

# New Perspectives on China's Relations with the World

Written by Daniel Johanson, Jie Li and Tsunghan Wu

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## New Perspectives on China's Relations with the World

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DANIEL JOHANSON, JIE LI AND TSUNGHAN WU, MAR 26 2019

**This is an excerpt from *New Perspectives on China's Relations with the World: National, Transnational and International*. Get your free copy here.**

In the late fall of 2016, the editors of this volume met and discussed concepts for what would later become this book. At the time we agreed that a new collection of research dedicated to exploring new trends and themes in Chinese Foreign Policy would be an essential addition to the existing literature and would allow for further specialised exploration into new and exciting topics. As China's role and influence throughout the world continues to grow, understanding this evolution is ever more important. Having an idea of how China's policies and strategies have adapted – be it on concepts of power, China's internal politics, regional actors, bilateral relations, or international actors – will enable us to further comprehend Chinese actions and priorities. Quickly we settled on a framework for the book based around three key areas: Firstly, national – touching on issues within China and its periphery. Secondly, transnational – looking more at how concepts and people influence power. And, finally, international – examining China's interactions with other regions and nations. The breadth of research in the book presents a multitude of new perspectives on China's interactions and activities throughout the world. From China's periphery to global issues and how policies are influenced, the chapters work together to further define Chinese foreign policy and inform us on how it has developed.

### National

The National section of this book consists of four chapters. The authors of these chapters have focused on ethnic minorities (Tibetans and Uyghurs), democratic development in the Pearl River Delta region, and the issue of Hong Kong. In their discussions, these chapters engage with themes concerning China's security, and the means by which the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) utilises and manages domestic tensions. With the comprehensive social transformation brought about by modernisation and the politico-economic reforms of recent decades, China has not only enjoyed success on the global stage, but Beijing has also acknowledged, albeit cautiously, the emergence of potential challenges. Indeed, these chapters provide analysts with exploratory insight into the Chinese government's actions and reactions to these new challenges.

The first two chapters focus on China's periphery – looking at Beijing's approach to Tibet and Xinjiang, respectively. Both authors delineate a precise picture by examining a wide and varied range of documents concerning the CCP's practice in ethnic minority regions. First, Tsunghan Wu outlines China's commitment to constructing a unitary multi-ethnic state and a combined united front, aligned to the former, for the Tibetan ethnic minority. Crucially, he distinguishes two distinct strategies: accommodation and suppression, that the ruling Chinese Communist Party has employed towards the traditional Tibetan 'upper strata'. Given a social elite feature, this group of 'upper strata' enjoys significant influence throughout all levels of local society. As such, the CCP endeavours to bring their power and influence under their control. As argued by Wu, the CCP's flexible uses of accommodation and suppression have effectively integrated Tibet into the PRC state as a whole. Wu argues that while the strategy of accommodation was implemented during the 1950s and 1980s, Beijing now relies on the strategy of suppression. An 'apparent' social order could be achieved from governmental view – however, the dynamics of ethnic conflict have evolved, both publicly and locally, which has conversely eroded the socio-politico-economic inducement policies that Beijing offered the Tibetans. At present, Tibet still poses a threat to China's nation-building.

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In the second chapter Claudia Zanardi depicts the evolution that the Chinese periphery has experienced since 1949. Through a multi-layer examination, Zanardi argues that the issue of Xinjiang is strongly related to Beijing's Uyghur policies and the Uyghur's embedment in both the pan-Turkic-Speaking nationalist and pan-Islamist networks in differing eras. In both networks, the Uyghurs are perceived as disloyal and a security threat to China's territorial integrity. As a consequence, the CCP adopted a repressive policy – though a certain degree of tolerance was evident in the 1980s. However, there is some similarity to the situation in Tibet whereby Beijing's policies fan Uyghur discontent and threaten a potential eruption of protest. Inequality, due to the uneven distribution of economic development along ethnic lines further exacerbates the conflict.

The next two chapters move on to assess the situation in other majority-Han regions in mainland China. Gustav Sundqvist first shifts our attention to the Pearl River Delta region, focusing on a vital topic when considering modern China – democratisation. In his chapter he investigates the impact of Hong Kong and Taiwan with regard to local democratisation development (a process termed as democratic diffusion). The author conducted this research mainly through interviews with twenty respondents from labour non-governmental organisations (LNGOs) based in Hong Kong and Guangdong province in southern China. His findings identify four mechanisms: consulting, financing, provision of free space and provision of international networks through which democracy diffuse in the region. Questions regarding the existence of a Chinese civil society and the suitability of democracy for Chinese society have long been important topics of debate. Sundqvist's work enhances this discussion and broadens our horizon concerning groups of labour organisation in mainland China. They not only have a strong desire for democratisation while living in a political system distinct from Hong Kong and Taiwan, but they also perceive both as sources of inspiration. A line of democratic diffusion is developing and expanding on a grassroots level through these identified mechanisms. In this sense, Sundqvist has set up a distinct landmark for follow-up studies.

The final chapter in this section by Neville Chi Hang Li shifts our attention to Hong Kong, where several anti-Beijing and pro-democracy demonstrations have occurred in recent years. The author analyses the political framework of 'one country, two systems', that Deng Xiaoping put in place to deal with any potentially problematic contradictions between the capitalist and socialist systems. Li refers to this as a 'political buffer' and suggests that its role is in danger. Referring to the concept of security developed by Barry Buzan and the Copenhagen School, Li contends that increasing conflict from both the pro-self-determination and the pro-establishment camps contribute to this. This chapter clarifies the basic viewpoints of these two groups and traces the origins of their distinct arguments. Specifically, the pro-self-determinists regard Hong Kong as the only referent object and thus seek full democracy and independence. On the other hand, the followers of the pro-establishment camp regard the entire state, i.e. the PRC, as the referent object. In this way, they avoid confrontation against the central government of Beijing. Clearly, these two stances are incompatible. Given the fact that both sides aim to securitise their referent objects, such an irreconcilable relationship of security competition can only lead to a growing sense of insecurity.

## **Transnational**

The transnational section also consists of four chapters, each dealing with a unique aspect of Chinese foreign policy. Tony Tai-Ting Liu's investigation into China's public diplomacy looks at how 'telling a good story of China' and the concept of 'China Dream' have been utilized to cope with the widespread 'China threat theory' and improve China's status and image. The author also discusses the contributions of the Confucius Institutes and the China Cultural Centres with regard to China's public diplomacy endeavours. He concludes that by making such efforts, China seeks to move away from the popular image of 'China threat' to a more cordial image of China as a friendly and peace-loving nation.

Following on from this, Shu Liang Yan utilizes a case study of China's High-Speed Railway project to illustrate that an infrastructural initiative such as this not only has a place on an economic agenda, but also aims to reshape the international political order in China's favour. In Yan's view, both the Belt and Road Initiative and the worldwide deployment of Chinese-made high-speed railways are concerted efforts launched by the Chinese government. The author argues that the common objective of both projects is building China's alliances through infrastructural construction. Both projects are served to connect continental Asia, change the regional power dynamic, forge a counter-hegemonic force against the Western liberal system and ultimately establish new international institutions

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that are in China's interest. However, Yan questions if the implementation of these public projects can adapt to different political institutions and business cultures as well as deal with countries with profoundly different domestic power dynamics.

Casper Wits argues that the achievement of Sino-Japanese diplomatic normalisation in 1972 and the Peace and Friendship Treaty in 1978, were the result of an intense process of bridge-building and (nominally) non-governmental contacts spanning decades. Central to these efforts was a transnational network involving people from both countries – to which the author refers as People's diplomacy (*renmin waijiao*) or People-to-People diplomacy (*minjian waijiao*). China and Japan both appear to look to the past to learn from the mechanisms that have contributed to the many achievements in post-war Sino-Japanese relations. This seems to be particularly true today as present bilateral relations are tense. People-to-People diplomacy offers a potential way to counteract the current downward spiral in bilateral relations. Such examples can provide us with a unique perspective for analysing modern China's relationship with Japan and the world in a broader twentieth century transnational history context. Wits's account shows that grass-roots transnational networks can be utilized to achieve political goals. History has shown us how civic action across borders changed seemingly rigid political realities throughout the Cold War.

The final chapter in this section by Jie Li focuses on how the changes in China's foreign policymaking combined with the shift in Sino-Soviet relations in the early 1980s affected the writing and thinking of Chinese scholars on the Soviet Union at that time. In the early 1980s, Chinese scholarly research into Soviet hegemony (*baquan zhuyi*), Soviet-Yugoslavian conflicts and Soviet-Third World relations all reflected Beijing's ambitions of challenging the orthodox Soviet model of economic development in the socialist world. This was in order to compete with the Kremlin for leadership amongst developing countries and to project a more benevolent image of Chinese socialism vis-à-vis Moscow. This chapter presents a picture of how Chinese scholars attempted to adjust their analyses to align with China's vision of itself and the world through their research on the formation and evolution of Soviet foreign policy. In the author's view, Chinese Soviet-watchers were not able to remain outside the confines of Chinese politics. The Party guideposts always transcended impartial academic research.

### International

In the first chapter of this final section, Benjamin Creutzfeldt offers an overview of the history of the interaction between China and Latin America – tracing the historical roots from the Qing dynasty until the establishment of the People's Republic of China. The development of the relationship between China and Latin American countries has at times been slow, especially in comparison to other parts of the world. Since Jiang Zemin visited the region in 2001, however, relations and trade quickly grew. Creutzfeldt notes that what makes the relationship most interesting for observers of Chinese foreign policy is where the region fits into China's strategy. On the one hand, it provides necessary raw materials for China's growth. On the other, it offers potential support for 'a new global framework' where China's involvement could either end up supporting the existing elites, or enabling change.

The next chapter in this section by Ilaria Carozza examines China's role in Africa, discussing China's socialisation to the international order and its work to utilise regional forum diplomacy and venues like the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) as a means to socialise African leaders into a similar security narrative. Carozza notes that many studies of socialisation fail to account for a bias in favour of the Western liberal order and its associated norms – and in the process neglect the give and take inherent in socialisation. She views China's use of FOCAC to have successfully created an accepted Sino-African narrative. In particular this appears to be China's reiteration that it too is a developing state and will continue to assist fellow developing countries in creating a shared future prosperity. Utilizing this, China has been able to bring African leaders into the dialogue and in the process allow for China to further help African development and play a more active role in African peace and security.

Following on from this, Daniel Johanson examines how China's role in the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) differs from its actions in earlier stages of the Iranian nuclear issue. As one of Iran's few remaining trading partners, China's role in the sanctions process that led to the agreement was essential – but also understudied and not well understood. What is telling is how China portrayed itself as 'active', 'constructive' and 'responsible'. This chapter shows that, at least in global issues that are not a core interest, China's actions will work within the system –

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for now at least.

The final chapter in this section, and of the book, is Nori Katagiri's examination of China's relationship with Japan and what it means for the region. Katagiri highlights two key factors that play a role in the relationship – the interpretation by each nation of the current state of their balance of power and the impact that the external environment plays. There is a mistrust between the two nations on security and military issues, stemming from a number of historical and modern issues. However, the increase in socioeconomic cooperation highlights a path for a better relationship. There are, of course, flashpoints that could cause things to change for better or worse: territorial disputes, North Korea, Taiwan, Southeast Asia and the uncertainty inherent in American foreign policy are mentioned in particular.

China undeniably plays a greater role in international affairs, and as this continues it is important to understand grand overarching questions like what its policies are, why they are, where change is occurring, and how they are changing. In the chapters that follow, we will see an excellent overview of the latest new perspectives in the study of Chinese Foreign Policy. The work in this volume not only updates our understanding of Chinese foreign policy, but also enables scholars to further this research and build upon it. The broad scope in themes and content should provide a wide overview of the study of Chinese foreign policy and the factors that influence it across the board. As you will see in the chapters that follow, these influences are many and each author brings their own unique perspective in analysing the issues at hand.

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## **About the author:**

**Daniel Johanson** received his PhD from King's College, London. His research focuses on how Chinese foreign policy has evolved and adapted to address issues of international concern, specifically on China's interactions with Sudan, Iran, and North Korea.

**Jie Li** received his PhD in History at the University of Edinburgh. His doctoral project (Sovietology in Post-Mao China, 1980–1999) examined the Chinese official and intellectual evolving perceptions of Soviet socialism in the 1980s and 1990s. He has published a number of commentaries on contemporary Chinese affairs as well as book reviews and papers on a variety of historical scholarship. He is currently teaching Chinese language and culture in Hong Kong.

**Tsunghan Wu** is a PhD candidate at the Lau China Institute, King's College London. His research interests focus on international relations, nationalism, ethnic conflicts and the Tibetan issue. His PhD deals with the politics of China's nation-building in Tibet in the post-1949 era.