilizational essentialism sustained the contentedness and practices of “Global America” is quite pertinent here. While profoundly flawed and exclusive, the essentialist narrative of “Global America” appeared to furnish (at least for a time) a compelling discursive imaginary that seemed capable of accommodating the pursuit of historical rectification of individuals, communities and countries around the world. Yet, as Richard Barnet (1971) noted more than half a century ago, it is the underlying assumptions of civilizational essentialism that precipitated the collapse of “Global America” long before its material decline by insisting

that the United States government can manage social and political change around the world; that it can police a stable system of order; that it can solve problems in other countries it has yet to solve for its own people; that there is no real conflict of interest between the people of the United States and people in Asia, Africa, [Europe], or Latin America; that the United States government, unlike all other governments, is capable of true philanthropy.

(Barnet 1971: 85–86)

The comparison with the exceptionalism of “Global America” bears important relevance for the civilizational essentialism of Global China. Both external and Chinese commentators seem to labor under a similar misapprehension that the PRC is exclusively positioned to offer novel solutions to global problems owing to the uniqueness of its history and intellectual traditions. The contributions to this volume suggest that while civilizational essentialists will do well to heed the history of prior discourses of exceptionalism, civilizational essentialists of Global China have ample evidence for the policy and scholarly shortcomings their accounts engender. Acknowledging the plurality of poly-cultural and entangled origins of

both Global China and its multiple interlocutors might provide a more meaningful strategy for the civilizational partnerships envisioned by the “community of shared future” than that of exceptionalists within and outside of China.

Synopsis of Chapters

China’s global impact and roles are far too many and important to be left to piecemeal and fragmentary accounts. This *Handbook* offers a nuanced and multidisciplinary framework to account for, understand and explore Global China in a broad spectrum of its effects and limitations. How is Global China framed in diverse disciplinary contexts, issue areas and practices? What forms and shapes does Global China take? How can we differentiate between Global China and the global power of the PRC? How does Global China manifest in International Organizations? In which ways does Global China offer solutions to emerging global challenges? How is Global China internalized at home and localized abroad? Chapters are not structured along specific foreign policy, economic and social fields, but offer an integrated and transversal assessment of China’s global footprint in five complementary thematic sections. At the same time, in addition to addressing conceptual, empirical and analytical blind spots, the *Handbook*’s epilogue offers five analytical registers as another way to coherently organize the chapters and study Global China, suggesting areas for further disciplinary and transdisciplinary research.

Framing Global China

The first part of the *Handbook* titled “Framing Global China” highlights key academic debates surrounding the concept of Global China. It explores the disciplinary perspectives, debates and ideas that scholars have put forward to understand the ideational underpinnings of Global China. From a disciplinary perspective, Global China unfolds within different academic frameworks, each providing unique insights into its nature and significance. This section also explores how Chinese scholars frame and discuss the concept, as well as the cross-disciplinary resonances, kinships, borrowings and potential blind spots that may arise. These debates present a range of perspectives, puzzles and answers, offering different interpretations of the dynamics of Global China. Uncovering the ideational underpinnings of Global China across disciplines, integrating the perspectives of Chinese scholars, and exploring cross-disciplinary connections, serve as springboards for further research and interdisciplinary dialogue on Global China.

In the opening chapter, **Bart Dessein** traces the genealogy of Sinology in Europe, its transition from philology through Sinology to Area Studies. Studies of China originated in Europe in the nineteenth century alongside the search for understanding of European cultures and religions in a comparative perspective. It is during this period that the orientalized version of a “mythical” China achieved its “global” significance for Europe. A civilizational “border” originally drawn between Europe on the one hand, and China on the other hand, “Global China” appears to be all about “crossing borders” over time. Since the period of decolonization, Asian and African cultures have increasingly come to speak for themselves. Sinology, Area Studies and Chinese Studies remain and should remain possessing their particular values, with the potential to be important contributors to a redefinition of Europe that suits the contemporary world order.

Ingo Liefner points out that while the sub-field of human geography continuously delivers valuable information to help understand the particularities of China, China's impact on the world and the world's impact on China, there is a clear lack of theoretical approaches and conceptual advancements that take China and Chinese thinking as a starting point. This is how geographers' research on Global China could make significant contributions beyond its narrow field. The research has to be designed and carried out by Chinese geographers who intend to present their understanding of China in a way that allows non-Chinese researchers to reflect and rethink their own understanding and learn from China, through key concepts in human geography that help frame Global China: global production networks; innovation systems; multinational enterprise, and social network theory.

William A. Callahan considers China's traditional world orders (All-under-Heaven – *tianxia*, Great Harmony – *datong*, the Tributary System) and examines the twentieth century's modern revolutionary world orders (Kang Youwei's Theory on Great Harmony, Sun Yat-sen's Three People's Principles and Mao Zedong's Three Worlds). He argues that China's world order in the twenty-first century is not post-socialist, but "neo-socialist" in the sense of syncretically mixing Chinese tradition, capitalist modernity and socialist modernity. *Tianxia* and Great Harmony continue to circulate in the Xi Jinping-era (2012–) as models for alternative non-Western world orders that are also popular beyond the PRC in the new field of Global IR.

Steve Chan challenges the prevailing model of power transition, as exemplified in the so-called "Thucydides' trap," popular in the US discourse. To portray the rising China as a challenger to US power and a "revisionist" actor in the international system is a typical binary framework for perceiving China's role and position in the international system, with a direct impact on framing the US policy agenda and public policy debate. Chan specifically points out the vicious cycle of power shift, problem shift and policy shift that tends to form a self-sustaining feedback loop.

Yih-Jye Hwang locates the Chinese School of IR in the context of post-Western IR theories. He argues that the enterprise of the Chinese School can still be a main driver of a post-Western global imaginary because it can be regarded as a reverse discourse, mimicking yet altering the original meanings of the taken-for-granted concepts, ideas and principles used by mainstream IR scholars. As a form of "theory," the Chinese School exists for the sake of inspiring resistance and enabling reflections, presumably fading in a world where a hegemonic power takes a different shape. With the judicious use of strategic essentialism, the Chinese School can potentially be one local group in a wider effort to contest diffused and decentered forms of Western domination through linking various struggles to form a unified "counter-hegemonic bloc" of post-Western IR in the discipline.

Chengxin Pan and **Wanyi Zhao** point out that Global China is a challenge not least because its extent is global in nature and in origin. This phenomenon simultaneously reflects and refracts the increasingly transnational and global sources, processes and practices that have made Global China possible in the first place. These patterns reveal the holographic nature of China itself, whose rise needs to be understood as a process of holographic transition whose transformation and the Global China brought about by these turbulent dynamics cannot be adequately grasped without the context of its multiple entanglements. What this also means is that both the meaningful encounter and effective engagements with the phenomenon of Global China require, above all, a better understanding of the global and holographic nature of contemporary China.

Actors and Agencies of Global China

The second part of the *Handbook*, titled “Actors and Agencies of Global China” investigates the key actors (both intentional and unintentional) participating in the construction of Global China. The contributions to this part of the volume explore their motivations and aims, assessing their effectiveness in making China’s global presence and shaping perceptions of Global China. The chapters included in this section of the *Handbook* undertake detailed examinations of the heterogeneous relationships established by these actors with the rest of the world, highlighting what defines them as “Chinese” actors and who has the authority to contest this definition. Furthermore, it explores the diversity of interests and preferences that drive these actors as they produce the material and ideational effects of Global China.

Rogier Creemers insists that even if Chinese technology businesses have been able to substantially grow their international footprint, the Digital Silk Road as a policy initiative remains hamstrung by a lack of planning clarity, China’s relative inexperience in foreign affairs and concerns about angering the West. The author also claims the accelerating confrontation with the West is fundamentally reversing the trend of technological integration and globalization, as economic considerations have swiftly made way for political and security considerations.

Dominik Mierzejewski and **Anna Rudakowska** discern two intertwined processes in PRC: The central government’s inclusion of cities and provinces in Chinese diplomacy (top-down perspective) and competition between local governments (horizontal perspective) to analyze the PRC local governments’ contribution to China’s rise to global prominence. The increasing participation of Chinese cities and provinces in global affairs has followed the processes of globalization and growing interconnectedness between the various non-central actors, functioning either indirectly as intermediaries, or directly when they establish bilateral cooperation with their counterparts. As local governments are uniquely embedded in PRC’s centralized system, horizontal competition has created a window of opportunity for local authorities to influence national foreign policies and constitutes an important driving force behind the global involvement of China’s local governments. Apart from serving as a vehicle for Chinese foreign policy, horizontal competition is also responsible for the export of Chinese values and norms.

Ralph Weber explores how the Chinese Party-State wields its power and influence across all corners of today’s interconnected world through networks of enlisted, co-opted or self-activating actors that are essential to these transgressive political activities abroad. In addition to the Party-State systems that are known to be engaged in such activities – for instance, the united front work and propaganda systems – he highlights the roles of embassies, consulates and intelligence services. The chapter emphasizes the imperative to research the Party-State’s global reach and its transgressive elements by adopting both national and transnational perspectives to fully comprehend their interconnectedness, and considers moral and political dilemmas surrounding the act of co-optation and the question of complicity.

Chiung-Chiu Huang examines Chinese style multilateralism by analyzing four cases: The Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC), the Cooperation between China and Central and Eastern European Countries (17+1), the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and the Belt & Road Initiative (BRI). She argues that China’s management of these multilateral settings differs from the conventional international institutions dominated by the Western powers, as relationality has guided China to practice multilateralism

with a core of bilateralism, and for the goals of inclusiveness and connectivity. Chinese relationality is better understood in making and conducting multilateralism through the concept of “improvised resemblance,” which emphasizes self-restrictions, bilateralism, gift-giving, connectivity and inclusiveness.

Martin K. Dimitrov's chapter engages with the question of the transferability of the Chinese model of digital authoritarianism and argues that hardware and software alone are insufficient for practicing digital authoritarianism. Among the three key components that Chinese digital authoritarianism depends on – surveillance hardware, sophisticated software and the human collection of intelligence – the last element remains essential despite the advance of artificial intelligence (AI) and smart policing. The impossibility of exporting the human intelligence component means that the most successful adopter of Chinese digital surveillance technology would be a country that already has a high human intelligence collection capacity. As the case study of Rwanda shows, sophisticated analog surveillance mechanisms enable the effective deployment of technologically-aided digital surveillance.

Ryanne Flock and Elena Meyer-Clement trace the changes of global connectivity in China's urban history, from imperial to republican China, the Maoist period and the phase of high-speed urbanization since 2001. In this current phase, China's cities have become more closely linked to global capitalism and the winding search for modernity is complemented by increasing aspirations for a global impact of China's cities. In recent years, the central leadership has notably strengthened its grip over urban development, increasingly binding municipal governments to the center again, promoting its own ideas of a China-specific urban modernity. This time, global recognition is an inherent objective of this attempt.

Csaba Moldicz argues that it has become increasingly clear that US-China technological competition is an integral part of the geopolitical struggle between the two countries. The author concludes that the United States has an advantage of about 5–10 years over China in the area of existing technologies because China has to catch up not only in terms of quantity but also in terms of quality indicators. Analyses that focus on perceived strategic areas tend to show China in a much more favorable light. While the Chinese advantage lies in planning and foresight, the disadvantage of the Chinese model is that it leaves less room for market forces, making it more difficult for Chinese companies to exploit the strategic ambiguity mentioned above, while American companies excel in this regard.

Global China and International Organizations

The third part of the *Handbook* explores the contributions and challenges brought about by Global China to the institutions, frameworks and practices of global governance. It examines how China's rise and associated claim to shape governance within and beyond international organizations and institutions affects their policies, processes and preferences. China has also not been averse to leveraging its economic clout and diplomatic influence to shape the agenda, decision-making processes and outcomes of international organizations. This can result in policy shifts and alterations of established norms. Additionally, the chapters included in this part of the volume illustrate China's endeavors as a norm entrepreneur in the global governance landscape.

Jörn-Carsten Gottwald and Niall Duggan look at China's status as a global financial power, highlighting the changes in China's role within the existing financial architecture,

the revision of its role conceptions and first moves to offer alternate leadership in global finance both through working within and outside existing structures and, second, through promoting new institutions in light of the limits set for Chinese actions by the specifics of its domestic political economy. Despite fundamental differences in ideology and development models, China has mainly stayed within the existing framework. New organizations such as the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) complement existing organizations rather than challenging or replacing them. The RMB and Chinese norms and ideas on financial governance still have a long way to go before they can fundamentally change global finance.

Lai-Ha Chan examines the interactions between Global China and global health governance, using two case studies of the COVID-19 pandemic, namely China–World Health Organization (WHO) relations and China’s vaccine diplomacy. She concludes that although China is widely recognized as a global force in health governance, its authoritarian governance, often shrouded in opacity and secrecy, is not necessarily “a force for good”. Rather, the PRC has not yet been a good follower of global health governance norms. In its dealings with China during the pandemic, WHO failed to defend and enforce global health norms for the benefit of the world’s population. As a result, global society does not have much confidence in the integrity of the WHO and the credibility of the WHO as a global institution in the field of public health.

Hongyuan Yu, Bo Yu and Yunhan Yu argue that as the world’s largest developing country, China has contributed its strength and wisdom to the global response to climate challenges by promoting domestic green transition, actively participating in international climate diplomacy, and sharing green knowledge and expertise, while insisting on safeguarding the common development interests of developing countries and promoting economic and social development.

Tiewa Liu and Huawei Zong provide a historical account of China’s ever-deepening engagement with UNESCO since 1971. China has developed its own approaches to participate in, partner with and contribute to the organization. Key features include aligning with UNESCO’s global priorities and putting forward the agenda of intercultural dialogue, clearly demonstrated in the case study of the revival of the UNESCO Courier. The authors analyze China’s potential engagement with UNESCO on three arenas: To support UNESCO through enhanced multilateral diplomacy and by facilitating participation of multiple stakeholders; to promote UNESCO activities that can benefit human development and cultural exchange in a sustainable way; and to strengthen South-South Cooperation within UNESCO.

Jeremy Garlick demonstrates that China’s Belt and Road Initiative is altering the landscape of development economics and political engagement in the Global South. Detailed empirical analysis of China’s approach to the developing world reveals a mostly consistent pattern of influence-building, which is substantively distinct from standard Western approaches based on the institutions of the liberal international order. China’s strategy is to engage with nations on a bilateral basis within the framework of regional cooperation mechanisms, enticing them with infrastructure investment projects funded by loans from state financial institutions. China remains the creditor of choice for many countries due to the relative ease of obtaining funds. China’s success in expanding its influence across developing regions has forced the previously hegemonic West to launch counter-initiatives. These are evidence that China has adapted better to the current era of uncertainty and complexity, becoming a catalyst of change in the Global South.

Marina Rudyak discusses Global China by reading the meaning of development both as a concept and as a “right,” as it is also the starting point and goal within other key concepts such as aid, modernization, multilateralism and cooperation. It is argued that these terms are at the core of China’s projection as a “great power and developing country” on the global stage and are used by China to challenge and shift existing status and power asymmetries in the global system. The chapter draws on the author’s work for the *Decoding China Dictionary* (Oud and Drinhausen 2023), a project that examines how the same key terms of international relations and international cooperation are understood differently in “Western” and official Chinese discourse.

Global China’s Responses to Global Challenges

The fourth part of the *Handbook* traces the proposals made by China to tackle the most pressing challenges of our times. The contributions to this part of the collection focus on the characteristics of the solutions and the “uniqueness” of China’s visions, agencies and approaches. The chapters included here also investigate the ways in which China’s historical and cultural contexts inform its approaches to the changing technological, social and environmental frontiers of modernity. Furthermore, the discussions included in this part of the *Handbook* examine the scientific and technical fields in which Chinese expertise and ingenuity are impacted by and entangled in global power dynamics.

David Tyfield inquires into China’s sustainable transition to an alternative digital-renewable-batteries energy system. The analysis concludes that China’s sustainable transition is still an open, but hugely complicated, question and one that is increasingly a political – indeed the dominant political – issue of the day, i.e., the issue of the self-reorganization of power/knowledge relations. Specifically, the relevant dynamics of China’s socio-technical systems transition will likely be both significantly hindered and propelled by the now undeniably worsening geopolitical situation.

Tracey Fallon’s chapter explores the global effects of China’s “meatification.” China’s rising incomes are accompanied by an increasing appetite for meat, which sees China as the world’s greatest global meat producer and consumer, and China’s global role now includes global agribusiness. China’s concurrent narratives of meat as the reward of modernization, and experiential aspects of cosmopolitan consumptive urban lifestyles, mean that meatification is well entrenched. Competing state interests around health, food security and business mean that policymakers will lack the political will to encourage wide-scale meat reduction. Thus, the question remains for China and the world whether a decoupling of improving living standards from meat consumption will take place.

Séverine Arsène argues that digital technology finds itself at the crossroads between globalization and techno-nationalism. China has emulated a global trend of betting on big data and used some of its specific assets to achieve the exceptionally fast and vast development of the digital industry, creating a Chinese tech sector deeply enmeshed in the global political economy, and a key stakeholder in global issues raised by tech development, from sustainability to labor and ethical concerns. More recently, in a context of rising geopolitical tensions, and under the influence of impulsive political styles, these interconnections have been increasingly seen as sources of vulnerabilities. China, the US and other countries have grown to see this interdependence as a liability in the context of increasing geopolitical tensions, and all have taken measures to “disentangle,” or mitigate that perceived risk.

Josef Gregory Mahoney unpacks the multiplicities of “modernity” for China: Modernity as periodization, political modernity, “Modern” and “Modernization” as ideologemes in CCP development and legitimacy, and modernity as “Technological Society.” The author also illustrates that since the 1990s, within critical, intellectual discourses, lively discussions of liberalism, cosmopolitanism, postmodernism and posthumanism all assert at least a “critical turn” within Chinese modernity. More recently, the so-called “GenZ” generation have experiences with modernity that are strikingly different from previous generations.

Pádraig Carmody, Tim Zajontz and Ricardo Reboredo demonstrate that the structural transformation of China’s economy since the late 1970s has been associated with poverty reduction at an aggregate level globally. However, while the Chinese economy and overseas economic engagements have distinctive characteristics, they have not altered the overall dynamics and contradictions related to the global dialectic of development/underdevelopment given their fundamentally capitalist nature. Greater China’s emergence has in some ways reproduced capitalism “as usual,” as it was always intricately embedded in capitalism relations of production (cf. Nonini and Ong 1996). More recently, China is seeking to reinvent itself as a partner for developing countries, with an attempt at “normalization” of China as a “donor” in a global development regime that is increasingly affected by geopolitical and economic competition between Global China and “the West.”

Entangled Encounters: Internalizing Global China at Home and Localizing Global China Abroad

The fifth part of the *Handbook*, titled “Entangled Encounters,” explores the complex demands, both domestically and internationally, created by China’s global outreach. The attention of the contributions included in this part of the volume is on the shifts in knowledge production and the growing tendency for self-reliance within the country. The chapters in this section of the collection explore the preparedness of the Chinese policymakers and public for the risks, expectations and requirements that China faces as a global actor. Lastly, the fifth part of the *Handbook* analyzes the ways in which Global China becomes intertwined with the domestic politics of other countries and regions, considering the diverse responses, interactions and constellations based on different political systems, cultural contexts and historical experiences.

Cong Cao and Yutao Sun argue that China’s achievement of the status as a rising global power in science, technology and innovation has come from its indigenous efforts while taking advantage of the benefits offered by globalization. The unique and exceptional features of the science and technology system’s reform and opening up have enabled innovation in China to embark on a distinct trajectory. Now, China is at a juncture not just as to where it will head to in the future in science, technology and innovation, but as to whether it will go backward to self-reliance or autarky as the country was in its first 30 years.

Nicholas Thomas looks at the hybrid forms of sub-nationalism in China that contemporary Chinese foreign policy makes use of to achieve its objectives. Local governments’ activities take place in a policy space one-step removed from central level interests, constituting a form of policymaking that transcends narrow conceptualizations of the Chinese state as centralized and authoritarian. The perceptible foreign policy of China emerges as an aggregated outcome of interactions across both its interlocutors sub-national and

national tiers of governance. China is more comprehensively equipped to organize a whole-of-government approach in ways that other federated and/or democratic states are not. Global China is thus not simply a China with international political and policy interests but an actor able to deploy all its resources – from the villages and cities up to the national institutions – in the pursuit of its foreign policy goals.

Harryanto Aryodiguno and **Chih-yu Shih** propose the concept of “post-Chineseness” as an evolving agenda to interrogate the crises of contemporary social sciences and humanities in their entirety and to reveal its potential to prescribe sophistication, recombination and reconstruction. Constituted trilaterally by Western liberalism, the Global-South post-colonialism and Greater-China Confucianism, post-Chineseness’ unusual place looms increasingly significant. The authors explore how the Sinological engagement with Chineseness of all sorts and ages, embedded in the intersection of the abovementioned tri-trajectories, can inspire a plausible reformation to emancipate China, as a category, name, identity, scope, consciousness and so on, from any fixation for the realization of a pluriverse beyond the world of each of us. Navigating post-Chineseness will constitute an important step toward breaking the bottlenecks of the Western academic disciplines and embody a pluriversal discipline that is co-hosted simultaneously by the West and the Global South.

David O’Brien and **Melissa Shani Brown** discuss the “re-education” in Xinjiang and the CCP’s placement of it as an anti-terrorism campaign and part of the “Global War on Terror,” and as a process of modernization. They argue that it is actually cultural difference that is being targeted, as a legacy of Social Darwinism within Marxism, as well as older Chinese discourses of civilizational superiority. These practices are then accompanied by recent (re)turn to racial nationalism, which then informs the preoccupation with the question of what constitutes “modern” Chinese culture and identity.

Tony Tai-Ting Liu examines the development of institutions that center on regional cooperation with China in Africa, Central Asia, Central and Eastern Europe, Latin America and Southeast Asia to understand the globalization of Chinese influence from the approach of regionalization. The chapter also discusses the power dynamics within institutions, highlighting the cases of Central Asia and Southeast Asia, as the participation of powers outside the region significantly implicates the working of the institutions. These institutions, executed often in a “top down” approach, can also become counterweights against China, as rules and regulations have the power to check Chinese actions. More recently, China experimented with the concept of public diplomacy and promoted the realization of people-to-people relations for several years. It remains to be observed whether public diplomacy or similar “bottom up” approaches in advancing cooperation would make a return in China in the near future.

Muhammad Tayyab Safdar examines the factors that explain the substantial Chinese investment in Pakistan’s power sector. The chapter highlights how Chinese state-owned enterprises (SOEs) negotiated from a position of strength as they looked abroad for more lucrative investment opportunities. Given the close strategic relations between the two countries and the broad-based domestic elite consensus, potential Chinese investors were induced with substantial incentives. However, the de facto and de jure safeguards have had limited value because Chinese investors who negotiated lucrative long-term contracts have faced the full brunt of structural problems affecting the power sector. These issues have been exacerbated by political uncertainty and changes in the elite consensus vis-à-vis Chinese investment as narratives of rent-seeking and debt traps gained traction.

Xiangming Chen explores the inside/outside relations between a globalizing China and its policies and practices for accelerating peripheral urbanization and lagging regional development through a paired comparison of two small peripheral cities. Focusing on Ruili in Yunnan and Kashgar in Xinjiang, the author reveals how locally targeted policies and trans-local political mobility from rich coastal cities for global integration have stimulated and fueled rapid urbanization and its transformative consequences within and between Ruili and Kashgar and their cross-border regional hinterlands. This chapter also examines how accelerating urban and regional change has reinforced China's attempts to globalize itself and shape globalization through cross-border channels of trade promotion and outward investment.

Conclusion

The current phenomenon of Global China represents a significant material and ideational change in the international system that is intimately associated both with globalization and the decentering of global life as a result of the so-called "rise of the rest." The past four decades have brought unprecedented attention to Chinese involvement in trade, investments and global supply chains. At the same time, since the late 2000s there has been a considerable shift away from questions of economic efficiency and profits, towards increasing geopolitical anxiety, strategic vulnerabilities and normative concerns with China's impact on world order. China has thus been gradually, yet seemingly firmly, positioned as "systemic rival" of the collective West.

Against this background, the notion of Global China fosters a renewed analytical focus on norms, practices and knowledge. If China's rise is part of the "rise of the rest," then the country plays a pivotal role in normative transmutation or what could be described as further epistemic decolonization (Wang 2017, Chen 2010). A central component of this transformative process is post-colonial reorientation of, and in, knowledge production facilitated by novel epistemological sensibilities to understand the world as well as the growing recognition of alternative modes of knowing and learning. Notably, these epistemic shifts do not happen in a vacuum. Chinese actors and agencies are in constant interaction with the Global South (Liu 2022) and face increasing competition with hegemonic epistemic discourses and policy agendas shaping world affairs. As a result, it is important to recognize that both Chinese International Relations Theory and Western China Studies/Sinology, as discussed by Dessein (this volume), Mahoney (this volume), Hwang (this volume) and Aryodiguno and Shih (this volume), must be understood as functioning and developing within contentious epistemic domains that are closely tied to power struggles and hegemonic strategies. In fact, the trope of the "New" or "Second Cold War" (Hung 2022, Schindler et al. 2023) illustrates the connection between concepts and operations of power. The trope of the "New Cold War" has become influential in conversations on Global China not only presupposing long-lasting hostilities between Washington and Beijing (and the absence of other actors capable to exert power and/or influence global dynamics), but also indicating a return of the centrality of technological innovation and transnational infrastructures in the context of militarized bipolar confrontation.

Thus, the phenomenon of Global China points to a growing number of challenges as well as opportunities. On the one hand, Global China as a material and epistemic phenomenon challenges Western hegemony in economic affairs as much as in knowledge production by reinforcing competing geo-narratives of global history and imaginaries of future technological connectivities (Mayer and Zhang 2021, Narins and Agnew 2020, Taylor 2022, Van Noort 2021) as well as alternative interpretations of universal values and concepts

(Rudyak, this volume). On the other hand, all modes of knowledge production that correspond with an emerging post-Western world order (cf. Stuenkel 2016, Rolland 2020) remain dynamically evolving and elusive undertakings that are, arguably, easily captured by political interests to legitimize hegemonic agendas. How different actors weaponize notions of anti-colonialism and neo-colonialism is a telling example (cf. Tenzin 2022). Chinese diplomats using anti-colonial narratives in service of increasing China's soft and narrative power in the Global South at the cost of former colonial powers is one pertinent illustration of discursive politicization (Ohnesorge and Owen 2023, cf. Brown 2020). At the same time, a vocal group of scholars and policymakers in the West continue to view Chinese investments in the Global South as neo-colonial practices that repeat the worst abuses of earlier imperial powers.

Today, China scholars face, more than ever, a shrinking range of non-politicized topics and issues. They have to carefully navigate the controversial disciplinary and popular framings of Global China – discussed in the first part of the *Handbook* – that are shaped by cognitive tensions, agenda-driven appropriations, pernicious othering and recurring binary traps. While Global China is a crucial site of normative contestation facilitating the provincialization of Europe and rejection of American pre-eminence, its study obviously can neither comfortably rely on East-West imagery nor on the democratic-authoritarian duality. At the same time, the phenomenon of Global China should not serve to legitimate nor romanticize the practices, policies and agenda of the PRC. Instead, the encounter with Global China draws attention to the need for reflective epistemic and methodological research approaches (Fisher-Onar and Kavalski 2022, Franceschini and Loubere 2022). As demonstrated by the chapters included in this *Handbook*, the turbulent unfolding of the phenomenon of Global China within diverse political, economic and cultural contexts, sectors, and regions – and its interplay with the multiple “rests” of the world – is a demanding yet much-needed intellectual and analytical task.

In this light, contributions to this volume indicate three essential epistemic commitments for studying Global China. Firstly, the chapters in this collection illustrate the relevance of research that offers space for the articulation of diverse viewpoints. The point is that the meaningful narration of Global China should offer non-binary, non-othering, relational frameworks in lieu of the great power reductionism that dominates policy and scholarly analysis. Secondly, the Global China perspective offers thoughtful and nuanced analytical approaches for dissecting China's past, current and future transnational entanglements, interdependencies and co-constitutive power relations with the “regional,” the “global” and the “planetary.” Such analysis assists the assessment of China's global outreach in ways that simultaneously look beyond and complicate the hegemonic projects of both the CCP and the increasingly antagonistic balancing initiated by the US. Thirdly, the alternative methodological approaches, ontological perspectives and analytical registers – condensed in the epilogue – offered by the Global China lens enable researchers and policy makers to envision and evaluate possible future trajectories of China and its evolving roles in international life, informing policy choices accordingly.

The contention of the contributors to this *Handbook* is that the multidirectional and terra-formative nature of Global China is also a point of departure for theoretical innovation, methodological reflection and analytical transformation. As such, the following chapters do not intend to offer a definitive resolution to all the dimensions and aspects associated with the phenomenon of Global China, nor should they be misunderstood as an exercise in ordering or classifying its multiplicity. Yet, by illuminating the diversity of

patterns and practices of Global China, the analyses included in this *Handbook* sketch the outlines of fresh modalities of critique, thinking and knowledge capable of offering meaningful encounters with China's engagements with world affairs, while simultaneously exploring how the case of China could provide opportunities for scholars and policymakers to rethink the ways in which we have theorized the complexity of global life.

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