Introduction

Global China at 20: Why, How and So What?

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The recent two-decade-long march of "global China" – manifested as outward flows of investment, loans, infrastructure, migrants, media, cultural programmes and international and civil society engagement – has left sweeping but variegated footprints in many parts of the world. From "going out," officially announced in the year 2000, to the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and Made in China 2025, and from the developing world to advanced industrialized democracies, state-endorsed campaigns are but tips of a much more momentous iceberg. Numerous Chinese citizens and private corporations have also participated in a global search for employment, business, investment and educational and emigration opportunities. International reactions to the increasingly ubiquitous presence of China and the Chinese people in almost every corner of the world have evolved from a mixture of anxiety and hope to a more explicitly critical backlash. Terms such as "sharp power," "debt-trap diplomacy" and the "new Cold War" bespeak the West's dominant perception today of China as a threat to be contained.

Despite its significance for global and Chinese developments, many scholars have not considered "global China" a bona fide China studies topic. This is perhaps because the phenomenon defies the territorial definition of our field, namely that China studies is about what happens or happened in China, a geographical and jurisdictional entity. No wonder that the first wave of global China research came mostly out of international relations and policy studies,[1] rather than the more popular disciplines of political science, sociology, anthropology and history. In 2007, a senior academic in Europe even made an offhand remark to me at a conference that no leading China scholar was interested in global China. He was dismissive of the topic, but his observation was correct.

Fortunately, a young generation of scholars has emerged as the intellectual force advancing our understanding of China beyond the Chinese borders. This special section showcases some of their cutting-edge work, marked by grounded and in-depth research, contextualized in broad historical and theoretical analyses, and with a strong comparative sensibility to boot. These scholarly qualities set them apart from the burgeoning genre of non-fiction, mass-market books on global China, some of which are

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1 Taylor 2006; Alden 2007; Bräutigam 2009.

published by academic presses.[2] Collectively, they have substantially expanded the empirical parameters of extant global China research, venturing beyond geopolitical grand strategies and Chinese state projects in Africa's mining and infrastructure to explore state investments in agriculture in South-East Asia, private Chinese factories in South Africa, wholesale traders in Tanzania, Confucius Institutes in Ethiopia, medical teams in South Sudan and Chinese diasporic communities in Laos and Thailand. This introductory essay highlights the intellectual merits of this new crop of global China scholarship, especially how they add to our understanding of the impetuses, mechanisms and consequences of the global China phenomenon. In the process, I show the inextricable linkages and therefore illusory boundaries between domestic and global China, and what these may imply for the field of China studies.

Why Global China?

Going global is China's strategy to overcome the twin and interlinked challenges of growth and governance. After three decades of sustained economic growth, overcapacity has become a major bottleneck for which going global is deemed a solution by Chinese officials. Political economists of China have identified the systemic sources of overcapacity: local protectionism, fragmentation of industries, low input prices, weak enforcement of central government regulations and fiscal and cadre-promotion systems that encourage growth over profit and a situation in which "anarchic competition among localities result[s] in uncoordinated construction of redundant productive capacity and infrastructure."[3] The problem was exacerbated by the 2008 global financial crisis, when the Chinese government rolled out a massive stimulus package that fuelled even more debt-financed expansion of production capacity. The utilization rate of industrial capacity during 2001–2011 averaged merely 69.3 per cent, compared to 76.5 per cent in the US, 83.4 per cent in Germany and 81.5 per cent in Brazil. A 2016 European Chamber of Commerce in China report found precipitous declines between 2008 and 2014 in utilization rates of major industries including steel, aluminium, cement, chemicals, oil refining, flat glass, shipbuilding and paper.[4] At the Central Economic Work Conference in late 2012, right before the BRI was announced, and which all the top national and provincial leaders attended, economic slowdown, growing surplus capacity and unbalanced development were regarded as the top domestic challenges for China.[5]

Overcapacity implies falling profits and can lead to non-performing loans, the draining of resources for technological upgrading and heightened trade tensions with other countries. Chinese officials have been upfront about the need to export excess capacity to other developing countries through the BRI, framing it as a

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2 Strauss 2019.
3 Hung 2008.
4 European Chamber of Commerce in China 2016.
5 Lai 2021.

win-win solution.[6] Beyond overcapacity, going global also helps the government and businesses to expand the markets for Chinese goods and services, move up the value chain and compete with other countries to set global norms and standards in technology (e.g. 5G), international law (e.g. the Law of the Sea), trade (e.g. e-commerce) and financing of infrastructure (e.g. the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank).

Going global resolves more than a potential crisis of overaccumulation. The legitimation and the governance of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) are at stake as well. A successful projection of China's global prowess can boost nationalism, the long-established legitimation strategy of the CCP, which justifies autocratic rule against dissent at home. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, there has been palpable fear among top CCP leaders about the West's conspiracy of "peaceful evolution." Even before Xi Jinping came to power, China's authoritarian intellectuals and incumbents already construed the colour revolutions in the Balkans in the early 2000s as a series of contagious and illegitimate political changes instigated by "overt and covert interventions of Western powers, the United States in particular, that lent political and logistical support to the indigenous anti-authoritarian opposition."[7] When the Arab Spring protests took place in Tunisia and Egypt, high-level security efforts were put into effect nationwide in cyberspace and on the streets.

After Xi came to power in late 2012, the trope of "foreign interference fomenting political instability" has been routinely invoked to explain and justify CCP reactions to incidents of dissent, ranging from the 2008 unrest in Tibet and the 2009 riots in Xinjiang, as well as the 2014 Umbrella Movement and the 2019 anti-extradition bill protests in Hong Kong. In early 2019, Xi warned that "in the face of a turbulent international situation, a complex and sensitive environment, and the arduous task of reform … We must be highly vigilant against 'black swan' and 'grey rhinoceros' incidents." (According to the Chinese press, "black swans" refer to unpredictable events that can derail an economy and "grey rhinoceroses" are known risks that go ignored until too late.)

Appealing to nationalism and projecting himself and his party as the guardians of national interests at a time of global volatility, Xi linked "the Chinese dream of great national rejuvenation," a feverish pitch for his signature BRI in 2013, to the need for concentration of power.[8] He told the country that the Chinese leadership was striving to transform China into a strong country (*qiangguo* 强国), economically, diplomatically, politically, socially, culturally and militarily. Such a holistic approach calls for a focus on both internal and external security. Warning the country that "to achieve great dreams, there must be great struggles," the Chinese leader consolidated his power by creating the most centralized power structure

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6 Yafei He, "China's overcapacity crisis can spur growth through overseas expansion," *South China Morning Post*, 7 January 2014, https://www.scmp.com/comment/insight-opinion/article/1399681/chinas-overcapacity-crisis-can-spur-growth-through-overseas.

7 Chen 2010.

8 Qin 2014.

within the party-state since Mao's times, setting up the National Security Commission in 2014 and dismantling the collective leadership system that Deng Xiaoping put in place. If Xi's reign is marked by a more aggressive push for global China coupled with more repressive control over domestic civil society than that of his predecessors, the reasons have to do with the mounting political-economic pressures the regime perceives or projects in the post-2008 world, and not just his authoritarian personality and outsized political ambition.

Beyond the Chinese state's political-economic interests, on which most of the literature has focused, global China is also driven by the private interests of citizens and corporations. Facing less competition, private migrant entrepreneurs in retail and construction find higher profit margins in the developing world than in China.[9] For employees of state-owned enterprises (SOEs) and private firms, hardship posts in Africa are typically compensated by incomes several times higher than those at home. The high costs of housing, education and medical care in China mean that overseas jobs are deemed necessary by many workers to socially reproduce themselves, leading to the common practice and ethos of collective asceticism (e.g. saving, self-discipline, residing in collective dormitories), or in Chinese "eating bitterness."[10] In this special section, the articles by Maria Repnikova and Yidong Gong expand the literature's focus to include Chinese professionals going global. Chinese language teachers, school administrators and medical doctors are motivated not so much by nationalism but personal ambition. Both authors write about Chinese citizens' desire for adventure, accruing international professional experience for career advancement, practising English, self-actualization or simply personal freedom. Notably, even though they were sent by the Chinese government under the auspices of the Confucius Institutes or as part of medical missions, their objectives have little to do with the state agenda of burnishing China's international reputation, cementing diplomatic relations and promoting national glory. Such findings are a useful reminder of the decoupling of state and civilian objectives, the uncertain consequences of state-initiated projects and the need to disaggregate the heterogeneous processes and actors involved in "going out."

Mechanisms and Consequences of Global China

A major analytical move made by the new wave of fieldwork-based empirical research represented in this special section is to approach global China as a power, rather than a policy or geographical, phenomenon. That is, global China is a bundle of generic power mechanisms – e.g. economic statecraft, patron-clientelism and symbolic domination – that China deploys in specific ways in pursuing its project of outward expansion. The intellectual payoff of seeing global China as a power project is that we will ask questions about agency

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9 Dobler 2009.
10 Monson 2011; Lee 2017; Driessen 2019.

(who), interest (why), method (how) and consequences (so what). Power is relational, so we should attend to resistance, bargaining, accommodation, appropriation and adaptations by players in this power project not as an afterthought or secondary supplementary study but as *constitutive* of global China. In other words, to understand Chinese investments in African mines, for instance, calls for analysis of African governments and labour, and not just Chinese management. And in order to identify what is Chinese about China's mode of foreign direct investment, one needs to compare Chinese with non-Chinese companies.

Emphasizing power rather than policy also allows us to avoid singling out, essentializing and demonizing China. For instance, while only China has the BRI, using concessional loans and infrastructure as geopolitical leverage is by no means a Chinese invention or practice. The World Bank, International Monetary Fund and Western donor countries have famously imposed structural adjustments on debtor countries as loan conditions with the goal of changing the latter's political economy and forging dependence on the West. Both are instances of "economic statecraft," a generic power mechanism to be discussed below and used by nation-states around the world. Noting Western parallels opens up the comparative questions of process and politics – what are the unique interests and players driving China's lending spree? In most debates, people write about "China" as if there was a wilful mastermind located in Beijing, pulling levers and making sinister decisions. In reality, there are many bureaucratic, ministerial, corporate and private interests behind "going out" or the BRI.[11] They compete as much as collude, and often end up defying, derailing or defeating Beijing's grand strategy.

Surveying the literature of the past two decades, three analytically distinct but empirically intertwined power mechanisms can be found in the playbook of global China: economic statecraft, patron-clientelism and symbolic domination. The effectiveness of these strategies has varied widely across countries and sectors, with many intended and unintended consequences not always foreseen or desired by the Chinese government, corporations and citizens.

Economic statecraft

Let's begin with the Chinese mode of economic statecraft, i.e. the use of economic means (e.g. foreign direct investment, acquisition and mergers, loans for infrastructure) to pursue foreign policy and political goals.[12] The international scope of Chinese economic statecraft triggers global concern about China's imperial aspirations, especially because of the unique centrality of SOEs and loans for infrastructure, both of which are time-tested tools for China's own domestic development. Under both the planned and market economy eras, SOEs have always been much more than economic entities, tasked with

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11 Jones and Zeng 2019, Zhang 2020.
12 Baldwin 1985; Norris 2016.

employment creation, stability maintenance, political and population control, technology transfers and upgrading, even defence. These days, when SOEs go abroad, especially for those in the strategic sectors, their encompassing missions include realizing multiple forms of "profit" for the Chinese state: expanding markets, financial returns, political influence and resource security.[13] Similarly, loans by the China Development Bank and foreign aid projects have since the 1980s had the twin agendas of profit and diplomacy.[14] A recent and controversial example of economic statecraft is the dredging industry, declared a priority growth area in 2001 by the Chinese government. Massive state investment in the past 20 years in dredging capacity and technology has not only allowed Chinese SOEs to corner the world market for artificial island building and land manufacturing, but is also widely seen as a military move to expand China's maritime jurisdiction (i.e. nation building) in international waters in the South China Sea.[15]

Using loans for fixed-asset investment, such as those under the frameworks of the Forum on China–Africa Cooperation or the BRI, has long been a strategy for domestic regional development, or what political geographers call "territorial state making." Yeh and Wharton underscore the many uncanny parallels in state discourse and practice between "going out" and "going west" (the common shorthand for the Open Up the West Campaign). In "going west" as much as in "going out," the Chinese government uses large-scale infrastructure projects as a spatial fix for Chinese capital flow and consolidation of state power, masking fiscal transfers to SOEs as development aid, and trumpeting a "win-win" discourse of "mutual benefits." These are all elements of a "development model" that China has deployed within and outside of the country. One particular instance illustrates this connection literally: "since 2013, a number of infrastructural projects built under the name of Going West, such as the Qinghai–Tibet Railway, are now being extended beyond China's borders under the label of the One Belt One Road Initiative [now the BRI], bringing together China's westward and outward strategies."[16]

Due to their geopolitical and economic ramifications, the bulk of global China scholarship has focused on the pledges and intentions of Chinese state banks and firms in the construction, extractive and resource sectors in Africa, Asia and Latin America. The framing question, echoing public concerns in the global media, has been whether Chinese SOEs are advancing a 21st-century colonial project in the developing world. Never mind that what counts as colonialism or imperialism is never spelled out in these rhetorical debates. The assumption in many policy and media writings on Chinese SOEs is that these are all-powerful

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13 Lee 2017; Zhang 2020.
14 Downs 2011; Zhang and Smith 2017; Snow 1989.
15 Vince Beiser, "Aboard the giant sand-sucking ships that China uses to reshape the world," *MIT Technology Review*, 19 December 2018, https://www.technologyreview.com/2018/12/19/103629/aboard-the-giant-sand-sucking-ships-that-china-uses-to-reshape-the-world/.
16 Yeh and Wharton 2016, 291.

corporations backed by unlimited state financing and the full diplomatic weight of the Chinese state bureaucracy. The dearth of follow-up reports and research on the consequences of these projects has perpetuated the myth of global Chinese dominance. In reality, while the publicly announced amounts of state investment and loans are indeed staggering, Chinese state projects abroad often run into all sorts of operational, labour and political problems, compounded by managerial inexperience and disadvantages associated with Chinese firms' latecomer status. Two scholarly studies have shown that Chinese oil companies often lack international experience in an industry long dominated by Western corporations and wrought with complicated elite politics.[17] A 2017 investigative report by the *Financial Times* on 18 Chinese overseas high-speed rail projects found that the value of cancelled rail projects was almost double that of projects still under way at the time of the report.[18] Other Chinese projects have been stalled by civil wars, legal problems of land tenure, transparency regulations, social resistance, debt sustainability and political instability.

Academic studies have also debunked the many exaggerated portrayals of Chinese economic power abroad. In agriculture, where Chinese land grabs in Africa allegedly advanced China's empire-building ambition, Deborah Bräutigam found that half of the most reported cases of land acquisition to be either non-existent or reported with factual errors and exaggerations. Among actually existing agricultural investments, some were loss making or abandoned, while others were of a much smaller scale than was reported.[19] The charge about China's "debt-trap diplomacy" – i.e. debt-for-equity swaps of infrastructural projects funded by Chinese concessional loans, thereby converting credit into territorial control by the Chinese government – is also exaggerated. The most celebrated cautionary tale, that of Chinese taking control of Sri Lanka's Hambantota Port, turned out to be a regular business takeover of a port that was badly in need of cash infusion by new investors. There was no cancelling of Chinese loans, which account for only 10 per cent of Sri Lanka's foreign debt.[20]

More specifically with regards to the BRI, one sobering academic report concluded that it has so far failed to reverse the trend of overcapacity. "Judged by the post-BRI capacity utilization of the sectors identified by the state as top priorities for remedial [*sic*], however, the positive effect of the BRI seem temporal and limited. The BRI only arrested the decline in capacity utilization of most the eight sectors of this kind in 2013, and failed to reverse the decline of all these sectors during 2014–16."[21] While the reason for this is unclear, analysts have pointed to the daunting challenge of governance of the sprawling BRI initiative.

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17 Patey 2014; Corkin 2013.
18 Kynge, Peel and Bland 2017. "China's rail diplomacy hits the buffers," *Financial Times*, 17 July 2017, https://www.ft.com/content/9a4aab54-624d-11e7-8814-0ac7eb84e5f1.
19 Bräutigam 2015.
20 Bräutigam 2020.
21 Lai 2021.

There is no unified department to manage it and practical implementation continues to be determined by fragmented agencies competing for lucrative overseas projects. "Unwanted adventurism" by provinces and SOEs and inadequate regulation are costing the Chinese government multi-billion-dollar debt write-offs.[22]

Behind the BRI's mind-boggling financial pledges and game-changing blueprints are complex, competitive and contradictory interests among multiple institutional actors. The driving forces for "going out" and the BRI are SOEs, banks, ministries and provincial and local governments whose interests do not always align with those of the central government. An important example is China's international engineering and construction contracting industry, now a world leader claiming some 25 per cent of total revenue worldwide, and as much as 60 per cent in Africa. Undertaking international aid projects for Beijing in the early 1990s, and tasked with exporting China's industrial goods and technology, these powerful SOEs were given policy tools (state-provided bank guarantees, insurance, and subsidized working capital loans) under "going out" to compete for international projects. They identify projects, secure financing from Chinese policy banks which conduct lending assessment and approve projects for governments to sign off on.[23] The moral hazard in this financing model is that concessional loans for infrastructure have generated lucrative and protected overseas markets for many Chinese state-owned contractors who are guaranteed high fees paid out by Chinese state banks as loans to foreign governments. But these contractors bear little risk and may overstate the case for a potential project and encourage the host government to seek financing from China. Corporate profit motives of Chinese contractors drive these projects, relegating to an afterthought the host country's developmental prospects or debt sustainability. "The Chinese banks, on the other hand, may not have adequate local knowledge to make a sound assessment of the project's risks. When the project runs into financial trouble, both the bank's balance sheets and the Chinese government's reputation (due to the inter-governmental nature of the loans) suffer."[24]

In short, we need to investigate the processes of Chinese activities and the local negotiations they entail in order to grasp the actual influence of global China. In this special section, Juliet Lu's study of a Chinese state farm's investment in Lao rubber plantations illuminates the often unpredictable travails of Chinese state investment abroad. Studying how Yunnan State Farms faltered and flourished over a six-year period, Lu shows that high-level diplomatic support and ample access to loans and subsidies did not guarantee success – the farms were not able to obtain land. Instead, Yunnan State Farms serves as an example of how Chinese state firms are pulled between the need to develop profitable investments and attend to multiple state interests (in both China and the host country)

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22 Jones and Zeng 2019, 1427.
23 Lee 2017, 47–52.
24 Zhang 2020, 23.

to which they are bound. For Yunnan State Farms, the ability to navigate often conflicting national and subnational state interests (in Yunnan and provinces in northern Laos) was particularly important to its eventual success, as was its ability to differentiate itself from other Chinese rubber firms as not only a profit-driven business but also a development partner.

Beyond state projects, the new global China scholarship has shed important light on the "going out" experiences of private businesses and entrepreneurs. Their interests and capacities are markedly different from those of state capital, even though both types of capital have been racialized and categorized as "Chinese" in media reports and popular perception. Offering granular and textured analysis, the new studies are sensitive to the historical context and pre-existing social structure shaping Chinese arrival, as well as the modes of local resistance and adaptation. The articles by Liang Xu and Derek Sheridan are exemplary in arguing that South African and Tanzanian societies respectively were not tabula rasa when the Chinese arrived. Rather, Chinese industrialists and wholesalers seeking to make profits in both countries have had to contend with long-standing racial, class and gender hierarchies of power. In their analyses, we see Chinese and Africans cooperate in factories and wholesale markets but also contest with one another over wages, space, class mobility and the moral right to the market. Their arguments are not just cliché assertions or politically correct posturing that Africans have agency and can resist. They interlace their vivid ethnographic descriptions with theoretical discussions, identifying especially *how* racial construction, moral economy and labour market struggles in both South Africa and Tanzania structure Chinese and African encounters. The flows of capital and labour from China are as conflict ridden as those from other countries, but they are played out with historical and cultural specificities of African societies as much as those of the Chinese actors.

Patron-clientelism

Besides using economic resources to realize power and influence, global China entails the CCP regime's efforts at building and cementing patron-clientelism – long-term, unequal relations of exchanging material rewards for political support – with people and communities abroad. As with economic statecraft, patron-clientelism has an entrenched presence in state–society relations in rural and urban China, from the pre-People's Republic of China (PRC) era to the current era. After 1949, the CCP's control and selective distribution of economic, social and political resources have allowed it to forge unequal relations of dependence, loyalty and support with citizens and cadres alike.[25] In going global, the regime expands and exports patron-clientelism to cultivate dependence and loyalty among foreign nationals, political elites and overseas Chinese. For instance,

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25 Walder 1986; Oi 1989; Lee and Zhang 2013.

Chinese foreign assistance projects are tools for building such political patronage relations with African elites. A large-scale study on 1,650 Chinese development projects across 2,969 physical locations on the continent from 2000 to 2012 found that political leaders' birth regions receive substantially larger financial flows from China in the years when they hold power compared to what the same region receives at other times. These biases are a consequence of electoral competition: Chinese aid disproportionately benefits politically privileged regions in country-years when incumbents face upcoming elections and when electoral competition is intense.[26]

Financial incentives, funding support and business opportunities are used to entice pro-China behaviour among overseas clan associations, native place associations, Chinese business associations, friendship associations, councils for peaceful reunification of China, and the like. The Chinese embassies, via their control over Chinese nationals' passport statuses and life opportunities of family members back home, can demand compliance of Chinese students and scholars abroad, eliciting their assistance in collecting information on foreign countries. Economic incentives often come packaged with heavy doses of nationalistic rhetoric.[27] As China pursues global expansion, the regime has revamped its "united front" apparatus, an elaborate machine within the party-state dating back to the 1930s. Its nine bureaus cover almost all of the areas in which the CCP perceives threats to its power. The Third Bureau, for instance, is responsible for work in Hong Kong, Macau, Taiwan and among about 60 million overseas Chinese in more than 180 countries. The Second Bureau handles religion. The Seventh and Ninth bureaus are responsible respectively for Tibet and Xinjiang – two restive frontier areas that are home to Tibetan and Uyghur minority nationalities. Under Xi Jinping, a leading group has now been formed for united front work with direct command from the Politburo. Its training manual introduces a range of methods on how officials can use this "magic weapon," from the emotional, stressing "flesh and blood" ties to the motherland, to the ideological, focusing on a common participation in the "great rejuvenation of the Chinese people," and, most importantly, the material, providing funding or other resources to selected overseas Chinese groups and individuals deemed valuable to Beijing's cause.[28]

Yet, as with the use of economic statecraft, we know more about China's interests and strategies than those of the targeted groups on the receiving end. Instead of assuming the compliance of the Chinese diaspora to a revamped united front, some researchers have begun to examine how the Chinese diaspora appropriates Beijing's effort to harness their support, and if the united front is effective or if it leads to unintended consequences. Wanjing Chen's article in this special section exemplifies this approach. Her immersive research follows a group of diasporic

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26 Dreher et al. 2019.
27 To 2014; Hamilton 2018; Bowe 2018.
28 Kynge, Peel and Bland 2017.

leaders, or *qiaoling* 侨领, in Laos, a country that has recently emerged to be the target of the CCP regime's public diplomacy for the BRI. Their shrewd performance of patriotism, through hosting banquets for visiting Chinese officials and staging public events in the media, wins them official recognition as trustworthy and well-connected brokers for Chinese bureaucrats and investors unfamiliar with local conditions. Having accumulated precious symbolic capital, these *qiaoling* appropriate patron-clientelism for their often fraudulent businesses. Victims of their predatory dealings include Chinese SOEs. The Chinese government finds it difficult to discipline *qiaoling*, however, whose local citizenship and connections with the Lao elite often shield them from the full force of the law.

Po-Yi Hung's study of tea-growing Chinese communities in the northern Thai borderlands reveals the wax and wane of diasporic policies hailing from mainland China and Taiwan. The contested terrains between these "two Chinas" consist of state support for Chinese-language education (i.e. the teaching of simplified as opposed to traditional Chinese scripts) and tea-production technology and the marketing of tea. Caught in between these competitions, between the changing market structure for the tea business and the Thai government's strategy to develop tea tourism in the north, young Thais of Chinese descent embrace flexible citizenship and do not see themselves as loyal PRC diasporic subjects.

In short, China's global ambition has to be distinguished from China's global achievement. Chinese reputation and influence may be enhanced or damaged, depending on the political dynamic of patron-clientelism. There are as many cases of China succeeding in buying influence as there are failures. Recently, a palpable backlash against Chinese attempts to co-opt foreign politicians has gone beyond rhetorical accusations of "sharp power." [29] Legislations prohibiting foreign interference in the political, economic and civil lives of democracies in the US, Australia and New Zealand have been enacted. Even African political elites, who have been widely assumed to be clients of Beijing after years of lavish gifts of aid and loans, have shown signs of collective defiance against China's handling of Africans in China during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Symbolic domination

A third form of power mechanism in Beijing's pursuit of global China is what Pierre Bourdieu terms symbolic domination. This refers to the production and reproduction of power through symbolic forms (e.g. art, religion, language, media) due to their ability to construct, name and classify realities, making certain things thinkable, even natural. Mobilizing cultural goods and practices gets at people's dispositions, feelings and common sense (or doxa), and has a magical quality as it is almost invisible.[30] As with economic statecraft and patron-clientelism, symbolic domination has long been a CCP power strategy in

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29 Diamond and Schell 2018.
30 Bourdieu 1991; Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992.

governing the Chinese mainland and is now being exported abroad. In 2007, Hu Jintao included culture as a factor of "comprehensive national power" and began programmes to burnish China's "soft power." Xi Jinping spoke about seizing discursive power internationally, "telling a good China story," "spreading China's voice well" and creating a "trustworthy, lovable and respectable" image for China. Chinese media and think tanks have coined buzzwords such as the "China Model," "peaceful rise" and the "China Dream" to counter Western discourses of the "China threat," "Chinese neo-colonialism" and "China's collapse."[31]

The rebranding of China Central Television (CCTV) as the China Global Television Network (CGTV) is a multi-billion effort to produce and disseminate officially sanctioned perspectives on global news, allowing China to compete directly with other news agencies like Reuters, Bloomberg, CNN and the BBC. CGTV now broadcasts six channels, two in English and others in Arabic, French, Russian and Spanish, with reporting teams in more than 70 countries. In radio broadcasting and the print media, China has either bought stakes in existing outlets, used front companies to mask its editorial control or established its own networks of publication and distribution from Africa to America (e.g. China Daily Africa, in-flight magazines on Kenya Airlines, free inserts in national newspapers, and community radio and television stations targeting ethnic minorities in the US).[32]

Sensitivity to feelings and human relationships informs global China's people-to-people diplomacy. There are programmes aimed at building a network of young leaders who may eventually emerge as "friendship envoys" between China and Latin America and Africa, with favourable predispositions towards China. Under the banner of the "bridge to the future" exchange programme, organized by the All-China Youth Federation, Beijing has committed to training one thousand young leaders, mirroring equivalent training workshops for foreign government officials. Students and journalists are two other target groups. For instance, between 2015 and 2019, China offered tens of thousands of government scholarships to Latin American and African students and training fellowships to journalists under the aegis of the China Public Diplomacy Association.[33]

This special section features two studies that go inside two symbolic power projects by China – the global network of Confucius Institutes (CIs) and the deployment of medical teams in developing countries. Their grounded analyses illuminate the local dynamics that both facilitate and hinder China's ambition to project influence through the promotion of image, culture, discourse and good will.

Maria Repnikova's ethnographic study of CIs in Ethiopia focuses on *how* CIs actually operate – what are the motivations, interests and practices among people

31 Callahan 2015.
32 Thussu, de Burgh and Shi 2017; Wasserman 2018.
33 Gadzala 2019.

who administer, teach and learn at CIs? Her fascinating data show that the Chinese way of "pragmatic enticement" defies the core idea of "soft power" which posits that political-economic and cultural power are distinct and have to be pursued separately. Rather, the Chinese way of fusing practical/economic opportunities with language and cultural promotion actually speaks to local needs and desires. For administrators, the CI project presents job opportunities for their graduates, as well as a symbolic alignment of their institutions with the global education community and modernity. For students, the Chinese language is a channel for experiencing China as a destination and as an employer. For Chinese teachers, foreign postings are a professional and personal growth opportunity. But while pragmatic enticement may work well in the short run, it faces a sustainability crisis due to its strong dependence on China's presence in Ethiopia, the job market for Chinese-language graduates and rising expectations from host institutions.

Yidong Gong's article on China's medical diplomacy in South Sudan offers a rare look inside a time-honoured strategy of delivering public health assistance to the developing world. Since the first Chinese medical team was sent to Algeria in 1963, the mode of China's intervention has been transformed from Mao's "revolutionary humanitarianism" to an assemblage of medical diplomacy (sending doctors to teach and practise in teaching hospitals, organizing general health consultations in the countryside), and building health infrastructure (for example, South Sudan reached an agreement with a Chinese engineering company to construct at least 26 hospitals across the nation). Tellingly, Gong calls this a "non-suffering" mode of care, in stark contrast to the Western model of "universal humanitarianism" informed by Christian precepts of suffering and run by Christian organizations focusing on emergency cases and critical life-saving services. Yet on the ground Chinese doctors implementing the policy of non-interference and friendship are left to their own devices in negotiating with local colleagues and local conditions. Without a designated position in the local medical hierarchy, and no decision-making power in running the hospitals, they often feel disempowered and marginalized. For instance, Chinese surgeons and orthopaedists in the Juba Teaching Hospital cannot apply their medical skills inside the hospital, because their South Sudanese counterparts tend to outsource patients to private clinics in order to create a revenue stream for local doctors. An operation will easily cost two to three thousand South Sudanese pounds – a crucial source of income for doctors who have not received salaries from the government for a few months in the wake of nationwide economic crisis. Gritty realities like this have to be analysed together with grant strategies in order to understand global China.

Global China Studies

Since the *China Quarterly* special issue "China and Africa: Emerging Patterns in Globalization and Development" (vol. 199) published in September 2009, which

featured preliminary fact-finding studies about Chinese activities in Africa, research on global China has proliferated in terms of geographical region, subject matter and methodology. From Africa to South-East Asia and Latin America, from analyses of policy, official discourse and grand strategies to granular ethnographies of class, gender and race dynamics between Chinese and local actors, from state investment in commodities to private industrialists, diaspora, cultural and medical diplomacy, global China studies has taken off, especially among the younger generation of China scholars. The articles in this special section, first discussed in a workshop funded by the American Council of Learned Societies, do not claim to cover or represent all parts of global China. But their analyses of the configuration of power and relations under specific political economic contexts lend these case studies theoretical, rather than statistical, generalizability.

From afar and from the top down, using trade and investment statistics or interviews with politicians and policymakers in their palatial offices in capital cities, China looks like an unstoppable superpower ready to rule the world by throwing its financial weight around. Those aggregate pictures painted by numbers are useful and important for grappling with China's truly global ambitions. But the laborious, grounded empirical research of the papers in this special section is equally necessary, as they reveal the actual operations and consequences of global China. Even in countries with weak states and close ties with China – such as Laos, Tanzania, South Sudan, Ethiopia, Thailand and South Africa, each of which are examined in this collection – we find Chinese interests, both state and private, derailed, challenged and compromised. Together, these studies highlight the uneven and uncertain realities of global China by unearthing the mechanisms of power and the different forms of resistance and adaptation among Chinese and local regimes, interests and people. These analyses help us understand how and why a global backlash against China, rather than "Chinese colonialism" or the "Chinese century" postulated by those only looking at numbers or rhetorical debates, has surfaced in today's global politics and debates.

Global China studies is more than a niche literature. It has profound implications for contemporary China studies more generally. Adopting a power rather than geographic perspective, and following the footsteps of others, I have argued that the CCP regime exports its domestic political playbook to different parts of the world, generating variegated and sometimes unintended consequences. Contrary to the notion of "adaptive authoritarianism" that some scholars have proposed to describe the regime's flexible, guerrilla and contingent mode of governance, one could argue the exact opposite – that it has been rigid and unadaptable, assuming erroneously that what has worked inside China will also work outside its jurisdiction. The striking similarities in Chinese strategies in domestic governance and global expansion challenges us to recognize the limits of China studies' fixation on developments within China. Moreover, as the impetuses for China's "going global" originate from domestic economic bottlenecks and governance challenges, the consequences of global China are bound to affect what goes on in mainland China. Facing a global backlash against its

own global expansion, the CCP regime may have to confront an unprecedented combined crisis of accumulation and legitimation, and may need to further tighten political and social control in the name of national security, fuelling nationalism. Recent events in Hong Kong and Xinjiang could be harbingers of more repression ahead. Trade war with the US and sanctions against Chinese corporations will have severe impacts on China's agenda of climbing the global value chain and sustaining rural and urban employment, with of all the ensuing socio-political uncertainties and potentiality for instability.

Global China research raises the question of what is "Chinese" about China? That is, what are the peculiarities of Chinese practices, processes, patterns and policies? For a long time, much of China scholarship has taken for granted the "Chineseness" of things happening within the Chinese borders. But once our empirical focus leaves China, we can no longer hide behind geography to assert Chinese characteristics; we are compelled to show China's peculiarity, or the lack thereof, through comparison. The contributors to this special section point to this methodological sensibility in their articles and other writings. Gong's study argues that both China and the West sent medical missions to South Sudan, but China's development-oriented "non-suffering approach" differs from Christianity-inspired humanitarianism driven by a discourse of deliverance from "suffering." Repnikova finds that China's embedding of practical and eco-nomic enticement into cultural outreach is distinct from the American soft power programme emphasizing American values and the Russian approach rooted in inspiring nostalgia for the glorious times of Ethiopia–Soviet Union friendship. Xu's study on Chinese industrialists points to their productivity- and behaviour-based construction of race, rather than racial discourses of bodies and sexuality associated with Western colonialism. In Tanzania, Chinese businessmen are per-ceived by Africans to be different from another Asian group of traders, Indians. The former compete among themselves while the latter are said to collaborate to fix prices. The arrival of the Chinese broke the Indians' dominance and monop-oly in wholesaling, and opened up new mobility opportunities for aspiring Tanzanian petty traders with little capital, because Chinese goods are cheaper. Finally, comparison with China's own past illustrates continuity and change in relating to the Chinese diaspora. Chen alludes to the Qing dynasty's innovative practice of giving honorary bureaucratic titles to emigrant capitalists in South-East Asia to harness their political support and investment. Other than China, many countries have adopted a "diaspora turn" in their global public pol-icy since the 1990s, devising diaspora strategies to map and govern their extrater-ritorial populations as global migration intensified. The research featured in this special section is an invitation to compare, in order to establish the conditions for the variation in dynamics and consequences of China's global ventures, as well as what is and is not "Chinese" about "China."

Comparison is not the only methodological implication of global China stud-ies. Some young scholars are proposing global China as a method. In their approach, global China is less about China "going out," but how transnational

and global interests, imaginations, institutions and politics shape things that are happening inside China. It is a "method" as it is an analytical strategy that helps us overcome the long-standing "methodological nationalism" that has plagued China studies, area studies and the social sciences in general.

Darren Byler's study of Xinjiang as a penal colony is a prime example. He shows how digital surveillance systems, forced labour in cotton fields and factories and concentration camps targeting Uyghurs are atrocities accomplished by both the Chinese government and a litany of global actors. American research universities, global IT giants and experts and the global apparel industry are business partners complicit in the making of Xinjiang's human rights violations.[34] Beyond global capitalist interests, legal scholars have called out the global rhetoric and legalization of the "war on terror" in the past two decades. Equivalents of the Patriot Act in the US and counter-terrorism measures required by United Nations Security Council Resolution 1373 have enabled and encouraged China's "people's war on terror."[35] In short, China has been part of a global trend of leveraging national security legislation to curb civil and ethnic-minority rights and consolidate executive power in different regime types. How autocratization, as a global political movement not reducible to global capitalism, has shaped China and its variant of authoritarianism is an important topic for global China scholars. Elsewhere, Franceschini and Loubere illustrate a "global China as method" approach by tracing Chinese/global entanglements – i.e. material and discursive parallels and linkages – in various domains, from labour practices and surveillance capitalism to overseas development financing and the neoliberalization of universities and academia.[36]

Beyond the two short decades reviewed in this introduction, a new wave of scholarship has exhumed from the dustbin of history a "global China" in the pre-globalization and pre-reform era. During the Cold War period, despite the US embargo, communist China sustained international trade with and importation of technology from Europe and other developing countries.[37] The predecessor of today's BRI was China's extensive international development cooperation projects.[38] As a sociocultural force, China partook in the global sixties, when the ideology and practice of Maoism travelled widely in the Global South, and among the American and European Left.[39] Mao's "little red book," consciousness raising, armed struggle, the people's war, and more were inspirations for the Black Panthers and many national liberation movements in Asia, Latin America and Africa.[40] Providing scarce material resources ranging from military

34 Byler 2021.
35 Cody 2021.
36 Franceschini and Loubere forthcoming.
37 Kelly 2021.
38 Zhang 2021; Rudyak 2021.
39 Calhoun 2008; Lovell 2019.
40 Evans 2021; Snow 1989.

training and medical aid to scholarships and railways, Maoist China was the self-proclaimed leader in the global fight against racial injustice and colonial subjugation via the non-aligned movement seeking Third World solidarity and development models beyond the US and Soviet Union. Beyond the radical Left, trans-Pacific exchanges among American and Chinese journalists, musicians, dancers, Christians and diasporic activists defy the facile understanding of an insulated China before the official beginning of the reform and opening era.[41]

In a nutshell, global China is an exciting invitation to rethink existing boundaries and methods of studying China and the world, past and present. The China–world nexus – encompassing connection, complicity, competition, collaboration, contrast and convergence – compels us to move away from naturalizing China as a geographical entity defined by national jurisdiction, and assuming without empirical evidence or comparison that anything happens therein is uniquely and quintessentially "Chinese." At a time of rising (ultra) nationalism and international rivalry, as methodological nationalism garners even more political, moral and emotional purchase, *global* China, as a critical and intellectual resource, is therefore all the more important and urgent.

Acknowledgements

Conflicts of interest

None.

Biographical note

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41 Gao 2021.

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