STUDIENKURS POLITIKWISSENSCHAFT

Nele Noesselt

Chinese Politics

National and Global Dimensions

Nomos

STUDIENKURS POLITIKWISSENSCHAFT

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1. Introduction

The People's Republic of China (PRC) has risen to global power status. Its new role as investor in Europe and the US, as architect of the globe-spanning New Silk Road, and as advocate of major reforms of existing international institutions in the name of the so-called Global South has refuelled the "old" debate about the uniqueness and singularity of the Chinese case: is it possible to analyse Chinese politics based on theoretical frameworks inspired by European history and developed by scholars based in Western democracies? Or do non-Western states display patterns of (domestic) governance and international relations rooted in their distinct historical-philosophical foundations and cultural traditions? If so, this would imply that one would have to resort to alternative analytical frameworks to understand the hidden drivers and determinants of these countries' deviation from the "universal" model.

Regarding the causal nexus between domestic system patterns and the PRC's position as an actor on the global stage, two (opposing) theory-guided approaches can be identified:

The first approach starts from the assumption of a direct causal relation between a state's political regime patterns and domestic economic structures, as well as philosophical-cultural foundations, and its foreign strategy and global positioning. A socialist state-actor would accordingly display behavioural patterns different from those of a pluralist, liberal democratic system. For example, Democratic Peace Theory postulates that democracies would not fight each other. Non-democratic systems, by contrast, are expected to pursue an assertive, expansionist foreign policy and to oppose the liberal international order.

The second approach postulates that the inclusion of the PRC into international institutions and organisations would cause an internalisation of international values and compliance with international rules and regulations. Over time, the integration of a socialist state into a capitalist world (trade) system was expected to trigger a transformation towards capitalism and democracy. The currently observable development – that a rising non-democratic system might climb within the existing international institutions and participate in the reform and restructuring of the international order, but not necessarily plot its overthrow – has initially not been reflected by studies subscribing to this second approach.

The signals sent by the PRC often appear slightly contradictory, at least when viewed from the perspective of an outside observer. The Chinese leadership resolutely rejects and denies pursuing any hegemonial power ambitions or striving for supreme global leadership (*bu dang tou*). Nonetheless, at a working meeting of the Commission for National Security in February 2017, Xi Jinping framed the concept of "twofold guidance" (*liang'ge yindao*): to "guide the international community to jointly build a more just new world order" and to "guide the international community to jointly maintain international security". In terms of terminology, this is in line with the PRC's axiomatic foreign policy principles, as it draws a clear divisive line between the concept of "guiding" (*yindao*) and the

notion of "leading" (*lingdao*). Nonetheless, the PRC's global role conception has undergone some internal revisions: China is actively participating in multilateral bargaining rounds on global trade and finance as well as on global politics and (non-traditional) security.

This textbook introduces the reader to the basic patterns and guiding principles of Chinese politics, covering both the domestic and the global level. It discusses the interplay between formal and informal dimensions and includes the political psychological level of Chinese politics through images, perceptions, and role claims. The textbook summarises the existing English-language state of the art, complemented by select streams of contemporary inner-Chinese debates and theory models. These debates amongst Chinese scholars and frameworks developed by Chinese political scientists are often excluded from textbook introductions to the political system of the PRC. They are, however, essential for understanding the concepts and calculations underlying the dynamic institutional adjustments and policy innovation in China. When institutional change becomes visible, this is normally the outcome of an internally discussed re-steering process that has been prepared over a long time. By decrypting the debates amongst scholars and think tanks advising the government, one might be able to identify these shifts before they are ultimately proclaimed. It goes without saying that during these phases of internal institutional restructuring China's visible political actions might appear irrational, as they are not in line with previous practices.

The PRC is a dynamically learning system, permanently adapting itself to changes in its domestic and global environment. A textbook which provides the tools and techniques to analyse Chinese politics can, therefore, only pinpoint current basic features and core patterns of Chinese politics and tentatively sketch potential future development trajectories. A multitude of governance concepts and ways of positioning China at the global stage are being discussed amongst Chinese scholars and policy practitioners – out of which the decision-making elite can cherry-pick and amend the official model accordingly. As the following chapters will show, the Chinese political system has never been an ideologically ossified, monolithic system – with the Mao years being no exception. Novel structures and instruments are experimentally tested, informal mechanisms and practices dominate formal system settings. Knowledge of the PRC's formal institutional order and administrative structures is generally important, but one should not forget that in a (Communist) one-party state the party has the final say and stands above the law and the state apparatus. To understand the functional mechanisms of Chinese politics and to assess their current transformations, one has to wear both structure- and agency-focused analytical lenses and to reflect on the ideas and policy paradigms underlying the system's ordering principles.

This textbook is located at the intersection of political science research and modern China studies. To allow the reader to go deeper into the details of the topics addressed, each chapter ends with a list of recommended reading. The textbook employs illustrative case studies to point out recent transformations, often not yet covered in English-language secondary literature. For these specific case studies, Chinese primary sources are referenced. Over the past few years, these illustrations

have proven useful in seminars taught in Vienna, Göttingen, Hamburg, Duisburg-Essen and Zurich: they put flesh on the bones of the often rather abstract and blurry concepts of Chinese governance, and illustrate the variations and flexible (re-)interpretations of key concepts. The in-depth decryption of Chinese political science debates and governance innovation by the fourth and the fifth generation of Chinese political leaders was kindly sponsored and supported by the German National Research Foundation (DFG Project NO 1041/2–1). In this textbook, the results of my project-related fieldwork trips to China are not dealt with in full detail, but they are referenced whenever the internal scholarly debates seem crucial for understanding the most recent transformations of Chinese politics.

The audience addressed by this textbook includes undergraduate and graduate university students and scholars from the fields of political science, international relations, law, economy and China studies. It might also serve as policy consulting material for governmental and political institutions in this field.

The textbook is composed of six topical sections that reflect the historical and philosophical foundations of the PRC's political system, taking a closer look at the interplay between formal and informal system structures. Moreover, it looks at the causal relations between the national and global dimension of Chinese politics. The main contents of each chapter are summarized below to guide the reader through this book:

Chapter II starts with political philosophy and governance theory that determines and shapes Chinese politics. Knowledge of these historical-philosophical foundations is not just relevant to historians but is of crucial importance for being able to read and decrypt official political statements by the PRC's political elites. When drafting new policies, the political elites and their team of advisers debate not only the lessons to be drawn from policy experimentations in other systems but often undertake a retrospect evaluation of governance solutions documented in China's historical records. When proclaiming a new policy, the framing often borrows from China's (pre-modern) political philosophy or creates related neologisms (such as the Harmonious Society *hexie shehui*). The formula *yi shi wei jian*, to take history as a mirror, is almost omnipresent in these internal debates. Along these lines, in 2008 Wen Jiabao, in his role as premier, stressed that there would never be a relaunch of the Cultural Revolution in China – thus framing this episode of the PRC's history as a negative counter-image to the fourth generation's quest for harmony. The dissolution of the Soviet Union (SU), amongst others, is another cautionary historical example quoted to justify policy innovation and institutional reforms as the only way to avoid a state collapse. Recent studies by Chinese scholars come to the conclusion that the big-bang transformation of the Soviet economy and the neglect of ideology, in combination with a loss of control over the military, were the main drivers and causes of the SU's decay. Immediately after his appointment as General Secretary of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), Xi Jinping undertook steps to secure the army's loyalty to the party and started to redefine the PRC's core socialist values (inscribed as Xi Jinping Thought into the CCP's constitution at the 19th Party Congress). The Chinese Empire's dynastical records, and the reasons reported for the previous dynasty's decline therein, present the ruling dynasty as the one restoring

order, fixing the reported aberrations of their predecessors. Political historiography hence forms part of the PRC's official narrative to justify and legitimise reforms. One lesson from the Tang dynasty, for instance, was that empty talk causes the decline of the empire; this has been quoted to explain and justify the top-down enforcement of reforms (and the sanctioning of local officials in case of underperformance) under Xi Jinping. Operating with a symbolic path-dependent development narrative, the Hu–Wen administration (2002/2003–2012/2013) introduced novel political formula inspired by Confucian traditions. Likewise, Xi Jinping's speeches are full of direct and indirect quotes from the Chinese classics and pre-modern (political) philosophy. In addition to Xi Jinping's collected core speeches (available in English under the title *The Governance of China*) compilations of his quotations from the Chinese classics can be purchased in Chinese bookstores. These compilations list both the original quote as well as the context of Xi Jinping's speech in which this reference was made. They thus offer important clues to delve below the surface of Xi's official speeches and statements. English-language translations of Xi's speeches generally include the translation of the quote but do not provide the reader with any background information about the original quote's context and its exegesis by Chinese scholars and political scientists. In some cases, small deviations from the original quote imply that the formula has been adjusted slightly to fit into Xi's speech and send a decrypted message to some members of the audience (in some cases, this adjustment is done by using homophones, i.e., by replacing one character for another that is pronounced the same way – these messages are only visible in the printed version of the speech). The quotations from the Chinese classics serve the construction of a unified "Chinese" value and reference scheme that presents Chinese governance concepts as unique and sui generis. In addition, Xi Jinping has also reconfirmed Maoist concepts both in political debate and political practice – e.g., the "mass line" and campaigns to "rectify cadres' work style".

Likewise, groups of Chinese intellectuals look at contemporary developments against the backdrop of China's historical past and argue that any denial of the country's distinct (political) history would equal the end of China's political system. Liang Zhu's (Peking University) pamphlet against "historical nihilism" fuelled an emotional debate on the Chinese Internet, during which the fragmentation of China's scholarly community and the incompatible positions of competing factions within the CCP became visible once again. The bone of intellectual contention was the parallel that Liang Zhu outlined between the de-Stalinisation and historical nihilism under Khrushchev and the developments in the contemporary PRC (Liang 2012).

The official governance model coined by the fourth and the fifth generation of the PRC's political leaders should not be mistaken as a unified monolithic model, synthesizing the various sources of Chinese governance philosophy. Instead, these philosophical reference systems (Confucianism; Daoism; Buddhism; Marxism/Maoism; and Western values) coexist and are only loosely combined under one overarching roof. Depending on political developments, some frames and elements might be (temporarily) deactivated or removed from the official governance canon.

A clear line of demarcation has been drawn rhetorically between the Maoist era of revolution and class struggle and the post-Maoist era of reform (of the economic system). However, the debate on "historical nihilism" and the concept of "permanent, continued class struggle", initiated by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences in Beijing, demonstrates the persistence and the legacy of Maoist concepts and terminology in the 21st century.

Chapter III provides the reader with an overview of China's institutional order and the operative mechanisms of the Chinese party-state. The notion of the "party-state" illustrates the close intertwined relationship between the CCP and the PRC's state apparatus. This parallel, mirror structure of party and state is re-duplicated at all levels of the administration, down to the level of the county. However, in the PRC's political history there have been periods of radical restructuring or abrogation of China's state institutions – as, for example, during the Maoist mass campaigns. The post-Maoist generations of China's political leaders are guided by the proclaimed goal of setting up a modern, transparent administration with robust checks and balances. After internal turbulences and interruption of these reforms, the fourth and the fifth generation have undertaken efforts to enforce the implementation of these restructuring measures. However, any institutional reforms or adjustments of the governance process can be expected to generate resistance of the bureaucratic state apparatus and groups of state officials whose (institutional) power would be curbed by these reform measures. Mass mobilisation or anti-corruption campaigns are one possible way to enforce the employment of new political personnel and to ensure compliance with the central authorities' reform agenda. The anti-corruption campaign initiated by Xi Jinping persecutes "tigers and flies", i.e., cadres at all ranks and levels of the party-state (including the military) (Noesselt 2014). Anti-corruption campaigns might have multiple goals and drivers. They can be deemed necessary to restore the efficiency and performance of the state apparatus – and they can be used to get rid of counter-elites and opposition movements. On the other hand, they can be an attempt to win back people's trust in the political regime and to generate symbolic support for the CCP and its governance approach. Corruption and power abuse by local party cadres and state officials have shaken people's trust in the system. In the perception of Chinese (local) society, the family members of high-ranked cadres are seen as enjoying multiple privileges. The lawsuits against "tigers" (and "flies") have accordingly been publicly documented by Chinese state media.

Another Achilles' heel of the one-party state is the phenomenon of so-called "naked cadres", i.e., cadres who managed to transfer their family and fortune to other countries and are the only ones of their family staying on. At internal meetings, Chinese analysts have remarked that a similar phenomenon of capital flight occurred in the final years of the Soviet Union. Before this background Xi's anti-corruption campaign goes far beyond those launched by his precursors in terms of scope and range. Operation Fox Hunt (*da liehu*) targeted Chinese officials who had escaped abroad (Xinhua 2015). Until 2017, this operation was coordinated by Wang Qishan, a close ally and companion of Xi Jinping, in his

function as head of the CCP's Commission for Discipline Inspection. Whilst, with the PRC's entrance into the period of reform and opening, this commission did not attract much attention, the role and power of this party organ have been reinforced from 2012 onwards. Operation Fox Hunt was succeeded by Operation Skynet which persecuted Chinese nationals in the US and Great Britain accused of having committed economic crimes. In March 2018, the National People's Congress passed a revision of the Chinese state constitution that included the establishment of a National Supervisory Commission (*Guojia Jiancha Weiyuanhui*) with regional sub-branches. In 2019, a second investigation round of Operation Skynet was launched (*Renmin Ribao* 2019).

The fine-tuning and modifications to the PRC's state apparatus also imply a re-distribution of power and responsibilities between the party and the state as well as amongst the central ministries. Super-ministries have been reorganised and sub-divided into smaller units. Additional mechanisms of internal supervision and checks and balances have been introduced. The fifth generation's governance model follows a "top-level design" (*dingceng sheji*): power has become recentralised. Albeit in political practice, the central party-state still relies on cooperation with the lower levels of administration instead of enforcing top-down decisions without prior consultation. It also continues to cooperate with local (civil) society; formats of local self-administration are regarded as essential for the successful implementation of central level regulations (and their adaptation to local conditions).

The formal institutional order of the state apparatus, as documented in the PRC's constitution, is hardly revealing when analysing the complex interactions between central and local levels as well as between party and state, and regarding the PRC's special administrative units. Hong Kong and Macao are parts of China but – under the formula of "one country, two systems" (*yi guo, liang zhi*) – are allowed to have their own multi-party system structures. Likewise, Taiwan is de jure treated as a province of China – even though the CCP government in Beijing never exerted direct power and control over the island. Chapter III concludes with an assessment of the political history of Hong Kong and Taiwan and discusses the outcome of recent elections and their implications for Beijing.

Chapter IV starts from the Fourth Plenum's (2014) announcement to strengthen legal reforms and the legal system. This chapter places these developments in the historical context of China's past processes of state-building and constitutionalisation. It outlines the parallels between Xi Jinping's proclamation of rule-based governance (*yi fa zhi guo*), complemented by the idea of constitution-based governance (*yi xian zhi guo*), and the intellectual debates and initiatives in the late 19th century to transform China into a constitutional monarchy. In the 20th and 21st centuries, the PRC's ruling elites repeatedly discussed the function of legal frameworks and institutionalised modes of governance to stabilise the one-party state. The Fourth Plenum in 2014 was, however, the first of its kind to formally highlight the importance of rule-based governance. The concept of constitution-based governance, which was discussed simultaneously, was later dropped. This points at internal controversies within the CCP. In January 2013, the Guangdong-based weekly newspaper *Nanfang*

Zhoumo (*Southern Weekend*) reported that the new year editorial, originally entitled as "Chinese Dream, Dream of Constitutional Governance" (*Zhongguo meng, xianzheng meng*), had been censored. Other newspapers and journals also elaborated on this notion – including *Yanhuang Chunqiu* (English title: *China through the Ages*), whose webpage was down after an essay had been posted that identified constitution-based governance as a necessary prerequisite for a general restructuring of the political system (Yuen 2013). The official party organ, *Renmin Ribao* (*People's Daily*), intervened in this dispute and published three editorials that documented the official definition of the Chinese governance model and rule-based governance. Since August 2013, constitutionalism and democracy, as well as Western values, have obviously been put on a blacklist.

The internal controversy back in 2013 over the concept of constitutionalism insinuates that one should not look at the Chinese configurations of the law (and law-based governance) separately, but in connection with the concepts of democracy, socialism and capitalism. In Western political science, democracy and rule of law are widely seen as causally interrelated. In the Chinese debate, these concepts have been redefined and adapted to the political reality of the one-party state.

In principle, the strengthening of rule-based governance accompanies the recent modifications of the PRC's economic development strategy and its institutionalisation. Chapter IV thus concludes with some reflections on the transformation of the Chinese economy and the debate about a distinct "Chinese" variety of capitalism.

With **Chapter V** the textbook turns to the visible pluralisation of actors directly or indirectly involved in Chinese politics (and policymaking). During the Maoist years, tensions between factions – competing interest groups within the CCP – had reached their peak in the "struggle between two lines", i.e., between those labelled as "revolutionary-proletarian" and those falling into the category of "capitalist-bourgeois" forces. These cleavages have survived and continue to erupt from time to time. Tensions and conflicts also occur amongst China's economic elites – between the state-owned sector and the private economy, between advocates of a neo-Maoist development approach and those favouring a neo-liberal agenda. One of the CCP government's central tasks is to restore and maintain social harmony and cohesion and to mediate between the competing socio-economic actor groups. In 2018, the PRC's Gini coefficient, describing the inequal distribution of income, reached 46.8 (down from 49.1 in 2008, but up from 46.2 in 2015).[1] This indicates a severe imbalance that could threaten social harmony and regime survival.

The economic reforms initiated in 2013 aim at reducing state subsidies for state-owned companies and to strengthen market-based competition. The National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC), an agency under the State Council, outlined some basic reform ideas in its 383 Plan. This plan proposes the simultaneous expansion of market economy principles, the reform of administrative

1 https://www.statista.com/statistics/250400/inequality-of-income-distribution-in-china-based-on-the-gini-index/.

system structures and the strengthening of rule-based governance. To foster competition, the NDRC recommends a further opening of the market for private and foreign investors, especially the sectors of banking and finance – and to further internationalise the Chinese renminbi. The plan also includes the liberalisation of the energy and telecommunication sectors. With regard to the situation of Chinese peasants, the 383 Plan devises the strategy of reforming land use rights regulations. The prospective legalisation of rural–urban labour migration also requires the establishment of (private) social insurance systems. Access to social security and welfare systems should no longer depend on people's original *hukou* registration.[2] The Third Plenum (2013) finally passed a 60-points reform package that remained far more abstract than the original NDRC reform proposal.

The reform package of the Third Plenum formally stands for a top-down imposed re-steering of China's economy. Indirectly, the reform proposal reflects the positions and demands of relevant societal actor groups. Under certain conditions – outlined in Chapter V – mass protests and contestation movements are tolerated, as they serve as seismographs that provide the central government with information about local (mis)developments and allow the formulation of policies designed to pre-empt people's demands. The CCP has undergone a transformation from a revolutionary party of workers, soldiers and peasant to a ruling party that represents the Chinese "people" in its entirety. This also includes the group of the so-called "red capitalists" – private entrepreneurs maintaining a symbiotic relationship with the party. But the CCP also pays special attention to rural areas, maybe also due to historical legacies, as the revolution that brought the CCP to power heavily relied on its power bases in the countryside. Furthermore, as historical records reporting on the decay of several Chinese dynasties highlight, religious movements and peasant rebellions were the main reasons for the fall of the ruling dynasty and the instalment of a new – sometimes local only – government led by the revolutionary forces.

Chapters **VI** and **VII** turn to the global dimensions of Chinese politics and assess the links and dependencies between the PRC's global positioning and reforms and developments at the domestic level. **Chapter VI** begins with a short overview of the international perceptions and views on China's role as an actor in international politics, contrasting them with the PRC's officially proclaimed national and global role conceptions. In international political science, as well as in debates amongst Chinese academic communities, one central topic is the modes and effects of the rise of a state to global power status. Whilst neorealist scholars categorically deny that such a process could occur peacefully, the political and political science debate in China operates with the paradigm of Peaceful Rise (*heping jueqi*) and postulates that the PRC is cooperatively rising within the existing international system structures. The Peaceful Rise (also framed as Peaceful Development Road (*heping fazhan zhi daolu*)) is – like the Harmonious World (*hexie shijie*) – one of the PRC's magic formulas to defuse threat perceptions and to counter scenarios of an inevitable conflict between rising powers (China) and the old gravitational centres of world

2 The 383 NDRC document is available online: http://www.xatdj.com/article/11003.html.

politics (the US). Chapter VI moves beyond the official narratives of China and the US by assessing concrete actions and developments in select sub-fields of global politics – especially in those characterised by under-regulation and seen as emerging fields of global power competition: outer space, cyberspace and the Artic region. To assess global power shifts, the chapter examines the PRC's refined approach to Africa and Latin America – the latter being historically regarded as the strategic backyard of the US. The expansion of Chinese economic (and political) activities is an undeniable fact – as the emergence of the PRC as an investor in Europe and the US, also covered in Chapter VI, corroborates. The exploration of global markets and the PRC's infrastructure and investment in other world regions have led to a readjustment of China's security strategy. China did not only modernise its army – the annually announced increase of its military spending adds fuel to the debate on Beijing's "new assertiveness" – but also set up a blue water navy and special forces trained for global missions. The PRC participates in UN peacekeeping missions and, under Xi Jinping, for the first time in its history, also contributed combat forces. This indicates that crises and conflicts in other world regions are seen as detrimental to Chinese economic development interests – and, clearly, Beijing seeks to position itself as a responsible global power contributing to the resolution of global challenges. These image campaigns might also explain the PRC's new positioning in the fields of global climate change and global finance. Whilst, over the past few decades, the PRC refused to sign any contracts that would include binding quota for emission reduction, since the Paris Summit (2015) the PRC actively advocates the re-steering of national and global economies towards green and sustainable development. Two developments might lie behind this strategic turn: firstly, the PRC enforces a more sustainable, low-emission growth model at home and heavily invests in the development of green technologies – which could be exported to other regions undergoing a similar re-steering process. Secondly, the PRC's positioning as an advocate of combatting climate change happened when the Trump administration withdrew from the Paris protocol. At the World Economic Forum and at G20 meetings, the PRC also pushed for "green finance" and put forward its own concepts to stabilise the global financial system.

Chapter VII takes a closer look at recent power shifts and transformations of world politics that are still at an early stage but have the potential to trigger additional modifications in China's foreign and security strategy (this already happened in some cases). With the New Silk Road (also known as One Belt, One Road (OBOR) or Belt(s) and Road(s) Initiative), the PRC has put forward the idea of constructing a globe-spanning network of trade corridors managed and coordinated by Beijing. This New Silk Road also means that the PRC's relations with the Arab world will be deepened and expanded. This diversification of the PRC's foreign relations and its reaching out to "new" world regions has implications for the Chinese-imagined cartography of the world as composed of major power centres. The Chinese term *duojihua* (multipolarisation) stands for a transition from the US-centred world system to one in which China would play an important role but not act as supreme leader. In the Chinese political debate of the 1970s/1980s, the rather broad concept of multipolarity was broken down to pentapolarity, a world composed of China, Europe, Japan, Russia and the

US. Chapter VII re-assesses these four bilateral relationships by looking at their historical evolution and most recent transformations in the 21st century.

A retrospect view on the theories and paradigms guiding research on Chinese politics evidences that scenarios and interpretations tend to be overshadowed by the researcher's position in time and space and impacted by global power constellations and power competition. Sometimes, analyses might have also been inspired by normative views and thus do not document facts but provide the reader with an *ex cathedra* interpretation of Chinese politics.

The evaluation and classification of Xi Jinping's leadership style by international analysts illustrates that the interpretation of Chinese politics is subject to rapid changes of views and opinions (of course, reflecting unexpected shifts and turns of Chinese politics). Initially hailed as liberal reformer, Xi Jinping, for example, activated slogans and steering mechanisms of the Mao era. In official party terminology, he is referred to as core leader (*hexin lingdao*), his theory on Chinese socialism – Xi Jinping Thought – was inscribed into the CCP constitution at the 19th Party Congress. At this congress, Xi was also reconfirmed as CCP General Secretary. In March 2018, the National People's Congress passed a revision of the state constitution that would allow him to remain in his position as State President for life (before the revision of the constitution, this had been formally limited to two consecutive office terms). Hence, international observers now see him more as charismatic-authoritarian leader and conservative defender of one-party rule than as a liberal reformer (see, inter alia, Economy 2014).

Even the cult of personality appears to have been restored. There has been no second red book or wide-spread launch of propaganda posters (though wall slogans and posters carrying core political statements can be found across the country). But one should not forget that Xi Jinping's speeches have been compiled and translated into various languages; the third volume was released in 2020. Additionally, short video clips and animated cartoons on the PRC's reform policies are being circulated on the (Chinese) Internet. Some of them address the Chinese audience, others are reaching out to the English-language community (such as one cartoon on the advantage of Chinese meritocracy as compared to Western democracy, and one music cartoon clip on the PRC's 13th Five-Year Plan). The analysis of visual documents – images, graphs and maps printed in Chinese newspapers; posters; animated cartoons; videos and documentaries broadcast by Chinese state media – offer additional ways to get access to the "hidden" dimensions of Chinese politics. Whilst the official political narrative operates with rather obscure frames and concepts that are open to definition, the visualisation of these frames by the state media hints at some of the content elements linked to these frames which are currently being discussed. Regarding the fifth generation of Chinese political leaders, these visual dimensions of Chinese politics have remained rather under-theorized and under-explored. Given the opaqueness of the Chinese political system and the partial self-censoring of the public (intellectual) debate, visual documents provide the analyst not only with the official narrative of the party-state but might reflect elements of the various competing policy images and reflections on China's future developments that are

neither publicly displayed nor documented in official political statements or official journal publications.

These contemplations on the dynamic fluidity of Chinese politics imply that a textbook written to provide the reader with the knowledge and skills needed to identify and interpret contemporary developments of Chinese politics can only document the basic patterns and facts and outline views and interpretations documenting the state of Chinese governance at the moment of the conclusion of the textbook manuscript. This textbook aims at raising the reader's awareness of the importance of the informal dimensions of Chinese politics and the temporary oscillations of the system (which should *not* prematurely be read as indicators of a lurking regime collapse).

In order to allow the reader to "jump" between the chapters and to use this book also as reference book to look up basic definitions and core facts, some definitions and episodes mentioned in the opening parts of this book are taken up again at a later point – so that each (sub-)chapter can also be read as independent (learning) unit.

In addition to the list of references and the list of recommended literature at the end of each chapter, this textbook includes a list of central databases and online portals on Chinese politics. Throughout the manuscript Hanyu Pinyin is used for romanising Chinese characters – unless an older (e.g., Wade Giles) transcription is commonly used for certain names of people or places in the English-language literature.[3]

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3 E.g., Chiang Kai-shek is used instead of the pinyin transcription as Jiang Jieshi; Sun Yat-sen instead of Sun Yixian.

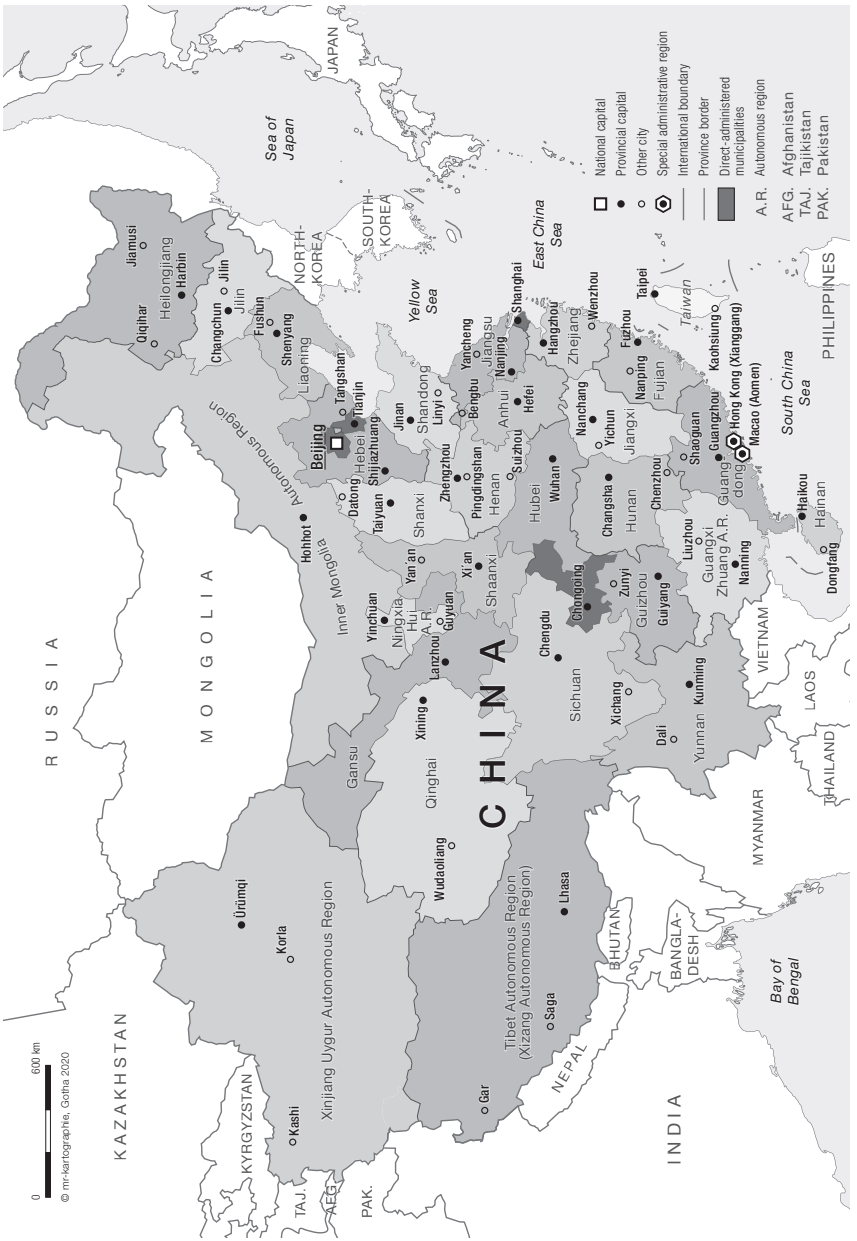


Figure 1: Map of China

6. Global Dimensions: China's "New" Role in World Politics

Key Content and Learning Goals

- Overview of core theories and frameworks of analysis to assess the underlying multidimensional dynamics and main determinants of China's positioning in world affairs
- Introduction to the historical and cultural foundations of contemporary Chinese foreign relations
- Summary of Chinese world order views and think-tank debates on key concepts of world politics and global governance
- Illustrative case studies on China's changing positioning in global governance
- Theory-guided evaluation of China's "new" role in world politics: "norm taker", "norm maker" versus "norm innovator"

In the first decades following the PRC's entrance into the post-Mao reform era, the country's foreign policy decision-making process was readjusted and professionalised. Personalistic, charismatic leadership as practised by Mao was replaced by the principle of collective leadership. Instead of being (mis)guided by ideological visions and Maoist revolutionary dreams of the global spread of Chinese socialism, economic pragmatism became the predominant focus of Beijing's foreign relations. To achieve a critical, theory-guided assessment of China's regional and global environment and to calculate Beijing's options in bi- and multilateral bargaining rounds of international politics, the party-state intensified its deliberation with external advisors and promoted the formation of professional foreign policy think-tanks.

Informal institutions and informal consultations are far more powerful than the formal settings of China's foreign and security policy-making process. The PRC's foreign strategy has to accommodate the interests of a huge variety of actors, who sometimes even try to pursue their own foreign policy agenda beyond the PRC's officially proclaimed foreign and security strategy. As the case of China's engagement in Africa clearly illustrates, China's foreign relations with Africa are not so much coordinated by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, but are clearly deeply influenced by the Ministry of Commerce and Chinese (state-owned) banks. On the ground, a plurality of state-owned as well as of private Chinese companies and investors is competing for market shares. Whilst there is still one unified, official foreign strategy of the PRC, activities by local (especially private) "Chinese" actors do not necessarily mirror the Chinese government's official agenda and vision of world order.

The following chapter introduces the reader to the main patterns and drivers underlying the PRC's foreign relations and Beijing's strategic positioning in global affairs. It reflects the PRC's national role claims as well as the roles ascribed to China by the international community. To document the (still ongoing) transformation of China's international actor identity, this chapter includes case studies on China's evolving role as a global investor and supporter of development in Africa and Latin America. Furthermore, additional case studies elaborate on the

reconfiguration of the PRC's national and global security concept and China's efforts to explore and govern "new" areas – such as outer space, cyberspace or the Arctic region.

This chapter concludes with some reflections on China's role in international institutions and reassesses the main assumptions of socialisation theories. The original expectation had been that the integration of states in international (liberal) institutions and global capitalism would lead to these states' compliance with international norms, values and principles of interaction. The related policy diffusion and learning process was thought to occur from the Global North to the Global South, and from the West to the East. The PRC's rise to global power status does not seem to fit into this equation. Beijing is no longer a passive receiver of prescribed rules nor a submissive, accommodating member of international institutions. The PRC has (re-)started to articulate its own world order views and global governance concepts, and to ask for a reform of select international institutions. In addition to these reform initiatives targeting the "old" order, the PRC has also commenced to set up its "own" multilateral institutions such as the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) and the BRICS New Development Bank (NDB). Whilst this move has widely been interpreted as a challenge to the "liberal" order and its institutional backbone(s), a closer and theory-guided evaluation of these "Chinese" institutions might, as the reader will see at the end of this chapter, lead to a more complex scenario beyond the black-and-white scenario of an overt power struggle and system antagonism between the "West" (the US) and the "East" (the PRC).

6.1. China's Self-Image as a Modern Great Power: Imperium or Pole in a Multipolar World?

"Theory is always for someone and for some purpose. All theories have a perspective. Perspectives derive from a position in time and space" – this statement by Robert Cox (1981: 128) highlights the impact of the analyst's location and socialisation on their interpretation of past and current international relations and the formulation of policy advice.

How the rise of China to global power status is evaluated and classified depends on the theoretical framework applied. Neo-realist scenarios and power transition theories postulate that the ascent of a novel player will never be peaceful and will lead to an inevitable war between the old hegemon and the rising power. Scholars inspired by liberal or globalist frameworks, by contrast, tend to stress the increased economic interdependencies and related mutual vulnerability and thus argue that most players will rather seek to avoid any open confrontation. Certain streams of socio-constructivism stress the role of interaction-induced identity-formation as well as the travelling and diffusion of norms and values, hoping that the integration of China will kick-off the internalisation of Western liberal norms and standards. Or, at least, secure compliance with international norms and institutions.

When assessing China's role in world politics, one has to differentiate between foreign policy analysis (FPA) and International Relations (IR) theories. FPA approaches look at the level of foreign policy decision-making, evaluating actors and their mind maps, structural determinants, abstract policy options as well as the final implementation of the foreign policy solutions. FPA thus targets one specific dimension of international relations. Theories of IR look at the level of interactions and often operate with scenarios derived from the analysis of historical cases. IR theories relying on the concept of "like units" start from the assumption that all actors will, given similar environmental conditions and structural settings, follow a unified pattern and resort to the same mode of interaction (and conflict behaviour). This implies that the categorisation of an actor as an "empire" or "great power" is directly linked to ideas regarding his positioning, strategic actions and long-term foreign policy goals.

Opposing the threat scenarios and conflict predictions put forward by neo-realist analysts, Chinese scholars and politicians are engaged in coining an alternative narrative on China's identity and strategic behaviour as a global power. The diversity of IR debates and world order contemplations within China indicates that the remodelling of China's national and global role is still an ongoing process. A critical decryption of the debates related to Chinese IR allows one to gain insight into the transformation and remaking of China's actor identity at the global stage.

This deciphering requires a context-based reading of think-tank publications combined with a frame analysis of the PRC's official diplomatic rhetoric. Transition and foreign policy adjustment processes can occur via a substitution of the official foreign policy master frames or by reiterating key frames but filling them with new content:

Whilst the international debate often tends to classify the PRC as an emerging revisionist and increasingly assertive "empire", the PRC itself operates with the self-image of being a pole in a multipolar world and a great power (*daguo*) in a world composed of one superpower and many great powers. Whilst the concept of multipolarity, coined back in the 1970s, continues to serve as the official reference scheme of China's diplomacy, the meaning ascribed to the concept of "pole" and *daguo* has silently been amended and adapted to the changes in China's regional and global environment. The PRC's official world politics rhetoric still iterates Deng Xiaoping's claim that China would never pursue any hegemonic power ambitions and would never seek to position itself as a global leader (*bu dang tou*). Moreover, the PRC has reconfirmed its dedication to the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence presented by China's foreign minister Zhou Enlai at the Bandung Conference back in 1955. Nonetheless, the PRC's conduct of its foreign relations is often overshadowed by tensions and contradictions between Beijing's abstract foreign policy principles and its actual foreign behaviour. Some inherited foreign policy principles, or "thinking sets", however, seem to be eternal, unchanging ones – such as the prioritisation of (national) economic development or the conviction that China's relationship with the US ranks highest on China's foreign strategy matrix, overshadowing and driving all other bi- and multilateral interactions (see also: Xu/Du 2015).

Given the existence of eternal, axiomatic principles of China's foreign and security strategy, the general expectation is that regular leadership changes are orchestrated as a handing over of the baton to the next generation of leaders who will follow in the footsteps of their predecessors. Nonetheless, the changing of the guard in 2012/2013 and the ascent of Xi Jinping to the top echelons of the Chinese party-state was accompanied by international debates expecting a formal modification and update to the PRC's official foreign strategy. Xi Jinping did, indeed, introduce novel formula such as the Chinese Dream (*Zhongguo meng*) and the Community of Shared Destiny (*renmin gongtong mingyunti*). A thoughtful decryption and excavation of these concepts' historical and philosophical underpinnings evidences that – at least at the content level – the PRC's old, inherited foreign strategy and world order narratives have been continued and reconfirmed. Sometimes, however, official frames might also be filled with "new" content, e.g., by reactivating and adapting strategies and world order ideas that had been temporarily put on ice (He/Feng 2013). Nonetheless, whether the PRC pursues a grand strategy or just undertakes ad hoc crisis management, implying punctual modifications to its foreign behaviour and positioning strategy, remains a question yet to be answered.

The PRC's rise to global power status has fuelled debates amongst scholars and intellectuals in China regarding the eventual need to reformulate the country's foreign strategy in order to reflect changing structural constraints as well as Beijing's upgraded bargaining power vis-à-vis other players in the international realm. The liberal, reform-oriented camp of Chinese scholars favours continuity and advises the government to avoid any actions that could be interpreted as an assertive move and thus catalyse the emergence of anti-Chinese containment coalitions. The hardliners, including certain groups within the Chinese military, by contrast, demand a more self-confident positioning and defence of Chinese national core interests. This internal conflict has become known to the wider public in and outside China in connection with the controversy over the correct reading and interpretation of Deng Xiaoping's *taoguang yanghui* formula.

As the Chinese political scientist Ye Zicheng explains, the formula *taoguang yanghui* – commonly translated as "keep a low profile and bide your time" – is taken from a 28-character statement by Deng Xiaoping back in the 1990s. Deng's statement reacted to continued international criticism directed against Chinese socialism and calculated ways to upgrade Beijing's diplomatic leverage and room of manoeuvre at the global stage. Deng's contemplations do, however, not condemn the PRC to a passive and obedient subordinate to demands and expectations put forward by the international community. The *taoguang yanghui* formula is directly followed by the four-character set *yousuo zuowei* – "to play an active role". Seen from a strategic point of view, *taoguang yanghui* formed part of camouflage tactics, aimed at defusing threat perceptions and preventing the formation of anti-Chinese containment coalitions. Following the end of the Cold War and the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the PRC, as the only remaining major socialist power, became the main target of global initiatives seeking to induce the transformation of the few remaining non-capitalist communist one-

party states. These prevailing scenarios of system antagonisms were identified as adverse to Chinese economic development interests. To realise the modernisation of the Chinese economy and to boost economic growth, the PRC needed a stable and peaceful regional and global environment. The integration into global trade and finance ranked high on the post-Maoist modernisation roadmap (Ye 2002). In the run-up to the changing of the guard in 2012/2013, the "correct" definition and interpretation of the *taoguang yanghui* formula triggered a heated, controversial debate amongst Chinese scholars, think-tank researchers and factions within the CCP. Patriotic groups as well as hardliners from the military demanded that the PRC should undertake a more active and self-confident positioning in regional and global affairs, reflecting the country's upgraded power capacities and rising global economic status. They called for a substitution of the *taoguang yanghui* concept, stressing the tension and incompatibility between *taoguang yanghui* and *yousuo zuowei*. Rather liberal, globalist circles, by contrast, argued that Deng's statement would not a priori inhibit an active engagement and positioning of the PRC in world politics and economics. Scholars from this liberal-globalist group also voiced their concerns that a formal invalidation of *taoguang yanghui* would kick-off dangerous security spirals and arms races. As Yan Xuetong, IR specialist at Tsinghua University in Beijing, explains, Xi Jinping has added a novel frame to the debate on China's foreign and security strategy: *fenfa youwei* – which he translates as "striving for achievement" (Yan 2014).

The *taoguang yanghui* episode shows that the PRC is currently re-thinking and re-evaluating the basic principles of its foreign policy. Likewise, international IR analysts seem to be quite uncertain regarding Beijing's future strategic moves. These debates on China's evolving role in the global system are often guided by the core assumptions of neo-realism and power transition theories, predicting that rising powers will pursue an increasingly assertive foreign strategy and seek to achieve global hegemony. It is expected that the old power centre will try to defend its position, which implies overt confrontation or even the outbreak of war (Organski 1968; Organski/Kugler 1980).

Shaun Breslin, however, argues that the PRC does not actively strive for the overthrow of the existing system structures but rather asks for (modest) reforms – given that the "rise" of China took place embedded in the institutions set up after the Second World War. Any structural change or substitution of these institutions might have unpredictable implications for China's global status and development options (Breslin 2013).

Major critical junctures, such as the end of Cold War bipolarity and the restructuring of international institutions, neither generated a major readjustment of the PRC's foreign and security strategy nor kicked off a reformulation of the country's national role conception and related status and identity claims (Beylerian/Canivet 1997). As the *taoguang yanghui* debate evidences, it was not the external structural transformation of China's global environment as such, but the increase in the PRC's economic and monetary power capacities which has triggered a redefinition of the official Chinese national and global role set.

China operates with an inherited but highly fragmented set of national and global roles, combining the role of "great power" with a reference to "socialism" and the status of a "developing country". Since the PRC's entrance into the Xi Jinping era, the concept of "great power" has, undoubtedly, emerged as the predominant national role element. The official Chinese narrative constructs the notion of "great power" (*daguo*) as opposed to the idea of "empire" (*diguo*). The latter has a rather negative connotation and, dating back to the Cold War years, had been mainly used to classify both the US and the Soviet Union as "empire" and "imperial(ist) powers". The PRC's self-proclaimed national role identity is that of a "responsible great power". This term might remind the reader of the US's efforts to secure the PRC's compliance with international norms and standards by asking Beijing to behave as "responsible great power". The integration of this national role conception ascribed to – if not rhetorically "forced" on – the PRC by other players did, however, not result in compliance and passive role-taking. Instead, the Chinese side displayed an "as if" role-taking behaviour by borrowing a key term of the US debate and merging it with "Chinese" IR norms and world order conceptions.

Diplomatic statements and states' narratives of world politics generally do not allow any direct conclusions to be reached regarding these players' current and future international behaviour. Instead, the coining of official national roles can be understood as part of identity-building and symbolic legitimation. These legitimation narratives are often designed as indirect two-level games: they seek to present political decisions and actions as being in line with the country's historical and cultural traditions and the related value system – thus addressing a domestic audience. Targeting specific groups of cooperation partners at the international level, the official national role conceptions create a shared group identity – when reaching out to the states of the Global South and the developing world – or, in the case of Sino–US interactions, stress the PRC's claim for acceptance and to be treated as an equal partner.

National roles are regarded as dysfunctional if they are not accepted by the targeted audience. Furthermore, if a country's national role claims are perceived as standing in sharp contrast to its actual role behaviour, the continued reference to these internationally "questioned" role claims might be highly counterproductive, as this might ultimately fuel contestation movements. Reports about hidden debt traps attached to China's unconditional granting of loans and credits along its New Silk Road corridors caused the postponement or annulation of already signed investment and infrastructure construction deals by quite a number of states in Africa and Latin America. Whilst the PRC officially sticks to its self-defined identity as a "developing country", and thus promoter of win-win solutions with the Global South, counter-narratives have emerged, accusing China of being a "neo-colonial" power, exploiting these countries and expanding its (political-ideological) spheres of influence.

The perception of Chinese role claims and the interpretation of its actions on the ground do have a strong impact on China's national role conceptions and the coining of related narratives (Hu 2006). The concept of a Peaceful Rise,

forming part of the PRC's national role conception narrative under Hu Jintao, was ultimately replaced by the formula of Peaceful Development, as the former notion had not been well-received by the international audience who doubted the feasibility of a "peaceful" redistribution of power capacities amongst the core players of world politics.

The configuration of Chinese national and global roles mirrors a strategic mapping of given global power constellations: the Chinese role conception of *daguo* is, first of all, a status claim and, in connection with the formula "new type of great power relations" coined by Xi Jinping, constructs a symbolic power parity between China and the US. *Daguo* as such remains an empty signifier, allowing the various (competing) societal actor groups to fill it with their own ideas and imaginations of China's future role in world politics and economics. The self-imagination of China as being a power centre and great power continues the old legacy of China's self-proclaimed identity of *tianxia*. *Tianxia* – all under heaven – is not only the Chinese term for the Chinese Empire, but also operates with the division of the world into the civilised space of the *tianxia* and the barbarian world beyond the imagined four oceans which separate the *tianxia* from these uncivilised parts of the world. *Tianxia* thus symbolises a cultural, civilisational community and is not bound to territorial borders (Zhang, Weiwei 2012). The forced opening of the Chinese Empire for international trade by the Unequal Treaties of the Opium Wars did, as Levenson, postulates, initiate a transformation of China from the status of empire/*tianxia* to the status of a nation-state. Tributary relations and the symbolic *kowtow* submission to the Chinese emperor were substituted by international law and treaty regulations of the Westphalian system composed of nation-states. Beyond this operational level, as Gerald Chan argues, China did not follow the role and identity of a nation-state but remained deeply inspired by its historical identity as a civilisation-state. Some irrational moves and overreactions in Chinese foreign relations could be the result of these internal role and identity tensions (Chan 2014: 280).

Despite international and domestic structural transformations, the PRC did not undertake any official readjustment of its national role conceptions at a terminological level. It did, however, adapt its foreign strategy and foreign policy behaviour (Chen, Yingchun 2007). When entering the post-Maoist reform era, the PRC officially changed its core foreign policy slogan from "war and revolution" (*zhanzheng yu geming*) into "peace and development" (*heping yu fazhan*), later adding the concept of cooperation (*hezuo*) (Liu 2013). Qin Yaqing, summarising this evolution, argues that the PRC underwent a transformation from being a revolutionary power to a rather conservative "status quo" actor. This transformation, according to Qin, was primarily driven by economic calculations. China's economic modernisation required the country's active involvement in the world economy. Integration into the international institutional settings implied a partial modification of China's system configurations and created structural interdependencies, thus forcing China to stabilise the institutional architecture of international trade and finance (Qin 2003). The modification of the PRC's national development strategy, implying a farewell to ideology-based revolutionary

rockets and satellites to political ideology: the "East Wind", "The East is Red" and the "Long March" represented key concepts of Mao's socialist modernisation and national development path. The turn to Chinese mythology still presents the space and lunar projects as being distinctly "Chinese" but also as projects that could be connected to international space initiatives. The "jade rabbit" certainly enjoys a higher symbolic popularity than "The East is Red".

The Chinese Moon mission is not only motivated by the idea of leaving a Chinese footprint on the Moon by adding Chinese landmarks to the official cartography; the Chinese lunar programme seeks to go beyond the existing state of the art and to present new scientific findings to send the signal to the world that the PRC is no longer learning and imitating but has strong innovation capacities. In 2015, (Chinese) media reported the discovery of a new, so-far unknown type of basalt on the Moon (Ling et al. 2015).

6.6. Global Dimensions of the Cyberspace

Most studies on the Internet and China tend to exclusively look at the local, censored and controlled Internet within the walls of the Great Firewall. The global character of the world-wide web is treated marginally, often limited to the normative presumption that the "global" Internet generally puts additional pressure on the Chinese one-party system and, in the long run, would cause its decay. When China connected to the global Internet, Bill Clinton claimed that controlling the net would be like "nailing Jell-O to the wall". Contrary to expectations, the regulations and censorship mechanisms developed in China allowed the party-state not only to control and steer the Internet but also to use it as a tool to generate legitimacy and to upgrade the system's governance capacities. There is neither a transformation automatism inherent to the Internet and social media, nor is there a unilateral pressure exerted on China via the "global" Internet. The PRC developed local hardware and software solutions (sometimes even in collaboration with international, Western companies) that allow control and surveillance. But Chinese IT giants and AI start-ups also designed communication tools and applications that have a high popularity amongst Chinese netizens and amongst smartphone users all over the globe. The "Chinese" Internet is going global – exporting hardware, software and package solutions. The Chinese Internet and communication giants (e.g., Huawei, ZTE) are setting up ICT grids (and 5G infrastructure) in other countries and regions. Chinese ICT companies and AI start-ups also exported their smart (and safe) city solutions, tested in select Chinese cities, to a number of African capitals.

The global Internet has become a space, a new arena, of international relations (Choucri 2000, 2012; Eriksson/Giacomelli 2006). Cyberspace is not only a global platform for interactions amongst states, companies or (world) society, it is also a room created and shaped by their exchange and interactions. IR theory-guided approaches to the global dimension(s) of the world-wide web can be grouped into the following five categories of research:

1) Studies on the global cyberspace and global regulation efforts of online and offline politics via processes of constitutionalisation
2) Studies on the global cyberspace as a platform for interactions between states, focusing on cyber conflicts, cyber hacking and cyber manipulation
3) Studies on the global cyberspace as allowing a continuation of foreign politics with other means, focusing on cyber-warfare as a new mode of non-conventional combat
4) Studies on the global cyberspace as a space for (inter)actions and competition amongst IT and AI companies (Google, eBay, Twitter, Facebook in the US – or Baidu, Alibaba, Sina Weibo and WeChat on the Chinese side)
5) Studies on the global cyberspace as a hiding space for cyber terrorists, whose activities can target states as well as public and private security of civilian actors.

Whilst cyberspace has become a new arena of competition, joint challenges and security threats might pave the way for joint actions and regulations. The existence of national regulations and regional "great firewalls" indicates that the current "global" cyberspace is composed of various sub-realms and is highly fragmented.[86] IT and AI companies entering new markets are generally expected to comply with national laws and regulations – including regulations for data security and data privacy. Given the differences and contractions between certain national regulations – not to forget the tensions between the idea of a "free" Internet and the idea and practice of a censored and regulated "national" Internet – this raises a number of questions.

With regard to the regulatory backbones of the existing (global) cyberspace, NGOs and cyber activists have continuously expressed their criticism of the invisible hegemony and ultimate power of the US-based Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN), coordinating the global Domaine Name System and managing Internet protocol numbers. ICANN, however, is not involved in content regulation nor engaged in the setting up of ethical, data-related standards. Likewise, the UN-sponsored World Summit on the Information Society did not succeed in establishing a global code of conduct, but set up a Working Group of Internet Governance (WGIG). The WGIG proposed the creation of a transregional Internet Governance Forum (IGF).[87]

The field of global Internet governance obviously is one of those where the PRC seeks to act as a norm-maker and coordinator. In 2014, the PRC opened a new format for the coordination of the future principles of global Internet governance: The World Internet Conference, also known as (annually held) Wuzhen Summit. At the inaugural conference, Xi Jinping outlined the principle of "cyber sovereignty", later on further defined in his speech at the second Wuzhen summit as follows:

86 O'Hara and Hall (2018) differentiate between "four" competing national/regional visions of the Internet and Internet regulation – the Silicon Valley's "open Internet", the EU's "bourgeois Internet", the PRC's "authoritarian Internet" and Washington's "commercial Internet".

87 http://www.internetsociety.org/igf.

> "We should respect the right of individual countries to independently choose their own path of cyber development, model of cyber regulation and Internet public policies, and participate in international cyberspace governance on an equal footing. No country should pursue cyber hegemony, interfere in other countries' internal affairs or engage in, connive at or support cyber activities that undermine other countries' national security" (Xi Jinping, quoted from MOFA 2015).

A number of social media applications and Internet (entertainment) services provided by US companies are banned from the Chinese Internet as they are seen as Trojan horses that might be used to mobilise revolutionary upheavals or fuel local rebellions and separatist movements – an obvious threat to the PRC's (cyber) sovereignty. Following the outbreak of the 2007 riots in Xinjiang, Facebook, YouTube and Twitter have been blocked. Social media launched by China's IT giants in the years 2007–2009 – with Tencent's WeChat and Sina Weibo holding the largest market shares – are living in a symbiosis with the Chinese party-state. The number of Chinese microblog accounts increased exponentially from 2009 to 2012. Laws and regulations issued under the Xi administration, however, including the enforcement of real-name registration and the passing of the PRC's Cybersecurity Law (2016 – implemented on 1 June 2017)[88] caused a declining popularity of certain online applications and social media services. Under Xi Jinping, cyberspace has been identified as a core priority: in 2013/2014, a Central Leading Group for Cybersecurity and Informatisation was set up, directly headed by Xi Jinping. In 2018, as part of the reform and restructuring of state institutions, (most) leading groups were upgraded to the status of commission.

Beyond this national dimension of cybersecurity and cyber governance, at the 2015 Wuzhen Summit, Xi also elaborated on the need for global regulation and standardisation, stressing that "international cyberspace governance should feature a multilateral approach with multi-party participation" and claiming that the China-run World Internet Conference would provide the platform to achieve this purpose (Xi Jinping, quoted from MOFA 2015). In 2017, the Chinese Ministry released its "International Strategy of Cooperation on Cyberspace" (MOFA 2017), integrating the core frames and ideas outlined by Xi Jinping in a concrete roadmap for coordinated global cyberspace interactions.

China's New Silk Road includes a digital dimension, as Xi Jinping stated at the first BRI Summit in Beijing. Along the BRI trade corridors, Chinese companies are setting up digital connectivity networks (Shen 2018). This could mean a silent export of Chinese IT standards and related Internet governance concepts – the release of the China Standards 2035 strategy indicates that the PRC has started to design its own technological norms und legal regulations, which might not be in line with liberal Internet norms.[89]

88 The Chinese document is available online: "Zhonghua renmin gongheguo wangluo anquanfa" (Cybersecurity Law of the PRC), 2016, http://www.cac.gov.cn/2016-11/07/c_1119867116.htm.

89 Back in 2009, when Chinese Internet(-related) service companies designed their own social media applications, they had to comply with the PRC's national Internet laws and regulations. Tencent's smartphone app *Weixin* (WeChat) soon programmed an English-language user interface and won subscribers in almost

Xi Jinping's dream to build China into a "great cyber power" (*wangluo daguo*) is a multifaceted project, composed of centralized control over the domestic Internet, rule-making authority in the multilateral bargaining rounds on global Internet governance, the promotion of globally competitive Chinese IT and AI champions (supplying hardware, software, "smart" package solutions) – and the power to shape the debates and narratives on the global Internet. China's state news agency, online portals of Chinese newspapers, as well as the PRC's state television are offering information in various languages. The mid-range goal is to feed English-language news provided by Chinese agencies into global search engines and to secure that they are listed amongst the first research results. The global cyberspace is getting more Chinese, as a basic search will now include links to English-language Chinese views and Chinese interpretations of world politics (as well as developments in China).

6.7. Multilevel Interdependencies: Global Transformations and Domestic System Reforms

6.7.1. Environmental Protection and Measures to Combat Global Climate Change

China's changing position on issues of global climate change and environmental protection measures illustrates the country's development dilemma. Over the past few decades, the international community insisted that the PRC – as the world's largest CO2 emitter – should contribute to the global fight against climate change by changing its industrial production. At international conferences and fora on climate change, Beijing constantly stressed its role-identity as a developing country and refused to agree to any binding regulations. The Chinese government argued that China, being a developing country, would have the right to catch up by increasing its industrial output and that China should not be held responsible for its global emission footprint, as a large proportion of these emissions would have been caused by China's export-oriented production of goods for the US and the European markets. By outsourcing those parts of their production chains and thus causing heavy pollution to China, these states would have successfully reduced their emissions – but only at the national level. The PRC was, however, not the only actor refusing to reduce its emissions. The US as well as India likewise declined the ratification of international protocols that prescribe fixed emission reduction quota for states or groups of states. China, however, remained the main target of international criticism. Its national role claim to be treated as a developing country – repeatedly iterated at the annual meetings of the UN Climate Change Conference (UNCCC)[90] – was no longer accepted by most participating countries given China's rise to the world's second largest economy. China and India, the two rising Asian giants, were those held accountable for the "failure" of the Copenhagen Conference (December 2009). Contrary to hopes and expectations, the 2009 conference did not end with a configuration of a

all other world regions. As the company's servers were all based in the PRC, netizens were soon debating whether their private chats and short messages would automatically face censorship (Millward 2013).

90 Reports and background materials can be found on the official webpage of the UN IPCC: http://unfccc.int/2860.php.

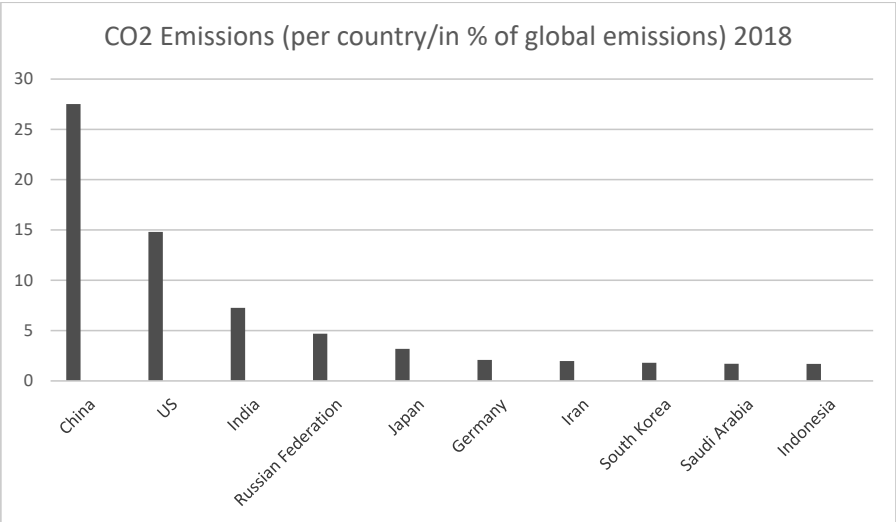
follow-up treaty to the Kyoto Protocol. Nonetheless, the US also opposed the quota and mechanisms proposed by the European participants.

Whilst international media reports blamed Beijing's reluctance to take on more responsibility in combatting climate change, Chinese media presented the outcome of the Copenhagen Conference as a diplomatic achievement. The Chinese government, according to Xinhua, successfully defended the PRC's national development interests and did not bow to international pressure. Furthermore, the Chinese accounts of the conference stated that China did agree to make a tangible contribution to the fight against global warming and climate change: Beijing proposed to reduce CO2 emission by 40–45 % compared to 2005. This reduction would, however, not be measured in absolute terms but in GNP-related units (Xinhua 2009). How the final reduction equation would look like remained extremely vague.

At the APEC Summit in Beijing (2014), China and the US presented a joint declaration on climate protection measures. They stressed their commitment to (bilateral) cooperation in the renewable energy sector. The Chinese side also declared that it would not increase its emissions after the year 2030. By that time, non-fossil, renewable energy should account for approximately 20 % of China's total energy mix. The US gave even more concrete data for their own reduction plan: by 2025, emissions should be reduced by 25 % compared to 2005 (US–China Joint Statement on Climate Change 2014).

The 2014 statement did not trigger a U-turn of China's development strategy, as one could clearly observe at the following year's Paris Conference. The PRC continued to stress the "common but differentiated responsibilities" (CBDR) principle. One major demand voiced was to set a concrete red line for global warming. The Paris Agreement proclaimed to hold global average temperature increase well below 2 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels and to try to limit the average temperature increase to 1.5 degrees Celsius. The oil-producing and oil-selling OPEC countries, whose national wealth and economic growth relies on the export of their "black gold", are openly opposed to the idea of a carbon cut. Another controversial issue at the Paris Conference was the sharing of burdens of costs amongst the states of the developed and of the developing world. The old narrative had been that the industrialised nations caused the high emission rates that had triggered a degradation of the global climate and, therefore, should shoulder the costs. The rapid economic rise of the BRICS countries and the catching-up modernisation of the states in Africa and Latin America did, however, change the global emission equation. To design a treaty without any binding obligations and quota for these groups of states and emerging economies was heavily opposed by Washington – as the US, belonging to the group of industrialised nations, would have been subject to fixed reduction quota and sanctions, in case of nonfulfillment. In 2018, the PRC accounted for 27.5 % of global fossil fuel CO2 emissions, the US for 14.8 %, and India for 7.3 % (Figure 4).

Figure 4: The World's Top-ten CO2 Emitters



Source: Statista 2020

The final agreement reached at the Paris Conference was celebrated by Chinese media as a major breakthrough. Chinese media reports mentioned that the final agreement had been made possible due to Beijing's bilateral agreements bargained prior to the summit with the US, the EU, India, Brazil, France and other players. Xinhua reports stressed that China took a leadership role regarding the Paris Agreement on countering global climate change. The Chinese side stated that, according to calculations and projections, the PRC would reach its CO2 emissions peak by the year 2030, but would seek to cut emissions "per unit of GDP" by 60–65 percent measured compared to the year 2005 (Xinhua 2015d).

The Chinese representative at the Paris summit, Xie Zhenhua, outlined China's refined national role identity and strategic position as a promoter of global sustainability right from the beginning, underscoring that China would hope for a legally binding ambitious agreement (Xinhua 2015c). International media reports, by contrast, classified the PRC as a rather reluctant player, hindering the implementation of global regulations. The international documentation of China's role at the 2017 summit in Bonn was also rather critical (2017). Again, the Chinese narrative, as circulated via the state news agency, presented the PRC as a global green player and stressed that China would keep its promises and play an active role in combatting climate change, whilst the US under Trump had withdrawn from the Paris Agreement (Xinhua 2017). In September 2020, in his UN General Assembly address, Xi Jinping proclaimed that the PRC would achieve "carbon neutrality" by the year 2060 (UN News 2020).

The PRC's voluntary concessions in the fields of global climate change are caused by a combination of domestic and international factors. Over the past few years,

7. China in the Global System of the 21st Century

Key Content and Learning Goals

- Introduction to novel foreign policy trends under Xi Jinping: the New Silk Road and the PRC's interactions with the Arab world
- Overview of China's strategic positioning within the ("imagined") multipolar/pentapolar world order
- Critical assessment of the historical foundations and the evolution of China's relationship with the EU, Japan, Russia, and the US

It is quite remarkable that the PRC managed to undertake a twofold readjustment of its economic modernisation path – i.e., the turn to capitalism after Mao, followed by the proclaimed entrance into the era of "new normal" and socio-ecological sustainability under the Xi–Li administration – without formally giving up any of its axiomatic foreign policy principles. At the operational level, the PRC sped up the internationalisation of its domestic economy, starting with the reopening of the Chinese domestic markets for joint ventures and foreign direct investment, followed by the "going global" of Chinese companies and, finally, the outsourcing of parts of the Chinese production process to other world regions. Furthermore, the PRC diversified its foreign relations and started to explore (and develop) new markets in Africa and Latin America. The global expansion of Chinese economic activities has not been achieved via offensive competition. The rise of "China" to global economic and monetary power took place in the shadow of the global financial crisis, when the "old" investors and major trading powers reduced their global activities. Chinese banks and companies used this window of opportunity to fill this void. In addition, China's principles of peaceful coexistence and non-conditionality allowed Chinese investors and companies to interact with states sanctioned and isolated by the international community – such as in the case of Iran and Sudan. Moreover, under its fifth generation of political leaders, the PRC began to pursue a more sophisticated multi-level approach to international relations by not only cooperating with single states but by also intensifying its collaboration with regional organisations or regional sub-groupings. As the development of Sino–European relations evidences, the Chinese side has commenced to pay more attention to the mechanisms of the supranational decision-making procedures of the EU but also attentively observes the frictions and tensions within the EU (and the Schengen Area).

With the launching of the New Silk Road Initiative, Beijing positioned itself at the centre of a globe-spanning network of transportation and supply channels. The related connectivity initiatives create additional transnational and transregional interdependencies. Decisions made in Beijing will have direct implications for the future transformation and development of the global system. Vice versa, the reorientation of the US development model under the Trump administration, the readjustment of the US's economic strategy and Washington's re-joining of international agreements (such as the Paris Protocol) by the Biden/Harris Administration, as well as the restructuring of the EU's integrated market and customs union

in connection with the Brexit are forcing the PRC to adapt its foreign strategy accordingly.

Changes and readjustments in a state's foreign (and security) strategy are often guesstimated rather than observed. Disruptive departures from inherited foreign policy principles are the rare exception in world diplomatic history – and normally occur in connection with regime transformations or in the early stages of regime-building. The PRC formally "cancelled" all treaties and cooperation agreements concluded by the GMD government of the Republic of China. Despite the fact that the Communist government in Beijing was not recognised as the official representation of China until the 1970s, it did exert power and control over the Chinese mainland and coordinate the mainland's foreign relations. In the first two decades under Mao, the PRC was "leaning to one side", i.e., copying the Soviet institutions and Soviet world order views. The Sino–Soviet split, the Sino–US rapprochement, and the reorientation of the Chinese political economy in the post-Mao years catalysed the PRC's transition towards a more pragmatic, cooperative foreign strategy, guided by the principle of peaceful coexistence.

The Cold War world is generally described as a bipolar power structure, dominated by the global system antagonism between the US and the Soviet Union. After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, a unipolar world order emerged centred on the US as the only remaining superpower. The PRC, joined by other rising economies and states located in the so-called Global South, promotes the formation of a multipolar world and openly opposes any world order dominated by just one or two superpowers. Multipolarity is both a vision for a future (post-US) global order and a pair of theoretical lenses through which China looks at the world. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, Chinese scholars broke the concept of multipolarity down to the idea of a pentapolar world system composed of five major power centres (the US, Russia, China, Europe/EU, Japan). The formula of multipolarity has never been deactivated and can still be found in Chinese diplomatic statements and joint declarations with Russia and the BRICS countries. There are, however, certain indications that the definition of multipolarity has changed and that the configurations of the model's core poles might have been silently modified. Likewise, the modes of interaction between poles and non-poles appear to have undergone a major revision – in theory as well as in political practice.

How can these changes and modifications be tracked and categorised? As, in most cases, the PRC reiterates the core foreign policy paradigms and terms coined in the Mao era – amended but not substituted by auxiliary follow-up concepts by each Chinese leadership generation – it is almost impossible to deduce these reorientations in Chinese foreign strategy directly from official speeches or diplomatic statements. As these reorientations occur gradually, they often start with the redefinition of core terms at the content level. It is thus important to undertake a critical analysis of the subtext of official diplomatic statements and speeches and to take the simultaneously occurring internal debates – within the party, Chinese think-tanks, across scholarly circles – into account.

Additionally, the launching of "new" initiatives or the proclaimed entrance into a "new" stage of development signals reform and renewal. Whilst stressing the path dependency of China's development model, the fifth generation seems to have proactively decided to enter "unknown" waters in domestic and global politics.

This chapter starts with a critical assessment of the PRC's 21st century New Silk Road initiative. The "re"-launch of the "old" Silk Road implies that Beijing will strive to deepen its relations with the Arab world. In 2016, the PRC released a first policy paper on its relations with the Arab world. Several corridors of the PRC's New Silk Road will run to or through the Middle East. Therefore, one could expect to see a more proactive positioning of China on issues related to regional peace and stability. Does Xi Jinping's visit to the region (Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Iran) in 2016 represent a farewell to the foreign strategy pursued by the fourth generation (Hu Jintao, Wen Jiabao)? Moreover, does the PRC's turn to the "East" and the Global South cause a declining interest in cooperation and interactions with the "old" poles of China's imagined pentapolar world order? This chapter thus continues with a retrospective assessment of the genesis and transformation of the PRC's relations and interactions with the US, Russia, Japan, as well as Europe.

7.1. China, the New Silk Road, and the Arab World

With the launching of the New Silk Road initiative, the PRC's relations with the Arab world have been upgraded. Whilst trade and economic transactions dominate bilateral exchanges, the Arab region is ascribed a central meaning for the realisation of China's long-term geostrategic goals. The diversity of the Arab region, the rivalries and tensions within the Arab world, and the revival of religious extremism do, however, pose unexpected challenges to the PRC's reiterated role identity and strategic positioning as a "neutral" partner without any political ambitions. So far, Beijing has refrained from siding with any of the conflict parties involved in territorial (or religious) disputes in the Middle East. The PRC's voting behaviour on issues related to UN interventions or the imposing of sanctions is principally driven by Chinese domestic development interests. Interventions in conflicts or crises are condemned as interference into the internal affairs of sovereign states. Besides, interventions by alliances of NATO states, even if backed by a UN mandate, are seen as a Trojan horse to silently induce a regime change and to replace the political elites by groups expected to comply with Western norms and demands.

China's cooperation with the OPEC states in the Arab world did not just take off with the New Silk Road but has been driven by the rising demand for oil and gas imports to fuel China's domestic economy. Initially, in the 1960s, the exploration of the Daqing oil field in Heilongjiang province, supported by Soviet expertise and technology, had made the young PRC self-sustaining in terms of energy. Due to the double-digit growth of the Chinese economy in the post-Mao decades, since 1993, the PRC has become a net oil importing country. Against this background, it is hardly surprising to observe a deepening and widening of cooperation between the PRC and the Middle East. Under the Hu–Wen administration, the PRC sought to set up ties with regional associations and organisations in the Arab world, including the Gulf Cooperation Council and the Arab League.

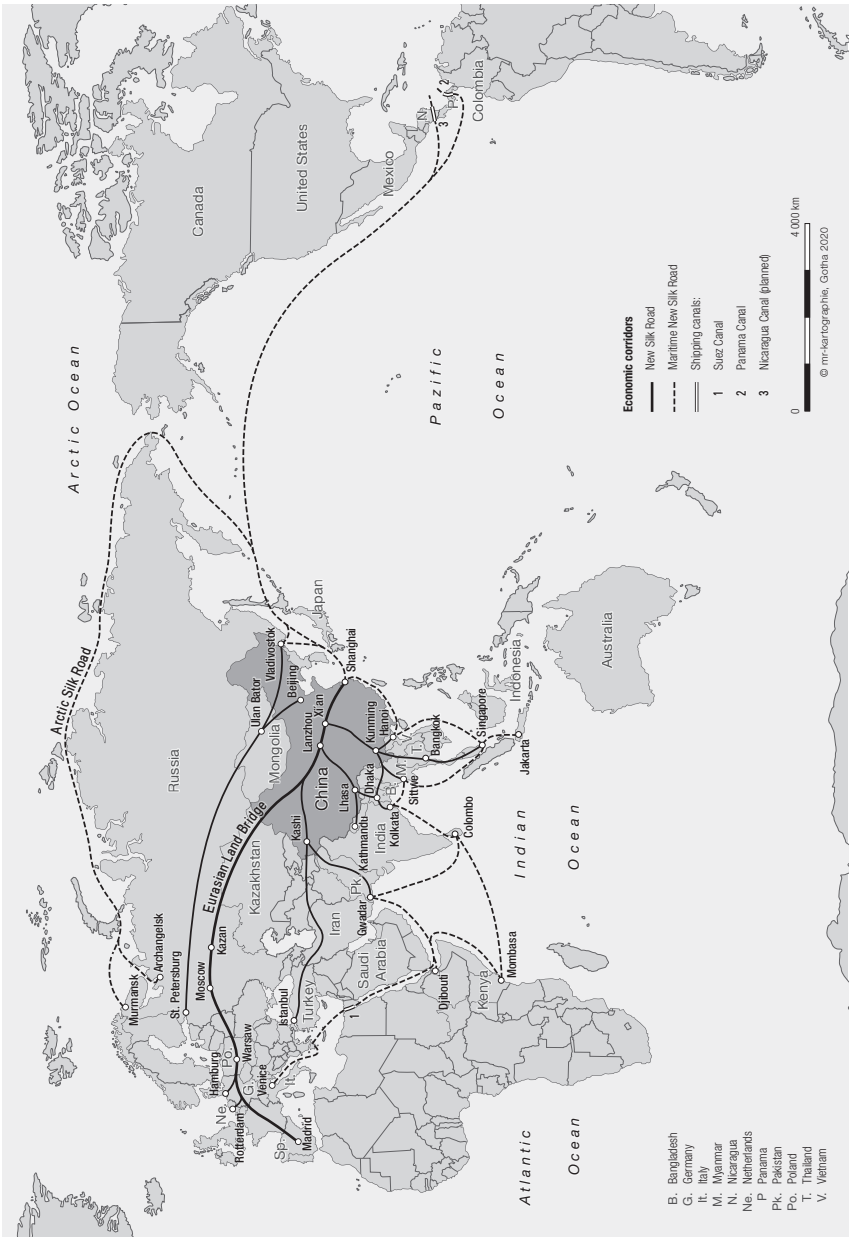


Figure 5: China's New Silk Road

Up until 2014, Saudi Arabia was listed as the PRC's most important oil supplier. In 2015, partly due to the introduction of the petroyuan, Russia outstripped the Arab world as China's top oil provider (*Bloomberg* 2015). After the end of the gold standard, the US had installed the petrodollar to settle oil trade with Saudi Arabia, cementing the related institutions and mechanisms of the global oil markets. The introduction of the petroyuan has thus been observed as an attempt to install alternative structures and to replace the OPEC system. In 2017, the PRC surpassed the US as the world's top crude oil importer. According to EIA, in 2019, the PRC's crude oil imports reached 10.1 million barrels per day (on average), an increase of about 0.9 barrels per day compared with the 2018 average (EIA 2020). In 2019, Saudi Arabia, once again, was listed on top of China's oil supplying trade partners.

Table 10: Chinese Oil Imports (2019)

Country	**Share of total Chinese oil imports (%)**
Saudi Arabia	16.8 %
Russia	15.3 %
Iraq	9.9 %
Angola	9.5 %
Brazil	7.8 %
Oman	6.9 %
Kuwait	4.5 %
United Arab Emirates	3.1 %
Iran	3 %
United Kingdom	2.7 %
Congo	2.3 %
Malaysia	2.3 %
Colombia	2.3 %
Libya	2 %
Venezuela	1.9 %

Source: EIA (2019/2020)

In January 2016, before Xi Jinping left for his first official state visit to the Middle East – touring Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Iran – the PRC released its first strategy paper on relations with the Arab world (Xinhua 2016a). In line with similar policy papers on the PRC's relations with other world regions (Latin America, Africa) or with regional organisations (EU), the 2016 paper does not just concentrate on state-to-state relations but also addresses China's cooperation

State Council 23, 53, 58–60, 72, 89, 107, 133, 137, 192, 207, 209, 210, 236
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