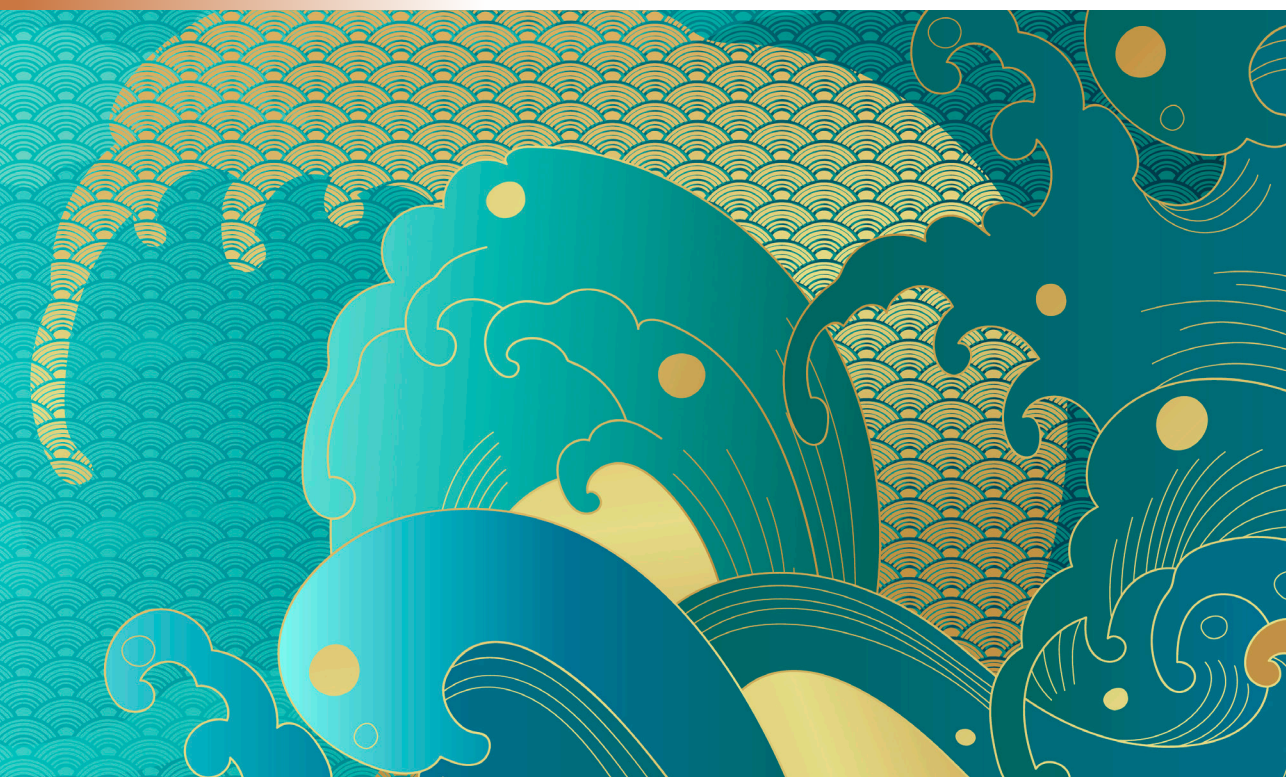
International Quarterly for

Asian Studies

Volume 53, Summer 2022

China beyond China, Part I

Infrastructuring and Ecologising a New Global Hegemony?



Published from 1970 to 2016 as
Internationales Asienforum
ISSN 2566-686x (print)
ISSN 2566-6878 (online)

International Quarterly for Asian Studies

International Quarterly for Asian Studies is a forum for multidisciplinary research on current and historical topics relevant to politics, economics and society in contemporary Asia. It seeks to make the results of social science research on Asia known to a broader public beyond the circle of regional specialists and to provide a solid and informed basis for the public discourse about Asia.

The contributions are intended for a public that is aware that the regions and cultures of the world have always been interlinked and, thus, need to be understood in relation to one other. Submitted manuscripts are peer-reviewed anonymously by external reviewers and members of the editorial or advisory board; the acceptance or rejection of manuscripts is finally decided by the editors.

International Quarterly for Asian Studies appears quarterly, or semi-annually as a double issue. Price per issue €20.00 (double issue €40.00), per year €80.00, plus postage. This journal is also available in an open access version. For further information please go to our website at:

https://asianstudies.arnold-bergstraesser.de

The editorial staff invites the submission of manuscripts, while noting that they cannot comment on such submissions as a rule and cannot accept any liability. Unsolicited books will not be returned. The editors reserve the right to select works to be reviewed.

Articles appearing in this journal are abstracted and indexed in Historical Abstracts and/or America: History and Life; International Political Science Abstracts; World Agricultural Economics and Rural Sociology Abstracts (WAERSA); Worldcat; Google Scholar; Social Science Open Access Repository (SSOAR); J-Gate; EBSCO Academic Search Premier and ProQuest Information and Learning.

International Quarterly for Asian Studies

Arnold Bergstraesser Institute
Windausstraße 16
79110 Freiburg, Germany

Phone: 0049-761-88878-33
asianstudies@abi.uni-freiburg.de
asianstudies.arnold-bergstraesser.de

International Quarterly for

Asian Studies

International Quarterly for Asian Studies

Volume 53, Number ii, Summer 2022

China beyond China, Part I
Infrastructuring and Ecologising a New Global Hegemony?

Special Issue edited by David Tyfield and Fabricio Rodríguez

Book Review

IQAS Vol. 53 /2022 II, pp. 171–180

China *beyond* China: Infrastructuring and Ecologising a New Global Hegemony?

Editorial

David Tyfield, Fabricio Rodríguez

Since the call for papers for this Special Issue less than two years ago, the world has faced a stream of existential challenges, with the background drumbeat of environmental catastrophe(s) and geopolitical tensions growing ever louder. A troubled landscape of peoples and territories has been constantly sending shockwaves of socio-political and politico-ecological exhaustion across the planet. Moreover, at this moment of unprecedented global challenges, it is increasingly apparent that the sphere of international politics and government, to which citizens would turn for action, is itself also displaying a deep crisis of structural dysfunction. Far from offering reassurance on ways forward, a community of GDP-worshipping nation-states is creating, sustaining and exacerbating a whole raft of political inadequacies and injustices.

From a narrow concern for declining growth rates and global financial instability, Bremmer and Roubini (2011) anticipated a "G0" world at the start of the 2010s. Now in the early 2020s it is clear that we have passed into a new and much more complex phase of systemic ruin that would be better called a "G-minus" world. This term connotes the emergence of an actively fragmenting geopolitics, characterised by a negative-sum game in which two nation-states – the United States and the People's Republic of China (PRC) – vie for supremacy in ways that harmfully restructure their own domestic behaviour as well as those of other countries and intermediate power blocs in the process. This situation simultaneously exposes the absence of any geopolitical arrangement centred on either state that would have a credible claim to offer a solution-oriented, life-

David Tyfield, Lancaster Environment Centre, Lancaster University, UK; d.tyfield@lancaster.ac.uk. Fabricio Rodríguez, Arnold Bergstraesser Institute, Freiburg, Germany; fabricio.rodriguez@abi.uni-freiburg.de. The guest editors were supported by the Junior Research Group "Bioeconomy and Inequalities. Transnational Entanglements and Interdependencies in the Bioenergy Sector" at the Friedrich Schiller University Jena, Germany, funded by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) (funding number 031B0021).

DOI 10.11588/iqas.2022.2.19448

protecting and hence persuasive vision for a renewed global hegemony. At this moment of dire need for global cooperation, we find precisely the opposite to be unfolding.

For our purposes, however, perhaps the most salient factor is how China, and its ongoing but unassured geopolitical ascendancy, runs through all these developments. While the COVID-19 pandemic itself has put the Chinese state at the forefront of global affairs since 2020, a series of polarising events has triggered further instability in the geopolitical order, pushing ecological issues into a subordinate, but increasingly angry, desperate and irrepressible shadow layer of public and scientific attention. Such issues include major disruptions from war and unparalleled disturbances to transnational economic activity – e.g., from logistic bottlenecks in China's ports – culminating now in surging global inflation, economic chaos and fragmenting and even "deglobalising" patterns of transcontinental trade. These political economic headwinds are now threatening the collapse of basic services and public goods, including health, food and fuel. These are issues that the industrialised world had come comfortably to regard as external pathologies long-since tamed and compatible with, if not dependent upon, socio-economic trajectories of constantly accelerating complexity and cross-border interconnection.

Moreover, the growing influence of China appears to be both a contributing cause and partial effect of the perceived international vacuum of the multilateral action needed to prevent and respond to such a serious moment of planetary crises. In other words, the stuttering but relentless growth in global influence of the PRC unfolds in systemic relation – a positive feedback loop – with the deeply challenging dynamics of the present. This process is being refracted through domestic politics and parallel trajectories of dysfunction across almost all (powerful) states, including even in seeming bastions of liberal democracy and in China itself. The result is that the progressive fragmentation and division in geopolitics between a US-centric West and a globally active China is now sowing a broader self-fulfilling zeitgeist of distrust and securitisation that is overwhelming their respective ranges of rule and control (Rodríguez / Rüland 2022). Most graphically, this has now broken through into outright military conflict at the European end of Eurasia; a development hailed by many as unthinkable, notwithstanding the fact that inter-hegemonic struggle and geopolitics have always been setting fires elsewhere on the global map. The long-externalised problems of contemporary political institutions are surely coming home to roost.

And, indeed, both Russia's flagrant invasion of Ukraine and the excruciating challenges that have followed from it also bear the marks of a rising China, including challenges for China itself. Russia is explicitly a – perhaps even the closest – strategic partner for Beijing's self-referencing vision of global multipolarity and the rebalancing of global power away from the United States. Yet

the war has not met with unqualified Chinese support because it has also come to reinforce the geopolitical uncertainties of the very interconnections across the Eurasian landmass that the Chinese state has promised to revitalise via its Belt and Road Initiative(s) (BRI), and on which the continued economic growth of the PRC – its internal sine qua non of regime legitimacy – largely depends.

China, therefore, must go "beyond" China, and is doing so unstoppably, albeit in ways that reify the fragility of an unproven global power searching for safe havens within a system of constraints and possibilities already established from the rickety US-led world order. But in "going beyond China" there is also a further key connotation regarding the main theme of this Special Issue. This concerns how this process of interweaving Chinese interests, norms and imageries into the world beyond its (contested) territorial borders is changing China itself as well as the "China" that its increasingly centralised, authoritarian government is single-mindedly determined to preserve and advance.

The burning question of the age arguably concerns how China will use, expand or lose its remarkable sources of economic, political and technological influence in this system crisis scenario while attempting to stabilise (or at least not upend) its own economic and socio-political conditions in the process. How will China actually go beyond China? And what world – what world order, what planet and nature, what globe-spanning sociotechnical systems – will this singularly important but not yet well-understood phenomenon create?

This Special Issue opens up this agenda, presenting a series of insightful papers across a range of empirical sites that illuminate not only *that* profound change is underway with the (uncertain) rise of China and the global reach of its infrastructural projects amidst planetary phase shift, but also *how* that is currently unfolding. The collection of articles of this double volume foreground a set of three novel concepts that we suggest should increasingly be seen as central to the high-stakes reorganisation of geopolitics, while also thereby highlighting some of the fundamental inadequacies of contemporary orthodox readings of China beyond China. As such, in the midst of both a wholesale shift in system and, in parallel, a new emerging language, attempts to capture this perforce involve new connotations to seemingly familiar terms. In what follows we flag these through an unavoidable proliferation of scare quotes.

First, if a key challenge before us is to understand how China itself is changing, it follows that the flurry of popular and ill-equipped conceptualisations of "China" is a primary impediment to this agenda. Too often, China is still understood as a self-contained and sui generis political-administrative unit set against the (equally over-unified) "West" or as being a natural "leader" of the "Global South"; rather than itself a diverse, fragmented set of agencies coordinated by a constitutively authoritarian centre that is connected with, differentiated from, defended from and contested by similarly diverse agencies overseas.

This complex and dynamic landscape of interaction between "China" and the "world", from which new systemic relations are emerging, must first be acknowledged – i.e., named – before we can then begin in earnest to work out precisely *what* it is. We thus call for research on geopolitics to engage with the now irreducibly **"Sino-global"** character of China as well as with the Sino-global elements of world order and power relations that this phenomenon is itself inducing. The articles in this Special Issue offer alternative perspectives by (albeit sometimes implicitly) acknowledging and starting from the Sino-globality of China as a deeply transformative phenomenon with multiple and increasingly diverse ramifications for virtually every region and ontological sphere of the world: from the Arab world through Africa to South America, from South East Asia to Europe to the global Anglosphere, from CCP-China to a "deep" China of its plural and diverse citizenry;[1] and from multilateral institutions to the competitive world market and private sector corporate power, from the global agri-food sector to medical technologies and the "health Silk Road", and from cyberspace to terraforming in the deep sea and on the moon.[2]

As this list already implies, however, our second key concept brings in the importance of thinking socio-technically and onto-politically about the diverse and open-ended worlds that the strikingly pragmatic agencies of contemporary China are actually busily building. Drawing on a growing literature in science and technology studies, anthropology and geography, inter alia, our second keyword is thus **infrastructuring**. There is no shortage of case studies that immediately present themselves regarding issues of infrastructure and its construction across the world, especially when one turns to China going "beyond China", most obviously in the Belt and Road Initiative(s). It also cannot be denied that these initiatives are hugely significant for the future of a Chinese-influenced geopolitics, and hence also for promising avenues for research. Yet the focus on "infrastructure" (i.e., as a noun, referring to a *structural* phenomenon) too easily licenses analysis in which what is actually being built, and how, is simply treated as a background technical detail or a stage on which familiar actors interact according to an equally familiar plot and script (e.g. the logics of capital expansion and accumulation).

Such an approach neglects the qualitative detail, techno-cultural dynamics (including socio-technical "imaginaries", e.g. Jasanoff / Kim 2015) and productive world-building nature of these projects, which is, in fact, precisely where

1 See, respectively, in the two parts of this Special Issue Gurol / Schütze on the Arab world; Banik / Bull on Africa and Latin America; Wilkinson / Saggioro Garcia / Escher on Brazil; Galka / Bashford on the South China Sea; Huang / Mayer / Huppenbauer on Europe; Chubb on China – official and non – and the Anglophone world; Smyer Yü and Huang / Westman / Castán Broto on CCP-China; and Tyfield / Rodríguez on "deep China".

2 See, respectively, Banik / Bull on multilateralism, Wilkinson et al. on the world market and corporate power in the agri-food sector; Chubb on diverse parties across Chinese and international government, business, consultancy and academia; Gurol / Schütze on digital and health-related BRI initiatives; Huang / Mayer / Huppenbauer on cyberspace; and Galka / Bashford on terraforming.

the real change unfolding in the global system is actually taking place. The term "infrastructuring", by shifting registers to a verb or ongoing and active social process of doing, instead refers ideally to the thoroughly socio-cultural and political process of construction of socially-enabling connections via infrastructures, whether physical or digital – indeed, expanding and redefining what "infrastructure" itself is, as is currently happening, not least due to rampant digitisation. Infrastructuring the BRI is thus the active and long-term process of building and harnessing social networks of interaction through physical infrastructures that not only transform the affected peoples and territories in uneven ways but also aim to strengthen and reproduce the output-oriented dynamics of authoritarian hyper-modernism with "Chinese characteristics" that the CCP claims for itself and its own nationalistic vision of "China".

Our third concept is likewise dynamic: **ecologising**, as opposed to ecology or ecological, and not least "green" or "sustainable". In an age when ecological challenges are becoming increasingly insistent, prevalent and profound issues at the very top of political and governance agendas, it is obvious – though curiously still under-acknowledged (e.g. Willis 2020, Wainwright / Mann 2018) – that issues of the environment are going to completely transform political processes, constitutions and agents in ways that are only just beginning to be recognised. Certainly, if a rising China and boom in (digital) infrastructure are both already key elements of the ongoing system transition and the current global turbulence, then the manifest inadequacy of current political settlements to tackle climate change, predominantly, but also biodiversity, nutrient cycles and water and soil exhaustion, is another key factor.

Moreover, "ecologising" signals acceptance of the fact that there is currently no clear example or template of what "sustainable" societies look like, what "ecological" actually means. Rather, there is only "ecologising" as an ongoing experimental process, with much uncertain learning still to happen. "Ecologising" is thus, most abstractly, the challenging road ahead by which human societies rearrange themselves (socially, technologically and politically) such that they become capable of supporting, and even actively regenerating, flourishing ecologies – i.e., simply, life – rather than being locked into dynamics of active depletion, death and relentless self-destruction.

Yet "ecologising" is both a normative term, invoking this broad emergent telos of government, and also a descriptive one, inviting empirical investigation of precisely how such goals are taken up. Turning to China, then, "ecologising" denotes the processes – intended and unintended – by which the Chinese party-state engages in the large-scale transformation of nature-society relations (and the associated historical records of environmental and/or techno-cultural policy) to achieve political targets and sustainable transition goals. As the articles in these two volumes show, however, Chinese state-led ecologising unfolds mostly as a top-down project of power. This process is ready to praise and promote

technological innovation and environmental protection in the name of national rejuvenation, but is also equally ready to combat and repress any kind of environmental politics that lies outside of the state machine and party control. Instead of endogenising life into state-society relations, the state is ready to kill that social life and use environmental protection or techno-ecological change if that is what is needed to ensure that social life remains party-led life (see Li / Shapiro 2020).

Where, then, does this lead? In short, to confrontation with the fact that we know the identity *but not yet the substantive meaning* of several novel keywords for the (early) 21st century; and that this includes not just the (irreducibly Sino-global) ecologising and infrastructuring that together constitute transition, but also, and crucially, "China" itself. This Special Issue thus primarily aims to initiate a programme of research that is explicitly engaged with investigation and substantiation of these concepts, recognising also that, as a new emergent system with internal relations of mutual hermeneutic definition between them, they will need interrelated interpretations and exploration. We also hope thereby to enrich transdisciplinary debates across science and technology studies, political geography, environmental history, global environmental sociology, and international relations beyond dominant West-centric theory, including critical and neo-classical approaches. While, in methodological terms, by highlighting the transregional and multiscalar dynamics of Sino-Global phenomena from the local to the global and vice versa, this collection also invites us to think about China beyond an "area studies" approach.

A new global hegemony?

With this cluster of emerging concepts, we also can begin to open up and redefine other key but more familiar terms already supposedly doing a lot of work in the strategic apprehension of the changing world, such as transition or hegemony. A key question, for instance, is whether China is on the way to ecologising and infrastructuring a new global hegemony. We can provide no conclusive answer in this brief editorial and the articles that follow likewise do not provide a singular and settled response. But they do provide thoughtful contributions to question the very idea, necessity and purpose of a geopolitical project of such scale and top-down ambition, especially under current planetary conditions. For they present a dynamic and contested arena of infrastructuring and ecologising – by diverse, cosmopolitised Sino-global agencies – that is busily creating and destroying new worlds, intentionally and unintentionally.

In particular, China and Chinese subjects, of party-state and private interests alike, together present a contradictory picture, ripe and rife with internal tensions: between initiatives of seemingly singularly concentrated and self-serving

(state) power for the expansion of global influence of the CCP; and equally striking turbulence, backfiring overreach or self-defeating geopolitics, hence of strategic ironies and inversions. Similarly, across the articles we find rich evidence of emerging models of Chinese infrastructuring and ecologising, which seem primarily to augur a deepening system crisis and retrenchment of existing pathological state forms and power relations; as well as evidence of multiple examples of reconstructive and profound reimagining, including some that reconnect to ways of thinking – often of (neo-)traditional Chinese origin – that depart starkly from modern Western paradigms (including those, ironically, of the Leninist party-state itself).

Indeed, these striking tensions confront us with an equally arresting conclusion: that at the centre of all the systemic change demanding these conceptual innovations is not so much (a contemporary crisis of) the geopolitical system of nation-states, but the problem of the state itself, at least in its currently dominant form.

Certainly, we cannot hope to understand how China will go beyond China from a state-centric perspective, since this rules out precisely the most important questions at issue. In naming the state the central problem with which we are concerned, however, we are going much further than this. We argue that insofar as the early 2020s have been a paroxysm, or constant series of fits, of death – of social and sociable life, of cordial international relations and a stable geopolitical order, of domestic political stability and democratic norms, of human victims of both the pandemic and the pandemic-related lockdown, and, relentlessly, of diverse ecosystems – all these are symptoms of a deeper relation of the modern state and death, which is now manifesting itself relentlessly.

Not only is the state the primary purveyor of death – most visibly, now, in the form of actual war – but its long-witnessed biopolitical power (Foucault 2008), over death and *life*, is also mutating increasingly towards being an agent overwhelmingly of the former because (and as) it is itself dying. This is not least because the techno-cultural systems and constantly expanding growth logics around which state-society relations are currently organized, exacerbate pollution, resource overconsumption, global warming and the emergence of pandemics. In short, in failing to reorient its institutions and productive forces towards the genuinely harmonious revitalisation of nature-society relations, the modern state, and not least its Chinese party-led manifestation, undermines the socio-political and material conditions of its own existence in the era of ecological breakdown (see Tyfield / Rodríguez in Part Two of this Special Issue).

A turn to the exploration of the actual, unfolding process of China going beyond China is particularly illuminating in this regard, and not (primarily) because this brings into focus a uniquely problematic and dysfunctional state or one that is exceptional in the extent of its intervention on these issues. Undeniably, there are specific, unsettling and exceptionally striking problems with the current Chinese party-state and its trajectory of increasingly uncompromising,

powerful and centralised authoritarianism. But these problems, paradoxically – from the broader lens of Sino-global infrastructuring and ecologising – simply make contemporary China one of the most graphic illustrations of the broader exhaustion of the dominant (modern, Western) state form per se.

Most states (and certainly all of the most powerful ones), regardless of their ideological or constitutional specificities, are firmly and explicitly committed to the same geopolitical competitive game of maximising national GDP and (military, technological, energy, food, etc.) security vis-à-vis other such states. And the clear unpalatability of both the incumbent US and the "ascendant" PRC, as the two pre-eminent options for hegemony, manifests and entirely conditions the broader dysfunction of the entire global geopolitical system of such states. Moreover, the self-destructive paralysis regarding increasingly urgent need for global climate action (as well as the unfinished global effort against COVID-19) is thereby significantly illuminated. For there seems little prospect indeed of meaningful progress towards an expedited, deep – let alone "just" – transition in a world overwhelmingly organised as, and run by, such states. Rather, the precondition and key missing piece for socio-technical transition towards sustainability is the need for a simultaneous transition in the predominant form of the (nation) state, and in the globally dominant states especially.

And, again, China is exceptionally illuminating in this regard, but indeed not uniquely so. Specifically, in the PRC party-state we find a political organisation that is exceptionally committed to, and empowered regarding, a project of intrusive preservation of its own "life" above that of all other things. As such, it is strikingly enabled vis-à-vis infrastructuring to that end, while also fundamentally constrained in the forms of ecologising it can even conceive, much less deliver (see Huang et al. in this Special Issue). This is thus a highly dynamic situation revealing the foundational incompatibility of the new politics of planetary regeneration that is so urgently needed with a globally-powerful form of political agency committed only to its own "life". This tension, however, lies primarily in the constitutive – that is, parasitic – rationale of the *state* of the PRC, a factor shared with all other modern nation-states. It does not lie in its specific *party*-state form, contrasted with the "liberal democratic" states that are too commonly – and, in their own assessment, self-evidently – represented as the apex of human political organisation. At most, China's specific form of state simply renders the underlying tensions particularly stark.

The fundamental challenge of contemporary geopolitics is thus perhaps best understood not as the destabilisation of a particular regime of global hegemony and its uncertain transition to a new one. Instead, what is crucial is the now unstoppable death of the form of state upon which the current geopolitical arrangement as a whole rests. It is thus destabilised not primarily because "China" is "rising" while it is America's inescapable fate and time to decline; but because its institutional foundations are thoroughly rotten and actively

disintegrating, and indeed toxic and suffocating of diverse types of "life" and of vital, lively attempts to defend and preserve that life.

For our purposes and our three key concepts, then, what is specifically needed is the unpacking of the dynamics of state/capitalism formations (systemic, interdependent formations of state and of capitalism, as opposed to "state capitalism"), not least of China and global capitalism, in the context of contemporary dynamic innovation or knowledge economies. For the latter connotes the new and enduring context in which such "innovation-as-politics" (Tyfield 2018) – and, as a key specific form of that, infrastructuring – is now the very nexus of the relentless and accelerating mutual transformation of the political order and socio-technical facts on the ground. Moreover, such open-ended processes of (re-)infrastructuring the state are not only no longer limited to action within their national territorial borders on the Earth's surface. They also furnish a crucial lens onto the actual activities associated with the state's ongoing (for the foreseeable future) experimental interventions of ecologising.

What emerges clearly from this perspective in the ensuing discussions is that those institutional foundations of the state – and the geopolitical order with it – will only be rejuvenated, fit for the challenges of the 21st century, insofar as they are "given life" or themselves become "lively", "life-oriented" and "living". What must be sought, therefore, is evidence of such life and productivity – evidence that, in fact, abounds regarding China (and the underestimated potential for innovation of its firms and citizens) once one looks from an appropriate perspective.

And such "life" means that these are polities that are precisely and self-consciously ecologising, infrastructuring and Sino-Global, while the specific dynamics of how China thus goes beyond China are key to the survival and stability of both China and the globe. For what is evidently needed (both in and beyond China) is a re-purposing of the state as, respectively: constitutively oriented to life, including in its own operations and ways of working, i.e. itself living; constantly building and rebuilding the techno-socio-natural preconditions of individual-societal-planetary flourishing (as such civilizational "life"); and expressive of productive, not mutually self-destructive, relations and tensions between "China" and (the existing modern Western-globalised) "world".

A new agenda thus emerges, for the engaged and ongoing exploration of openings for a productive reimagining of states in a world of deepening Sino-global entanglement, infrastructuring and ecologising. It is our sincere hope that these pages make a positive and constructive contribution to averting the self-confirming dynamics of polarised and partial analyses that feed the total breakdown of global order, and hence the catastrophically inadequate action on climate, pandemics, transition, conflict and other issues; and instead support the realisation of a future that is more collaborative, regenerative and full of life, respectively.

References

Bremmer, Ian / Roubini, Nouriel (2011): A G-zero World. The New Economic Club Will Produce Conflict, Not Cooperation. *Foreign Affairs* 90, p. 2.

Foucault, Michel (2008): *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978–1979*. Translated by A. Davidson and G. Burchell. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Jasanoff, Sheila / Sang-Hyun Kim (eds) (2015): *Dreamscapes of Modernity: Sociotechnical Imaginaries and the Fabrication of Power*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Li, Yifei / Shapiro, Judith (2020): *China Goes Green: Coercive Environmentalism for a Troubled Planet*. Cambridge: Polity.

Mann, Geoff / Wainwright, Joel (2018): *Climate Leviathan: A Political Theory of our Planetary Future*. London: Verso.

Rodríguez, Fabricio / Rüland, Jürgen (2022): Cooperative Counter-hegemony, Interregionalism and "Diminished Multilateralism": The Belt and Road Initiative and China's Relations with Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC). *Journal of Internatioal Relations and Development* 25, pp. 476–496. https://doi.org/10.1057/s41268-021-00248-6

Tyfield, David (2018): *Liberalism 2.0 and the Rise of China: Global Crisis, Innovation and Urban Mobility*. London / New York: Routledge.

Willis, Rebecca (2020): *Too Hot to Handle: The Democratic Challenge of Climate Change*. Bristol: Bristol University Press.

IQAS Vol. 53 / 2022 ii, pp. 181–206

Ecological Civilisation
A Historical Perspective on Environmental Policy Narratives in China

Linda Westman, Ping Huang

Abstract

This paper engages with China's currently most prominent environmental policy concept: ecological civilisation. As this concept is becoming a cornerstone of China's strategy of socialist modernisation, we examine whether and how the term can enable ecological protection in China and beyond. We argue that ecological civilisation, while a recently emerged discourse, builds on established environmental governance practices in China that shape its manifestation in political action. To illustrate this argument, we explain how two philosophical principles central to ecological civilisation discourse, "holism" and "harmony", have been expressed in environmental political practice in Communist China. Building on this analysis, we suggest that ecological civilisation discourse may have a profound impact in certain policy domains (e.g., resource conservation and ecological conservation redlines), but limited transformative capacity in others (e.g., environmental litigation and resource extraction).

Keywords: China, environmental policy, ecological civilisation, discourse, holism, harmony

Introduction

Among China's many transformations, the shift in the country's international environmental profile is one of the most recent, as well as the one most visible to foreign observers. In 2009, China was portrayed as the party that "wrecked the deal" of the international climate negotiations in Copenhagen (Lynas 2009). Only a few years later, China was seen as central to the successful negotiations that culminated in the Paris Agreement (Dong 2017, Hilton / Kerr 2017). Ten years after Copenhagen, Xi Jinping was applauded by some observers for shouldering a leadership position in international climate agendas by adopting a carbon neutrality target to be reached 2060 (Tooze 2020).

Linda Westman, Urban Institute, University of Sheffield, UK; l.westman@sheffield.ac.uk. Ping Huang, The Institute for International Affairs, Qianhai, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, Shenzhen, China, and China Urban Institute, University of Sheffield, UK; p.huang@sheffield.ac.uk.

DOI 10.11588/iqas.2022.2.13948

What does it mean for the world that China is contending for the role of flagbearer of global environmental progress? The shift in geopolitics that underpins this pivot suggests that the implications may be profound. As argued in this Special Issue (see Tyfield / Rodríguez 2022: 171–180), we may be standing on the brink of a new era, in which the putative rise of China as a new hegemon challenges institutions that have dominated world politics throughout modern history. Within this reorganisation of authority, global environmental governance constitutes a main arena. China accounts for a rising share of global resource consumption, but is also a leader in the production and use of renewable energy technology (REN21 2021). Through trade and investment flows, China is exerting increasing leverage over infrastructure around the world, as particularly evidenced by the Belt and Road Initiative (Pradhan 2018, Winter 2020). A more subtle form of authority is exercised through the construction of new discourses and norms in international projects and institutions (Salamatin 2020), including in environmental governance (Esarey et al. 2020). This places environmental policy narratives in China in a new light, as their underpinning assumptions and principles may shape possibilities of ecosystem protection both within and beyond the country's borders.

With this new imperative to examine environmental politics in China in mind, we engage with the chief environmental policy concept promoted by the Xi Jinping administration: ecological civilisation. In the report delivered by Xi Jinping at the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China (CPC) in 2017, the principle was framed as an essential component of socialism with Chinese characteristics (Solé-Farràs 2008). The term was first included in China's Constitution in 2018. As is often the case with CPC rhetoric, assessments of ecological civilisation have generated confounding conclusions. On one hand, the narrative is presented as a sign of a deep shift in China's development trajectory (Weiming 2001). According to this perspective, China's political leadership seeks to revive ancient philosophical principles through the concept (Pan 2007, Solé-Farràs 2008).

Philosophical principles inspired by Confucianism, Daoism, and Zen Buddhism view the natural world as interconnected and interdependent with human life, imbued with morality and intrinsic value. For instance, *Qi Wu Lun* ("Uniformity Theory") by Zhuangzi stated: "Heaven and Earth co-exist with me, and all things and I are in oneness" (Guo 1961: 79). Similarly, Zen Buddhism reflects the philosophy of unity of humanity and nature (Song 2004). The principle of unity (Qian 1991, Zhang 1997) represents "a sustainable harmonious relationship between the human species and nature" (Weiming 2001: 253). Interpretations that stress the revival of these values suggest that ecological civilisation carries significant potential to tackle environmental degradation and reimagine socioecological relations.

Others remain sceptical. According to Hansen et al. (2018), ecological civilisation draws on reductionist and selective accounts of Chinese philosophy. It is a cultural signifier rather than a call for radical reform, and it fails to address root causes of environmental destruction, such as global capitalist relations or growth-oriented development (Hansen et al. 2018). From this perspective, ecological civilisation is characterised by a forceful focus on science and technology, with innovation framed as the principal solution to ecological destruction (ibid., Geall / Ely 2018, Hansen / Liu 2018). The claim that Chinese philosophical traditions are environmentalist has been criticised as anachronistic. Pre-industrial thought in other parts of the world could equally be characterised as eco-centric, as many traditional systems of knowledge reflect a deep understanding of the natural world and its interconnections with human life (Heurtebise 2017). These interpretations present the concept as elaborate political greenwash – a cynical attempt by the CPC to infuse environmental programmes with legitimacy by linking them to deeply rooted values.

Our position in this debate is that we cannot assume a direct translation of concepts from ancient Chinese philosophy into contemporary environmental policy. Yet, neither can we dismiss the discourse as an empty political slogan. We suggest instead that ecological civilisation is embedded in a trajectory of environmental governance practices within the Communist Party. Drawing on insights from historical research on environmental politics in China, we argue that ecological civilisation, while a recently emerged discourse, builds on established rationalities that shape its manifestations in political action. These consolidated practices suggest that ecological civilisation discourse may have a profound impact in certain policy domains (e.g., resource conservation and ecological conservation), but limited effect in others (e.g., local environmental litigation and resource extraction).

We illustrate this argument through the following steps. First, we explain the importance of interpreting environmental policy concepts through a historical lens. Second, we discuss the complex connections – ruptures and continuities – that link philosophical ideas in ancient China with contemporary policy discourse. Next, we present a brief overview of the rise of environmentalism in China since 1972, reflecting on how environmental governance practices have been structured according to two principles for action: "holistic" thinking and the maintenance of stability, or "harmony". In Section 5, we examine the potential effects of ecological civilisation discourse through the perspective of these two principles. In conclusion, we suggest that the influence of the concept may be profound within China, but carries limited and uncertain implications for international politics.

Historical perspectives on environmental policy

All forms of environmental political action in the present are, in some way, shaped by events in the past. Historical institutionalism is a theoretical and methodological perspective that captures how historical processes and events produce (political) institutions, which come to structure both the form and content of political decision making (Steinmo 2008). Institutions, in this context, are understood as formal and informal rules that inform and structure social conduct. In a historical institutionalist sense, institutions are never external to political contestation, but represent the "enduring legacies of political struggles" (Thelen 1999). Examples of the conditioning effects of political institutions on social outcomes abound. For instance, the rules of interaction of interest groups shape the structure and operation of social welfare systems (Immergut 1992), while the structure of labour markets affects the organisation of political regimes (Collier / Collier 1991).

Paradoxically, while historical institutionalist analyses explain socio-political change, a central premise is that change is difficult to achieve (Steinmo 2008). There are multiple reasons behind the obduracy of political institutions, including the perceived legitimacy of social rules and the embeddedness of vested interests in existing rule sets (Powell / DiMaggio 2012). This does not imply that individuals or groups are hostages to political institutions, but rather that when rule sets change, this normally occurs slowly and in accordance with cultural understandings. For example, the concept of path dependency, as per historical institutionalist analyses, explains that political institutions develop through pathways that involve critical junctures and long periods of stability and continuity (Ikenberry 1994). Even throughout processes of change, political leaders never design interventions on a blank page; "when policy makers set out to redesign institutions, they are constrained in what they can conceive of by these embedded, cultural constraints" (Thelen 1999: 386).

These insights are well understood in environmental politics research. In environmental policy-making, critical junctures can open up for the deployment of new approaches and instruments (Froger / Méral 2012). However, continuity is a stronger theme than change. For example, analysis of the evolution of environmental policy in the European Union over decades reveals that, despite significant shifts in global socio-environmental conditions, policy change has mainly been incremental, often following entrenched path dependencies (Zito et al. 2019). In cases where new policy strategies are introduced, their realisation can be prevented by existing structures and rationalities of government (Varjú 2021) or by different forms of path dependency within administrations responsible for their implementation (Kirk et al. 2007, Marshall / Alexandra 2016).

A parallel literature explains the relative stability of environmental policy over time through continuities in policy discourse. Environmental policy discourses produce frames of reference, established linguistic tropes and assemblages of ideas that define possible and appropriate forms of political action (Dryzek 2013, Feindt / Oels 2005). Environmental policy discourses are created through contestation between multiple groups and forms of knowledge, and, as they consolidate over time, they often become linked with policy tools or political practices (Hajer 1995). Environmental policy discourses are often resistant to change. When political leaders attempt to shift direction in environmental politics (including through radical pivots), they often instead end up rehashing established approaches by recycling ideas from the dominant discourse (Simoens / Leipold 2021, Wurzel 2010). In a synthesis of studies on environmental policy discourse in the past decades, Leipold et al. (2019: 452) identify a pattern of "persistence or incremental change of discourses (and of connected institutions and policies), often accompanied by policy outcomes that are perceived as being dissatisfactory". As the trend in environmental policy discourses globally follows a pattern of "remarkable continuity" (Leipold et al. 2019), the adoption of new policy narratives in China will likely also reflect established political rationales. To determine whether this is the case, we examine the conceptual building blocks of the ecological civilisation narrative from the perspective of their deployment in environmental governance practices over time.

Ruptures and continuities of environmental thought in communist China

Environmentalism in modern China emerged in parallel with profound social, economic and political change. The evolution of CPC ideology and practice, including the creation and dissolution of links with ecological ethics in Chinese philosophy, relates directly to this history.

Research on environmental policy in the Mao era (1949–1978) demonstrates how connections with the past were severed through explicit attempts to eradicate cultural and social memories. This was a period of deep turbulence, involving political movements (e.g., Destroy the Four Olds) that sought to destroy everything from historical monuments to traditional values. The work of Shapiro (2001) engages with the environmental destruction caused during the reign of Mao. She shows how "Mao's war against nature" left China a dismal environmental legacy, in terms of over-exploitation of resources, deforestation, desertification and severe pollution (cf. Smil 1984). In Shapiro's view, an attitude of opposition to nature and of violence explains the justification

of ecosystem degradation during this time, alongside erosion of social institutions and the discontinuation of sustainable farming practices (ibid.).

The politics of the Mao era, however, were complex and multifaceted. Other scholars have shown that government programmes in the early years of the PRC did involve environmental research and ecological protection, such as water and soil conservation conducted through large-scale planting and plot rotations (Gao / Muscolino 2021). It is also possible to trace continuities in political praxis from this era until the present. For example, faith in technology to deliver social progress was formulated under Mao, as captured in Schmalzer's (2016) account of the interconnection between China's red and green revolutions. Mao portrayed "scientific experiment" as one of the key revolutionary movements to build a socialist nation (Schmalzer 2016). This line of thinking found resonance years later in the Scientific Outlook on Development narrative, promoted by the Hu Jintao Administration, and it continues to permeate the development discourse of China's 14th Five Year Plan (FYP) (NDRC 2021).

Likewise, the Reform and Opening Up period, initiated by Deng Xiaoping in 1978, disrupted socio-political structures and human–nature relations. The widespread ecological destruction that occurred in this period was deeply interconnected with the shift to a capitalist economy. Authority over land use was transferred to local governments and markets, alongside new modes of production, land ownership and livelihoods (Muldavin 2000). These shifts also created new patterns of exclusion, enclosures and extraction. For example, during the 1980s–1990s, the establishment of "township and village enterprises" was encouraged and barely regulated, becoming an economic development strategy that contributed significantly to pollution (Tilt 2009). Rural populations experienced a sharp rise in vulnerability, which contributed to a growing exploitation of ecosystems and neglect of previous communal assets, such as forests and grasslands (Muldavin 2000). Nonetheless, certain environmental governance practices remained intact throughout these years of turbulence. For example, the regional development strategy of the reform era emphasised the strategic upgrading of manufacturing and export capacity in China's coastal region, buffered by the extraction of resources from "peripheral" provinces. This scheme not only bore a resemblance to mechanisms of territorial control and resource appropriation in dynastic China (Xu / Ribot 2004), but continued to be reflected in economic development plans over the coming decades (Tilt 2014).

Over the years, the mobilisation of ancient philosophy in political ideology in China has followed similar cycles of neglect and re-discovery. Mao Zedong Thought, a building block of "socialism with Chinese characteristics", reinterpreted Marxism through the incorporation of Chinese philosophy. In particular, Mao built on a long tradition of naïve dialecticism as articulated in the classical text I Ching and in Daoist thought (Dirlik 1996). Such Sinicisation of Marxism

resulted in an amalgam of ideals, in which modernist developmental thinking was infused with "traditional" values (Chenshan 2019). While Confucian thought was actively condemned during the Mao era, it began to re-emerge in CPC rhetoric around the 1990s. The Jiang Zemin administration (1993–2003) explicitly mobilised Chinese philosophy in CPC rhetoric, including by integrating the Confucian term "harmony" (和谐观/大同观) in diplomatic practice. The embrace of Confucianism became more evident in successive administrations, from Hu Jintao's slogan of a harmonious society to Xi Jinping's routine promotion of Confucian ideas. In recent years, the very notion of "traditional" thought has been complicated by the CPC's merging of references to ancient Chinese civilisation with communist ideology, a strategy that supports the legitimisation of the CPC model of statism (Callahan 2015).

As already mentioned, the debate on ecological civilisation has located the narrative within this revival of deep-rooted values. Academic references to ecological civilisation appeared in the late 1980s and early 1990s (Huan 2016). Two different views emerged among Chinese scholars, in which the key difference lies in its relationship with industrialisation (Lu 2017, 2019). The first view considers ecological civilisation to be a part of and complementary to industrial civilisation. The argument is that because of the absence of an ecological mind-set, industrial development has caused ecological problems. Therefore, once humans learn to protect ecosystems, industrial society can be "fixed" and ecological crises can be resolved (Lu 2019). Ecological civilisation thus denotes the "ecologicalisation" of industrial society; this perspective closely mirrors the ecological modernisation debate in Anglophone scholarship (cf. Buttel 2000).

The second view, which is more radical, considers ecological civilisation to be a more advanced form of human civilisation (Lu 2019). The argument is that industrial civilisation, governed by capitalist logic, is incapable of addressing ecological breakdown. Ecological civilisation represents a new human society – reached through a teleological progression from agricultural, to industrial, to ecological civilisation – that transcends capitalist ideology (Wang 2020). As a political term, "ecological civilisation" is first and foremost used by the CPC (Goron 2018). In 2007, the concept was endorsed by former President Hu Jintao. On 1 July 2021, at a ceremony marking the centenary of the founding of the CPC, ecological civilisation was presented by Xi Jinping as an integral component of a new model for human advancement (Xi 2021). Nevertheless, in political discourse ecological civilisation is described both as a component of industrial civilisation and as an advanced form of human civilisation, indicating conceptual ambiguity.

To gain a deeper understanding of the meaning of ecological civilisation, we focus on two philosophical principles associated with the narrative: "holism" (全局观/整体观) and "harmony" (和谐观/大同观). These concepts have roots in a Chinese worldview represented by a correlative cosmology (Schwartz 1973),

which assumes that social reality is composited of innumerable, interdependent relations (Dongsun 1995, Rošker 2017). In this understanding of the universe, holism assumes that humans are part of a greater whole. Holism is proposed as a "cultural fundamental" of East Asian philosophy that can be traced back to Confucianism, Daoism and Buddhism (Lim et al. 2011). As a principle with an incredibly long history, holism is not defined within any single body of thought. However, one strand of theory suggests that from a holistic perspective, ethical rules should be considered through the lens of communal objectives. According to this interpretation, "strategies and decisions are taken in view of achieving goals which are required to benefit the entire group, not any one individual" (Lin / Huang 2014). Members of a community will prosper when the whole prospers (Lim et al. 2011).

"Harmony", likewise, is a complex construct. In Confucian thought, harmony has been understood to represent "an active process in which heterogeneous elements are brought into a mutually balancing, cooperatively enhancing, and often commonly benefiting relationship" (Li 2013: 1). The concept embraces a diversity of relationships (e.g., interpersonal harmony, harmony between humanity and nature) on multiple levels (e.g., between individuals, in a family, or a nation; Li 2008). Conceptualised under the correlative cosmology, harmony is by its nature relational, meaning that it is achieved through an equilibrium built upon interaction within networks of interdependent components (Li 2008). For society, harmony can imply a social order that emphasises relations ordered by ethical rules (Xiaohong / Qingyuan 2013). In this context, stability relates to systems of rule that structure social hierarchies (Yao / Yao 2000), which does not imply conformity or obedience, but dynamic tension and negotiation to reconcile difference (Li 2013).

Table 1: Translation of the concepts of holism and harmony into holistic thinking and maintenance of stability in CPC rhetoric

Confucian value	CPC principle	Examples of expression in CPC rhetoric	
holism	holistic thinking	**The CPC Constitution**	The CPC represents the fundamental interests of the nation as a whole / the overwhelming majority of the people
		Jiang Zemin's Three Represents	Economic production, cultural development, and the interests of the majority of the people
		Xi Jinping's Chinese Dream	Reflects the aspirations of the Chinese nation as a whole, including all ethnic groups
harmony	stability overwhelms everything	**Deng Xiaoping**	Stability is presented as a necessary precondition for economic development and social progress (CPC, ND)
		Hu Jintao	Avoid self-inflicted setbacks / don't rock the boat (*bu zhe teng*) (China Central Government Portal 2009)

Source: Compiled by the authors

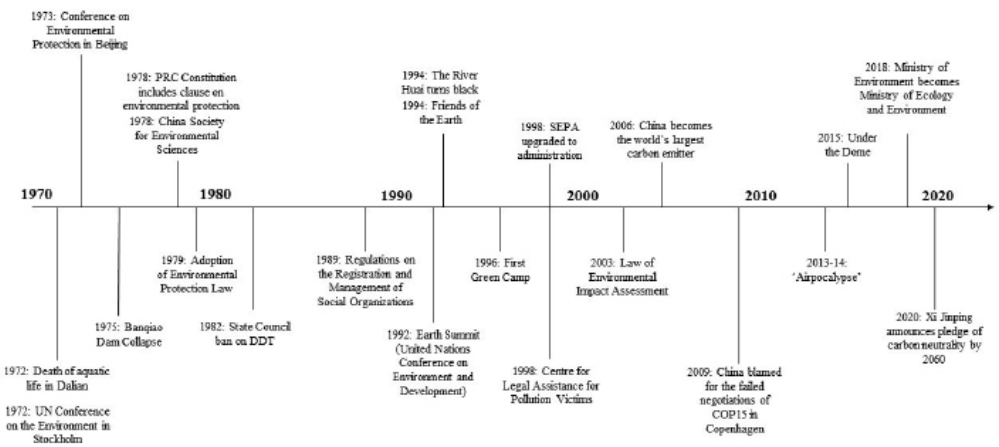
Structuring principles of contemporary environmental governance

To explore how the principles of holism and harmony have shaped environmental governance practices, we conducted a review of the literature on modern environmental history in China. We focused this review on contentious issues (e.g., pollution, hydropower and wildlife protection) that have shaped the boundaries of political action in this domain (Figure 1). We searched for continuities within this material (e.g., persistent rationalities and forms of action) and reflected on emerging patterns from the perspective of structuring principles for action. As explained above, the concepts of holism and harmony derive from multifaceted debates, neither of which can be neatly assigned a simple definition. Our interest, however, is not in the philosophical meaning of these terms, but in their translation into CPC ideology and practice (Table 1). In fact, as explained in detail below, the governing principles of holistic thinking and maintenance of stability bear only a tenuous resemblance to their philosophical derivatives. While the CPC does make strategic references to these ideals (which support their ideological project), their expression in environmental action have less to do with ethics and more to do with practical governance challenges.

Holistic thinking

In Maoist Thought, holism has been expressed through a form of "holistic thinking", understood according to a distinction between primary and secondary "contradictions". This describes how an overarching purpose can be identified at the level of society, encompassing multiple individual interests

Figure 1: Key moments in China's modern environmental history, 1970–2020



Source: Compiled by the authors (based on Bao 2006, 2009; Boyd 2013; Hilton 2013; Moser 2013; Muldavin 2000; Shapiro 2001; Tilt 2009)

that may conflict on lower levels. Thus, "the whole is greater than the parts and the parts are subordinate to the overall situation. When the overall interests and specific interests conflict, the overall interests must first be given priority" (Wang 2001).

In line with these ideas, we identify the following distinguishing features of holistic thinking. Holistic thinking is deployed by the CPC to provide a unified ("holistic") purpose for the nation. It is used to develop nation-building projects that symbolise progress, simultaneously demonstrating the validity of socialism as a path to national fulfilment and the unique capacity of the CPC to lead the people of China to this destination. Accordingly, the CPC often highlights its ability to represent the interests of the Chinese nation, and its people, as a whole. Some scholars describe the CPC as a "holistic interest party" (Zhang 2017). This logic has been articulated by a succession of political leaders, including through Jiang Zemin's Three Represents and Xi Jinping's Chinese Dream.[1] Holistic thinking is intimately linked with strategies to build output legitimacy, that is, a form of political purchase fixed in the delivery of social goods. This is a well-known phenomenon in Chinese politics; as the non-democratic regime cannot seek legitimacy through democratic performance (procedural legitimacy), it instead builds public trust and support by satisfying utilitarian needs (Guo 2010). That is, the regime derives power from the people by delivering on their material demands (Xie 2020). Further, holistic thinking operates through a centralised state apparatus, which means that the balancing of values and the construction of knowledge that underpin decisions are often geographically removed from the locations where decisions have an impact. This creates a privileged position for the centre, through which the interests of far-flung regions can be easily framed as "lower level" concerns.

We trace the logic of holistic thinking back to the early practices of environmental governance in China. Already in the early 1970s, the political leadership was acutely aware of widespread environmental deterioration, caused particularly through industrialisation and the use of agricultural chemicals (Bao 2006, Muldavin 2000). China was represented at the 1972 Stockholm Conference of the Environment, which was followed by a national Conference on Environmental Protection in 1973. Both events introduced environmental protection into China's political identity. The national Conference on Environmental Protection in Beijing in 1973 communicated that socialism, which unlike capitalism serves the masses, has the ability to tackle industrial pollution (Bao 2006). The conference was followed by the adoption of China's first environmental policy documents and an administrative system for pollution management.

1 The "Three Represents" theory was put forward by Jiang Zemin. It refers to what the Communist Party of China represents: 1) the development of advanced means of production, 2) an advanced culture, and 3) the fundamental interests of the overwhelming majority of the people of China. The "Chinese Dream" was proposed by Xi in 2012. At its core, it represents the imaginary of a great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.

Additional policies were introduced during China's reform era. The 5th National People's Congress in 1978 included a new statement on environmental protection in the PRC constitution, creating a strong legal basis for ecosystem protection (ibid.). The second National Conference on Environmental Protection in 1983 confirmed environmental protection as a strategic development objective, accompanied by new policy instruments (e.g., environmental impact assessments, market tools and stricter implementation guidelines; see Bao 2006). Still, environmental destruction continued. In 1994, the Huai River turned black, becoming a symbolic representation of unprecedented ecosystem collapse (Economy 2004).

Explanations of the failure to curb ecosystem deterioration have centred around two factors. The first is inappropriate institutional design, which refers to the weakness of environmental protection agencies and ambiguous regulations. The environmental protection administration was only upgraded to ministerial status in 2008 and always enjoyed less influence than economic departments (Jahiel 1998). The second – more influential – explanation is the tendency of national and local government to prioritise the economy over the environment.[2] This follows the logic of an environmental Kuznets curve of development, which assumes that a resource-intensive stage of industrialisation must precede a clean phase of prosperity. We agree with both of these explanations, but provide a complementary reading based on holistic thinking.

During the formulation of a policy framework for environmental protection, the "primary contradiction" in China related to poverty alleviation. As stated at the 6th plenary session of the 11th CPC Central Committee in 1981, the "principal contradiction in our society is one between the ever-growing material and cultural needs of the people and the backwardness of social production" (Lin 2018). The top priority for the nation was to deliver material wellbeing for the population. Approaching this dilemma in terms of the interest of the nation as a whole explains the (sometimes intentional) neglect of environmental regulations whilst pursuing a basic quality of life for millions of Chinese people. The structuring logic here was not simply one of "economy over the environment", but a form of holistic thinking oriented towards the pursuit of "the fundamental interests of the nation as a whole", or the provision of benefits for "the overwhelming majority of the people" (Lin 2018). The discrepancy between the philosophical principle of holism (rooted in the human–nature balance) and the political practice of holistic thinking (emphasising state-led nation-building projects) is particularly clear in this developmental logic.

The principle of holistic thinking also manifests in other environmental domains, such as pollution legislation. In 1989, China's Environmental Protection Law stated that all individuals and organisations had the right and obligation to report pollution. Yet, environmental law has continually been criticised for

2 Cf. Jahiel 1998, Qi et al. 2008, Wang et al. 2014, Zhang / Wen 2008 and many others.

its weak enforcement (Wang 2006, Wang 2010). Environmental tribunals have increased since 1995, especially following the State Council support of public lawsuits in 2005 (Hilton 2013). However, barriers remain: courts refuse to hear cases, there is often insufficient evidence to win, and proceedings are prevented by local economic interests (Moser 2013, Zander 2017). Lawyers who take on sensitive cases face low payment, harassment and persecution (Fu 2018, Van Rooij 2010). According to the CPC approach to holistic thinking, individual grievances can be downplayed or overlooked as long as they are not considered relevant to the nation's primary development objective.

In other words, in a structured order of priorities, individual instances that conflict with overarching national purposes can be legitimately ignored. Individual cases only matter when they become indispensable to a broader agenda (for example, as through Li Keqiang's war on pollution in 2014). This problem can be interpreted in terms of a weak legal system, yet this does not reflect a historically weak legal tradition in China. On the contrary, Confucian ideology views legality as embedded in principles of morality (Jiang 2021), and there is an extended tradition of legal philosophy informing imperial rule, such as through the writings of Han Fei (Winston 2005). Legal systems were rebuilt and strengthened throughout the reform era, including through the rapid expansion of environmental law (Wang 2006). In terms of CPC governing practices, however, the Mao administration introduced a model of socialist legality, which allowed for the complete abolition of the legal apparatus and transfer of legal power to the party (Baum 1986). One can trace the legacy of placing CPC interests above the legal system in the continued neglect of environmental law enforcement. That is, the texts of legal documents are of less importance than national development (the priority of the CPC at the time); the interests of the whole override the law.

Hydropower is an extremely emotive policy domain in China, also shaped by holistic thinking. This topic is linked with memories of nationalist dreams and disastrous construction failures in the Mao era (Boyd 2013). Hydrologist Huang Wanli's opposition to the Sanmenxia Dam on the Yellow River, resulting in bans on his research, is emblematic of the repression of dissent during this period (Shapiro 2001). The monumental Banqiao Dam collapse in 1975 came to symbolise the risks of large hydropower projects (Geall 2013). Environmental movements have emerged from resistance against such projects, which threaten irreversible biodiversity loss, loss of livelihoods and cultural identity, and enormous population displacements (Tilt 2014). The intense contestation around hydropower has functioned as a driver of the pluralisation of China's environmental policy-making system, as coalitions of NGOs, media and environmental departments have resisted these projects in the name of protecting society and the environment (Mertha 2011).

At the same time, the continued support for hydropower and its position as a central pillar of China's "modern energy system" in the 14th FYP (NDRC 2021) demonstrates the power of holistic thinking within this policy domain. Tilt (2014) has explored the moral dilemma involved in balancing conflicting demands around hydropower. He concluded that coalitions of the central government with energy corporations have consistently framed hydropower as essential for economic growth, which has proven the primary concern in these debates. This political dynamic reveals the weighing of local concerns against national development priorities, resulting in the intentional neglect of lower-level concerns (the wellbeing of the nation as a whole legitimises such sacrifices). It also showcases the weight of scientific expertise in holistic decision-making processes (Tilt 2014).

A final policy area that illustrates this logic is resource management. The FYPs have always considered how the country's limited natural resources would meet the needs of development. It was already apparent in the 1970s that domestic energy resources would be insufficient for the planned economic expansion. Energy conservation was adopted as an objective in the 6th FYP (1981–1985; Zhiping et al. 1994), followed by energy security and energy efficiency targets in subsequent decades (Meidan et al. 2009, Tsang / Kolk 2010). In terms of ecological protection, this has translated into an interest in carrying capacities and ecological limits. For example, China's 13th FYP stated that based on "the master strategy for regional development […] we will promote […] development that is within the carrying capacity of the environment and natural resources" (NDRC 2016: 103). This statement demonstrates the intention to align development with available ecological resources, combat the "irrational" distribution of resource-intense development and alleviate pressures in the "underdeveloped" Western provinces (where sensitive ecosystems and valuable natural resources are located).

The most recent expression is Ecological Conservation Redlines (ECRs), which have emerged as a strategy to protect sensitive ecosystems (Gao et al. 2020, Xu et al. 2018). ECRs represent the "cross-sector integration of ecological protection systems to correct the current problem of decentralization and implement effective management of ecosystems across China's vast geographic range" (Gao et al. 2020: 1520). This policy strategy reflects holistic thinking by ensuring that China's natural environment can sustain its path towards a "moderately prosperous" (小 *xiaokang*) society. It accomplishes "the goal of national development by drawing upon the resources of peripheral regions" (Tilt 2014: 8), ensuring that natural resources are mobilised to serve central policy preferences.

Harmony – the maintenance of stability

The principle of harmony is articulated by the CPC as the maintenance of stability. Strategies to maintain stability emerged in response to threats of fragmentation and disruption of China's vast, heterogeneous territory. Since Emperor Qin Shi Huang unified China and established a centralised state (in 221 BCE), the nation has been governed by an authority with far-reaching responsibility for maintaining "peaceful order" (Zhao 2006). This relates to the need to protect the integrity of the political regime and maintain the status quo (Yu 2018), including through the use of violence. In 1989, when Deng Xiaoping met US President Bush in Beijing, he proclaimed that "[i]n China the overriding need is for stability. Without a stable environment, we can accomplish nothing and may even lose what we have achieved" (Deng 2010). "Stability overwhelms everything" became a guiding principle of governance (Yu 2018) and a top priority for leaders on all government levels (Zhou 2017). As with holistic thinking, the discursive association between stability and economic expansion allows the principle of maintenance of stability to function as a chief source of political legitimacy (Sandby-Thomas 2008), while any threat is framed as jeopardising the path towards social and material wellbeing (ibid.).

The maintenance of stability is deeply intertwined with measures to maintain social control. This relates to authoritarian techniques of oppression, such as monitoring and limiting mobilisation and dissent, as well as to more sophisticated techniques of communication that allow the formulation and pursuit of collective goals. Teets argues that China operates according to a "consultative" authoritarian model – "an interactive and dynamic process whereby government officials and civil society leaders learn from experiences with each other" (Teets 2014: 2). This reflects a culture of social interaction that builds on an extended history of reconciliation of difference through dialogue. This suggests that while the regime maintains a semi-authoritarian system, the absence of conflict does not equate with an absence of contestation. In fact, there is constant negotiation of the rules that maintain stability.

Since the reform period, the concept of stability itself has morphed. "Dynamic stability" that builds on reflexivity and responsiveness is gradually replacing a concept of "static stability" dominated by "blocking" (a translation from Chinese, which can be understood as "blocking of public opinion or dissent") (Yu 2018). This flexibility is reflected in an increasing acceptance of governance modes and policy interventions based on experimentation (Lo / Castán Broto 2019). In this case, principles of harmony (as a form of mutually balancing, cooperatively enhancing beneficial relationships) can be understood as operating within the authoritarian regime, thus translating into various forms of resistance, self-regulation and negotiation.

Historically, the construction of the environment as a political domain relates to the establishment of a boundary between interventions that maintain stability and those that challenge it. The maintenance of this boundary explains why some forms of environmental action are approved by the party, while others are distinctly off-limits. For instance, this tension has dictated the emergence of environmental NGOs (ENGOs) in China, including their form, function and area of engagement. During the Mao era, few organisations outside the state were permitted (Ho 2001), but the reform period gradually introduced rights of association alongside a growing civil society (Hilton 2013). In the late 1980s, new laws on freedom of association were introduced, although in limited form (ibid.). Various restrictions were inspired by the fear that any form of social mobilisation could lead to state collapse. Despite this control, the number of ENGOs grew in the 1990s in parallel with the emergence of a middle class and the rise of environmental consciousness (Bao 2006, Bao 2009). Recognising the ineffectiveness of environmental regulations, the government acknowledged the need for multiple actors to address environmental issues (Bao 2009). While this included ENGOs, their characteristics were shaped by the concern with maintaining social stability. Strict regulations specified whether and how ENGOs were permitted, including the need for official approval, sponsorship and non-overlapping activities with other NGOs (Bao 2009, Ho, 2001). The majority of ENGOs were denied access to legal status and funding, and their activities were limited to non-confrontational or "politically innocent" activities (Bao 2009, Ho 2001). These approaches continue to be evident today. In the limited space for political advocacy that remains under the Xi Jinping administration, ENGOs strategically cultivate their relations with government bodies to communicate issues, carefully frame demands to sustain pressure but avoid direct confrontation, and collaborate with the media to ensure visibility of environmental concerns (Dai / Spires 2018).

Such tension is also apparent in the activities of journalists. In the 1990s, local newspapers began to report on previously taboo issues, including the environment (Geall 2013). Since then, journalists have used the media as a conduit for reporting on political concerns, such as corruption, lack of transparency, lack of participation and political rights (ibid.). However, this reporting is conducted within tightly defined boundaries. Liu Jianqiang, an environmental reporter, stated in 2010 that "[t]he environment in China is not politics" (Liu 2010). This statement demonstrates how journalists constantly navigate the boundary between socially acceptable topics and political issues; as long as environmental issues are not considered a threat to social stability, they are not considered to be political. Journalists push the boundaries of politics with their reporting, always cognisant of state retaliation when their activism goes too far (Mao's

Hundred Flowers campaign represents a historical reminder of the ultimate consequences of crossing this line[3]).

Likewise, environmental activists align their activities with the rationale of maintaining stability and often accept that their work is most effective when it supports government objectives. This is, for example, evidenced in the large number of non-state organisations focusing on technical dimensions of environmental protection (Westman / Castán Broto 2019). The first ENGO established in China, in 1978, was the China Society for Environmental Sciences (Bao 2009). This was followed by a list of environmental organisations with close links to the state, frequently described as government-organised NGOs (GONGOs). For example, the Institute for Environment and Development, which provides business training in clean production, pursues goals closely aligned with public policy (Ho 2001). Wildlife conservationists have, similarly, navigated a space perceived as non-confrontational and therefore appropriate (Bao 2009, Boyd 2013). For example, Friends of Nature, a highly effective wildlife protection group established by Liang Congjie in 1994, was explicitly framed as a collaborative programme supporting government-led environmental protection (Boyd 2013). Conservation campaigns are less successful when they stray into conflictual politics. For example, species protection can overlap with contested issues of deforestation and land development (e.g., the entrenched economic interests entangled in deforestation in Yunnan; see Boyd 2013). The conflicts that occur in these cases jeopardise social stability, and, as a result, tend to undermine the success of environmental campaigns.

Ecological civilisation – What does it mean in practice?

The logics of holistic thinking and of maintaining stability have structured activist and policy-oriented interventions in environmental governance in China for decades. We argue that they are central to the formation of political responses carried out in the name of ecological civilisation. To begin with, ecological civilisation responds directly to a shift in the "primary contradiction" in China. With rapid economic growth and the gradual realisation of the national goal of building a moderately prosperous society, the main priority for the nation has been redefined. In 2017, the 19th National Congress Report stated that:

> [S]ocialism with Chinese characteristics has entered a new era, the principal contradiction facing Chinese society has evolved. What we now face is the contradiction between unbalanced and inadequate development and the people's ever-growing needs for a better life (Xi 2017b).

3 During the Hundred Flowers campaign, which took place between 1956–1957, the CPC invited citizens to openly express their opinions and dissatisfaction with current social and political conditions. However, immediately following the campaign, party dissenters were rounded up and violently punished.

This shift in priorities occurred as the destruction of the environment came to affect the welfare of the nation as a whole. The principle of "development first" was clearly no longer tenable as an objective that represented the benefits of the majority. Instead, ecological civilisation was adopted as a national priority and unifying development objective of the CPC. At the same time, ecological deterioration had grown into a major threat to social stability. In the past decade, environmental pollution has become a top cause of social unrest and a leading factor behind "environmental mass incidents" in China (i.e., violent protests and uprisings; cf. Bloomberg 2013, Ma 2008). Chai Jing's documentary "Under the Dome", for instance, was a landmark event that ignited a nationwide debate on air pollution. Although the documentary was soon banned in mainland China, it alerted the political leadership to the urgency of addressing pollution issues. In response to this threat to social stability, ecological civilisation was articulated as a path to socialist modernisation. In 2018, the Ministry of Environment was restructured into an expanded and more influential Ministry of Ecology and Environment, stressing the newfound concern with ecological protection at the highest level of political power.

The operational meaning of ecological civilisation in different domains can be understood in relation to the degree to which environmental programmes match the two principles of holistic thinking and maintenance of stability. For example, resource conservation is likely to be prominent on ecological civilisation agendas and potentially very effective. Xi Jinping's address at the 19th Party Congress remarked:

> We should, acting on the principles of prioritising resource conservation and environmental protection and letting nature restore itself, develop spatial layouts, industrial structures, and ways of work and life that help conserve resources. […] We will encourage conservation across the board and promote recycling, take action to get everyone conserving water, cut consumption of energy and materials, and establish linkages between the circular use of resources and materials in industrial production and in everyday life. We encourage simple, moderate, green, and low-carbon ways of life, and oppose extravagance and excessive consumption. (Xi 2017a)

This statement captures the unproblematic relationship between CPC objectives and resource conservation. In terms of adopting efficient technologies of production, shifting towards circular industrial models and encouraging environment-friendly lifestyles, there are no contradictions – only benefits to both industry and society. As these forms of action clearly follow holistic thinking (resource conservation is required for continued development) and maintenance of stability (win-win solutions for the state and corporate sector), we expect a continuation of success similar to that witnessed in earlier resource management programmes (e.g., energy efficiency; see Jiang 2016, Sinton et al. 1998, Zhou et al. 2010). This optimism is reflected in the strong focus on sustainable consumption and production, technology innovation and the circular economy in government programmes and in scholarly debates on ecological civilisation (Wei et al. 2011).

Likewise, pollution control is likely to be pursued aggressively and could be highly effective at a macro level. Pollution was a key area targeted by concepts that informed ecological civilisation, such as the ideas on ecological agriculture as a solution to ecosystem degradation proposed by Ye Qianji in the 1980s (Marinelli 2018). In 2005, Pan Yue (then vice minister of the EPA) made a speech to international journalists in which he admitted the system-threatening character of environmental degradation in China, especially in terms of pollution and its catastrophic impact on health (Hilton 2013). Combating pollution, the most visible form of environmental degradation, will continue to be a core agenda for the CPC, especially through more stringent enforcement of industrial and agricultural emission guidelines. However, as discussed above, pollution control will not necessarily be effective in individual cases or when pollution control conflicts with macro-agendas. For example, we expect challenges in environmental litigation to remain (unless strategically linked with broader development agendas) and a continued reliance on coal power plants for years to come.

Current CPC rhetoric contains a very strong emphasis on the protection of ecological zones, including ecological red conservation lines. Xi Jinping's address at the 19th National Congress highlighted this form of action in particular. His statement not only unambiguously stressed the valuation of the natural environment, but also holistic thinking in ecosystem protection:

> Building an ecological civilisation is vital to sustain the Chinese nation's development. We must realise that lucid waters and lush mountains are invaluable assets and act on this understanding. Efforts to develop a system for building an ecological civilisation have been accelerated; the system of functional zoning has been steadily improved. […] We will adopt a holistic approach to conserving our mountains, rivers, forests, farmlands, lakes, and grasslands, implement the strictest possible systems for environmental protection. […] Only by observing the laws of nature can mankind avoid costly blunders in its exploitation. Any harm we inflict on nature will eventually return to haunt us. (Xi 2017b: 20, 45)

We believe that interest in protecting ecological zones will continue to increase. Ecosystem collapse is clearly contrary to the interest of the nation as a whole, and a "rational distribution" of development activities according to regional resources matches the logic of holistic thinking. Pan Jiahua is the director of CASS Institute for Urban and Environmental Studies; his interpretation of ecological civilisation captures this inclination clearly, placing carrying capacities front and centre of the debate (Pan 2016). Ecosystem protection in many cases overlaps with habitat and biodiversity protection, trademark domains for Chinese ENGOs. Causes championed by ENGOs working for wildlife conservation may continue to be successful, but only when their campaigns align with reforestation and ecosystem protection interventions determined through nation-wide analyses of ecosystem limits and a rational (centrally dictated) distribution of development activities.

Although ecological civilisation is likely to act as a forceful policy narrative in the above domains, it will probably have limited reach in others. The situation is complicated in areas where environmental policy objectives do not align with holistic thinking or maintenance of stability. In particular, this relates to activities that are core to capitalist reproduction, such as resource extraction, accumulation of capital, and continued economic growth. Ecological civilisation emerged as a critique of the neoliberal co-optation of the state and China's integration into the global capitalist economy (Gare 2012). Scholars that view capitalism as "inherently anti-ecological" (Wang et al. 2014: 47) therefore argue that ecological civilisation needs to dismantle capitalism. In this vein, Pan Yue originally mobilised the concept in rejection of Western development models.

In CPC political practice, however, ecological civilisation is highly unlikely to perform such a function. From the perspective of holistic thinking, the concept in fact delivers the opposite aim. Communism is depicted by the CPC as a utopian endpoint, to be reached by passing through capitalist development. Within China's current national agenda, ecological civilisation features as a strategy to support socialist modernisation. Ecological civilisation is a means to pursue green economic development, with the support of science and technology. In terms of nation-building projects, capitalist rationales thus remain firmly embedded in ecological civilisation programmes (as also observed by Hansen et al. 2018). In terms of maintenance of stability, any challenge to the capitalist economy would require the overhaul of fundamental structures of ownership, wealth and political economies. Such undertakings would threaten not only the privilege of the ruling class in China, but also the social wellbeing that has delivered political legitimacy for decades. These contradictions suggest that it is currently out of the question for ecological civilisation to take on the challenge of dismantling the capitalist economy.

Conclusions

Environmental discourses structure the problem frames and perceptions of available solutions, thereby shaping action. In the context of domestic politics in China, ecological civilisation is a narrative that creates legitimacy for certain forms of environmental interventions (while discounting others). We expect that a range of actors will be supported in their efforts to pursue environmental protection, whether through new models of urban planning, development of new materials and industries, adoption of new technology, or protection of sensitive ecosystems. A strength of holistic thinking lies in its ability to encourage experimentation and variety as long as these can be linked with national priorities. Yet, if there is a dark side to ecological civilisation, it lies in the risk that projects carried out under its banner could have harmful impacts at the local

level whilst serving "higher order" interests. For instance, reforestation in the Western regions could be considered acceptable even if it encroaches on struggles for cultural identity and autonomy (Yeh 2009). This danger is real, even though such dynamics existed within China's political system long before the emergence of this narrative. The extent to which the discourse may be used to serve oppressive politics remain, however, to be seen.

What, finally, are the implications for international politics? There is a pronounced concern that non-democratic practices will gain purchase as China's influence abroad expands. For instance, the "soft power of harmony" may become coercive when linked with the power of hegemony (Hagström / Nordin 2020). While Chinese norms travel internationally, ecological civilisation rationales are not likely to be expressed in a straightforward way. As explained in this paper, the principles of holistic thinking and maintenance of social stability are tied to China's political system and formulated specifically in relation to national concerns. While tactics of ecological protection (e.g., conservation redlines) can diffuse, the underpinning logics cannot be readily transplanted.

At this stage, the extrapolation of environmental governance trends from within China to other locations risks yielding shallow or inaccurate analyses. Not only is it too early to predict what effects ecological civilisation may have beyond China's borders, but, also, unexpected outcomes may result from the complex encounter between Chinese interests and diverse groups affected by projects on the ground. Thus, the dynamics of a post-dichotomous global landscape evade the available lexicon of geopolitical analysis and constitute a matter for future empirical study.

References

Bao, Maohong (2006): The Evolution of Environmental Policy and its Impact in the People's Republic of China. *Conservation and Society* 4(1), pp. 36–54.

Bao, Maohong (2009): Environmental NGOs in Transforming China. *Nature and Culture* 4(1), pp. 1–16.

Baum, Richard (1986): Modernization and Legal Reform in Post-Mao China: the Rebirth of Socialist Legality. *Studies in Comparative Communism* 19(2), pp. 69–103.

Bloomberg (2013): China to Curb Cars, Coal and Steel to Eliminate Heavily Polluted Days in Decade. Toronto Star, https://www.thestar.com/news/world/2013/09/12/china_to_curb_cars_coal_and_steel_to_eliminate_heavily_polluted_days_in_decade.html (accessed 20 January 2021).

Boyd, Olivia (2013): The Birth of Chinese Environmentalism: Key Campaigns. In: Sam Geall (ed.): *China and the Environment: The Green Revolution*. New York: ZED, pp. 40–95.

Buttel, Frederick H. (2000): Ecological Modernization as Social Theory. *Geoforum* 31(1), pp. 57–65.

Callahan, William A. (2015): History, Tradition and the China Dream: Socialist Modernization in the World of Great Harmony. *Journal of Contemporary China* 24(96), pp. 983–1001.

Chenshan, Tian (2019): Mao Zedong, Sinization of Marxism, and Traditional Chinese Thought Culture. *Asian Studies* 7(1), pp. 13–37.

China Central Government Portal (2009): 胡锦涛在纪念党的十一届三中全会召开30周年大会上的讲话 [Hu Jintao's Speech at the Commemoration of the 30th Anniversary of the Third Plenary Session of the Eleventh Central Committee of the Communist Party of China]. China Central Government Portal, http://www.gov.cn/test/2009-10/13/content_1437699_6.htm (accessed 3 July 2022)

Collier, Ruth B. / Collier, David (1991): *Shaping the Political Arena: Critical Junctures, the Labour Movement and Regime Dynamics in Latin America*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

CPC (not dated): 在中央工作会议上的讲话 [Addresses to the CPC National Congress Working Conferences]. 十三大以来重要文献选编 [Compilation of Important Documents since the 13th CPC National Congress]. CPC, http://cpc.people.com.cn/GB/64184/64186/66684/index.html (accessed 20 June 2022).

Dai, Jingyun / Spires, Anthony J. (2018): Advocacy in an Authoritarian State: How Grassroots Environmental NGOs Influence Local Governments in China. *The China Journal* 79(1), pp. 62–83.

Delman, Jorgen (2018): Ecological Civilization Politics and Governance in Hangzhou: New Pathways to Green Urban Development. *Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus* 16(17/1), pp. 1–21.

Deng, Xiaoping (2010 [1989]): The Overriding Need Is for Stability. China Daily Online, 26 October 2010 http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/19thcpcnationalcongress/2010-10/26/content_29714418.htm (accessed 15 June 2022).

Dirlik, Arif (1996): Mao Zedong and "Chinese Marxism". In: Saree Makdisi / Cesare Casarino / Rebecca Karl (eds): *Marxism Beyond Marxism*. London / New York: Routledge, pp. 119–148.

Dong, Liang (2017): Bound to Lead? Rethinking China's Role after Paris in UNFCCC Negotiations. *Chinese Journal of Population Resources and Environment* 15(1), pp. 32–38.

Dryzek, John S. (2013): *The Politics of the Earth: Environmental Discourses*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Economy, Elizabeth (2004): *The River Runs Black: The Environmental Challenge to China's Future*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press.

Esarey, Ashley / Haddad, Mary Alice / Lewis, Joanna I. / Harrell, Stevan (2020): *Greening East Asia: The Rise of the Eco-developmental State*. Washington: University of Washington Press.

Feindt, Peter H. / Oels, Angela (2005): Does Discourse Matter? Discourse Analysis in Environmental Policy Making. *Journal of Environmental Policy and Planning* 7(3), pp. 161–173.

Froger, Géraldine / Méral, Philippe (2012): Towards an Institutional and Historical Analysis of Environmental Policy in Madagascar. *Environmental Policy and Governance* 22(5), pp. 369–380.

Fu, Hualing (2018): The July 9th (709) Crackdown on Human Rights Lawyers: Legal Advocacy in an Authoritarian State. *Journal of Contemporary China* 27(112), pp. 554–568.

Gao, Guannan / Muscolino, Micah (2021): *The Tale of Treasure Grass: Sweet Clover's Introduction and Extension in China, 1942–1961*. London / New York: Routledge.

Gao, Jixi / Wang, Yan / Zou, Changxin / Xu, Delin / Lin, Naifeng / Wang, Lixia / Zhang, Kun (2020): China's Ecological Conservation Redline: A Solution for Future Nature Conservation. *Ambio* 49(9), pp. 1519–1529

Gare, Arran (2012): China and the Struggle for Ecological Civilization. *Capitalism Nature Socialism* 23(4), pp. 10–26.

Geall, Sam (2013): China's Environmental Journalists: A Rainbow Confusion. In: Sam Geall (ed.): *China and the Environment*. New York: ZED, pp. 15–39.

Geall, Sam / Ely, Adrian (2018): Narratives and Pathways towards an Ecological Civilization in Contemporary China. *The China Quarterly* 236, pp. 1175–1196.

Goron, Coraline (2018): Ecological Civilisation and the Political Limits of a Chinese Concept of Sustainability. *China Perspectives* 2018(4), pp. 39–52.

Guo, Baogang (2010): *China's Quest for Political Legitimacy: The New Equity-enhancing Politics*. Plymouth: Lexington Books.

Guo, Qingpan (1961): 庄子集释 [Zhuangzi, with collected explanations]. Beijing: 中华书局 [Zhonghua].

Hagström, Linus / Nordin, Astrid H. (2020): China's "Politics of Harmony" and the Quest for Soft Power in International Politics. *International Studies Review* 22(3), pp. 507–525.

Hajer, Maarten A. (1995): *The Politics of Environmental Discourse: Ecological Modernization and the Policy Process*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Hansen, Mette H. / Li, Hongtao / Svarverud, Rune (2018): Ecological Civilization: Interpreting the Chinese Past, Projecting the Global Future. *Global Environmental Change* 53, pp. 195–203.

Hansen, Mette H. / Liu, Zhaohui (2018): Air Pollution and Grassroots Echoes of "Ecological Civilization" in Rural China. *The China Quarterly* 234, pp. 320–339.

Heurtebise, Jean-Yves (2017): Sustainability and Ecological Civilization in the Age of Anthropocene: An Epistemological Analysis of the Psychosocial and "Culturalist" Interpretations of Global Environmental Risks. *Sustainability* 9(8), pp. 1331.

Hilton, Isabel (2013): The Return of Chinese Civil Society. In: Sam Geall (ed.): *China and the Environment: The Green Revolution*. London: Zed books.

Hilton, Isabel / Kerr, Oliver (2017): The Paris Agreement: China's "New Normal" Role in International Climate Negotiations. *Climate Policy* 17(1), pp. 48–58.

Ho, Peter (2001): Greening without Conflict? Environmentalism, NGOs and Civil Society in China. *Development and Change* 32(5), pp. 893–921.

Huan, Qingzhi (2016): Socialist Eco-civilization and Social-ecological Transformation. *Capitalism Nature Socialism* 27(2), pp. 51–66.

Ikenberry, John G. (1994): History's Heavy Hand: Institutions and the Politics of the State. Paper prepared for a conference on "New Perspectives on Institutions", October 1994, University of Maryland.

Immergut, Ellen M. (1992): *Health Politics: Interests and Institutions in Western Europe*. (Cambridge Studies in Comparative Politics). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Jahiel, Abigail R. (1998): The Organization of Environmental Protection in China. *The China Quarterly* 156, pp. 757–787.

Jiang, Bo / Bai, Yang / Wong, Christina P. / Xu, Xibao / Alatalo, Juha M. (2019): China's Ecological Civilization Program: Implementing Ecological Redline Policy. *Land Use Policy* 81, pp. 111–114.

Jiang, Jinhe (2016): China's Urban Residential Carbon Emission and Energy Efficiency Policy. *Energy* 109, pp. 866–875.

Jiang, Tao (2021): *Origins of Moral-Political Philosophy in Early China: Contestation of Humaneness, Justice, and Personal Freedom*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Kirk, Elizabeth A. / Reeves, Alison D. / Blackstock, Kirsty L. (2007): Path Dependency and the Implementation of Environmental Regulation. *Environment and Planning C: Government and Policy* 25(2), pp. 250–268.

Leipold, Sina / Feindt, Peter H. / Winkel, Georg / Keller, Reiner (2019): Discourse Analysis of Environmental Policy Revisited: Traditions, Trends, Perspectives. London: Taylor and Francis.

Li, Chenyang (2008): The Philosophy of Harmony in Classical Confucianism. *Philosophy Compass* 3(3), pp. 423–435.

Li, Chenyang (2013): *The Confucian Philosophy of Harmony*. London: Routledge.

Lim, Tae-Seop / Kim, Sang-Yeon / Kim, Jihyun (2011): Holism: A Missing Link in Individualism-collectivism Research. *Journal of Intercultural Communication Research* 40(1), pp. 21–38.

Lin, Kuo-Wei / Huang, Kai-Ping (2014): Moral Judgment and Ethical Leadership in Chinese Management: The Role of Confucianism and Collectivism. *Quality & Quantity* 48(1), pp. 37–47.

Lin, Zhaomu (2018): 正确认识我国社会主要矛盾的转化 [Correctly Understanding the Transformation of China's Primary Contradiction]. 人民日报 [People's Daily], http://www.cqvip.com/qk/60709a/20188/675347643.html (accessed 5 June 2022)

Liu, Jianqiang (2010): Interview with Liu Jianqiang: Environmental Journalism and Censorship in China. Asia Society, https://asiasociety.org/northern-california/interview-liu-jianqiang-environmental-journalism-and-censorship-china (accessed 3 July 2022)

Lo, Kevin / Castán Broto, Vanesa (2019): Co-benefits, Contradictions, and Multi-level Governance of Low-carbon Experimentation: Leveraging Solar Energy for Sustainable Development in China. *Global Environmental Change-Human and Policy Dimensions* 59(12), p. 101993.

Lu, Feng (2017): 生态文明" 概念辨析 [Ecological Civilization: Concept Analysis]. 晋阳学刊 [*Jinyang Journal*] 5, pp. 63–70.

Lu, Feng (2019): 生态文明：文明的超越［Ecological Civilization: The Transcendance of Civilization]. 北京:中国科学技术出版社 [China Science and Technology Press].

Lynas, Mark (2009): How Do I Know China Wrecked the Copenhagen Deal? I Was in the Room. The Guardian, 22 December 2009. https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2009/dec/22/copenhagen-climate-change-mark-lynas (accessed 20 June 2022)

Ma, Tianjie (2008): *Environmental Mass Incidents in Rural China: Examining Large-scale Unrest in Dongyang, Zhejiang*. China Environment Series 33, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, Washington.

Marinelli, Maurizio (2018): How to Build a "Beautiful China" in the Anthropocene. The Political Discourse and the Intellectual Debate on Ecological Civilization. *Journal of Chinese Political Science* 23(3), pp. 365–386.

Marshall, Graham R. / Alexandra, Jason (2016): Institutional Path Dependence and Environmental Water Recovery in Australia's Murray-Darling Basin. *Water Alternatives* 9(3), pp. 679–703.

Meidan, Michal / Andrews-Speed, Philip / Xin, Ma (2009): Shaping China's Energy Policy: Actors and Processes. *Journal of Contemporary China* 18(61), pp. 591–616.

Mertha, Andrew C. (2011): *China's Water Warriors*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Moser, Adam (2013): The Yangzonghai Case: Struggling for Environmental Justice. In: Sam Geall (ed.): *China and the Environment: The Green Revolution*. London: ZED Books.

Muldavin, Joshua (2000): The Paradoxes of Environmental Policy and Resource Management in Reform-era China. *Economic Geography* 76(3), pp. 244–271.

National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC) (2016): The 13th Five-Year Plan for Economic and Social Development of the People's Republic of China. National Development and Reform Commission, Beijing.

National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC) (2021): People's Republic of China 14th Five-Year Plan for National Economic and Social Development and Long-Range Objectives for 2035, China National Development and Reform Commission, Beijing.

Pan, Jiahua (2016): *China's Environmental Governing and Ecological Civilization*. (China Insights). Berlin / Heidelberg: Springer.

Pan, Yue (2007): 潘岳:生态文明将促进中国特色社会主义的建设 [Ecological Civilization will Promote the Building of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics]. China Economic Net, http://www.ce.cn/xwzx/gnsz/szyw/200710/22/t20071022_13333741.shtml (accessed 15 June 2022).

Powell, Walter W. / DiMaggio, Paul J. (2012): *The New Institutionalism in Organizational Analysis*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Pradhan, Ramakrushna (2018): The Rise of China in Central Asia: The New Silk Road Diplomacy. *Fudan Journal of the Humanities and Social Sciences* 11(1), pp. 9–29.

Qi, Ye / Ma, Li / Zhang, Huanbo / Li, Huimin (2008): Translating a Global Issue into Local Priority: China's Local Government Response to Climate Change. *The Journal of Environment & Development* 17(4), pp. 379–400.

Qian, Mu (1991): 中国文化对人类未来可有的贡献［The Possible Contribution of Chinese Culture to Human Future]. 中国文化 [*Chinese Culture*] 1, pp. 93–96.

REN21 (2021): Renewables 2021 Global Status Report. REN21, https://www.ren21.net/reports/global-status-report/ (accessed 15 June 2022).

Rošker, Jana S. (2017): Structural Relations and Analogies in Classical Chinese Logic. *Philosophy East and West* 67(3), pp. 841–863.

Salamatin, Mikkaela (2020): China's Belt and Road Initiative Is Reshaping Human Rights Norms. *Vanderbilt Journal of Transnational Law* 53(4), p. 1427.

Sandby-Thomas, Peter (2008): The Legitimating Logic of Stability: Analysing the CCP's Stability Discourse. PhD thesis, University of Nottingham.

Schmalzer, Sigrid (2016): *Red Revolution, Green Revolution. Scientific Farming in Socialist China*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Schwartz, Benjamin I. (1973): On the Absence of Reductionism in Chinese Thought. *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 1(1), pp. 27–44.

Shapiro, Judith (2001): *Mao's War against Nature: Politics and the Environment in Revolutionary China*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Simoens, Machteld C. / Leipold, Sina (2021): Trading Radical for Incremental Change: The Politics of a Circular Economy Transition in the German Packaging Sector. *Journal of Environmental Policy & Planning* 23(6), pp. 1–15.

Sinton, Jonathan E. / Levine, Mark D. / Wang, Qingyi, (1998): Energy Efficiency in China: Accomplishments and Challenges. *Energy Policy* 26(11), pp. 813–829.

Smil, Vaclav (1984): *The Bad Earth. Environmental Degradation in China*. Armonk: ZED Press.

Solé-Farràs, Jesús (2008): Harmony in Contemporary New Confucianism and in Socialism with Chinese Characteristics. *China Media Research* 4(4), pp. 14–24.

Song, Zhiming (2004): 简论佛教本体论的中国化 [On the Sinicization of Buddhist Ontology]. 浙江社会科学 [*Zhejiang Social Science*] 1, pp. 175–177.

Steinmo, Sven (2008): Historical Institutionalism. In: Donatella della Porta / Michael Keating (eds): *Approaches and Methodologies in the Social Sciences: A Pluralist Perspective*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 118–138.

Teets, Jessica C. (2014): *Civil Society under Authoritarianism: The China Model*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Thelen, Kathleen (1999): Historical Institutionalism in Comparative Politics. *Annual Review of Political Science* 2(1), pp. 369–404.

Tilt, Bryan (2009): *The Struggle for Sustainability in Rural China: Environmental Values and Civil Society*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Tilt, Bryan (2014): *Dams and Development in China*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Tooze, Adam (2020): Did Xi Just Save the World? *Foreign Policy*. https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/09/25/xi-china-climate-change-saved-the-world%E2%80%A8/ (accessed 15 June 2022).

Tsang, Stephen / Kolk, Ans (2010): The Evolution of Chinese Policies and Governance Structures on Environment, Energy and Climate. *Environmental Policy and Governance* 20(3), pp. 180–196.

Tu, Weiming (2001): The Ecological Turn in New Confucian Humanism: Implications for China and the World. *Daedalus* 130(4), pp. 243–264.

Tyfield, David / Rodríguez, Fabricio (2022): China beyond China. Infrastructuring and Ecologising a New Global Hegemony? Editorial. *International Quarterly for Asian Studies* 53(2), pp. 171–180.

Van Rooij, Benjamin (2010): The People vs. Pollution: Understanding Citizen Action against Pollution in China. *Journal of Contemporary China* 19(63), pp. 55–77.

Varjú, Viktor (2021): The Policy Transfer of Environmental Policy Integration: Path Dependency, Route Flexibility, or the Hungarian Way? *Policy Studies*. https://doi.org/10.1080/01442872.2021.1882670

Wang, Canfa (2006): Chinese Environmental Law Enforcement: Current Deficiencies and Suggested Reforms. *Vermont Journal of Environmental Law* 8, p. 159.

Wang, Jin (2010): China's Green Laws are Useless. China Dialogue, https://chinadialogue.net/en/pollution/3831-china-s-green-laws-are-useless/ (accessed 15 June 2022)

Wang, Yanshi (2001): 怎样认识"整体利益"与"具体利益" [How to Understand Overall Interests and Individual Interests]. Guangming Daily, https://www.gmw.cn/01gmrb/2001-08/31/01-D1D266711A725E-B248256AB80080DCA6.htm (accessed 15 June 2022).

Wang, Yuchen (2020): 论生态文明的本质与价值归宿 [On the Character and Values of Ecological Civilisation]. 东岳论丛 [*Dongyue Tribune*] 8, pp. 26–33.

Wang, Zhihe / He, Huili / Fan, Meijun (2014): The Ecological Civilization Debate in China: The Role of Ecological Marxism and Constructive Postmodernism. Beyond the Predicament of Legislation. *Monthly Review* 66(6), p. 37.

Wei, Zhang / Li, Hulin / An, Xuebing,(2011): Ecological Civilization Construction is the Fundamental Way to Develop Low-carbon Economy. *Energy Procedia* 5, pp. 839–843.

Westman, Linda K. / Castán Broto, Vanesa (2019): Techno-economic Rationalities as a Political Practice in Urban Environmental Politics in China. *Environment and Planning C: Politics and Space* 37(2), pp. 277–297.

Winston, Kenneth (2005): The Internal Morality of Chinese Legalism. *Singapore Journal of Legal Studies* (December 2005), pp. 313–347.

Winter, Tim (2020): Silk Road Diplomacy: Geopolitics and Histories of Connectivity. *International Journal of Cultural Policy* 26(7), pp. 898–912.

Wurzel, Rüdiger K. (2010): Environmental, Climate and Energy Policies: Path-dependent Incrementalism or Quantum Leap? *German Politics* 19(3/4), pp. 460–478.

Xi, Jinping (2017a): Secure a Decisive Victory in Building a Moderately Prosperous Society in All Respects and Strive for the Great Success of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era. 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, Beijing.

Xi, Jinping (2017b): 习近平在中国共产党第十九次全国代表大会上的报告 [Xi Jinping's Report at the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China]. Renminwang, http://cpc.people.com.cn/n1/2017/1028/c64094-29613660.html (accessed 5 July 2022).

Xi, Jinping (2021): 习近平：在庆祝中国共产党成立100周年大会上的讲话 [Xi JInping: Speech at the Celebration of the 100th Anniversary of the Founding of the Communist Party of China]. Xinhuanet, http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2021-07/15/c_1127658385.htm (accessed 3 July 2022).

Wei, Xiaohong/ Li, Qingyuan (2013): The Confucian Value of Harmony and Its Influence on Chinese Social Interaction. *Cross-Cultural Communication* 9(1), pp. 60–66.

Xie, Zhenhua (2020): China's Historical Evolution of Environmental Protection along with the Forty Years' Reform and Opening-up. *Environmental Science and Ecotechnology* 1, p. 100001.

Xu, Jianchu / Ribot, Jesse C. (2004): Decentralisation and Accountability in Forest Management: A Case from Yunnan, Southwest China. *The European Journal of Development Research* 16(1), pp. 153–173.

Xu, Xibao / Tan, Yan / Yang, Guishan / Barnett, Jon (2018): China's Ambitious Ecological Red Lines. *Land Use Policy* 79, pp. 447–451.

Yao, Xinzhong (2000): *An Introduction to Confucianism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Yeh, Emily T. (2009): Greening Western China: A Critical View. *Geoforum* 40(5), pp. 884–894.

Yu, Keping (2018): 中国的治理变迁 (1978–2018) [Governance Change in China (1978–2018). Beijing: 社会科学文献出版社 [China Social Sciences Press].

Zander, Sophie (2017): How Effective a Weapon Is the New EPL in China's War against Pollution: The Past Triumphs and Future Challenges of Environmental Public Interest Litigation. *New York University Journal of International Law and Politics* 50, pp. 605–636.

Zhang, Dainian (1997): 中国哲学大纲 [Outline of Chinese Philosophy]. Beijing: 中国社会科学出版社 [China Social Sciences Press].

Zhang, Dongsun (1995): 知识与文化 [Knowledge and Culture]. Beijing: Zhongguo guangbo dianshi.

Zhang, Kun-Min / Wen, Zong-Guo (2008): Review and Challenges of Policies of Environmental Protection and Sustainable Development in China. *Journal of Environmental Management* 88(4), pp. 1249–1261.

Zhang, Weiwei (2017): 西方之乱与中国之治的制度原因 [Systemic Reasons behind the Revolts in the West and Rule in China]. 求是 [Quishi "Seeking Truth" Journal], 15 pp. 59–61.

Zhao, Tingyao (2006): Rethinking Empire from a Chinese Concept "All-under-Heaven" (Tian-xia). *Social Identities* 12(1), pp. 29–41.

Zhiping, Liu / Sinton, Jonathan E. / Yang, Fuqiang / Levine, Mark D. / Ting, Michael K. (1994): Industrial Sector Energy Conservation Programs in the Peoples Republic of China during the Seventh Five-year Plan (1986–1990). Lawrence Berkeley Lab, California, United States.

Zhou, Nan / Levine, Mark D. / Price, Lynn (2010): Overview of Current Energy-efficiency Policies in China. *Energy Policy* 38(11), pp. 6439–6452.

Zhou, Xueguang (2017): 中国国家治理的制度逻辑 [The Institutional Logic of Chinese State Governance]. Beijing: 新知三联书店 [SDG Joint Publishing].

Zito, Anthony R. / Burns, Charlotte / Lenschow, Andrea (2019): Is the Trajectory of European Union Environmental Policy Less Certain? *Environmental Politics* 28(2), pp. 187–207.

IQAS Vol. 53 / 2022 ii, pp. 207–230

Multilateralism to the Rescue?
Beijing's Support for Multilateral Institutions during the COVID-19 Crisis

Dan Banik, Benedicte Bull

Abstract

During the global COVID-19 crisis, China has portrayed itself as a "champion of multilateralism" – defending UN institutions and its own multilateral initiatives in a variety of spheres. China's approach has, however, often been criticised for undermining multilateralism through its use of multilateral platforms as arenas to contest US leadership. This paper examines the official Chinese discourse on multilateralism during the COVID 19 crisis in the years 2020 and 2021 in light of Beijing's multilateral diplomacy in the Global South, exemplified by the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) and the China-CELAC Forum (China–Community of Latin American and Caribbean States Forum). The authors argue that China's growing multilateral engagement must be understood in the context of a multilateral system that was already in crisis before the pandemic due to its inability to resolve major global challenges. The term "multilateralism" is essentially used by Beijing to discursively oppose "unilateralism". While its active multilateral engagement may be able to prevent and resolve major global crises in the future, Beijing's approach offers limited multilateral spaces for deliberation and contestation by weaker states and non-state actors.

Keywords: China, multilateralism, diplomacy, foreign policy, COVID-19 crisis, FOCAC, CELAC, CCF

Introduction

Since the turn of the millennium, Beijing has radically stepped up its engagement in existing multilateral institutions (Liu 2020). It has also established new formal and informal multilateral spaces, many of which are designed to govern its signature foreign policy plan – the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Beijing increasingly portrays itself as a champion of multilateralism, a feature that has become particularly pronounced during the COVID-19 pandemic. After having

Dan Banik, Centre for Development and the Environment, University of Oslo, Norway; dan.banik@sum.uio.no. Benedicte Bull, Centre for Development, University of Oslo; benedicte.bull@sum.uio.no. The authors are grateful to Tracy Yin and Ingrid Ågren Høegh for research assistance. The paper has benefitted from excellent comments and suggestions from two anonymous referees and from the editors of this special issue.

DOI 10.11588/iqas.2022.2.14102

initially controlled the spread of the coronavirus at home, Beijing used the pandemic as a springboard to expand its already extensive collaboration with low-income countries.[1] In doing so, it extended strong support for existing multilateral institutions and highlighted the need to further develop new forms of multilateralism.

In this paper we explore the evolution of the discourse and practice of Chinese multilateralism during the COVID-19 pandemic and examine whether Beijing's current approach may remedy the crisis of multilateralism as previously identified in the literature (Zürn 2021). In identifying such crises, scholars often adopt John Ruggie's definition of multilateralism as "an institutional form that co-ordinates relations among three or more states on the basis of generalized principles of conduct" (Ruggie 1992: 571). Multilateralism's main purpose, Ruggie argues, is to modify the "state's self-serving behavior by specifying appropriate conduct for a class of actions, without regard to the particularistic interests of the parties or the strategic exigencies that may exist in any specific occurrence" (ibid.: 11). This is also the definition adopted here. We understand the multilateral system as a set of multilateral institutions and their resulting interactions. Multilateral institutions are "the formal organizational elements of international life" that are characterised by permanent locations and postal addresses, distinct headquarters and ongoing staffs and secretariats (Caporaso 1992: 602).

In order to study how Beijing's support for multilateralism has potentially been strengthened during the COVID-19 crisis, we first reviewed official Chinese declarations of support for multilateralism in the year 2020 as evidenced in reports in Xinhua News – the official state-run news agency and the largest and most influential media organisation in China.[2] While we are aware that we could have chosen alternative sources and that many nuances may potentially be lost when translated into English, we nonetheless believe the articles offer a glimpse of how Beijing understands multilateralism and of the strategies it adopts to counteract major powers such as the United States while promoting and strengthening its version of a multi-bilateral agenda.

Second, we explored how Chinese multilateralism evolved in two regional contexts, Africa and Latin America, through a literature review and collection of data on Beijing's actions during the COVID-19 crisis. While numerous studies of Chinese multilateral practices focus on the World Trade Organization, UN organisations, multilateral financial institutions and Beijing's regional relations in Asia, Beijing's multilateral efforts through the Forum on China-Africa Co-

1 China was, for example, quick to extend support for the purchase of masks and other sanitary equipment to help countries in Latin America and Africa cope with the crisis. See, for example, Telias / Urdiñes 2020.

2 This study was completed in early 2021. The search on Xinhua.net included all articles published in 2020 on "multilateralism". We identified around 40 relevant news reports, covering bilateral meetings between Chinese officials and their counterparts in Asia, Africa and Latin America; speeches delivered by President Xi, Foreign Minister Wang Yi and high-ranking leaders; statements by various world leaders that affirm China's role in upholding the values of multilateralism; and interviews with "experts" from the Global South as well as UN officials.

operation (FOCAC) and the China–Community of Latin American and Caribbean States Forum (China-CELAC Forum, or CCF) have been much less studied. Nonetheless, although Africa and Latin America are perhaps not overtly a part of Beijing's current core strategic interests, access to their natural resources and markets, as well as their political support, are of great importance to the Chinese leadership (Creutzfeldt 2017). At the same time, close ties with China are crucial for sustaining the long-term development strategies of numerous Latin American and African countries. We have chosen to include both regions, as we consider Chinese multilateralism to be a form of cooperation that evolves through interactions with numerous actors at different levels in different parts of the world. Our goal is to contribute to the growing literature that views China's multilateralism as a result of a process of socialisation into international institutions (Jones 2020) in addition to a relational and contested process of "co-production" that occurs both transnationally and in specific places (Oliveira / Myers 2021).

We argue that Beijing's ability to become a legitimate regional leader in multilateral settings depends on the degree to which it is able to establish a basic consensus around common goals upon which a deep form of multilateralism can rest. It also depends on the degree to which multilateral institutions are able to incorporate broad societal interests, i.e., not just the narrow interests of African and Latin American elites. Beijing is emulating an institutional form of multilateralism that was established by Western powers. While a main driving force at the global level appears to be the goal of resisting US hegemony and unilateralism, China's regional-level multilateralism not only ensures access to resources necessary for its own development, but extends bilateralism with the aim of seeking political support in international arenas. This became clearly evident during the COVID-19 crisis, as will be discussed further below.

We begin with an overview of recent debates on Chinese approaches to multilateralism before examining how these approaches evolved in 2020, i.e., following the onset of the pandemic. Thereafter we briefly review this emerging Chinese multilateralism vis-à-vis the FOCAC and the CCF, focusing particularly on how such multilateralism has evolved during the COVID-19 crisis.

Multilateralism with Chinese characteristics

Beijing has engaged with multilateral institutions for several decades. After a period of estrangement from the multilateral system following Sino-Soviet tensions and growing polarisation in the early 1960s (Dittmer 2011: 21), China's inclusion into the United Nations in 1971 was followed by a period of increased membership in international organisations (ibid.). Between 1977 and 1988, the People's Republic of China signed 124 multilateral treaties, an increase of more

than fifteen times compared with the period from 1949 to 1970. Already by 1989, China had joined 37 major intergovernmental organisations, including the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (Hoo 2018). Since its inclusion into the World Trade Organization in 2001, Beijing's foreign policy has increasingly taken on a multilateral orientation (Moore 2011, Kastner et al. 2020).

With China being one of the biggest beneficiaries of globalisation, this initial enthusiasm for the multilateral system encompassed primarily the economic domain (Yahuda 2011). However, in recent years, Beijing has moved from this selective multilateralism (Rajan 2016) to involvement in a wider range of multilateral spaces, including international security institutions and multilateral human rights regimes (Paltiel 2011, Wu / Lansdowne 2011, Yuan 2011). In the process, it went from being a "rule-taker" to a "rule-breaker", but also increasingly a "rule-maker" by establishing numerous new formal and informal, regional and global institutions – such as the New Development Bank and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (Stephen 2020).

There are numerous ongoing and heated debates about how China is actively shaping and reshaping the principles of international cooperation. On the one hand, some argue that Beijing is upholding rather than undermining a global order based on liberal principles and a set of multilateral institutions, in place since World War II, under US domination.[3] As China has benefitted enormously from the traditional multilateral system, it is often viewed as a staunch defender of multilateralism as well as a norm entrepreneur contributing to the further development and evolution of multilateral cooperation (Stuenkel 2016). On the other hand, Chinese scholars typically claim that the principles of win-win, non-interference, solidarity and mutual respect that China emphasises in its international engagements offer new forms of global leadership and partnerships without preaching the virtues of any particular form of societal organisation or political process (Zhao 2005, Xuetong 2019). Policymakers in Beijing do not pursue a unified model of multilateralism; rather, they adopt different modalities to accommodate different geopolitical and geo-economic conditions (Wu / Lansdowne 2011).

However, several scholars argue that China is adding new layers to (and deepening) the so-called "crisis of multilateralism" – associated with the multiple failures of goal achievement and the flawed and undemocratic governing structures of multilateral institutions, many of which predated the rise of China (Morse / Keohane 2014, Chin 2015). Moreover, this crisis has been further exacerbated by the ambivalent and instrumental attitude of the United States towards international institutional reform.

3 Several authors focus on how China is reproducing the main tenets of current global capitalism and is socialised into a multilateral system that it engages with, rather than undermines. See Stuenkel 2016, Jones 2020 and Lee et al. 2020.

Some scholars have therefore highlighted the extent to which Beijing is essentially competing with Western powers by establishing parallel institutions that embed a different set of values that prioritise discretion and speed at the expense of transparency and democracy (Ellis 2017). In doing so, China displays its economic muscle and its vision of multipolarity while "strongly promoting a multilateralism that makes China an important actor but limits the responsibilities that come with such a status" (Courmont 2012: 184). Accordingly, China's grand strategy is both "pragmatic and proactive" as it strives for a balance between opportunities and duties (ibid.). Similarly, Daniel Lemus Delgado argues that in the Chinese perspective, "multilateralism does not mean equality, but a world ordered by hierarchy in which China sees itself as an older brother: a guide, an assistant, and a role model (Delgado 2015: 15)".

Nuancing this argument, Scott Kastner, Margaret Pearson and Chad Rector (2020: 3) argue that Beijing has been an "inconsistent player in multilateral settings" and that three types of behaviour characterise its approach to multilateralism: accepting, investing or holding up. Since becoming a member of the WTO in 2001, it has largely "*accepted* and complied with existing rules" rather than taking a pro-active stance to change the rules of the game (ibid.: 4). In relation to the North Korean nuclear issue, China has over the years *invested* more time and effort in mediating and in being a part of a multilateral dialogue to ease tensions. And since the 2008 financial crisis, China has pursued a *hold-up* strategy vis-à-vis the international financial regimes, "conditioning active participation in regime maintenance on a set of concessions favorable to PRC interests" (ibid.: 4).

In addition to the challenges caused by major international circumstances, such as the Iraq War and the Trump administration's withdrawal from the World Health Organization and its reluctance to support multilateral organisations, Beijing's rivalry with Washington has also contributed to the crisis of multilateralism by questioning the legitimacy of major multilateral institutions. Indeed, rather than functioning as forums for resolving global problems, international institutions have been transformed by this rivalry into arenas for power struggles between states aspiring for regional and/or global leadership. One of the key strategies embraced by states and regional organisations in the ensuing tug-of-war for institutional supremacy is "forum shopping". While such a strategy may serve the interests of particular states, it is unable to resolve major crises (Rüland 2012). Thus, in the context of a "power diffusion from the West towards the South and East", there appears to be a move towards "contested multilateralism" – a strategy adopted by states, multilateral organisations and non-state actors to use multilateral institutions, existing or newly created, to challenge the rules, practices or missions of existing multilateral institutions (Morse / Keohane 2014).

What is seldom discussed in the debate on the crisis of multilateralism is the fact that the legitimacy of the post WWII-multilateralism rested not only on the acceptance of Western leadership, but also on its ability to offer arenas for smaller states and civil society actors to contest great power dominance (Cox 1992). One resulting outcome of this process was the rise of "complex multilateralism" (O'Brien et al. 2000), in which a variety of governing structures are coordinated by states as well as non-state actors such as the private sector (Brinkerhoff / Brinkerhoff 2011, Andonova 2017). While some question the legitimacy of the multilateral system due to new forms of market-based multilateralism (Bull / McNeill 2007) that arguably favour Western societies and elites (Bexell et al. 2010), the discourse on the topic illustrates the multicentredness of Western models of multilateralism.

Beijing has used the concept of multi-stakeholder governance to characterise the new regional arrangements it has promoted in Africa and Latin America. However, it is unclear whether and to what extent this will contribute to establishing platforms for the incorporation of weaker states and non-state actors. In the ensuing sections, we will examine how Beijing projects and articulates its understanding of multilateralism in a time of global crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic before we explore how this plays out regionally in Africa and Latin America in relation to FOCAC and CCF.

China's perspective on multilateralism before and during the COVID-19 pandemic (2020–2021)

The beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic placed China at the heart of many discussions on global governance and multilateralism. When the epidemic began attracting international attention in January 2020, the strength of the Chinese state was on full display. Beijing began implementing mass quarantines and disseminated evidence of its extraordinary logistical capacity to construct new hospitals within record time. Soon thereafter the inward-looking narrative shifted to one in which Beijing began pursuing a more aggressive public relations campaign to address growing racism against Chinese citizens abroad and the general international backlash that began blaming China for intentionally spreading the virus. The Chinese government as well as private businesses decided to ship essential medical equipment and donated vaccines to large parts of the word (so-called "mask diplomacy"; Telias / Urdinez 2020), partly as a continuation of China's previously announced "Health Silk Road" project. For this, Chinese leaders, and business tycoons such as Jack Maa, received much praise and gratitude from recipient countries.[4] Beijing also appeared to have stepped up its support for multilateral organisations, as the leadership of the United States

on the global arena became increasingly questioned. Yet, it is unclear to what extent Beijing's COVID-19-induced responses entail a new commitment to multilateralism. In the first half of 2022, especially since the spread of the Omicron variant of the coronavirus, China has struggled to implement a "zero-COVID" policy and several major cities (such as Shanghai) were placed under lockdown for weeks, resulting in considerable criticism at home and abroad. Our study, however, focuses mainly on the events that transpired in 2020. We begin by first discussing what multilateralism has come to mean for the Chinese leadership as portrayed in the official media.

While the term multilateralism is mentioned in many news reports in China, it is seldom defined. It is typically used interchangeably with "international order", "globalisation", "global governance", the "UN system" and the role and responsibilities of the "international community". President Xi has made support for multilateralism a cornerstone of China's foreign policy, arguing that "multilateralism will win over unilateralism" and that "[h]umanity lives in a global village where the interests and destinies of all countries are intertwined".[5] He has also argued that forums for international economic cooperation such as the G20 must "uphold multilateralism, openness, inclusiveness, mutually beneficial cooperation, and keep pace with the times".[6] Foreign Minister Wang Yi has similarly argued that fighting COVID-19 requires an effective multilateral response to ensure that "mankind, living in a global village together" is assured a "shared future".[7] In their speeches, political leaders and diplomats repeatedly highlighted the important role that multilateralism played in promoting global development and peace in the post-WWII period. And according to the Chinese perspective, it is wrong for countries to blame globalisation for their problems, since such attributions are unfounded and "incite the Cold War mentality and create estrangement and confrontations among countries".[8]

The theme of the Munich Security Conference at the start of 2020 was "Westlessness", a concept coined for the occasion that denoted the loss of the common understanding of what it means to be part of the West. The concept relates to the belief held by some that following the rise of China and others, disruptive decision making was emerging in new centres of power, and that

4 The following article sums up a series of comments praising Jack Ma: "Jack Ma Wins Praise for Donating Face Masks and Coronavirus Testing Kits", The Indian Express, 16 March 2020, https://indianexpress.com/article/trending/trending-globally/coronavirus-jack-ma-wins-praise-for-donating-face-masks-and-coronavirus-testing-kits-6316626/ (accessed 14 June 2022).

5 "Update-Xi Focus: Multilateralism Will Win Over Unilateralism: Xi", Xinhuanet, 10 November 2020, www.xinhuanet.com/english/2020-11/10/c_139506464.htm (accessed 14 June 2022).

6 "Xi Urges G20 to Uphold Multilateralism, Openness", Xinhuanet, 21 November 2020, www.xinhuanet.com/english/2020-11/21/c_139533539.htm (accessed 14 June 2022).

7 "Chinese FM Calls for Adherence to Multilateralism, Solidarity Infight against COVID-19", Xinhuanet, 31 March 2020, www.xinhuanet.com/english/2020-03/31/c_138934877.htm (accessed 14 June 2022).

8 "Senior Chinese Diplomat Calls for Joint Efforts to Uphold Multilateralism", Xinhuanet, 6 September 2020, www.xinhuanet.com/english/2020-09/06/c_139346668.htm (accessed 14 June 2022).

the West (especially Europe) was too slow to adapt. China's foreign minister used the Munich forum to further elaborate on a set of integral features of multilateralism.[9] One core feature was the pursuit of "common development", which is not possible when the development of only a handful of world powers is prioritised: "It is not multilateralism if only the Western countries prosper while the non-Western countries lag behind forever. It would not achieve the common progress of mankind."[10] Another aspect of multilateralism for China was for major powers to take on major responsibilities, which builds on the principle of "common but differentiated responsibilities" that Beijing has long promoted in many global forums, including in the UN. Other features of multilateralism mentioned by the foreign minister included the centrality of UN institutions and the rule of law in promoting peace and in the fight against global injustice.

An oft-heard argument is that even as China seeks to embed its international activities in multilateral organisations, many of its international cooperation policies are conducted bilaterally. A good example of this was the first official forum of its flagship multilateral project – the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) – in 2017, when over 200 bilateral agreements were signed (Jakóbowski 2018). Despite repeatedly warm endorsements of multilateralism, most speeches and statements were also carefully formulated to advocate in favour of extensive bilateral consultations – an idea that President Xi repeated at the 2019 BRICS summit in Brasilia.[11] Thus, there were numerous reports in 2020 of bilateral interactions between China and countries around the world. A common thread in such reports was that China and country X had agreed to strengthen communication and coordination of issues of mutual interest and relevance in multilateral platforms, including co-construction of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Illustrative examples included meetings with Peru, Senegal, Spain, Cambodia and the European Union.[12]

Multilateralism was almost always used to attack what officials termed the "unilateralism" pursued by some countries, most notably the United States. The general tenor in most of the reports was that multilateralism was under attack even before the onset of the pandemic: "multilateralism has been under vicious assault, while protectionism and isolationism have been on the rise in

9 "Spotlight: 'Westlessness' Discussions at MSC Highlight Need for Multilateralism", Xinhuanet, 17 February 2020, www.xinhuanet.com/english/2020-02/17/c_138789375.htm (accessed 14 June 2022).

10 "Chinese FM Calls for Multilateralism at Munich Security Conference", Xinhuanet, 16 February 2020, www.xinhuanet.com/english/2020-02/16/c_138787345.htm (accessed 14 June 2022).

11 "Xinhua Commentary: Multilateralism Matters", Xinhuanet, 21 September 2020, www.xinhuanet.com/english/2020-09/21/c_139384836.htm (accessed 14 June 2022).

12 "China Ready to Safeguard Multilateralism with Peru: Chinese FM", Xinhuanet, 6 November 2020, www.xinhuanet.com/english/2020-11/06/c_139496057.htm (accessed 14 June 2022); "China, Spain to Jointly Safeguard Multilateralism", Xinhuanet, 24 December 2020, www.xinhuanet.com/english/2020-12/24/c_139615246.htm (accessed 14 June 2022); "Let China-Africa Cooperation Shine as Example of Multilateralism: Chinese, Senegalese Presidents", Xinhuanet, 12 October 2020, www.xinhuanet.com/english/2020-10/12/c_139433976.htm (accessed 14 June 2022).

recent years".[13] Accordingly, "victory over the ravaging Covid-19 pandemic depends on how well countries around the world can work together".[14] At a meeting of the United Nations Economic and Social Council in July 2020, Foreign Minister Wang Yi stated: "We need to say no to unilateralism. We need to oppose any act of walking away from international organizations and treaties or replacing them with something out of nowhere. No one should challenge or undermine universally recognized rules out of selfish interests."[15] There were thus frequent references to how certain countries, especially the United States, had undermined the global order by withdrawing from the World Health Organization (WHO) and had generally weakened the UN system. While the rejection of unilateralism was justified by championing the causes of globalisation and scientific and technological progress, China also emphasised how emerging markets and developing countries have changed the global political and economic landscape. However, it placed considerable responsibility on affluent nations and multilateral institutions (without specifying any by name) to act to save the existing world order by providing debt relief.[16] Other Chinese officials reiterated, in an obvious attack on US policy, the official Chinese position that "international order is by no means an order where some countries are above others" and that "[s]overeign equality and multilateralism still remain the mainstream in today's world".[17]

In the media reports, the UN was seen to provide a legitimate arena for consultations based on respect for national sovereignty, territorial integrity and the rejection of hegemonism. The message appeared to be simple: the world is better off thanks to the UN, which has "fostered closer ties and deeper cooperation, and the global economic and social development has made a giant leap forward".[18] Hence, support for multilateralism meant safeguarding the authority of the UN. While the pandemic naturally enough resulted in considerable focus on the WHO, other UN agreements such as the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Paris Climate Accords, peacekeeping, counter-terrorism and the WTO-centred multilateral trading regime also found frequent mention.[19]

13 "Opinion: Multilateralism the Panacea for COVID-19 Pandemic", Xinhuanet, 26 June 2020, www.xinhuanet.com/english/2020-06/26/c_139169108.htm (accessed 14 June 2022).

14 "Opinion: Multilateralism the Panacea for COVID-19 Pandemic", Xinhuanet, 26 June 2020, www.xinhuanet.com/english/2020-06/26/c_139169108.htm (accessed 14 June 2022).

15 "China Voices Support for Multilateralism at UN Conference", Xinhuanet, 18 July 2020, www.xinhuanet.com/english/2020-07/18/c_139221917.htm (accessed 14 June 2022).

16 "Chinese Envoy Calls for Multilateralism, Cooperation for Sustainable Development", Xinhuanet, 15 July 2020, www.xinhuanet.com/english/2020-07/15/c_139212781.htm (accessed 14 June 2022).

17 "Senior Chinese Diplomat Calls for Joint Efforts to Uphold Multilateralism", Xinhuanet, 6 September 2020, www.xinhuanet.com/english/2020-09/06/c_139346668.htm (accessed 14 June 2022).

18 "Xinhua Commentary: Multilateralism Matters", Xinhuanet, 21 September 2020, www.xinhuanet.com/english/2020-09/21/c_139384836.htm (accessed 14 June 2022).

19 "Chinese Envoy Highlights Importance of Further Promoting Multilateralism in Counter-terrorism Efforts", Xinhuanet, 11 July 2020, www.xinhuanet.com/english/2020-07/11/c_139203934.htm (accessed 14 June 2022); "Chinese Envoy Stresses Multilateralism, Unity at UN Human Rights Council Session", Xinhuanet, 15 September 2020, www.xinhuanet.com/english/2020-09/15/c_139370748.htm (accessed 14 June 2022).

For example, there were some explicit links between highlighting China's "people-centered approach" in poverty reduction and future global progress in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.[20] Already in early January 2020, China's permanent representative to the United Nations, Ambassador Zhang Jun, insisted that implementation of the 2030 Agenda was proceeding too slowly. He argued for greater attention on peacebuilding in post-conflict settings, the formulation of country-specific development strategies, the importance of strengthening state capacity and the need to build social consensus in other to achieve sustainable development.[21] And in February 2020, another senior diplomat, Wu Haitao, praised China's ability to play an "active role in addressing regional and international hotspot issues" and reiterated the country's commitment to "facilitating the peaceful settlement of international disputes … holding the position of objectivity and impartiality".[22]

In mid-April 2020, Foreign Minister Wang Yi threw Beijing's weight behind the WHO and its beleaguered Director General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus. With an explicit reference to Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus being the first head of the organisation from a developing country, the minister boldly declared that supporting the WHO and its leadership equated to safeguarding "the philosophy and principle of multilateralism".[23] Beijing accused Washington in June 2020 of undermining the WHO's work, which threatened to "derail the very much needed global cooperation on containing the outbreak".[24]

In August 2020, China's top legislator Li Zhanshu, Chairman of the National People's Congress (NPC) Standing Committee, highlighted China's provision of COVID-19 assistance to 150 countries and international organisations. Pledging to provide two billion dollars in international assistance over the next two years, he urged country legislatures to "firmly safeguard multilateralism, and promote global anti-epidemic cooperation and economic recovery".[25] And foreign minister Wang Yi argued that "countries, irrespective of their size, strength and wealth, are equal" and that "dialogue and consultation should be the way forward in addressing differences and disputes, rather than unwarranted unilateral actions such as economic blockade, financial sanctions, acts of bullying and power politics,

20 "Chinese Envoy Calls for Multilateralism, Cooperation for Sustainable Development", Xinhuanet, 15 July 2020, www.xinhuanet.com/english/2020-07/15/c_139212781.htm (accessed 14 June 2022).

21 "Chinese Envoy Calls for Multilateralism, Development in Maintaining Peace and Security in Fragile Contexts", Xinhuanet, 7 January 2020, www.xinhuanet.com/english/2021-01/07/c_139649978.htm (accessed 14 June 2022).

22 "Chinese Envoy Calls On Int'l Community to Reaffirm Commitment to Multilateralism", Xinhuanet, 19 February 2020, www.xinhuanet.com/english/2020-02/19/c_138796623.htm (accessed 14 June 2022).

23 "Supporting WHO Means Safeguarding Multilateralism: Chinese FM", Xinhuanet, 19 April 2020, www.xinhuanet.com/english/2020-04/19/c_138989595.htm (accessed 14 June 2022).

24 "Opinion: Multilateralism the Panacea for COVID-19 Pandemic", Xinhuanet, 26 June 2020, www.xinhuanet.com/english/2020-06/26/c_139169108.htm (accessed 14 June 2022).

25 "China's Top Legislator Calls for Safeguarding Multilateralism", Xinhuanet, 20 August 2020, www.xinhuanet.com/english/2020-08/20/c_139303094.htm (accessed 14 June 2022).

and still less gross interference in other countries' internal affairs".[26] Several news articles advocated the view that there was no better venue to seek global solutions to global problems than the UN. Such consistent support for the UN fits into a wider pattern where Beijing believes it has the strong backing of many developing countries in UN-led forums.

"Co-produced" regional multilateralism during the COVID-19 crisis

Beijing's opposition to unilateralism and promotion of a multi-bilateral agenda provide a glimpse of the future of Chinese multilateralism in light of recent pandemic-related challenges. In this section, we briefly discuss the above findings in relation to the FOCAC and the CCF.

The Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC)

FOCAC is an illustrative example of Beijing's foreign policy push to "at least rhetorically declare its aim of overhauling the global order and advance a traditional hostility to hegemony" in the guise of "globalization" (Taylor 2013: 31). As Deborah Brautigam (cited in Tiezzi 2020) notes, FOCAC has over the years "evolved into a platform for deal-making, as well as a highly anticipated venue for Chinese leaders to announce specific pledges for development assistance and investment". Beijing has also used FOCAC as a blueprint to showcase new regional platforms for negotiating and shaping overarching mechanisms that guide China's activities in that particular part of the world. It is thus an important case for studying how Chinese multilateralism has evolved during the COVID-19 crisis in the context of this forum.

According to the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, FOCAC, established in 2000 and with planned ministerial summits every three years, aims to promote and further strengthen "pragmatic cooperation" on political and economic matters for the mutual benefit of China and Africa.[27] In recent years, the Belt and Road Initiative has complemented and often also exceeded commitments on education and human resource development made at various FOCAC summits (King 2020).

FOCAC propagates Beijing's idea of mutual benefit through the transfer of knowledge, capacity building initiatives and equality of opportunities for both Chinese and African governments and businesses (Dzinesa / Masters 2009,

26 "China Voices Support for Multilateralism at UN Conference", Xinhuanet, 18 July 2020, www.xinhuanet.com/english/2020-07/18/c_139221917.htm (accessed 14 June 2022).

27 "Characteristic of FOCAC", Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/zflt/eng/gylt/ltjj/t157576.htm (accessed 14 June 2022).

Ibonye 2020). To a significant extent, it provides "an alternative paradigm of engagement that represents a refreshing break from the past relationship with traditional donors" (Naidu 2007: 293). Although there are numerous ongoing debates on whether, and the extent to which, FOCAC has impacted African development,[28] the overtures from Beijing are appealing to African leaders (Hon 2010). As Christopher Clapham (2006: 3) argues, "one very important reason why China's involvement in Africa has been so widely welcomed and readily accommodated has been that it fits so neatly into the familiar patterns of rentier statehood and politics with which African rulers have been accustomed to maintain themselves".

For China and its partner countries in Africa to achieve greater global influence for their policy positions, Beijing has argued that it must continue to develop its own multilateral mechanisms that differ from Western-led efforts. An illustrative example of this argument was expressed by the Chinese Foreign Minister, who after a tour of five African countries in January 2021, stated that Beijing was ready to actively promote tripartite or multi-party cooperation with Africa so that the continent becomes "a big stage for international cooperation, not an arena for competition between major countries".[29] However, despite the official rhetoric, critics claim that FOCAC simply imposes a "Beijing-centric paradigm of globalization" (Ibonye 2020: 1). Jakub Jakóbowski (2018: 661–662) argues that Chinese-led regional platforms such as FOCAC are anchored in "Chinese norms of non-binding agreements, voluntarism and consensus, derived from the tradition of South-South cooperation". These norms help sustain institutional structures that are "flexible" and "loose", enabling Beijing to simultaneously pursue both bilateral and multilateral approaches. Thus, FOCAC and other Chinese-led regional platforms – while "nominally multilateral" – serve as important arenas for developing and managing bilateral relations (ibid.).

The hosting of high-level summits and meetings of administrative and political leaders at various levels develops an overarching set of intergovernmental mechanisms, albeit for implementation and further bilateral negotiations. Even when multilateral forums such as FOCAC are in session, bilateral interactions on the sidelines of such events and subsequent high-level political visits are crucial for the actual realisation of activities, and multilateral events often feature bilateral negotiations. One reason why most interactions with China tends to take place on a bilateral basis is the lack of consensus among African countries, which prevents them from negotiating in FOCAC as a bloc. This has the potential to undermine African agency in such a multilateral forum (Enuka 2001). Moreover, although FOCAC programmes and the negotiations at the summits have a continent-wide scope, not all countries are equally important and only

28 Cf. Davies 2007, Enuka 2011, Moyo 2012, Delgado 2015.

29 "China Appreciates Investment in Africa from Other Countries: FM", People's Daily, 11 January 2020, http://en.people.cn/n3/2021/0111/c90000-9807857.html (accessed 14 June 2022).

Algeria, Egypt and South Africa have comprehensive strategic partnerships with China.

When responding to criticisms of FOCAC, Chinese scholars typically point to challenges related to effective public administrations in, and insufficient policy support from, African countries and the lack of contact between researchers and policymakers in both China and Africa (Tang et al. 2020). They argue that regular high-level FOCAC meetings enable the coordination and implementation of long-term political plans for China and Africa as well as providing a venue for achieving consensus on global issues such as climate change (Zhiming Tu / Kai Zhang 2017, Hongming 2018). Policymakers in Beijing believe that the mutual respect between China and Africa and the absence of political conditionalities differentiates FOCAC from the bilateral relations of Western powers on the continent (Li 2018). Moreover, China's growing influence in world affairs gives FOCAC countries more bargaining power and increased space in negotiations with major world powers and other emerging economies (Zhiming Tu / Kai Zhang 2017). Others highlight the benefits of engaging in FOCAC given that China provides an alternative political and economic model of development that is more in tune with African needs (Zhou / Liu 2010).

There is also often a tendency in the China-Africa discourse to overestimate China's agency and underestimate Africa's (Van Staden et al. 2018). For example, although Beijing does set the agenda – and African countries may not know in advance what Beijing plans to unveil at the summits – African leaders are nonetheless able to influence overarching frameworks of discussion at FOCAC events, as illustrated by the integration of the African Union's Agenda 2063[30] in the action plan of FOCAC VI (ibid.). And although the FOCAC framework has been criticised for power imbalances, patrimonialism and a dependency relationship between China and African states, it has also resulted in the cancellation of debts and expanded Africa's access to world markets (Enuka 2011).

These features – the combination of multilateralism and bilateralism as well as the attempt at linking engagement in Africa to a global agenda – have also been evident during the COVID-19 crisis. In bilateral consultations with African countries, explicit mention has often been made of cooperation under the FOCAC umbrella. In some cases, there has also been talk of multilateralism being boosted by medical cooperation and the promise of the Chinese vaccine being supplied to partner countries.[31] Beijing's efforts to engage with the continent has involved a variety of actors at multiple levels. These include state-owned enterprises, private companies and the local Chinese diaspora. In addition to contact with

30 Agenda 2063 is the African continent's strategic framework for inclusive social and economic development, continental and regional integration, democratic governance and peace and security. The Agenda aims to reposition Africa as a dominant player in the global arena.

31 "China's Resolve to Bolster COVID-19 Global Medical Cooperation a Boost to Multilateralism, Says Expert", Xinhuanet, 17 June 2020, www.xinhuanet.com/english/2020-06/17/c_139146782.htm (accessed 14 June 2022).

country-level actors, Beijing has over the years also engaged with AUDA-NEPAD (the African Union's Development Agency) and the African Union's NEPAD Monitoring and Evaluation Framework with the goal of tracking the progress, and assessing the impact, of various projects and development partnerships.[32] Similarly, Beijing is often in dialogue with Regional Economic Communities (regional groupings of African states) – including the East African Community, the Economic Community of West African States and the Southern African Development Community – on trade and investment agreements (Terrefe / Bénazéraf 2015), infrastructure financing and support for the African Continental Free Trade Area. However, Beijing's efforts to adopt a continental approach have not had the desired impact. This is partly due to the fact that the African Union did not become a full member of FOCAC until 2010, after being an observer for almost a decade. In addition, the weak institutional capacity of the African Union and its Regional Economic Communities, and "the peculiarities of Chinese diplomacy, which relies heavily on government-to-government ties" (Carrozza 2018: 2) have further limited the continental approach.

FOCAC, on the other hand, has provided Beijing a platform to exert greater influence on the continent. Through FOCAC-related activities and events, Beijing has been able to practice bilateralism on a grand scale. However, the unequal distribution of resources provided under the FOCAC umbrella remains a challenge, as some African countries continue to enjoy better access to loans and investments from China than do others (Benabdallah 2021).

This imbalance has been aggravated during the pandemic. As of June 2021, Beijing claimed to have provided "more than 350 million doses of vaccines to the international community, including vaccine assistance to over 80 countries and vaccine exports to more than 40 countries".[33] However, its commitment to Africa in 2021 fell far short of expectations and a large majority of supplies made their way mainly to four countries – Morocco, Algeria, Egypt and Zimbabwe.[34] This opened the doors for the United States to, albeit belatedly, make a contribution and distribute 25 million vaccine doses to African countries through the COVAX alliance.[35]

Africa has benefitted more from another major Chinese initiative during the COVID-19 crisis: debt relief. When in April 2020 China joined the G20's Debt

32 "NEPAD and China to Strengthen Transparent and Accountable Partnerships in Africa", Nepad, https://www.nepad.org/news/nepad-and-china-strengthen-transparent-and-accountable-partnerships-africa (accessed 14 June 2022).

33 "Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Wang Wenbin's Regular Press Conference on June 2, 2021", The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/xwfw_665399/s2510_665401/2511_665403/202206/t20220621_10707226.html (accessed 15 July 2022).

34 "China COVID-19 Vaccine Tracker", Bridge Beijing, https://bridgebeijing.com/our-publications/our-publications-1/china-covid-19-vaccines-tracker/ (accessed 14 June 2022).

35 "African Countries to Receive First U.S. Donated COVID-19 Vaccines in Days – Gavi", Reuters, https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/african-countries-receive-first-us-donated-covid-19-vaccines-days-gavi-2021-07-16/ (accessed 14 June 2022).

Service Suspension Initiative (DSSI), it marked the first time that Beijing had agreed to be part of a multilateral debt relief programme. Four Chinese lenders – the Export-Import Bank of China (Eximbank), China Development Bank, Industrial and Commercial Bank of China and China International Development Cooperation Agency (CIDCA) – participated in debt restructuring in 2020 and 2021. As of June 2021, China had provided at least $12.1 billion in global debt relief in 2020 and 2021. Over $1.3 billion in DSSI relief from Eximbank and CIDCA was provided to 23 countries, of which 16 are African (CARI 2021).

Despite most interactions being premised on bilateral consultations, the image promoted by China is one where FOCAC contributes to African development through continent-wide relationships, including diplomatic, commercial and military cooperation. However, this does not mean that all countries participate equally (Taylor 2013). Beijing not only controls the entire FOCAC process, but also sets the agenda and determines the type of declarations issued and the formulation of the resulting outcomes.

The China-CELAC Forum (CCF)

The CCF is institutionally similar to, and modelled on, FOCAC (Zhou 2018). Like FOCAC, it aims to establish a "comprehensive cooperative partnership based on equality, mutual benefit and common development" (CCF 2015: 5). The context of the CCF's creation and its evolution as a platform for multilateralism was, however, very different from that of FOCAC. CELAC, upon which CCF is built, was partly the result of an aspiration to create a multipolar world in which Latin America viewed itself as playing a significant role (Rigirozzi / Tussie 2012). It was launched as a platform for regional dialogue in 2010 and established in December 2011 with a founding document strongly emphasising independence and anti-colonialism. As such, it clearly distanced itself from the US-dominated Organization of American States (OAS) (Segovia 2012) and sought to be an overarching institution encompassing the totality of Latin America and the Caribbean states (Vadell 2019). Although interpretations of CELAC's mandate differ, it was instrumental in increasing Latin American autonomy and reducing the influence of the United States in the region, which was a long-standing goal of the countries involved (Tickner 2013, Long 2018).

After 15 years of rapidly expanding economic relations with Latin America, China saw the formation of CELAC as a welcome opportunity to establish a platform for inter-regional dialogue (Zhou 2012).[36] A regular dialogue mechanism with the foreign ministers of the "leadership troika"[37] of the CCF (the predecessor

36 See also "Hu Jintao Sends Congratulations on the Establishment of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States", China News, https://www.chinanews.com.cn/gn/2011/12-04/3506135.shtml (accessed 14 June 2022).

37 This consisted of the three countries leading the forum. The first troika was Chile, Venezuela and Cuba. It was then expanded to include four members, sometimes referred to as the "amplified troika" and sometimes as "the quartet".

of the Dialogue of Foreign Ministers of China and the "quartet" of CELAC) was established by China in August 2012. At the 2nd summit of CELAC in January 2014, member countries adopted the "Special Declaration on the Establishment of the China-CELAC Forum" laying the foundation for China-CELAC to initiate the overall cooperation process. In July 2014, President Xi held a meeting with CELAC leaders in Brasilia, where a decision was taken to establish the CCF, later supported by the establishment of a US$35 billion China-CELAC financing facility earmarked for development finance to the CELAC region. During the first Ministerial Forum held in Beijing in January 2015 a declaration that set out the goals for the ensuing multilateral collaboration between China and Latin American countries was adopted. During the second Ministerial Forum in Santiago de Chile in 2018, Latin American and Caribbean countries were invited to become a part of the Belt and Road Initiative,[38] following which 21 countries (excluding three of the four largest economies – Brazil, Mexico and Colombia) signed BRI-related agreements.

As on the African continent, Chinese multilateralism in Latin America has been criticised for being merely a façade for bilateral agreements and offering an arena for China to contest US hegemony and interests (Ellis 2019). Some scholars have also warned against the way in which the CCF, and overall Chinese engagement, has increased Latin America's dependence on China (Jenkins 2012, Stallings 2020).

However, one may question whether the Chinese preference for bilateralism is by design or by default. By the time the CCF was established, the fragile regional unity and partial consensus around a set of developmental goals that had allowed for the creation of CELAC was already showing cracks. In the context of the economic crisis generated by the fall in commodity prices of 2014 and the deep political and economic crises in Venezuela and Brazil, regional cooperation all but broke down due to ideological polarisation and conflicts (Legler 2020). During the China-CELAC meeting in 2015, when the development agenda was defined, the Latin American countries had no explicit joint foreign economic policy strategy (Wise 2020). The aspirations of global multipolarity fell completely off the agenda towards the end of the 2010s, and multilateralism in UN organisations was opposed in action and discourse by major regional actors. Thus, the region itself lacked any basic consensus regarding its political direction or any other joint principles upon which an inter-regional multilateralism with China could be based. The Union of South American States, established in 2008, was dissolved, and CELAC suffered the exit of its largest member, Brazil. Regional health organisations (first and foremost the Pan American Health Organization) also suffered from political conflicts and defunding (Herrero / Nacimiento 2020).

38 http://www.itamaraty.gov.br/images/2ForoCelacChina/Special-Declaration-II-CELAC-CHINA-FORUM-FV-22.1.18.pdf (accessed 14 June 2022).

This was partly fuelled by increasing tension between China and the United States, casting a shadow over regional cooperation in Latin America. It has long been clear that China-Latin America relations cannot be understood without taking the latter's proximity to the United States into account (Denoon 2017, De Stange 2020). As Fabricio Rodríguez and Jürgen Rüland (2022: 477–78) put it: "China uses Sino-LAC interregional relations as a formally multilateral, yet chiefly national interest-led quest to establish a cooperative counter-hegemonic strategy against the US beyond its traditional Asian perimeter of interests." Yet, it was not until the latter part of the Trump administration that the US took on the challenge of China more directly by, for example, transforming the Inter-American Development Bank into a battleground for US-China rivalry, leading to even deeper multilateral crises (Politi 2019).

After China introduced health as a part of its BRI-programme in the "Health Silk Road" of 2017, this also became a part of the cooperation with CELAC, although without high priority (Flores Fuenzalida / Fulcherón 2020). However, China moved rapidly to assist Latin America after the COVID-19 outbreak. Over 530 Chinese medical-related donations were made in 33 countries of Latin America and the Caribbean between mid-February and June 2020 (Telias / Urdinez 2021). These donations came not only from the Chinese government, but also from many private corporations and foundations, contributing to the diversification of China–Latin America relations (Sanborn 2020). China also early on announced US$1 billion worth of loans intended for Latin America's medical purchases from China.

Most of the donations were made bilaterally, as were most of the later contracts signed for the provision of Chinese vaccines.[39] On several occasions, the provision of medical supplies or vaccines was accompanied by pressure to support China's political priorities. This was particularly felt by the remaining countries in the region that recognise Taiwan.[40] Tellingly, the Brazilian government sent Marcos Pontes, the minister of technology, to Beijing to negotiate vaccines – in return for opening the competition for Brazil's 5G concession to Huawei (Stuenkel 2020).

Nevertheless, China's overall performance in Latin America during the COVID-19 crisis may have strengthened its position as a leader of multilateralism. First, China and Latin America continued to hold multilateral meetings to reaffirm their desire to work jointly. At the July 2020 conference with the CELAC countries, China outlined a series of CCF meetings to be held to address the crisis. It claimed that "the two sides need to enhance communication and coordination in multilateral fora and on global governance, support the UN-centered multi-

39 See https://www.as-coa.org/articles/timeline-latin-americas-race-covid-19-vaccine for an overview (accessed 14 June 2022).

40 Of the 14 countries in the world that recognise Taiwan, 9 are in Latin America and the Caribbean: Belize, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, Nicaragua, Paraguay, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines.

lateral system and the international order underpinned by international law, reject unilateralism, protectionism and bullying practices, and work together to build an open world economy and safeguard the legitimate rights and interests of developing countries".[41] China continued to pursue the multilateral agenda through an initiative on digital technology and innovation related to COVID-19.[42]

Second, China has appeared as a staunch supporter of the multilateral COVAX mechanism and announced early on its support for open access to its vaccine patents. Importantly, for the Latin American public, this has contrasted markedly with the United States' reluctant approach and stinginess regarding vaccine donations (Lozano 2021). Yet, perhaps most importantly, in its health diplomacy in Latin America, after having been accused of favouring left-wing allies in Latin America for over a decade, during the COVID-19 crisis China has appeared to consciously avoid taking sides in the polarised regional political landscape. In sharp contrast again to the US, it has collaborated closely with countries on the left and right of the political spectrum, thus possibly easing some of the tensions undermining multilateralism in Latin America in the first place (Bull 2021).

Yet, while China's health diplomacy during the pandemic may have strengthened its role as a promoter of regional multilateralism, other events may have weakened it. China's investment and trade in the region are still largely focused on natural resources and energy in spite of recent diversification. While there is increasing evidence of diverse practices among Chinese businesses, there is some evidence that Chinese investments are more prone to provoking conflicts than those of other countries (Ray et al. 2015). One reason for this is that Chinese entities have failed to establish dialogue with civil society groups and environmental and social movements, either bilaterally or in the CCF. As a result, environmental concerns or conflicts have led to the cancellation of a large number of infrastructure projects.[43] While this does not appear to have weakened the appetite of Latin American elites for Chinese finance, trade or investments (Bull 2020), such stoppages weaken the legitimacy of China as a leader in the eyes of part of the Latin American public and could fail to generate regional consensus beyond summits, which could ultimately undermine China's ability to emerge as a strong leader in Latin America.

41 See https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/t1800563.shtml (accessed 14 June 2022).

42 See https://www.gob.mx/sre/prensa/foro-de-cooperacion-china-celac-sobre-tecnologia-digital-para-el-combate-a-la-covid-19?idiom=es (accessed 14 June 2022).

43 For example, the independent journalistic platform dialogochino.net (partly in collaboration with Armando Info) has documented a number of aborted projects in Venezuela as well as projects being delayed or altered due to environmental conflicts in Peru, Colombia, Brazil and Argentina.

Concluding remarks

The scaling up of investments under its flagship BRI is making China a more active collaborator on the world stage, including in countries where democracy and natural resource governance is weak. While refusing to impose normative conditions on bilateral collaboration, Beijing is increasing its efforts to influence the norms and rules of multilateral cooperation. Under Xi Jinping, China has expressed a desire to reshape the international system and the global rules of the game. There is concern in some parts of the world that we are perhaps witnessing the emergence of a less "committed" form of multilateralism that downplays international deliberation and enforcement.

During the COVID-19 crisis in 2020, Beijing reaffirmed its commitment to multilateralism by espousing the virtues of the UN system and the spirit of the UN Charter in addition to expressing strong support for the 2030 Agenda and the Paris Agreement. Beijing also used these opportunities to attack any unilateral attempt by a major Western power such as the United States to resolve global challenges. Since the UN celebrated its 75th anniversary in 2020, it was natural to expect considerable attention to the role and impact of the UN in media reports from this period. China played an active role in formulating the 2030 Agenda and has subsequently highlighted the close linkages between the BRI and the Sustainable Development Goals – implying that support for the BRI equates to support for achievement of the latter. China's white paper on international development cooperation, published in January 2021, also indicates the Chinese leadership's warm embrace of existing multilateral institutions and continued support for the further strengthening of Chinese-initiated regional forums and financing mechanisms.[44]

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic thus far, Beijing has cultivated close ties with countries in the Global South – promising delivery of vaccines as well as providing debt relief. However, while China has promised continued support for FOCAC and CCF, it continues to pursue bilateralism on a grand scale. There is thus a growing interest in better understanding how leaders in Africa and Latin America can best articulate their needs and interests at these high-level forums.

While China's recent engagements may not result in radical changes to existing multilateral institutions, it is also important – while evaluating Chinese engagement – not to hold it up against an imaginary past of broadly efficient and legitimate institutional arrangements. Rather, multilateralism, as here understood, was already in crisis for a variety of reasons. Nonetheless, this multilateral system has traditionally offered a platform for deliberation and communication of norms and principles that also allows weaker states and non-states actors to contest

44 "Full Text: China's International Development Cooperation in the New Era", The State Council, The People's Republic of China, http://english.www.gov.cn/archive/whitepaper/202101/10/content_WS5ffa6bbbc6d0f72576943922.html (accessed 14 June 2022).

existing patterns of dominance. What we have seen emerging over the course of 2020 is Beijing's promotion of a form of multilateralism that places China in the lead while seeking to deepen bilateral alliances. While nominally emphasising a multi-stakeholder approach in Latin America and Africa, such multilateralism provides only limited mechanisms for involving civil society organisations and social movements in deliberating the merits of development projects.

References

Andonova, Liliana B. (2017): *Governance Entrepreneurs: International Organizations and the Rise of Global Public-Private Partnerships*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Benabdallah, Lina (2021): In Line for FOCAC 2021: Africa, China, and the Others. Istituto per gli Studi di Politica Internazionale (ISPI), July 2021, https://www.ispionline.it/it/pubblicazione/line-focac-2021-africa-china-and-others-31249 (accessed 8 August 2021).

Bexell, Magdalena / Tallberg, Jonas / Uhlin, Anders (2010): Democracy in Global Governance: The Promises and Pitfalls of Transnational Actors. *Global Governance: A Review of Multilateralism and International Organizations* 16(1), pp. 81–101.

Brinkerhoff, Derick W. / Brinkerhoff, Jennifer M. (2011): Public-Private Partnerships: Perspectives on Purposes, Publicness, and Good Governance. *Public Administration and Development* 31(1), pp. 2–14.

Bull, Benedicte (2020): A New Global Resource Order, Elites and the Environment in Latin America. In: Giovanna Franca / Danilo Freire / Umberto Mignozzetti (eds): *Natural Resources and Policy Choices in Latin America*. São Paolo: Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, Brazil, pp. 45–73.

Bull, Benedicte (2021): *Latin-Amerika i dag: Nye interesser og gamle bånd til USA, Kina, Russland, Midt-Østen og Europa*. Oslo: Cappelen Dam Akademisk.

Bull, Benedicte / McNeill, Desmond (2007): *Development Issues in Global Governance: Public-Private Partnerships and Market Multilateralism*. London / New York: Routledge.

Caporaso, James A. (1992): International Relations Theory and Multilateralism: The Search for Foundations. *International Organization* 46(3), pp. 599–632.

CARI – China Africa Research Initiative (2021): Debt Relief Dashboard. CARI, June 2021, http://www.sais-cari.org/debt-relief (accessed 8 August 2021).

Carrozza, Ilaria (2018): China's African Union Diplomacy: Challenges and Prospects for the Future. Global South Unit Policy Brief Series 2/2018, London School of Economics.

CCF (2015): Beijing Declaration, 23 January 2015. China-CELAC Forum, http://www.chinacelacforum.org/eng/zywj_3/201501/t20150123_6475938.htm (accessed 15 July 2022).

Chin, Gregory T. (2015): The State of the Art: Trends in the Study of the BRICS and Multilateral Organizations. In: Dries Lesage / Thijs van de Graaf (eds): *Rising Powers and Multilateral Institutions*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 19–44.

Clapham, Christopher (2006): Fitting China In. Brenthurst Discussion Paper 8. Johannesburg: Brenthurst Foundation.

Courmont, Barthélémy (2012): Promoting Multilateralism or Searching for a New Hegemony: A Chinese Vision of Multipolarity. *Pacific Focus* 27(2), pp. 184–204.

Creutzfeldt, Benjamin (2017): One Actor, Many Agents: China's Latin America Policy in Theory and Practice. In: Margaret Myers / Carol Wise (eds): *The Political Economy of China-Latin America Relations in the New Millennium: Brave New World*. New York: Routledge, pp. 15–30.

Davies, Penny (2007): *China and the End of Poverty in Africa: Towards Mutual Benefit?* Sundbyberg: Diakonia.

Delgado, Daniel Lemus (2015): Discourse, Identity and International Development Cooperation: China, Africa and FOCAC. *Asia-Pacific Social Science Review* 15(2), pp. 1–18.

Denoon, David B. H. (2017): China's Arrival in Latin America. In: David B. H. Denoon (ed.): *China, the United States, and the Future of Latin America: U.S.–China Relations*. New York: New York University Press, pp. 3–15.

De Stange, Ana. M.S. (2020): Triangular Relations: China, Latin America, and the United States. In: Nele Noesselt (ed.): *China's Interactions with Latin America and the Carribbean: Conquering the US's Strategic Backyard?* Marburg: Tectum Verlag.

Dittmer, Lowell (2011): China's New Internationalism. In: Guoguang Wu / Helen Lansdowne (eds): *China Turns to Multilateralism: Foreign Policy and Regional Security*. London: Routledge, pp. 21–34.

Dzinesa, Gwinyayi A. / Masters, Lesley (2009): Taming the Dragon? Defining Africa's Interests at the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC). Centre for Conflict Resolution, University of Cape Town.

Ellis, Evan (2017): The Strategic Context of China's Advance in Latin America: An Update. *Note d'actualité* 17(24), pp. 1–7. https://asiacentre.eu/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/17-Ellis-Amerique-Latine_180417.pdf (accessed 15 July 2022).

Enuka, Chuka (2011): The Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC): A Framework for China's Re-Engagement with Africa in the 21st Century. National University of Malayisa, E-Bangi, https://ejournal.ukm.my/ebangi/article/view/21884 (accessed 8 August 2021).

Flores Fuenzalida, Alejandro / Fulchéron, Alexis (2020): China's Health Diplomacy in Latin America: A Silk Road of Health? The Case of SARS-COV-2. *Journal of Public Governance and Policy: Latin American Review* 6(9), pp. 49–62.

Gallagher, Kevin (2016): *The China Triangle: Latin America's China Boom and the Fate of the Washington Consensus*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Herrero, María B. / Nascimiento, Beatriz (2020): ¿Qué pasa con la cooperación latinoamericana en salud? *Nueva Sociedad*, December 2020, https://nuso.org/articulo/que-pasa-con-la-cooperacion-regional-en-salud/ (accessed 8 August 2021).

Hon, Tracy / Jansson, Johanna / Shelton, Garth / Haifang, Liu / Burke, Christopher / Kiala, Carine (2010): Evaluating China's FOCAC Commitments to Africa and Mapping the Way Ahead: A Report. Centre for Chinese Studies, University of Stellenbosch, prepared for the Rockefeller Foundation, January 2010.

Hongming, Zhang (2018): Forum as a Mechanism in the Transformation of China-Africa Collaboration. *Contemporary World* 2018(2), pp. 48–51.

Hoo, Tiang Boon (2018): *China's Global Identity: Considering the Responsibilities of Great Power.* Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press.

Ibonye, Vincent (2020): The Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) and Knowledge Transfer in Sino-Nigerian Development Cooperation. *Asian Journal of Comparative Politics* 2020, pp. 1–25. https://doi.org/10.1177/2057891120912333

Jakóbowski, Jakub (2018): Chinese-led Regional Multilateralism in Central and Eastern Europe, Africa and Latin America: 16 + 1, FOCAC, and CCF. *Journal of Contemporary China* 27(113), pp. 659–673. https://doi.org/10.1080/10670564.2018.1458055

Jenkins, Rhys (2012): Latin America and China: A New Dependency? *Third World Quarterly* 33(7), pp. 1337–1358. https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2012.691834

Jones, Catherine (2020): Contesting within Order? China, Socialisation, and International Practice. *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 33(1), pp. 105–133. https://doi.org/10.1080/09557571.2019.1674781

Kastner, Scott L. / Pearson, Margaret M. / Rector, Chad (2020): *China's Strategic Multilateralism: Investing in Global Governance*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

King, Kenneth (2020): China-Africa Education Cooperation: From FOCAC to Belt and Road. *ECNU Review of Education* 3(2), pp. 221–234.

Lee, Pak K. / Heritage, Anisa / Mao, Zhouchen (2020): Contesting Liberal Internationalism: China's Renegotiation of World Order. *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 33(1), pp. 52–60. https://doi.org/10.1080/09557571.2020.1715682

Legler, Thomas (2020): A Story within a Story: Venezuela's Crisis, Regional Actors, and Western Hemispheric Order Upheaval. *European Review of Latin American and Caribbean Studies / Revista Europea de Estudios Latinoamericanos y del Caribe* 109, pp. 135–156.

Li, Anshan (2018): Outlook of 2018 Summit of Forum on China-Africa Cooperation: Superiority and Challenges. *Contemporary World* 2018(7), pp. 21–24.

Liu, Hongsong (2020): Chinese Perception of China's Engagement in Multilateralism and Global Governance. *The Pacific Review* 33(3/4), pp. 469–496. https://doi.org/10.1080/09512748.2020.1728570

Long, Tom (2018): Latin America and the Liberal International Order: An Agenda for Research. *International Affairs* 94(6), pp. 1371–1390. https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iiy188

Lozano, Genaro (2021): Vaccine Diplomacy: A New Cold War. *Americas Quarterly,* 11 February 2021, https://www.americasquarterly.org/article/vaccine-diplomacy-a-new-cold-war/ (accessed 8 August 2021).

Moore, Thomas G. (2011): Racing to Integrate, or Cooperating to Compete? Liberal and Realist Interpretations of China's New Multilateralism. In: Guoguang Wu / Helen Lansdowne (eds): *China Turns to Multilateralism: Foreign Policy and Regional Security*. London: Routledge, pp. 35–50.

Morse, Julia C. / Keohane, Robert O. (2014): Contested Multilateralism. *The Review of International Organizations* 9(4), pp. 385–412.

Moyo, Dambisa (2012): *Winner Take All: China's Race for Resources and What it Means for the World*. Toronto: Harper Collins.

Naidu, Sanusha (2007): The Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC): What Does the Future Hold? *China Report* 43(3), pp. 283–296.

O'Brien, Robert / Goetz, Anne Marie / Scholte, Jan Aart / Williams, Marc (2000): *Contesting Global Governance: Multilateral Economic Institutions and Global Social Movements*. Cambridge Studies in International Relations. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Oliveira, Gustavo L. T. / Myers, Margaret (2021): The Tenuous Co-Production of China's Belt and Road Initiative in Brazil and Latin America. *Journal of Contemporary China* 30(129), pp. 481–499.

Paltiel, Jeremy (2011): Peaceful Rise? Soft Power? Human Rights in China's New Multilateralism. In: Guoguang Wu / Helen Lansdowne (eds): *China Turns to Multilateralism: Foreign Policy and Regional Security*. London: Routledge, pp. 198–221.

Politi, James (2019): IDB Scraps Annual Meeting after China Excludes Venezuela. *The Financial Times*, 23 March 2019.

Rajan, D. S. (2016): China's Selective Approach towards Multilateralism, C3S Paper No. 0032/2016, Chennai Centre for Chinese Studies, https://www.c3sindia.org/archives/chinas-selective-approach-towards-multilateralism-by-d-s-rajan/ (accessed 15 July 2022).

Ray, Rebecca / Gallagher, Kevin / Lopez, Andres / Sanborn, Cynthia (2015): *China in Latin America: Lessons for South-South Cooperation and Sustainable Development*. Boston: Center for Transformation Research.

Riggirozzi, Pia / Tussie, Diana (2012): *The Rise of Post-Hegemonic Regionalism: The Case of Latin America*. London / Heidelberg: Springer.

Rodríguez, Fabricio / Rüland, Jürgen (2022): Cooperative Counter-hegemony, Interregionalism and "Diminished Multilateralism": the Belt and Road Initiative and China's Relations with Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC). *Journal of International Relations and Development* 25(2), pp. 476–496. https//doi.org/10.1057/s41268-021-00248-6

Ruggie, Jjohn Gerald (1992): Multilateralism: The Anatomy of an Institution. *International Organization* 46(3), pp. 561–598.

Rüland, Jürgen (2012): The Rise of "Diminished Multilateralism": East Asian and European Forum Shopping in Global Governance. *Asia Europe Journal* 9(2), pp. 255–270.

Sanborn, Cynthia (2020): Latin America and China in Times of COVID-19. Latin America Program and Kissinger Institute, October 2020, https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/media/uploads/documents/FINAL%20Updated%20Sanborn%20Article.pdf (accessed 8 August 2021).

Stallings, Barbara (2020): *Dependency in the Twenty-First Century? The Political Economy of China-Latin America Relations*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Stephen, Matthew D. (2020): China's New Multilateral Institutions: A Framework and Research Agenda. *International Studies Review* 23(3), pp. 807–834, https://doi.org/10.1093/isr/viaa076 (accessed 8 August 2021).

Stuenkel, Oliver (2016): *Post Western World*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Stuenkel, Oliver (2020): Huawei or Not? Brazil Faces a Key Geopolitical Choice. *Americas Quarterly*, 30 June 2020.

Tang, Lixia Zhou, Wenjie / Li, Xiaoyun (2020): New Development and Challenge for China-Africa Agricultural Cooperation under the FOCAC Framework. *West Asia and Africa* 2020(5), pp. 3–20.

Taylor, Ian (2011): *China's New Role in Africa*. Boulder: Lynne Reiner Publishers.

Taylor, Ian (2013): From Santa Claus to Serious Business: Where Should FOCAC Go Next? *African East-Asian Affairs* 74, pp. 31–38.

Telias, Diego / Urdinez, Francisco (2021): China's Foreign Aid Political Drivers: Lessons from a Novel Dataset of Mask Diplomacy in Latin America During the COVID-19 Pandemic. *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs* October 2021, pp. 1–19.

Terrefe, Biruk / Bénazéraf, David (2015): China and the African Regional Economic Communities: Transforming Multilateral Cooperation. Policy brief, Centre for Chinese Studies, Stellenbosch University, Stellenbosch.

Tickner, Arlene B. (2003): Hearing Latin American Voices in International Relations Studies. *International Studies Perspectives* 4(4), pp. 325–350. https://doi.org/10.1111/1528-3577.404001

Tiezzi, Shannon (2020): FOCAC Turns 20. Deborah Brautigam on China-Africa Relations: A Look at the Origins, Goals, and Continuing Legacy of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation. *The Diplomat*, 2 December 2020, https://thediplomat.com/2020/12/focac-turns-20-deborah-brautigam-on-china-africa-relations/ (accessed 8 August 2021).

Vadell, Javier A. (2018): El Foro China-CELAC y el nuevo regionalismo para un mundo multipolar: desafíos para la Cooperación ´Sur-Sur´. *Carta Internacional* 13(1), pp. 6–37. https://doi.org/10.21530/ci.v13n1.2018.733

Vadell, Javier A. (2019): China in Latin America: South-South Cooperation with Chinese Characteristics. *Latin American Perspectives* 46(2), pp. 107–125. https://doi.org/10.1177/0094582x18815511

Van Staden, Cobus / Alden, Chris / Wu, Yu-Shan (2018): In the Driver's Seat? African Agency and Chinese Power at FOCAC, the AU and the BRI. Occasional Paper 286, South African Institute for International Affairs, Johannesburg.

Wu, Guoguang / Lansdowne, Helen (eds) (2011): *China Turns to Multilateralism: Foreign Policy and Regional Security*. London: Routledge.

Wise, Carol (2020): Dragonomics. *How Latin America Is Maximizing (or Missing Out) on China's Inernational Development Strategy*. New Haven / London: Yale University Press.

Xuetong, Yan (2019): The Age of Uneasy Peace: Chinese Power in a Divided World. *Foreign Affairs* January / February 2019, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2018-12-11/age-uneasy-peace (accessed 8 August 2021).

Yahuda, Michael (2011): China's Multilateralism and Regional Order. In: Guoguang Wu / Helen Lansdowne (eds): *China Turns to Multilateralism: Foreign Policy and Regional Security*. London: Routledge, pp. 75–89.

Yan, Xuetong (2011): *Ancient Chinese Thought, Modern Chinese Power*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Yuan, Jing-Dong (2011): The New Player in the Game: China, Arms Control, and Multilateralism. In: Guoguang Wu / Helen Lansdowne (eds): *China Turns to Multilateralism: Foreign Policy and Regional Security*. London: Routledge, pp. 51–72.

Zhao, Tingyang (2005): *The Tianxia System: An Introduction to the Philosophy of World Institution*. Beijing: China Renmin University Press.

Zhou,Yuyuan / Liu, Hongwu (2010): China's African Strategy: How to Cope with International Multilateral Cooperation. *Pacific Journal* 18(7), pp. 31–39.

Zhiming Tu / Kai Zhang (2017): Cross Regional Cooperation between China and Africa and Africa's Regionalism. *Forum of World Economics and Politics* 2017(5), pp. 56–71.

Zürn, Michael (2021): Multilateralism in Crisis. A European Perspective. In: Thomas Meyer / José Luis de Sales Marques / Mario Telò (eds): *Towards a New Multilateralism. Cultural Divergence and Political Convergence?* London: Routledge, pp. 119–131.

IQAS Vol. 53 / 2022 ii, pp. 231–249

Infrastructuring Authoritarian Power
Arab Gulf–Chinese Transregional Collaboration beyond the State

Julia Gurol, Benjamin Schütze

Abstract

From collaboration on infrastructural megaprojects to vaccine development and digital surveillance techniques: Arab Gulf–Chinese relations in times of COVID-19 are complex and multi-layered. Nonetheless, established regime-centric, analytical approaches often fail to see this complexity by almost exclusively focusing on questions of collaboration between authoritarian regimes. Such approaches not only ignore the diversity of involved actors and the inherently transregional nature of contemporary authoritarian power, but also bear the risk of reproducing binary notions of authoritarianism vs. liberal democracy that fundamentally ignore the latter's coercive core. Recent work on the duality of infrastructure as both enabling global flows of goods and (re)producing social hierarchies helps us overcome the methodological nationalism found in the majority of scholarship on authoritarian power. In this article, we provide a selective overview, through the prism of logistics and infrastructure, of Arab Gulf–Chinese authoritarian entanglements in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Understanding authoritarian practices as territorially unbounded modes of governance, our objective is to develop a more in-depth and context-sensitive understanding of the transregionally connected mechanisms of (re)producing authoritarian power. We argue that the pandemic constitutes a seemingly technical opportunity for the intensified diffusion of authoritarian practices that both enable certain infrastructural politics and in turn are also rendered possible by them. This emphasis on infrastructure, understood as simultaneously fostering a global circulation of goods and capital, as well as reinforcing containment and facilitating new forms of managing and repressing public discontent, provides us with a helpful lens for the development of a truly transregional understanding of authoritarian power. We discuss this argument based on select examples of digital and physical infrastructure(s) in Arab Gulf–Chinese relations, and their embedment in global flows of capital.

Keywords: China, Arab Gulf, infrastructure, authoritarian practices, COVID-19

Julia Gurol, Department of Political Sciences, University of Freiburg; julia.gurol@politik.uni-freiburg.de. Benjamin Schütze, Arnold Bergstraesser Institute, Freiburg and Young Academy for Sustainability Research at the Freiburg Institute for Advanced Studies (FRIAS), Freiburg; benjamin.schuetze@abi.uni-freiburg.de. Part of the research leading to this article was carried out in the context of the research project "Global Autocratic Collaboration in Times of COVID-19: Game Changer or Business as Usual in Sino-Gulf Relations?", funded by the Volkswagen-Foundation (2021–2022). We thank Antonia Thies, Simon Sackers and Elias Klenk for research assistance and Klara Leithäuser for proofreading.

DOI 10.11588/iqas.2022.2.14220

Introduction

Authoritarian power in China and in the Arab world is mostly analysed on its own or in comparison with the other. However, interpretations of Arab and Chinese authoritarian power that are spatially bound by the physical borders of the nation-state or as a product of particular regimes fundamentally ignore the manifold connections between Arab and Chinese authoritarianisms and the multiplicity of actors from within and beyond the state involved in their (re)production. In this paper, we go beyond regime-centric notions of authoritarian power by exploring Arab Gulf–Chinese authoritarian collaboration in the context of COVID-19. We do so by assessing authoritarian power through the prism of logistics and infrastructure. We overcome the methodological nationalism that characterises the majority of scholarship on authoritarian power (Diamond et al. 2016, Linz 2000, O'Donnell 1999, Levitsky / Way 2010) by using infrastructure as an analytical prism, understanding the latter as both enabling global flows of goods and as (re)producing social hierarchies (Chua 2018: 2–3, Cowen 2014).

Democratisation scholars such as Diamond et al. (2016) consider authoritarian regimes as the sole sources of authoritarian power. In contrast, we suggest that authoritarian power has gained an international dimension not only because of the "challenges presented by regimes in Moscow, Beijing, Tehran, Caracas, and Riyadh" (Diamond 2016: 17), but to a significant extent also due to the mounting authoritarian collaboration between actors below or beyond the institutional level of the nation-state, such as transnational private firms. After all, Arab Gulf and Chinese authoritarianisms are not as easily separable as most existing accounts make us believe, given that the two produce and inform one another. However, in existing research, these entanglements have hitherto received only scant attention.

Understanding authoritarian practices as territorially unbounded "mode[s] of governing people" (Glasius 2018a: 179), our objective is to develop a more in-depth and context-sensitive understanding of the modes and mechanisms through which authoritarian power is (re)produced. While we build on Glasius's understanding of authoritarian power as consisting of extraterritorial practices (2018a), we see such power not only as sabotaging a form of pre-existing accountability (2018b: 517), but also as preventing "demanded forms of accountability via strategies of pre-emption, technocratization, and coercion" (Jenss / Schuetze 2021: 83). We argue that in the context of the global pandemic, different forms of Arab Gulf–Chinese private sector collaboration have gained prominence in advancing authoritarian practices both within and beyond established nation-state contexts. Given that they are not necessarily limited to regime contexts, an exploration of authoritarian practices from an infrastructure perspective, rather

than via the tiresome nation-state lens, is a fruitful endeavour that promises a more nuanced understanding of contemporary modes and mechanisms of authoritarian collaboration. While the state continues to play a central role in the authoritarian practices we discuss, it has become a globalised institution (Bogaert 2018). Private actors who want to share state power, in order to thereby benefit from capital accumulation, play an increasingly central role in this globalisation or transregionalisation of authoritarian power.

To disentangle the modes and mechanisms of the (re)production of authoritarian power beyond the nation-state, we assess transregional authoritarian practices through the prism of critical infrastructure and logistics. We look at select examples of Arab Gulf–Chinese collaboration in the development of both digital and physical infrastructures in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Along with the examples of tracking apps, surveillance techniques and health infrastructure, we discuss the role of these infrastructures in enabling the transregional travelling of certain authoritarian practices, thereby (re)producing authoritarian power. Finally, we scrutinise the functioning of infrastructures as a tool for exerting and stabilising authoritarian power.

In a nutshell, we argue that the pandemic constitutes a seemingly apolitical opportunity for the diffusion of transregional authoritarian practices via the means of infrastructural politics. These practices, we contend, have no conventional boundaries, but stretch along the entire logistics space (Cowen 2014). As with the physical and digital infrastructures used during the fight against the pandemic, which are deeply embedded in global flows of capital, Zuboff (2019) pointedly speaks of the development of a form of "surveillance capitalism", an economic system that has at its core the commodification of personal data with the aim of making a profit (Aho / Duffield 2020). In pointing towards the crucial role of digital and physical infrastructures – developed or enhanced during the global pandemic – for authoritarian power, we build on Demmelhuber et al. (forthcoming), who describe the pandemic as a "silver platter for Middle Eastern autocrats to further fine-tune modes of digital surveillance and repression", however with a decidedly more transregional approach.

The remainder of this article is structured as follows. We begin by discussing the role of infrastructure(s) for transregional authoritarianism by briefly sketching existing literature on authoritarian power, infrastructure and the COVID-19 pandemic. We then outline our argument about new forms of Arab Gulf–Chinese private sector collaboration as a key driver behind the advancement of authoritarian practices in the context of COVID-19. In the subsequent empirical section, we explore such forms of transregional authoritarian collaboration in more depth with regard to the promotion and realisation of both digital and physical forms of infrastructural cooperation (the development of tracking apps and merging of different infrastructures – e.g., the Health Silk Road and Digital Silk Road).

The role of infrastructure(s) for transregional authoritarianism

We position our paper at the intersection of three intertwined bodies of literature. Firstly, we speak to and seek to enhance literatures on authoritarian power and neoliberalism (Glasius 2018a, 2018b; Bogaert 2018; Bruff / Tansel 2019; Hasenkamp 2020; Zuboff 2019). Secondly, we build on critical research on infrastructure and logistics (Cowen 2014, Chua 2018, Khalili 2018, Ziadah 2019, Apostolopoulou 2020), which we understand as simultaneously enabling the circulation of goods and capital, as well as reinforcing containment and facilitating new forms of managing and repressing public discontent. Finally, we look at the role of logistics and infrastructure for authoritarian entanglements beyond the state level through the lens of a global crisis, the COVID-19 pandemic. Thereby we speak to the fast-growing body of literature on the political and societal implications of the global pandemic (Greitens 2020, Levine 2020, Rapeli / Saikkonen 2020, Verma 2020).

The study of authoritarian power is dominated by an inherent state-centrism. While Linz's focus on limited pluralism, limited participation and ill-defined limits of power as key features of authoritarianism (2000: 159–261) does not per se constitute an example of methodological nationalism, it has predominantly been applied to nation-states. Conventional understandings of where different world regions begin and end, solidified by respective university programmes and curriculums, have further narrowed the contexts within which politics is understood and analysed. Oftentimes, the state is assumed as the given and natural unit of analysis (Mitchell 1991). Jenss / Schuetze, in contrast, highlight the importance of taking into account transregional authoritarian connections between seemingly unconnected geographical sites. They further point to the "absence of capital accumulation and racialized forms of labour exploitation as a purpose for authoritarian power" in traditional studies on authoritarian power (Jenss / Schütze 2021: 83).

This article seeks to build on these findings. We argue that a stronger focus on transregional authoritarian practices allows us to overcome the problematic association of authoritarianism with the institutional "level of the nation-state" (Glasius 2018b: 519). It also opens our eyes to the overlaps "in the cross-border spatial cartographies of military operations, humanitarian aid delivery, and private logistics firms" (Ziadah 2019: 1685) and to the traceability of many "autocratic" techniques to "democratic" architects (Morgenbesser 2020: 1055). Bogaert (2018) accordingly speaks of a "globalized authoritarianism", which, while manifesting itself at specific sites, is produced by a whole range of state and non-state actors from both within and beyond the state of concern. In short, state-based impressions of authoritarian power are at least in part the effect of transregional authoritarian practices and entanglements.

Authoritarian power in China is partly (re)produced through collaboration with the Arab World (and other world regions) and vice versa. Hence, strategies of strengthening authoritarian power are no longer reduced to the boundaries of nation-states or regimes (Kumar 2013: 151), but rather exceed national borders. Thus, instead of simply comparing or juxtaposing Arab Gulf and Chinese authoritarianisms, and thereby reproducing flawed assumptions of authoritarianism's uniformity, as well as questionable notions of supposed spatial boundaries, this article thinks context anew (Appadurai 2013: 138). In doing so, we draw on prior work by Jenss / Schuetze (2021) and other examples of transregional studies (see for example Derichs 2017, Lowe 2015, Boatcă 2020). Fundamental to our approach is Massey's (1991: 27) call to stop thinking "of places as areas with boundaries around, [but] as articulated moments in networks of social relations and understandings".

Recent literature on logistics and infrastructure is highly helpful for the suggested rethinking of context, as it challenges state-centric forms of spatial imagination. While infrastructure is often presented as neutral or as a purely technocratic means for the bypassing of politics, it creates new selective connectivities based on categories of class and race (Appel 2019) and "can empower actors in various degrees or empower a single actor against others" (Kurban et al. 2017: 6). Throughout this article, we understand infrastructures as "critical locations through which sociality, governance and politics, accumulation and dispossession, and institutions and aspirations are formed, reformed, and performed" (Anand et al. 2018: 2).

We further aim to go beyond a purely material reading, as infrastructure is also imbued with non-material power and can be used to exert spatial, temporal, social, ideational and circulatory power (Star 1999, Larkin 2013). As indicated by Ho (2020: 1469), the non-material dimensions of infrastructure are relatively well explored by the disciplines of geography, anthropology and sociology, but less so in international politics. Ziadah (2019: 1685) makes fruitful use of a humanitarian logistics lens, in order to do justice to "the transnational character of both conflict and humanitarian response", and Khalili (2020: 3) demonstrates the ways in which the Arabian Peninsula and China connect via maritime transport and associated racialised hierarchies of labour, which enable powerful forms of capital accumulation (see also Bruff / Tansel 2019, Apostolopoulou 2020). Approaches that explicitly link the logistics space with transregional authoritarian practices still remain in their infancy, however.

It is this transregionalisation that has informed the emergence of a body of literature that assesses global authoritarianism in the context of global capital flows and the commodification of personal data (Zuboff 2019). In that regard, we can observe deepening linkages between surveillance infrastructures and artificial intelligence technologies for the purpose of statecraft – not only but also in terms of authoritarian power. This rise of surveillance capitalism can

be linked to the general neoliberalisation of political and economic structures worldwide (Aho / Duffield 2020). Moreover, as Bruff and Tansel argue, modes of crises at various levels of governance foster the "extant anti-democratic tendencies of neoliberalism" (Bruff / Tansel 2019: 3) and generate new mechanisms that support or reproduce such autocratic tendencies.

Thus, the emerging body of literature on transregional authoritarian power in the global fight against the COVID-19 pandemic is bringing to light the importance of authoritarian connections beyond the level of the nation-state. Recent publications on the impact of the pandemic on democracies has outlined that the declining trend of democratic quality can be interpreted as a cause for concern in the face of a global pandemic (Lührmann / Maerz et al. 2020: 10). For instance, Kurki (2020) argues that the pandemic has exposed the dysfunctions and inequalities of liberal democracies, and the flaws in conceptualising humans as separate from nature. Discussing the implications of a shift toward planetary politics, she calls for a rethinking of the "international order". Even though it seems to be common sense that the repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic may seriously aggravate the situation in countries where democracy is already eroding (Rapeli / Saikkonen 2020, Bremmer 2020, Levine 2020), little attention has hitherto been dedicated to the transregional travelling of authoritarian practices in combatting the pandemic, to the latter's effects on authoritarian regimes (for an exception, see Gurol et al. 2022) and to the ensuing need to reconceptualise authoritarian power beyond a focus on established regimes. This paper dives into this gap and scrutinises Arab Gulf–Chinese collaboration during the global pandemic from the intersection of logistics, infrastructure and transregional authoritarian collaboration.

While authoritarian power always manifests itself in specific physical spaces, we argue that its imagination, performance and construction are not necessarily limited to these. Remaining stuck in established state-centric notions of context makes us blind to this transregional dimension of authoritarian power. Moreover, we acknowledge and emphasise that infrastructure "collides with and corrodes national territory" (Cowen 2014: 10). Accordingly, we will focus on the role of hitherto largely ignored non-state actors in the authoritarian (re) shaping of modes of governance, such as private firms. In doing so, we seek to go beyond the traditional understandings of infrastructure that define it primarily as an instrument of the state, serving political, economic and military purposes (Ho 2020). Instead, we emphasise the inherent nexus between infrastructure and authoritarian power, in that infrastructure enables the transregional diffusion of certain authoritarian practices, while at the same time enabling the strengthening of authoritarian power. Moreover, we follow the argument of Bruff and Tansel (2019) that global (economic) crises foster the emergence of authoritarian practices, thereby revealing the intertwinement of authoritar-

ian power and neoliberalism, and take the COVID-19 pandemic as a point of departure for our analysis.

Empirical snapshots

In the following, we will scrutinise the nexus between infrastructures and authoritarian power in a two-fold inductive manner. We first shed light on digital infrastructures (tracking apps and CCTV technology) then subsequently examine physical infrastructures (e.g., medical aid and BRI infrastructure projects). Our particular regional focus in the realm of Arab-Chinese relations is on the resource-rich Arab Gulf monarchies that are strategically important partners for China in the context of its Belt and Road Initiative, or BRI. As rising technology hubs, and given the centrality of financial markets in the Arab Gulf for the wider MENA-region as well (Hanieh 2018: 174), these monarchies constitute a most-likely case scenario to analyse the nexus between infrastructure and authoritarian power in the context of the global pandemic.

Over the course of the analysis, we show how infrastructure contributes to the transregional expansion of authoritarian power in enabling the travelling and exchange of authoritarian practices. We further explore how Arab Gulf–Chinese authoritarian collaboration unfolds beyond the nation-state, placing particular emphasis on elements of neoliberal authoritarianism and the ways in which processes of capital accumulation, technocratisation, surveillance and repression interact (Bruff / Tansel 2019, Jenss / Schuetze 2021: 83). In doing so, we dedicate special attention to the role of the private sector and specific state institutions, as opposed to unitary regime notions, in this transregional (re)shaping of authoritarian practices.

Digital infrastructures: big data, big surveillance

The two most prominent examples for critical digital infrastructures in the context of the global pandemic are tracking apps and CCTV technology. In the following, we will discuss the infrastructure-authoritarianism nexus along these two examples.

Tracking apps are a vivid example of facilitators for authoritarian practices and have become some of the most striking tools for thwarting people's privacies and freedom of movement in the COVID-19 context. In particular the Emirati firm Group 42 Holding Ltd. (short: G42) has made a name for itself as a frontrunner in developing apps that can be used for anti-pandemic purposes but also provide an additional tool for the Emirati ruling family to keep their population under surveillance, thereby enabling a more strategic collection and storage of

data that further intensifies authoritarian control.[1] In the context of the development of this infrastructure, we can observe entanglements between Chinese and Emirati firms that support our argument that authoritarian power, if scrutinised through the lens of logistics and infrastructure, should be considered as not merely bound to nation-states. For instance, there is evidence of collaboration between the Chinese-based company Beijing YeeCall Interactive Network Technology and the Abu Dhabi-based company Breej Holding Ltd.

Beijing YeeCall Interactive Network Technology was the leading firm in developing the Chinese Voice over IP (VoIP) tracking app YeeCall, which served as a template for the Emirati tracking app ToTok (Kumar / Salim 2019). Breej Holding Ltd., in turn, is closely connected to G42, which created the ToTok app. G42's CEO is Peng Xiao, the former CEO of DarkMatter's Pegasus LLC division. DarkMatter is a subfirm of G42 that gained attention in 2019 when a hacking unit called "Project Raven" targeted Emirati activists around the world (Marczak 2020). When this came to light, DarkMatter was restructured and integrated into the newly established artificial intelligence and cloud-computing company G42, albeit in its previous structure. The head of this newly established cloud-computing firm became Dan Hu, former Huawei Sales Director in Abu Dhabi. This further illustrates the linkages between Chinese and Emirati firms. As Demmelhuber et al. (forthcoming) argue, G42 thereby constitutes an extended arm of the Emirati regime and thus one of the most important non-state players in the COVID-19 context. We build on and further expand that argument and consider the entanglements between Chinese and Emirati firms in the development of tracking infrastructure as an example for the transregionalisation of authoritarian power. Focusing on such transregional authoritarian production networks allows us to capture the ways in which authoritarian manifestations in one location are co-produced by actors from another – a dynamic that regime-centric analyses struggle to fully recognise.

Similar entanglements in terms of collaboratively developed infrastructures, albeit less profound, can be found in Bahrain, where China has become a major source of external cybertechnological assistance and of knowhow for surveillance and digital technology. According to the head of Bahrain's Information and eGovernment Authority (iGA), the development of the Bahraini COVID tracking app BeAware was inspired by the successful COVID-19 mitigation efforts in China. Not only does BeAware monitor peoples' movements and extensively collect, as well as store, data, the app was also linked to a national TV show, called "Are you at home?" that was overseen by the iGA.

The iGA would select five daily winners from among the contact numbers registered in the BeAware app, with numbers called live on air to check if app users were at home. Rewarding those practicing social distancing with a prize

1 For a detailed assessment of the role of G42 in the context of authoritarian power in times of a global pandemic, see Demmelhuber et al. (forthcoming).

of up to 1,000 Bahraini dinars, this TV show illustrates the type of carrot-and-stick strategy applied by the Bahraini regime to control and discipline its population. Participation in the programme was initially mandatory, until Bahrain's Information and eGovernment Authority added the possibility to opt out (Amnesty 2020).

While coordinated by the state, this top-down exertion of authoritarian power would have been impossible without the close collaboration also of non-state actors. The increase in control and repression through the newly established digital infrastructures also becomes apparent when considering Bahrain's electronic bracelet, which is paired with BeAware and is mandatory for all those registered for home quarantine. Location data and additional information from this bracelet are sent regularly to the app via Bluetooth. In the event of a breach of the quarantine, penalties under the Public Health Law No. 34 apply, including at least three months of imprisonment and/or a fine of 1,000–10,000 Bahraini dinars (2,700–27,000 US dollars). Premised on the commodification of human experience and enabling more efficient authoritarian control and more targeted repression (Xu 2020), tracking apps such as BeAware illustrate both transregional surveillance capitalism (Zuboff 2019) and authoritarian neoliberalism (Bruff / Tansel 2019). They demonstrate how transregionally entangled processes of capital accumulation and authoritarian power enable one another, and thus challenge established notions of self-contained authoritarian regime units. Moreover, this serves as a flagship example of how infrastructure can form, reform and perform governance and politics (Anand et al. 2018), thereby reinforcing authoritarian entanglements (as between China and the Arab Gulf).

Bahrain's digital advancements are directly dependent on a record of authoritarian practices that include CCTV cameras outside Shi'i villages (Jones 2020: 324), strict censorship and the publishing of sensitive personal health information online (Amnesty 2020). Shi'i villages, such as Sitra, Samaheej, Diraz, Dai, Karbabad, Arad or Al Ekr are heavily patrolled by police forces, and people are not allowed to leave villages without official permits.

In this context, the COVID-19 pandemic has provided the Sunni regime with another tool to further intensify authoritarian control over the Shi'i majority – in striking resemblance to the Chinese detention of its Uyghur Muslim minority in Western China. Affected populations not only suffer from intensified repression, as established state structures make increasing use of digital infrastructures, but are also exposed to greater risks of COVID-19 infection, as they are neglected when it comes to the distribution of masks and relief material, as well as vaccines. Thus, responses to COVID-19 in both China and the Arab Gulf contribute to the further containment of marginalised populations, rendering them more vulnerable and exacerbating pre-existing religious and socio-

economic inequalities, while at the same time reinforcing the privileged position and power of members of the regime and the socio-economic elite (Hammond 2019). A focus on infrastructure and transregional authoritarian practices allows us to understand Bahraini repression of activists and its Shi'i majority as partly co-produced by Chinese repression and detention of its Uyghur Muslim minority, against whom the surveillance infrastructures now used in the Arab Gulf were initially optimised and rendered more efficient.

While facial recognition tools by US tech firms and predictive policing systems reveal inadvertent racist biases due to the mis- and/or underrepresentation of minorities in the used data sets (Zou / Schiebinger 2018), the large-scale utilisation of Chinese surveillance tools for the tracking of 11 million Uighurs demonstrates deliberate racist discrimination (Mozur 2019). Both examples show the ease (intentional or unintentional) with which digital infrastructures enable or lead to authoritarian exclusion and control, and the similarities in terms of those marginalised and/or oppressed across established notions of space.

Yet Bahrain is not the only showcase for intensified transregional authoritarian collaboration in the field of digital infrastructure. We find similar evidence for private sector collaboration in Saudi-Chinese relations, more specifically between the Saudi Data and Artificial Intelligence Authority (SDAIA) and the Chinese firms Alibaba and Huawei in Saudi Arabia. As a joint cooperation, they launched the National Artificial Intelligence Capability Development Program. SDAIA has further been involved in the development of the digital tracking apps Twakkalna and Tabaud to combat COVID-19.

Despite their claimed primary focus on combatting the pandemic, Chinese digital infrastructure, public surveillance platforms – enhanced with AI technology, location-tracking software and personal data integration techniques – foster the diffusion of a number of authoritarian practices that provide recipient governments with an authoritarian toolkit that goes far beyond its alleged public health purpose. While most efforts emerge as initiatives of the government, or more precisely, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), the private sector and firms play a crucial role as an extended arm of the Chinese state in furthering these diffusion processes.

In this regard, the pandemic has constituted a crucial booster for a transregional expansion of Chinese surveillance technology (Greitens 2020: E170). Examples thereof are manifold. Already before the pandemic, the Chinese companies Hikvision and Huawei were involved in marketing biometric surveillance systems in the UAE. Similarly, Chinese cell phone hacking software has been used by Emirati leaders to spy on hundreds of dissidents and regime critics. In a similar vein, the national police in Dubai are using the facial recognition program "Oyoon" (Arabic for "eyes") to record and analyse people's faces, behaviour and movements, in order to combat crime – including oppositional activism – more "efficiently". The technology involved can once more be linked back to the Chinese company Hikvision (Rajagopalan 2019).

Hence, we can conclude that with regard to the deployment and advancement of digital infrastructure such as surveillance technology and CCTV equipment between China and Arab Gulf states, COVID-19 has not led to a reinvention of the wheel as far as the travelling of authoritarian practices is concerned. Rather, it has catalysed processes that originated before the outbreak of the global pandemic, and has brought to our attention the transregionalisation of authoritarian practices. Just as authoritarian repression in the Arab Gulf is partly enabled by forms of surveillance capitalism (Zuboff 2019) that descend from China, the latter has gained new opportunities for capital accumulation and technical refinement as its surveillance infrastructures are used in the Arab Gulf.

This becomes especially apparent in a work report, released by China's National Standardization Committee in March 2020, that explicitly appeals to Chinese firms and state-led enterprises to take the global pandemic as a window of opportunity to set the global standards for next-generation technologies. As stated in the report, the overall objective is to "strengthen the construction of the relevant standard system for the prevention and control of COVID-19" and promote "standards for emergency response, social prevention and control" (Standardization Administration of People's Republic of China 2020). While the first points towards obtaining a leading role in combatting the global pandemic, the latter explicitly refers to the dissemination of technology and digital norms with the objective of social control.

Physical and digital infrastructures only appear unrelated at first sight. As mentioned earlier, infrastructure is both material and non-material. Tracking apps and surveillance tools, as well as the provision of vaccines, are tied to a physical and imaginative geography that requires enclosures to make things flow (Chua 2018). The former help keep authoritarian elites in power, while disciplining and repressing minorities and oppositional activists. The latter operates via highly problematic bio-political judgments regarding who deserves privileged treatment and who not (see also Schuetze 2017).

Physical infrastructures: China's health diplomacy and the "Health Silk Road"

Physical infrastructure plays a crucial role in the pandemic context. The following section scrutinises the mutual effects of logistics and physical infrastructure on transregional authoritarian entanglements between China and Arab Gulf countries as well as vice versa.

With regard to Arab Gulf–Chinese health infrastructure, COVID-19 has led to a further boost in already existing forms of collaboration, emphasising that authoritarian collaboration is not a one-way street. On the contrary, at the beginning of the pandemic, it was mostly the Arab Gulf states that supported China by sending medical supplies and equipment. Having flattened the curve of new infections and beginning to recover from the consequences of the pan-

demic, Beijing unfolded its own health diplomacy vis-à-vis the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. This took place on various levels, as for instance on the level of central and local governments, state enterprises and private companies, but also relied on individual donations from Chinese in China and Chinese nationals residing in the MENA region (Zoubir 2020). In contrast to the ad-hoc emergency measures taken by many of the MENA countries during the outbreak of the pandemic, this initiative was much more concerted and organised and was accompanied by certain narratives about the supremacy of Chinese infrastructures and practices. In fact, as the majority of mask factories are located in China anyway, the Chinese leadership had an easy job of assuming an almost monopolistic position to provide the world with masks and medical kits and present itself as a relief supplier (Rudolf 2021: 3).

A vivid example of this is the Chinese Health Silk Road (HSR) initiative, launched at the highpoint of the pandemic in 2020. This Silk Road, as announced by the Chinese government, would work in tandem with the Digital Silk Road, thereby merging digital and physical infrastructures with the objective of global health provision. While the concept of the HSR is all but new – in fact, the first evidence of the development of an HSR dates back to 2015 – the political context of its official launch was most advantageous for China, providing the PRC with the unique chance to position itself as a "saviour" in the global crisis and to promote digital and physical infrastructures under the auspices of global health provision (Greene / Triolo 2020). Virtually from one day to the next, health was elevated to one of the most crucial elements of the BRI (Rudolf 2021: 5). Overnight, the Chinese leadership activated already established BRI infrastructure networks around the globe, among them BRI rail links and airline supply lines for aid goods. In line with this promotion and re-branding of already existing BRI infrastructure, China launched a huge propaganda campaign to buttress the claim of the superiority of China's system and anti-pandemic infrastructure. In that regard, we could argue that the pandemic provided a perfect opportunity to showcase the supposed supremacy of both Chinese public health management and centralised state governance more generally (Zhao 2021: 7). Such initiatives of ostensible soft power or image projection are oftentimes directed towards "the West" and actively challenge the Western liberal script, including its traditional institutions, procedures and norms (Wang 2011).

This once more stresses the dual function of infrastructure, which on the one hand enables the buttressing of government authority, while on the other hand making possible an exchange and collaboration beyond the state level and in the realm of the private sector. The above-mentioned examples further underline that infrastructure should not be understood merely in material terms but that the transregional logistics space can also foster the travelling of ideas, values and narratives. In the case of Arab Gulf–Chinese relations, the narratives used by Chinese officials leave no doubt regarding the role that China

ascribes itself in the context of the global pandemic. In fact, they reveal with astounding clarity the underlying Chinese motives (Zhao 2021: 7).

According to official sources, the deployment of infrastructures through the state and private firms should fuel the development of China as a "global health leader" (State Council Information Office 2020) and should contribute to building a "community of common health for mankind" (Xi Jinping 2020). At the same time, China seems to seek global leadership as a technological power and strives towards becoming the most important provider of health technology (Xi Jinping 2019, Office of the Central Cyberspace Affairs Commission) and an ostensible "cyber-superpower". This alludes to increased Chinese ambitions for infrastructuring a new global hegemony and thereby promoting the effectiveness, availability and thus also supremacy of Chinese infrastructure in comparison to Western models that seem to combat the pandemic in a less effective manner.

In a similar vein and with comparable motives, in the realm of vaccine infrastructure, China gained a first-mover advantage in distributing its vaccines in non-Western countries. The UAE and Bahrain were the first to approve the vaccine developed by the China National Biotech Group, a subsidiary of Sinopharm. Beforehand, there had been close cooperation between Emirati G42 and Sinopharm in conducting large-scale trials in the UAE and Bahrain. In collaboration with G42, Sinopharm had also set up a huge PCR test centre in Abu Dhabi in the early days of the pandemic – the first of this level outside of China (Zoubir 2020: 4).

Hence, in general terms, the global crisis-mode created a window of opportunity for China (Buckley 2020: 311) to rebrand BRI infrastructure. Two readings are striking with regard to the merger of China's mounting tech authoritarianism (Heath 2020) and physical BRI infrastructure projects in the context of the global pandemic. On the one hand, most infrastructure projects rely on inducing productivity gains in the host country and produce net benefits. In this reading, Chinese BRI projects will certainly suffer pandemic-induced shocks, as the crisis affects many BRI-related contracts.

On the other hand, the deepening interlinkages between physical infrastructure of BRI projects and digital infrastructure promoted through the Digital Silk Road can be interpreted as an example of intensifying transregional Arab Gulf–Chinese authoritarian linkages and provides evidence for the diffusion of authoritarian practices via both physical and digital infrastructures, as well as for the increasing transregionalisation of authoritarian power at large and the emergence of "new spatial geographies of control" (Ziadah 2019: 1698). Moreover, they offer opportunities for further future entanglements beyond the nation-state. Funnelling into this is what the OECD (2019: 1) describes as a "widespread consensus that mobilizing investments in infrastructure is critical for fostering inclusive growth and development, including by enhancing

countries' connectivity into regional and global value chains". Statements such as these clearly point to the centrality of infrastructure in contemporary developmental strategies. However, and in stark contrast to voiced claims of connectivity and inclusivity, we have shown that infrastructures are a central component in the transregionalisation of authoritarian power.

The travelling of authoritarian practices – not a one-way street

In the above discussion of digital and physical infrastructures in Arab Gulf–Chinese authoritarian collaboration in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, we have challenged established state-centric forms of spatially imagining authoritarian power. We brought into dialogue the literature on (trans)regionally connected authoritarian and neoliberal practices (Glasius 2018a, 2018b; Zuboff 2019, Jenss / Schuetze 2021, Bruff / Tansel 2019), critical scholarship on infrastructure and logistics (Cowen 2014, Chua 2018, Khalili 2018, Ziadah 2019, Apostolopoulou 2020), as well as emerging scholarship on the effects of the pandemic (Greitens 2020, Levine 2020, Rapeli / Saikkonen 2020, Verma 2020). In so doing, we zoomed in on the political economy and the infrastructure that underlies and drives the intensification of Arab Gulf–Chinese authoritarian collaboration. One of our key findings is that infrastructural development (physical and digital) in China and the Gulf countries has reinforced authoritarian power and enables new forms of infrastructural violence. Along with the example of transregional infrastructure development it has become clear how physical and digital infrastructures link together authoritarian practices below and beyond the level of the nation-state, fundamentally reshaping the nature of authoritarian rule.

Our analysis has further shown that the infrastructuring of authoritarian power entails both an increased mobility of authoritarian practices – their travelling beyond established notions of context – and highly similar forms of containment along the newly emerging authoritarian production networks (Cowen 2014). The COVID-19 pandemic presented a seemingly technical opportunity for the intensification of transregional authoritarian collaboration between China and the Gulf countries. The authoritarian practices that enable certain infrastructural politics and in turn are also rendered possible by them have no conventional boundaries, but stretch across the entire logistics space. Given that AI technology, which supports tracking apps, is deeply embedded in global flows of capital, this forms a prime example of what Zuboff (2019) pointedly terms the emergence of "surveillance capitalism".

We argue that authoritarian power needs to be analysed not in narrow regime and/or state contexts, but in new contexts such as the transregional authori-

tarian logistics space (Jenss / Schuetze 2021: 83). One of the key analytical advantages of the latter is its openness to forms of political agency that criss-cross established nation-state contexts and its focus on the nature of authoritarian power itself, rather than on the spatial units within which the latter is assumed to manifest. Our discussion of China-Gulf authoritarian entanglements is hence not to be misread as an attempt to provide a comprehensive mapping of all actors involved in practices of surveillance and repression in the Arab Gulf countries or China. Instead, our analysis offers an innovative angle to better bring to light the transregionally connected and co-produced nature of authoritarian power in these two regions. Needless to say, different "Western" public and private actors also drive the development of technologies that are used both to fight COVID-19 and to further reinforce authoritarian power (see also Morgenbesser 2020: 1055).

The empirical snapshots that we have discussed show how digital and physical infrastructures reinforce authoritarian practices in and between the Arab Gulf and China. However, while all infrastructures rearticulate space, territory and time, it is important to recall that infrastructure "does not define political or other outcomes in any deterministic way" (Cupers forthcoming: 4). As infrastructure has become an increasingly popular means for the reinforcement of authoritarian power, we will likely see the emergence of corresponding counter-infrastructures as a new mode of resistance, reminding us of the ambivalences and potentially unintended consequences that are always associated with the reconfiguration of modes of power. Dajani and Mason (2018: 131) have for instance explored "counter-hegemonic water infrastructure" in the Golan Heights, as a response to discriminatory restrictions on the use of water. Whether comparable counter-infrastructures – for instance in the form of digital collaboration among political activists – have already taken shape between China and the Arab Gulf would be an interesting topic for future research. Transregional authoritarian entanglements between various (non-)state actors show that the spaces in which authoritarian power predominantly manifests itself are not necessarily congruent with those in which it is imagined, funded, tested and/or rendered more efficient.

In short, as long as the discussion of authoritarian power remains premised on questionable notions of context that pre-assume authoritarianism's spatial boundedness and uniformity, we will fail to adequately grasp the role of newly emerging transregionally connected forms of political agency in pre-empting dissent, technocratising politics and repressing oppositional activism. A practice approach to authoritarian power and the realisation of mutually reinforcing dynamics between the latter and processes of capital accumulation are crucial first steps for the realisation of authoritarianism's spatial unboundedness and the centrality of transnational corporations in reinforcing authoritarian surveillance and repression.

While the emerging body of transregional or transnational studies has discussed the transnational character of migration (Wimmer / Glick Schiller 2003), knowledge production (Derichs 2017), ongoing colonial entanglements (Boatcă 2020, Lowe 2015), conflict (Graham 2009) and humanitarian response (Ziadah 2019), a conceptualisation of the ways in which the "revolution in logistics" (Attewell 2018: 722) has transregionalised authoritarian power is still in its infancy. The travelling of authoritarian practices is not a one-way street that exclusively leads from China to the Gulf countries or elsewhere. Instead, authoritarian entanglements between China and the Arab Gulf stabilise and enhance authoritarian power in both contexts. Moreover, they are also informed by authoritarian practices originating from democratic regime contexts. The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated what we may call the transregionalisation of authoritarian rule. To better grasp the diversity of actors involved in the latter, more analytical approaches that go beyond the state- and regime-centric literatures are needed to also account for authoritarianism's transregional supply chains and production networks.

References

Aho, Brett / Duffield, Roberta (2020): Beyond Surveillance Capitalism: Privacy, Regulation and Big Data in Europe and China. *Economy and Society* 49(2), pp. 187–212.

Amnesty (2020): Bahrain, Kuwait and Norway Contact Tracing Apps among Most Dangerous for Privacy. Amnesty International, https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2020/06/bahrain-kuwait-norway-contact-tracing-apps-danger-for-privacy/ (accessed 5 February 2021).

Anand, Nikhil / Gupta, Akhil / Appel, Hannah (eds) (2018): *The Promise of Infrastructure*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Appadurai, Arjun (2013): Mission Statement Responses. *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 33(2), pp. 137–139.

Appel, Hannah (2019): *The Licit Life of Capitalism: US Oil in Equatorial Guinea*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Apostolopoulou, Elia (2020): Tracing the Links between Infrastructure-Led Development, Urban Transformation, and Inequality in China's Belt and Road Initiative. *Antipode* 52(3), online first.

Attewell, Wesley (2018): "From Factory to Field": USAID and the Logistics of Foreign Aid in Soviet-occupied Afghanistan. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 36(4), pp. 719–738.

Boatcă, Manuela (2020): Thinking Europe Otherwise. Lessons from the Caribbean. *Current Sociology* 68(6), pp. 389–414.

Bogaert, Koenraad (2018): *Globalized Authoritarianism: Megaprojects, Slums, and Class Relations in Urban Morocco*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Bremmer, Ian (2020): Coronavirus and the World Order to Come. *Horizons: Journal of International Relations and Sustainable Development* 16, pp. 14–23.

Bruff, Ian / Tansel, Burak (2019): Authoritarian Neoliberalism: Trajectories of Knowledge Production and Praxis. *Globalizations* 16(3), pp. 233–244.

Buckley, Peter J. (2020): China's Belt and Road Initiative and the COVID-19 Crisis. *Journal of International Business Policy* 3(3), pp. 311–314.

Can, Kurban / Peña-López, Ismael / Haberer, Maria (2017): What is Technopolitics? A Conceptual Schema for Understanding Politics in the Digital Age. *IDP. Revista de Internet, Derecho y Politica* 24, pp. 3–20.

Chua, Charmaine (2018): Containing the Ship of State: Managing Mobility in an Age of Logistics. PhD thesis, University of Minnesota, USA.

Cowen, Deborah (2014): *The Deadly Life of Logistics: Mapping Violence in Global Trade*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Cupers, Kenny (forthcoming): On the Coloniality of Infrastructure. In: Kenny Cupers / Sophie Oldfield / Manuel Herz / Laura Nkula-Wenz / Emilio Distretti / Myriam Perret (eds): *What is Critical Urbanism?* Zurich: Park Books, pp. 1–23.

Dajani, Muna / Mason, Michael (2018): Counter-infrastructure as Resistance in the Hydrosocial Territory of the Occupied Golan Heights. In: Filippo Mega / Erik Swyngedouw (eds): *Water, Technology and the Nation State*. Abingdon: Routledge, pp. 131–146.

Demmelhuber, Thomas / Gurol, Julia / Zumbraegel, Tobias (2022): The Corona Temptation? Autocratic Linkages in Times of a Global Pandemic. In: Jan Völkel / Zeina Hobaika / Lena-Maria Möller (eds): *Arab Countries and the COVID-19 Pandemic: Impact, Implications, and Future Prospects*. London et al.: Routledge, pp. 19–35.

Derichs, Claudia (2017): *Knowledge Production, Area Studies and Global Cooperation*. London: Routledge.

Diamond, Larry J. / Plattner, Marc F. / Walker, Christopher (eds) (2016): *Authoritarianism Goes Global: the Challenge to Democracy. A Journal of Democracy Book*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Glasius, Marlies (2018a): Extraterritorial Authoritarian Practices: A Framework. *Globalizations* 15(2), pp. 179–197.

Glasius, Marlies (2018b): What Authoritarianism Is … and Is Not: A Practice Perspective. *International Affairs* 94(3), pp. 515–533.

Graham, Stephen (2009): Cities as Battlespace: The New Military Urbanism. *City* 13(4), pp. 383–402.

Greene, Robert / Triolo, Paolo (2020): Will China Control the Global Internet via its Digital Silk Road? Carnegie Endowment, https://carnegieendowment.org/2020/05/08/will-china-control-global-internet-via-its-digital-silk-road-pub-81857 (accessed 7 October 2020).

Greitens, Sheena C. (2020): Surveillance, Security, and Liberal Democracy in the Post-COVID World. *International Organization*, online first, pp. 1–22.

Greitens, Sheena C. (2020): Dealing with Demand for China's Global Surveillance Exports. Brookings Report, https://www.brookings.edu/research/dealing-with-demand-for-chinas-global-surveillance-exports/ (accessed 15 December 2020).

Gurol, Julia / Zumbrägel, Tobias / Demmelhuber, Thomas (2022): Elite Networks and the Transregional Dimension of Authoritarianism: Sino-Emirati Relations in Times of a Global Pandemic. *Journal of Contemporary China,* online first. https://doi.org/10.1080/10670564.2022.2052444

Hammond, K. A. (2019): Reconfiguring Geopolitics in the Era of the Surveillance State: The Uyghurs, the Chinese Party-State, and the Reshaping of Middle East Politics. Hoover Institution, https://www.hoover.org/research/reconfiguring-geopolitics-era-surveillance-state-uyghurs-chinese-party-state-and-reshaping (accessed 13 June 2022).

Hanieh, Adam (2018): *Money, Markets, and Monarchies: The Gulf Cooperation Council and the Political Economy of the Contemporary Middle East*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Hasenkamp, Miao-Ling Lin (2020): *China and Autocracy Political Influence and the Limits of Global Democracy: Political Influence and the Limits of Global Democracy*. London: I. B. Tauris.

Heath, Ryan (2020): China's Tech Authoritarianism too Big to Contain. Politico, https://www.politico.com/news/2020/11/20/chinas-tech-authoritarianism-438646 (accessed 2 December 2020).

Ho, Selina (2020): Infrastructure and Chinese Power. *International Affairs* 96(6), pp. 1461–1485.

Jenss, Alke / Schuetze, Benjamin (2021): Rethinking Authoritarian Power: The Logistics Space and Authoritarian Practices in and between Secondary Port Cities of the Global South. *International Studies Quarterly* 65(1), pp. 82–94.

Jones, Marc O. (2020): *Political Repression in Bahrain*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Khalili, Laleh (2018): The Infrastructural Power of the Military: The Geoeconomic Role of the US Army Corps of Engineers in the Arabian Peninsula. *European Journal of International Relations* 24(4), pp. 911–933.

Kumar, Udaya (2013): Mission Statement Responses. *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 33(2), pp. 150–152.

Kurki, Milja (2020): Coronavirus, Democracy and the Challenges of Engaging a Planetary Order. *Democratic Theory* 7(2), pp. 172–179.

Larkin, Brian (2013): The Politics and Poetics of Infrastructure. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 42, pp. 327–343.

Levine, Peter (2020): Theorizing Democracy in a Pandemic. *Democratic Theory* 7(2), pp. 134–142.

Levitsky, Steven / Way, Lucan A. (2010): *Competitive Authoritarianism: Hybrid Regimes after the Cold War*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Linz, Juan J. (2000): *Totalitarian and Authoritarian Regimes*. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers.

Lowe, Lisa (2015): *The Intimacies of Four Continents*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Lührmann, Anna / Maerz, Seraphine F. / Grahn, Sandra / Alizada, Nazifa / Gastaldi, Lisa / Hellmeier, Sebastian / Hindle, Garry / Lindberg, Staffan I. (2020): Autocratization Surges. Resistance Grows. Democracy Report 2020. Varieties of Democracy Institute (V-Dem), https://www.v-dem.net/media/filer_public/de/39/de39af54-0bc5-4421-89ae-fb20dcc53dba/democracy_report.pdf (accessed 1 December 2020).

Marczak, Bill (2020): A Breej too Far: How Abu Dhabi's Spy Sheikh Hid His Chat App in Plein Sight. Medium, https://medium.com/@billmarczak/how-tahnoon-bin-zayed-hid-totok-in-plain-sight-group-42-breej-4e6c-06c93ba6 (accessed 11 January 2021).

Massey, Doreen (1991): A Global Sense of Place. *Marxism Today* 38, pp. 24–29.

Mitchell, Timothy (1991): The Limits of the State: Beyond Statist Approaches and their Critics. *The American Political Science Review* 85(1), pp. 77–96.

Morgenbesser, Lee (2020): The Menu of Autocratic Innovation. *Democratization* 27(6), pp. 1053–1072.

Mozur, Paul (2019): One Month, 500,000 Face Scans: How China is Using A.I. to Profile a Minority. The New York Times, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/04/14/technology/china-surveillance-artificial-intelligence-racial-profiling.html (accessed 11 January 2021).

O'Donnell, Guillermo (1999): *Counterpoints: Selected Essays on Authoritarianism and Democratization*. Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press.

OECD (2019): Promoting Quality Infrastructure Investments in the MENA Region. MENA-OECD Competitiveness Programme, https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=2ahUKEwjx847V-afvAhXfAmMBHcLeAOMQFjACegQIARAD&url=-https%3A%2F%2Fwww.oecd.org%2Fmena%2Fcompetitiveness%2Fconcept-note-on-quality-in-frastructure.pdf&usg=AOvVaw2zjCZu0MZxCjtvtjAxzehf (accessed 11 March 2021).

Rajagopalan, Megha (2019): Facial Recognition Technology is Facing a Huge Backlash in the US. But Some of the World's Biggest Tech Companies Are Trying to Sell it in the Gulf. Buzzfeed News, https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/meghara/dubai-facial-recognition-technology-ibm-huawei-hikvision (accessed 16 December 2020).

Rapeli, Laura / Saikkonen, Inga (2020): How Will the COVID-19 Pandemic Affect Democracy? *Democratic Theory* 7(2), pp. 25–32.

Rudolf, Moritz (2021): China's Health Diplomacy during Covid-19. German Institute for International and Security Affairs, https://www.swp-berlin.org/fileadmin/contents/products/comments/2021C09_ChinaHealthDiplomacy.pdf (accessed 15 March 2021).

Schuetze, Benjamin (2017): Simulating, Marketing, and Playing War: US-Jordanian Military Collaboration and the Politics of Commercial Security. *Security Dialogue* 48(5), pp. 431–450.

Standardization Administration of People's Republic of China (2020): National Standardization Work Plan for China in 2020. Standardization Administration of People's Republic of China, http://www.gov.cn/zhengce/zhengceku/2020-03/24/5494968/files/cb56eedbcacf41bd98aa286511214ff0.pdf (accessed 1 December 2020).

Star, Susan L. (1999): The Ethnography of Infrastructure. *American Behavioral Scientist* 42(3), pp. 377–391.

Verma, Raj (2020): China's Diplomacy and Changing the COVID-19 Narrative. *International Journal: Canada's Journal of Global Policy Analysis* 75(2), pp. 248–258.

Wang, Hongying (2011): China's Image Projection and Its Impact. In: J. Wang (ed.): *Soft Power in China*. Palgrave Macmillan Series in Global Public Diplomacy. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 37–56.

Wimmer, Andreas / Glick Schiller, Nina (2003): Methodological Nationalism, the Social Sciences, and the Study of Migration: An Essay in Historical Epistemology. *International Migration Review* 37(3), pp. 576–610.

Xu, Xu (2020): To Repress or to Co-opt? Authoritarian Control in the Age of Digital Surveillance. *American Journal of Political Science* 65(2), pp. 309-325. https://doi.org/10.1111/ajps.12514

Zhao, Suisheng (2021): Rhetoric and Reality of China's Global Leadership in the Context of COVID-19: Implications for the US-led World Order and Liberal Globalization. *Journal of Contemporary China* 30(128), pp. 1–16.

Ziadah, Rafeef (2019): Circulating Power: Humanitarian Logistics, Militarism, and the United Arab Emirates. *Antipode* 51(5), pp. 1684–1702.

Zou, James / Schiebinger, Londa (2018): AI Can Be Sexist and Racist. It's Ttime to Make it Fair. Nature, https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-018-05707-8?source=post_page-----817fa60d75e (accessed 20 July 2020).

Zuboff, Shoshana (2019): *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism: The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power*. London: Profile Books.

IQAS Vol. 53 / 2022 ii, pp. 251–277

The Brazil-China Nexus in Agrofood
What Is at Stake in the Future of the Animal Protein Sector

John Wilkinson, Fabiano Escher, Ana Garcia

Abstract

For over a decade China has supplanted Europe as the principal stimulus for the production and export of soy from Brazil, overwhelmingly in the form of whole beans rather than meal. Medium-term projections, whether from the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) or Brazil's Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Supply (MAPA), suggest that this dynamic will continue, while China's Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs (MARA) forecasts are somewhat more modest. In this article, a range of new factors are taken into account, which point to a more uncertain future. These include: Brazil's alignment in the US-China trade war and the tensions this is creating both diplomatically and within the soy sector itself; the measures China is adopting to diversify its agricultural commodity supply bases; China's increasing commitment to global climate goals; the impact of food innovation and consumer trends on global meat consumption; and the policies China is putting into place to increase domestic capacity. All these factors, it is argued, may call into question the current dynamism of the Brazil-China soy nexus over the medium term, with the unintended consequence of easing of the pressure on Brazil's fragile Cerrados and Amazon ecosystems.

Keywords: Brazil, China, soy nexus, diplomacy, trade, climate commitments, global meat innovation, consumption, food security

Introduction

Many publications have analysed the extraordinary expansion of soy production in Brazil and the central role of Chinese demand in that expansion over the last two decades.[1] Various aspects of this dynamic have been examined, with particularly important contributions coming increasingly from Chinese scholars.[2] Among the issues of direct relevance to our present contribution are:

John Wilkinson, Department of Development, Agriculture and Society, Federal Rural University of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil; jhn.wlknsn@gmail.com. Fabiano Escher, Department of Development, Agriculture and Society, Federal Rural University of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil; escher_fab@hotmail.com. Ana Garcia, International Relations Institute, Pontifical Catholic University of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil; anasaggioro@puc-rio.br.

DOI 10.11588/iqas.2022.2.13950

the composition of Brazilian soy exports within the context of the downgrading and reprimarisation debates; Chinese strategies for establishing increasing control over the soy complex; the modernisation of the Chinese agrofood system; conflicts over the sustainability of soy on the Brazilian agricultural frontier; and the issues soy poses as a key component of the animal protein dietary transition and food security. While the Brazil-China soy nexus has been recognised to be complex and conflict-ridden, the idea that it will remain central to the global agrofood system over the medium and long term is a view that has been reinforced by global projections of demand and Brazilian projections of its capacity to respond to that demand.

The above issues are revisited in the course of this article but are now analysed in light of a very changed conjuncture that has become evident over the last five years or so. In the next section, we look again at the consolidation of the Brazil-China soy nexus and the debate on "downgrading", as Brazil's exports shift from soybean meal to whole soybeans. This is followed by a discussion of the way in which global conventions on sustainability and climate change are now influencing trade relations and the extent to which China is aligning itself with these initiatives. Next, we explore the shifts in the relationship between trade and diplomacy and the extent to which China is responding through efforts to diversify its supply bases and lessen its dependence on both Brazil and the United States. New developments in both food innovation and consumption trends, which may modify current projections of animal protein demand in the medium to long term, are examined in the section that follows. Finally, we look at measures that China is taking with regard to its own animal protein sectors and that may also modify future soy demand.

The article evaluates the extent to which sustainability, food security and geopolitics/diplomacy may be shifting some of the parameters of the Brazil-China soy nexus, with China lessening its dependence on both Brazil and the United States and increasingly aligning its trade policies with climate and sustainable development goals. It also analyses the extent to which actors in Brazil are taking these factors into account and the likely impacts this may have on the advance of the Brazilian soy frontier into the native vegetation and the forests of the Cerrados and the Amazon. While any one factor cannot be singled out as decisive, the combined tendencies identified in the body of the article lead us to suggest that the dynamic of Brazil's soy frontier may be less long lived than imagined. Given that there is no other commodity cluster on the same scale as the soy-meat complex, this would open up opportunities for the promotion of alternative forms of occupation of these strategic biomes.

1 Cf. Oliveira / Schneider 2016, Oliveira 2017, Schneider 2017, McKay et al. 2017.

2 Cf. Escher / Wilkinson 2019, Escher et al. 2018, Wilkinson et al. 2016, Zhang 2020, Zhang 2018, Yan et al. 2016.

Brazilian soy and the shift of trade from Europe to China

By the mid-1990s the new agricultural frontier in Brazil's savannah regions, from the centre of the country towards the direction of the Amazon, was already dedicated to cattle and above all soy. EMBRAPA, Brazil's national agricultural research institute, had adapted soy varieties to this latitude and in 2003 the Brazilian government legalised the use of transgenic seeds that, along with glyphosate-resistant varieties, were now combined with a new method of "direct planting" that simplified farming methods and enabled production at scales unimaginable in the south of the country, soy's original location.[3] China's demand for soy was already beginning to make itself felt, but Europe initially remained the principal market for Brazilian soy, with an increasing preference for soybean meal rather than whole soybeans, as European crushing operations began downsizing.

However, European demand for soy started to slow in response to changes in demographic and income factors. Food imports were relaxed following China's entry into the WTO at the end of 2001, and in 2002 China redefined soy as an industrial input and therefore not subject to the self-sufficiency goals reserved for grains. By the middle of the 2000s the dynamic of Brazil's soy trade had totally changed both in intensity, direction and profile, dominated by China's demand for soybeans to be crushed there to supply its domestic market with oil and meal (Escher / Wilkinson 2019, Oliveira 2017, Schneider 2017).

Analyses from the global value chains (GVC) literature at this time identified a shift in commodity trade from South-North to South-South, which was seen to be accompanied by a process of "downgrading", with China demanding raw materials whereas commodity trade with Europe had been associated with increasing levels of value added (Kaplinsky et al. 2010, Wilkinson / Rocha 2009, Menezes / Bragatti 2020). This has now become an issue in Brazil and negotiations with China are underway for a phytosanitary agreement that would facilitate soy meal exports. The shift to a soy export profile based almost exclusively on whole beans, however, would seem to be equally a consequence of the Brazilian tax reform, the Kandir Law, put in place in 1996, which lifted the export tax on primary commodities. The data show that this had an immediate impact and already in the late 1990s the export of soybean meal declined sharply in favour of whole beans (Table 1).[4] The motive for the tax law here was

3 In fact, transgenic soy had been planted since the mid-1990s via imported clandestine seeds, known as "Maradona" seeds, from Argentina where commercialisation was authorised in 1996.

4 Whereas the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) data for exports includes only soybeans, the Brazilian Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Supply (MAPA) provides disaggregated data for the soy complex as a whole. In 2020, according to MAPA, Brazil exported 74.9% of total soy production, but if only soybeans are considered, the percentage drops to 61.5%, figures slightly higher than those of the USDA. Disaggregation is important because it captures the continued importance of Brazil's soy crushing industry and of domestic demand for its globally competitive meats industry, which depends on soy for meal and feed to the animals.

Table 1: Brazil's soy complex exports by product and destination, 1997–2020

Year	Soy Complex (MMT)	Beans (%)	Meal (%)	Oil (%)	China (%)	EU (%)	Others (%)
1997	18,924	41.2	52,9	5,9	9,4	69,6	21,1
1998	20,979	43.8	49,7	6,5	11,4	68,7	19,9
1999	20,761	42.4	50,2	7,5	4,0	72,8	23,2
2000	21,922	52.5	42,6	4,9	8,7	68,8	22,7
2001	28,578	54.8	39,4	5,8	11,2	68,4	20,3
2002	30,401	52.5	41,2	6,4	14,6	63,0	22,4
2003	35,953	55.3	37,8	6,9	18,5	58,5	22,9
2004	36,138	53.0	40,0	7,0	18,2	56,3	25,5
2005	39,377	56.6	36,5	6,8	19,0	54,7	26,3
2006	39,616	62.8	31,1	6,1	27,8	48,3	23,9
2007	38,473	61.5	32,4	6,1	27,3	49,5	23,2
2008	39,089	62.7	31,4	5,9	32,1	48,3	19,6
2009	42,389	67.3	28,9	3,8	39,1	41,6	19,3
2010	44,294	65.6	30,9	3,5	45,2	35,1	19,7
2011	49,039	67.2	29,2	3,5	46,4	32,2	21,4
2012	48,945	67.2	29,2	3,6	48,4	31,7	19,9
2013	57,488	74.4	23,2	2,4	57,2	24,6	18,2
2014	60,710	75.3	22,6	2,1	54,5	24,7	20,9
2015	70,819	76.7	20,9	2,4	58,1	19,7	22,2
2016	67,276	76.7	21,5	1,9	57,7	19,7	22,6
2017	83,667	81.5	16,9	1,6	64,7	15,2	20,1
2018	101,332	82.2	16,5	1,4	67,9	13,2	18,9
2019	91,787	80.7	18,2	1,1	63,4	15,6	21,0
2020	101,040	82.1	16,8	1,1	60,2	16,6	23,3

Source: Compiled by the authors based on MAPA 2021

a macro-economic concern with promoting exports to improve the balance of payments in hard currency, rather than a sectoral strategy (Lemos et al. 2017).

The shift from meal to whole beans is better seen, therefore, as a convergence between macro-economic interests in Brazil, China's preference for processing in situ both for meal and for its edible oils market, and a global restructuring

of the soy complex around the Chinese market. Committed now to dependence on global markets, China's food security policy has become harnessed to its broader "going out" policy, and to varied strategies for establishing active control not only over trade, but over the whole global value chain involving soy and from there extending to further components of the animal protein sector, for which soybeans (meal) supply valuable feed (Schneider 2017, Sharma 2014). It should also be remembered that while soy occupies a central place, China's need for agricultural imports extends increasingly to other key staples (wheat, corn, rice and fish) and to non-food crops (cotton, tobacco, wood and pulp), as well as more recently to higher value products such as meat, milk products and wines, which have been outsourced to preserve grain self-sufficiency (Zhang 2018).

Different strategies on the part of China to ensure food security have prevailed at different times, including investments in agricultural lands, which have been widely opposed as "land grabbing" and have led to restrictive legislation in a number of key agricultural countries, including in Brazil, where such laws were specifically motivated by fears of Chinese investments (Oliveira 2017, McKay et al. 2017). On other occasions, large-scale contracts for entire harvests have been negotiated, often unsuccessfully as in both Brazil and Argentina, but also successfully in the case of wheat from the Ukraine (Wilkinson et al. 2016). A constant has been the provision of infrastructural investments – transports, energy, ports – that might involve greater direct control of supply chains or more generally improve the conditions of supply from different agricultural frontiers. In addition to its investments in port facilities in Brazil, Chinese firms such as the China Communications Construction Company (CCC) are participating in auctions for the construction of railways linking the soy frontier to Brazil's northern ports.

The extent of China's ambitions can be gauged by its interest in the construction of a roadway linking Brazil to ports in the Pacific, together with an earlier interest shown in the construction in Nicaragua of an alternative to the Panama Canal. Rather than seeing these different strategies as evolving over time, Zhang (2018) identifies the same mix but sees them as depending on the nature of the firms involved – state firms, private "dragon head" firms, firms at the local state level and state farm enterprises. As we will see below, Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) investments are opening up potential new sources of agricultural supply along China's borders with Central Asia. In terms of direct control, China's most important strategy has been that of direct foreign investment, usually via the purchase of established leading companies. The most important initiatives in the case of soy have been the purchase of Nidera and Noble by COFCO International, Fiagril by Hunan Dakang, a unit of the Shanghai Pengxin Group, and the purchase of Syngenta by ChinaChem. This, in addition to investments in ports, gives China a presence in all the stages of the supply chain

in Brazil and the Southern Cone countries. COFCO now challenges the leadership of the "Big Four" global traders – Archer Daniels Midland Co., Bunge Ltd, Cargill Inc. and Louis Dreyfus Co., known collectively as the ABCD (an acronym formed from the first letters of their names) – in this region. Syngenta Argentina has also entered, via barter arrangements with its agrichemical inputs, into the marketing of soy directly through the leading Chinese State trading firm, Sinograin (Escher / Wilkinson 2019, Wesz Jr. 2016, Oliveira / Schneider 2016, Wilkinson et al. 2016).

China's ambitions are not limited to greater control over strategic agricultural commodities but involve a global challenge to the hegemony of the ABCD traders. This can be seen in the reestablishment of a large measure of control over the crushing industry in China, which had been virtually taken over by ABCD players in the wake of a crisis bankrupting many domestic crushing firms (Solidaridad 2016). As a logical extension of its concern for control over soy, China is also establishing a strong footing directly in the meats sector, especially in the pig supply chain, both in Argentina and the United States, as its domestic production has been decimated by swine fever and continues to be at risk, as well as for beef in the case of Australia. China is also looking to challenge the control of the Chicago Futures Market and the pricing mechanisms which still favour the Big Four, through increasing barter arrangements, greater physical control of the global supply chains, efforts to extend the convertibility of the yuan and initiatives such as the Asia Pacific Futures Exchange, in the case of palm oil.

Radical changes have also occurred on the Brazilian side of the soy complex, as exports to China have dwarfed those to Europe and other countries, accounting in 2020 for more than 70% of Brazil's soybean exports. In the twenty years of the new millennium, Brazil's soy production increased from 38.3 to 134 million tonnes, and productivity increased from 2.75 tonnes/hectare to 3.50 tonnes/hectare. On top of this important increase in productivity, the area cultivated with soy also increased from 13 to 38 million hectares.

By 1998 the new savannah frontier was producing more soybeans than the traditional soy producing regions in Brazil's south and was expanding more rapidly (CONAB, 2020). In the Cerrados, the small and medium family farm model of the south – organised around cooperatives – was partially reproduced, but as lands further north were cleared this model gave way to the predominance of large farmers often cultivating thousands and even tens of thousands of hectares and marketing their product with the Big Four traders or negotiating directly on the futures market (Pereira 2016). In the most recent phase, with China also showing interest in land investments in Brazil, agricultural firms quoted on the stock exchange have been primarily responsible for opening up soy production in the savannah regions of the north and northeast (Wilkinson et al. 2016).

The scale of soy operations in the Cerrados and the importance of their export revenue for the balance of payments – in 2020 soy exports reached the value of US$35.2 billion, without which Brazil's trade balance would have been negative – has allowed for the emergence of powerful new farmers' organisations, especially the APROSOJA, which, as we will discuss below, aligned itself with the current Bolsonaro Government. The scale of operations in the Cerrados has allowed for significant on-farm accumulation, leading to the emergence of agribusiness groups that have expanded backwards and forwards along the value chains – without, however, becoming more than junior partners to the global traders (Pereira 2016, Wesz Jr. 2019).

Conflicts have always characterised this expansion of the soy frontier – over the use of transgenics, the environment, indigenous populations and lands, food security implications of an agricultural frontier dedicated to exports, and the promotion of a development model unable to create employment and diversify production. The most significant mobilisation, however, was that against the encroachment of the soy frontier into the Amazon. Even before the new Forestry Law, international NGOs and the global traders agreed to a Soy Moratorium, which since 2006 has banned the trading of soy produced in recently deforested areas.[5] This agreement has been implemented and effectively monitored and, although limited to soy, became a significant factor in the reduction of deforestation. The focus, however, was the Amazon, and the advance of the soy frontier into the Cerrados remained largely undisturbed and strongly supported by Federal Governments and policies during this period (Wilkinson 2011).

The shift in the axis of the global soy trade towards China had profound effects on both Brazil and China. For China, as will be explored further below, control of the soy supply chain is a key component of a larger strategy for negotiating its structural and growing dependence on out-sourcing for its raw material needs in general and for securing food security in particular. The downgrading of Brazil's soy exports from meal to whole beans was, as we have seen,

5 The new Forestry Law (Law No. 12.651/2012), which replaced the previous Forestry Code (Law No. 4.771/1965), changed the metrics of the main existing legal instruments – Permanent Preservation Areas (APPs) and Legal Reserves (RL) – and enacted new instruments for environmental management and for monitoring and combating illegal deforestation: the Rural Environmental Registry (CAR), which certifies the environmental regularisation of rural properties, and Environmental Reserve Quotas (CRAs), which allow for the creation of markets for environmental assets and liabilities. Since 2009, the proposed revision of the code has been marked by conflicts and debates involving, on the one hand, parliamentarians, ruralists and agribusinesses with productivist discourses and, on the other, environmentalists, scientists and NGOs with preservationist arguments, in addition to the government itself. In practice, the approval of the new law entailed the "amnesty" of fines and sanctions resulting from illegal deforestation carried out before 2008, which mainly favoured large landowners, and the exemption, especially for smallholders, from the obligation to restore deforested areas. Furthermore, there are numerous questions about the state's capacity, in terms of infrastructure and human resources, to oversee and facilitate the implementation and enforcement of the law, as well as differences in the application of federal and local rules and norms. These are seen as sources of insecurity in the legal order of environmental protection and causes of the erosion of the social function of the private property of land. The strength of those who refuse to comply with the law, given the constant delays and deadline extensions for its application, have contributed to the increase in deforestation since 2012, which has further accelerated with the current "dismantling" of environmental policy (Rajão et al. 2021, Silva et al. 2016).

the result of a convergence of at least three factors – Brazil's tax exemption for the export of raw materials, the global shift in the axis of demand that led to a relocation of the global traders' investments to crushing facilities in China, and China's interest in processing soybeans both for edible oils and for meal for its domestic market. China's concern was not so much with the specific issue of concentrating the value added of trade within its borders, but with the broader issue of control over global supply chains, which were now decisive for its long term goal of food security.

In the first decade of this century, sustainability concerns in the agrofood sector were focused on the impact of sugarcane biofuels, and a diplomatically successful campaign was launched to establish the sustainability of Brazil's ethanol, supported by a commitment not to encroach on the Amazon region and the acceptance of a zoning policy for sugarcane that had to respect areas of native vegetation and conservation (Wilkinson / Herrera 2010). The soy sector and the Cerrados frontier were largely untouched by these concerns in this period. This was to change with the repercussions of the RIO+20 Summit in 2012, when Brazil committed itself to the goal of sustainable development. At the same time, coinciding with Xi Jinping's assumption of the presidency in 2013, China also began to shift its international position on the question of sustainable development. For both countries, the BRICS position of "differentiated responsibilities" now gave way to clear commitments to the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the Paris Agreements, issues to which we now turn (Estevo 2019, Kuhn 2019).

Trade and sustainability

We have seen how, in the case of Brazilian soy at least, the association of a shift in trade from Europe to China, with downgrading, needs to be qualified and situated in a broader context, including Brazilian domestic policies and global agribusiness restructuring. It might be thought that this shift would also lead to less pressure for the adoption of environmental and climate change measures in the soy supply chain. Brazil and China, within the framework of the BRICS, rejected the view that the onus of climate change should be assumed by developing countries. This reluctance to assume international commitments on climate change was evident in China's role at the Copenhagen Summit on Climate Change in 2009 (Conrad 2012). Brazil's soy trade with Europe, on the other hand, was always subject to tensions, whether over transgenics or soy production in the Amazon.

China was exposed from the outset to the emergence of the international sustainability paradigm through its participation in the inaugural Stockholm

meeting in the 1970s, although at that time it flatly rejected any commitments that would prejudice development (Wang et al. 2014). Nevertheless, from the 1970s, protection of the environment acquired institutional status in the form of bureaus and national agencies in China and became enshrined in law. In 1990, the notion of sustainable development was adopted, and in the wake of Rio92 China prepared its Agenda 21 (Barbieri 2019).

By 2004, some 160,000 officials were working in China's Environmental Agency (Mol / Carter 2006). Conrad (2012) analyses this tension between an increasing adoption of sustainable goals in national policy and China's reluctance to commit itself to binding international agreements. Domestically, China committed itself to changing its fossil-based energy model: in the 12th Five Year Plan (2011–2015) it established for the first time the goal of emissions reductions, later transformed into concrete targets in the 13th Five Year Plan (2015–2020). In 2015, with Xi Jinping now in charge, China, in the absence of the United States, assumed a leadership position at CP21, Paris, where it committed China to peaking carbon emissions by 2030, and to a reduction of per capita carbon emissions by 60–65% in 2030 compared with 2005 (CCICED 2016).[6]

Following the Copenhagen Climate Change Conference in 2009, the European Union, individual European countries and global firms focused on cleaning the global supply chains of carbon emissions (European Commission 2019). The New York Declaration on Forests was launched in 2012, and by 2017 had been endorsed by 40 countries, 20 sub-units of countries, 57 global firms, 16 indigenous peoples and 65 NGOs/CSOs, which committed themselves to halving natural forest loss by 2020 with the goal of its complete elimination by 2030. Neither Brazil nor China signed this Declaration (Climate Summit 2014). The TRASE satellite and advanced technology tracking organisation was set up to assist firms and countries in identifying with precision the carbon footprint of different commodity chains, with a special focus on the issue of deforestation. In Brazil, TRASE has been able to identify, at the municipality level, individual flows of soy to their various purchasers, whether countries or firms. It has identified illegal deforestation in Brazilian soy production at the level of micro regions and has also carried out full life-cycle assessment of carbon footprints for soy for the imports of different countries and firms, allowing for detailed estimation of emissions (TRASE 2020a, 2020b, 2020c).

6 By the time of writing of this article, China's commitments for the Climate Summit in Glasgow 2021 were not public. Nevertheless, the Chinese government has announced a number of specific climate initiatives, such as the creation of a national carbon emissions trading market, a reduction in the operation of its steel plants, and the suspension of the construction of a large coal-chemical project within China. Cf. https://www.carbonbrief.org/china-briefing-8-july-2021-xi-invited-to-cop26-largest-coal-chemical-project-suspended-new-authority-for-climate-roadmap (accessed 20 July 2021); Eleonor Albert: Introducing China's Carbon Market. *The Diplomat,* 22 July 2021.

Specifically, in the case of China, TRASE has carried out studies demonstrating how it could decouple its Brazilian soy imports from carbon emissions based on deforestation, and in a similar study has identified the hidden deforestation in the China-Brazil beef and leather trade – this latter of particular importance, since China exports leather products to Europe (TRASE 2019, 2020c). The shift in Chinese policy towards a formal commitment to carbon emissions goals occurs precisely when Chinese firms, such as COFCO International, are establishing a leading position in the Brazilian soy complex via direct investments in established firms and investments in storage, transport and ports, together with direct contracting of soy with Brazilian farmers. In 2018, COFCO was second only to Bunge in its Brazilian soy purchases (Wesz Jr. 2019). COFCO has quickly aligned itself with the leading agribusiness associations in Brazil (the Brazilian Agribusiness Association, ABAG, and the Brazilian Vegetable Oils Industry, ABIOVE), and has positioned itself in favour of the Soy Moratorium from recently deforested areas. In a keynote speech to ABAG in 2019, COFCO's President focused almost exclusively on the need for sustainability and has set as a goal the elimination of deforestation from its suppliers by 2023.[7]

The issue of deforestation took a new turn in Brazil with the coming into force of the Forestry Code in 2012 and the later election of Bolsonaro, who was politically aligned with the soy producers' association, APROSOJA. As has been widely reported in the world press, the Bolsonaro government reneged on Brazil's commitments under the 2015 Paris Agreements, encouraged deforestation and mining activities in the Amazon region, shackled Brazilian bodies dedicated to controlling illegal activities in the Amazon, and attempted to discredit Brazilian institutions mapping deforestation. The Minister of the Environment, for his part, immediately blocked the Amazon Fund financed by the Norwegian and German governments and managed by the Brazilian National Development Bank (BNDES), which was a leading source of financing for social and environmental programmes in the region – largely promoted by NGOs demonised by the Bolsonaro government.[8]

APROSOJA – which along with ABIOVE, was a member of the Round Table on Responsible Soy (RTRS), a soy certification scheme organised by the World Wildlife Foundation (WWF), but left this organisation because of disagreement precisely over deforestation – is the principal organisation representing Brazilian

7 The visibility and reach of the BRI initiative have also been factors in China's adoption of global sustainability conventions; see Harlan 2020 and Hughes 2019. Harlan 2020 raises the issue of green washing in relation to BRI. The broader commitment to an "ecological civilisation" has led various authors to argue that while the environment is an externality, and therefore a cost, in Western economic theory, this is not the case in Chinese thought, where nature and humans are seen to form a continuum (Boyer 2017, Jullien 2018). Also on the notion of ecological civilisation, Geall / Ely 2018 show how discourses themselves influence the pathways to sustainability that are adopted

8 As an alternative, the Ministry of the Environment received US$500 million in funding from the BRICS-led New Development Bank for the Climate Fund in 2019. Cf. https://www.ndb.int/fundo-clima-brazil-national-climate-fund-project/ (accessed 10 August 2021).

soy farmers and is present in all the regions of soy production. As an alternative to RTRS, it has promoted a Soja Plus certification, based on the adoption of "good practices" and is very active in the promotion of training programmes. This organisation allied itself with the Bolsonaro government and is equally virulently opposed to the influence of NGOs in the soy chain, given their leading role in the Soy Moratorium. It has focused on the new situation created by the Brazilian Forestry Code to attack both the established Soy Moratorium, mentioned above, and the campaigns on deforestation. Prior to the Forestry Code there was no distinction between legal and illegal deforestation, and it was in this context that the global traders, pressured by the international NGOs Greenpeace and Friends of the Earth and the Brazilian NGO IMAFLORA, agreed to a moratorium on the purchase of any soy cultivated on land deforested after 2006. With the application of the Forestry Code, many farmers within already established soy producing regions in the Cerrados, who have forests on their farms in excess of the demanded reserve area, can now legally cut them down.

Of the established traders, only Cargill signed up to the New York Declaration on Forests, although Wilmar, a Singapore trader very active in the Chinese market and now trading in Brazil, is also a signatory (Climate Summit 2014). Nevertheless, the traders, including COFCO International, as we have seen, are increasingly committing to deforestation goals. The pressure on the soy sector has now firmly moved to the Cerrados, with the launching of the Cerrados Manifesto in 2017 against deforestation and the conversion of native vegetation, originally signed by 23 global industries in retail, fast food and final foods (Virah-Sawmy et al. 2019). The investor network FAIRR, which promotes ESG awareness in relation to the animal protein industry and has some 160 companies as members representing a value of ca. US$23 trillion, has also supported this Manifesto. The traders are not involved in this initiative, but their alignment on issues of deforestation has led APROSOJA to break with both the Brazilian Agribusiness Association (ABAG) and the Brazilian Vegetable Oils Industry Association (ABIOVE), which are accused of being "infiltrated" by international NGOs (Canal Rural 2020).

This opposition to NGOs flies in the face of the stakeholder approach to global governance, which has become established over the last few decades, and both the New York Declaration and the Cerrados Manifesto are joint initiatives of governments, firms and civil society organisations, including in the former of these two cases representatives of indigenous communities. As China – a country where civil society organisations are often harassed when not suppressed – has moved towards specific targeted goals in relation to carbon emissions, it too has called on environmental NGOs, both international (WWF, Greenpeace, FSC) and domestic (Friends of Nature), to help in the elaboration of measurement and monitoring metrics (CCICED 2016). Although, as we have noted, China is not a signatory to either of the above initiatives, it

is increasingly committed to greening its global value chains in the framework of carbon emissions reductions. Sinograin, a leading Chinese state agricultural commodity trading firm, is the first to be certified by the Round Table on Responsible Soy (Solidaridad 2016). In 2016, the China Council for International Cooperation on Environment and Development, created in 1992 with support from the highest levels of the Chinese Communist Party, produced a Report on "China's Role in Greening Global Value Chains". The Report contains a specific section on soy in Brazil and South America. After noting that "250 multinational companies have committed to eliminating deforestation from their supply chains", it concludes:

> Joining global efforts on soy would strengthen China's reputation on the international stage, its relations with producing countries, and the competitiveness of Chinese companies in the global market. It would also reduce China's contribution to climate change – deforestation from expansion of soy and other major commodities accounts for more than 10% of global emissions. (CCICED 2016: 9)

When questioned about pressure from European governments and firms to commit to the elimination of deforestation from the soy value chains, the APROSOJA President pointed out that Europe only accounts now for 10% of Brazil's exports and that exports to Europe could easily be terminated and substitute markets opened up. What this approach does not take into account, however, is the increasing convergence of China with global trends on the importance of eliminating deforestation as a key component in strategies for achieving the already established targets for carbon emissions reduction (Kuhn 2018, Greeven et al. 2020).

Trade, diplomacy and China's initiatives to diversify its feed and animal protein supplies

In the first years of the 2000s there was a clear convergence between the increasing importance of China as a trade destination for Brazil and the intensification of diplomatic relations between the two countries.[9] With the beginning of the first of Lula da Silva's two periods in government, Brazil's diplomacy became geared to establishing a leadership role in the developing world, and relations with China, which Lula visited three times, became consolidated through the creation in 2004 of the COSBAN, a high-level China-Brazil concertation and cooperation body coordinated by the Vice-Presidents of each country. The acronym BRIC was coined in 2001, identifying the emergence of large rapidly developing countries. Brazil, Russia, India and China quickly assumed this iden-

9 The diplomatic relations between Brazil and China date to the 1970s, and by the early 1990s a "strategic partnership" had already been established between the two countries.

tity and China promoted the inclusion of South Africa as a "gateway to Africa", forming the BRICS, to represent the leading emerging economies across the globe (Bond / Garcia 2015; Ramos et al. 2018, Garcia 2019).

Even in this period, however, Brazil was acutely aware of the imbalances in its trade with China, both globally in its export of agricultural and mineral commodities in exchange for manufactured goods and increasingly high technology imports, and within the agricultural sector in the dominance of soybeans. In 2008, Brazil launched the "Agenda China" document, which focused on the need to increase the technology content and the share of manufacturing in its exports (Berringer / Belasques 2020).

The world financial crisis of 2008, which badly affected the Brazilian sugarcane sector, the discovery of large reserves of petroleum in Brazil's "pre-salt" oil fields and global civil society opposition to biofuels undid Brazil's green development strategy. Government corruption scandals and the subsequent undermining of Brazil's leading construction and mining companies weakened the country's international presence and diminished cooperation projects. Rather than promoting development in the Nacala savannah in Mozambique, as had been planned with the ProSavana development Project, Brazilian soy and cattle farmers preferred to move further north and northeast on the Brazilian agricultural frontier, opening up what became known as the Matopiba region (Garcia / Kato 2020, Schlesinger 2013). At the same time, with the accession of Xi Jinping, China launched the One Belt One Road (OBOR) initiative, later renamed BRI, which completely dwarfed previous international cooperation on development initiatives and positioned China as a direct challenge to the US on the global stage.

The election of Bolsonaro as President of Brazil created a dramatically different context. Already as a candidate, Bolsonaro raised the concern that China was "buying up" Brazil (Spring 2018) and chose as Minister of Foreign Affairs a person who in a similar vein repeated "while we want to sell, for example, soy and iron ore, we are not prepared to sell our soul" (Araújo 2019: 88), at a time when Chinese firms were almost alone in their willingness to invest in Brazil.[10] At the same time, in agreement with the President, the newly installed Minister of the Environment called into question Brazil's international commitments on climate change, systematically undermined efforts to prevent deforestation and weakened the organs responsible for monitoring and policing illegal incursions into the Amazon. In addition, the Bolsonaro government allied

10 In the oil field auction of 2018 for the pre-salt region, two Chinese oil multinationals (CNOOC and CNODC) were the only foreign companies to participate (Rosa 2019). An important survey conducted by the China-Brazil Business Council showed that, despite the adverse political environment, the total amount of Chinese investments in Brazil actually increased by 117% in the first year of Bolsonaro's administration. In the last 13 years (2007–2020), Brazil has received almost half of total Chinese investments in South America (48%), involving 176 projects totaling US$ 66.1 billion. The main target sector has been electricity, followed by oil and gas and minerals. Agriculture comprises only 3% of total Chinese direct investments during this period (Cariello 2020).

itself with the US Trump administration, which had already initiated a trade war with China.

The Bolsonaro government broke with the consensus on Brazil's foreign policy with China, which despite cultural and ideological differences had traditionally been treated pragmatically since the 1970s, whatever the political alignments (Santoro 2020). Criticisms of China include fears of unfair competition and concerns about national security and cultural identity. Bolsonaro's nationalist right-wing base is composed of the military, which tends to support traditional relations with China, and the far-right "anti-globalist" groups, similar to populist movements in the US and Europe, which tend to create tensions through public statements resembling the positions on China expressed by Donald Trump.[11]

Despite these tensions, Brazil's vice-president and other state ministers made official visits to China in the first year of the Bolsonaro administration, and the president himself made a state visit to China and participated in G20 and BRICS meetings (MRE 2021).[12] On all these occasions, the interests of agribusiness have been reinforced, particularly the need to diversify and add value to Brazilian exports to China, given the excessive concentration on primary products. At the same time, bilateral partnership has been expected to ensure food security through the promotion of free trade flows in agricultural products. Different diplomatic agreements have been signed, of which the most notable were the health protocols for the export of heat-processed beef and for the export of cotton bran (MRE 2019b).[13]

Thus, despite tensions and contradictions between domestic groups and political orientations in the relationship with China, there has been an intense dialogue between the Brazilian Foreign Affairs Ministry and Brazil's agribusiness sector with a view to maintaining the continuity of diplomatic initiatives with the Asian nation. Agribusiness interests became firmly installed in Bolsonaro's government in the Ministry of Agriculture, whose Minister also led a delegation to China. A Department for the Promotion of Agribusiness (DPAGRO) was set

11 In line with Donald Trump and other global far-right figures, they reproduce social media posts with accusations of 5G as a technology for spying, the designation of the coronavirus as a "Chinese virus" and xenophobic expressions in relation to Chinese people.

12 In 2019, the first year of the Bolsonaro administration, Vice President Hamilton Mourão visited China for the 5th Plenary Session of COSBAN, where the Vice Presidents of both countries reaffirmed the need to diversify and add value to Brazilian exports to China. Additionally, the Minister of Agriculture, Livestock and Supply and the Minister of Mines and Energy visited the country. In that same year, Chinese authorities came to Brazil for the Brazil-China Global Strategic Dialogue (DEG) and different preparatory meetings for the BRICS heads of state summit in November 2019, when president Xi Jinping visited Brazil (MRE 2019a).

13 According to MAPA (2019), China imported US$25 million in processed beef and US$4 million in cotton bran for animal feed. In addition to the intergovernmental agreements, other agreements have been established between economic groups, such as the joint-venture contract between Frigorífico Minerva and Joey Foods (MRE 2021), and the Memorandum of Understanding between Embrapa and the Innovative Academy of Seed Design (INASEED) for the creation of joint laboratories for genetic research in soybean cultivation. According to MAPA, research will be carried out on germplasm characterisation, genome editing and functional genetics in soybean cultivation (MAPA 2019).

up in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and priority was given to agribusiness international fairs (MRE 2020a). Echoing the 2008 "Agenda China", the National Confederation of Agriculture (CAN) issued a document "The Future is Agro (2018–2030)", which reiterates the need to diversify Brazil's agribusiness export profile.[14] This position was also reinforced in a recent document launched by the Brazil-China Business Council, which states that, despite "complementarity and co-dependence", the excessive concentration of the trade agenda on a small number of basic commodities is not in the best interests to either China or Brazil (Rosito 2020).[15] In this sense, the diversification of trade in general, and agricultural trade in particular, becomes a goal in the diplomatic negotiations with China.

At the same time, Brazilian agribusiness seeks to maintain an image associated with sustainability, environmental preservation and a food supply system guaranteed to be safe. Deforestation, environmental deregulation and the widely reported fires in the Amazon and the Pantanal weakened this image in the first two years of the Bolsonaro government, with negative impacts on agribusiness international trade negotiations.[16] To address this concern, the Brazilian Embassy in the UK promoted a series of webinars on the theme "AgriSustainability Matters" in an attempt to offset the extremely negative images of the Amazon fires and the advance of deforestation (MRE 2020b).[17] As China tends to increasingly embrace the environmental agenda in its development processes, entities representing agribusiness seek to prepare for coming changes, with the

14 According to the CNA, Brazil's participation in the Chinese market, although important, is still unsatisfactory and highly concentrated on a few products, particularly soybeans. Concentration on soybeans and the lack of a long-term strategic partnership between China and Brazil was seen to have contributed to China's adoption of protectionist measures against Brazilian products, such as the sugar safeguard and the anti-dumping measures against chicken meat. Therefore, this entity demands a "strategic vision to diversify exports to China, decreasing the excessive concentration on the soybean chain and with the addition of new products in the export tariff" (CNA 2018: 68–69).

15 Although Brazil has a trade surplus with China, it is characterised by asymmetry and, at the same time, complementarity. While China exports diversified manufactured products to Brazil, Brazil's exports are highly concentrated in three products: soybeans, oil and iron ore, which accounted for circa 80% of exports over the last ten years. China, for its part, concentrates more than half of the world's crushing capacity, which would demonstrate the limits of the attempt to add value through crushing in Brazil (Rosito 2020: 93).

16 According to ABAG, the image of agribusiness has been damaged – associated with deforestation and fires, indigenous issues and agrochemicals – and is linked to the policies of the Bolsonaro government. Brazil is no longer a leader on environmental issues and is no longer part of any international commission related to the world's socio-environmental agenda. In this sense, the "Brazil brand" has become weakened (ABAG 2020). For ABAG's president, "agribusiness needs to speak (differently)", which requires "changes in foreign policy, public commitments, purchasing policies and, above all, correct, scientific and timely communication" in order to respond to the socio-environmental concerns of today's society (Brito 2020).

17 The Bolsonaro government has clashed with Europe and particularly France over deforestation in the Amazon and its association with the advance of soy into that region. France, in particular, is now committed to increasing its self-sufficiency in soy. We have already seen that APROSOJA regards the European market as of little importance, but the much more important free trade agreement signed between the Mercosur countries and the European Union includes a specific chapter on sustainability and ties trade to compliance with deforestation commitments. While the soy market may have become less important to Brazil, access to the European market as a whole is quite another question.

expectation of increasing environmental demands along the soy and meat chain, as already exist in relations with European countries (Wachholz / Dutra 2021).[18]

China depends on just two countries, Brazil and the United States, for 80% of its soy. When US President Trump placed tariffs on a range of Chinese imports, China retaliated with a prohibitive tariff on soy from the US. As a result, Brazilian farmers became virtually the sole source of supply. In this situation, the rising diplomatic tensions between the US and China, coupled with the latter's complete dependence on Brazilian soy, led to a bonanza for Brazil's soy farmers, reinforcing their support for Bolsonaro. At the same time, unexpected purchases of soy from the US by Brazilian firms, although in small quantities, pointed to the difficulty of supplying the domestic market in light of the huge demand for exports to China, which raised fears of domestic shortages of vegetable oils and animal feed in Brazil. While China then reached a level of agreement with the US, the tensions over trade represent the beginnings of what portends to be a long struggle for global economic and political power.

Zhang (2020) has drawn attention to the dangers for China of using food as a weapon in trade wars. In the trade dispute with the US, China was able to draw on extra supplies from Brazil, but this involved increased prices at a time when food inflationary pressures were already high as a result of the swine fever, which destroyed as much as a third of the total stock of pigs in China. It was also possible to link the extra demand for Brazilian soy with pressures to advance the soy frontier into the Amazon, identifying China with deforestation. What is clear is that China is now taking measures to diversify supplies both of feed and of meats. Syngenta and Sinograin contracted to supply 4.0 million tonnes of soy from Argentina in 2021. Argentina is also the source of increasing pork exports to China.

In 2019, 10 plants were authorised to export to China, and in 2020, a contract with a value of US$3.8 billion was signed to build 25 more plants with a view to producing 900,000 tonnes of pork exclusively for export to China (Pig Progress 2020). Kenya and Tanzania are also reported to be exporting soy to China, and China has called for a "soybean alliance" with Russia (SCMP 2020). In the context of the BRI, "China has signed 120 bilateral and multilateral agreements on food trade and agricultural cooperation with over 60 countries and international organizations" (Zhang 2020: 71–72). Zhang (ibid.: 72) further argues that "by the end of 2018, China had accumulated overseas direct agricultural investment of US$19 billion, with Chinese agribusinesses operating in more than one hundred countries".[19]

18 Wachholz and Dutra (2021) contend that Chinese political leaders and consumers are increasingly aware of climate change and the preservation of biodiversity, making environmental protection a driving force for industrial and energy modernisation. In this regard, Chinese banks and companies like COFCO tend increasingly to adopt sustainability criteria in projects and relations with direct producers.

19 Zhang (2018) draws attention to the extraordinary nature of China's measures against soy in the trade war with the US, given its overriding concern with food security and the fact that soy, key to China's dietary transition, is the product on which it is most dependent for imports. If China is prepared to take such action against the US today, can Brazil exclude the possibility of similar action tomorrow?

Recognising that it is now dependent on global supplies for an increasing range of foodstuffs, from grains to meat, dairy and other products, China, particularly through the BRI, is diversifying its supply lines and lessening its dependence on individual countries. Soy and animal protein are key here and although these initiatives will not replace China's dependence on the US and Brazil, when combined with the measures discussed above for direct control over the soy supply chain, especially in Brazil and Argentina, they may lead to a greater capacity for negotiation both of physical demand and especially of prices. If we combine these measures with further tendencies to lower the level of demand for animal protein and to promote innovations in China's domestic food production systems, the prospects for Brazilian soy and the other components of the animal protein sector may seem less "optimistic" than current projections predict. We discuss both these issues in the next two sections.

Food policy, food innovation and food consumption: Implications for the animal protein sector

Whether we look to the projections of the Brazilian government (MAPA 2021), those of the Brazilian Industry for Vegetable Oils (ABIOVE 2018) or the Chinese government's China Agricultural Outlook (MARA 2020), all consider future demand for soy and animal protein on the basis of broad demographic and income variables. They do not take into account the changed dynamic of innovation in the agrofood sector, the indications of major shifts in consumer demand or the increasing intervention of public policies aimed at reducing meat consumption. Many individual examples of public policy aimed at reducing per capita meat consumption may be cited and are evident in the nutritional guidelines now adopted by many countries (Yang et al. 2018). Perhaps the most significant development in this sense was the publication of the Lancet Commission Report in 2019, whose aim is to establish targets for food consumption in the light of the SDG goals and the Paris Agreements, which mirror the targets for emissions reductions now adopted by over 190 countries (Willet et al. 2018). The EAT-Lancet Commission Report calls for a "Great Food Transformation", which in the case of red meats would require a 50% reduction in consumption by 2050. The Chinese President, Xi Jinping, has called for a similar reduction in meat consumption in the case of China. This would lead to a proportionate decline in the demand for animal feed, relieving pressure on the advance of the agricultural commodity frontiers (Pan 2020).

The last decade and a half have seen a wave of innovations in food based on advances in synthetic biology and big data, led not by traditional agribusiness interests but by Silicon Valley style start-ups financed by investment funds and venture capital and addressing food from the perspective of a global, in-

creasingly urban, society. Alternatives to meat are at the centre of these innovation concerns. Big data analysis of vegetable proteins (and soy is no longer the default option) has been able to identify the tastes, smells and functional properties that approximate those of meat, and vegetable protein alternatives for ground meats (burgers, nuggets) have now gone mainstream. Beyond Meat, one of the leading vegetable protein firms, was launched on Nasdaq in 2019 and is valued at US$9 billion. This sub-sector raised US$1 billion in funding in 2019 (AgFunder 2020).

"Clean meat"– cell-cultured meat using cells drawn from living animals – is also at an advanced stage of research and close to marketing. Singapore has taken the lead in regulating the use of such meats and a restaurant there has now included it on the menu. The think tank RethinkX (Tubb / Seba 2019) in its report *Rethinking Food and Agriculture: 2020–2030* argues that we are moving into a second domestication of animals and plants that is occurring now not at the level of macro-organisms, whole plants and animals, but through the direct manipulation of micro-organisms responsible for the production of proteins and amino acids, the building blocks of other nutrients. The report argues that food research is now integrated into the digital world of innovation as regards scale and costs and predicts a collapse of the traditional dairy and meat industry by the middle 2030s and a concomitant collapse in the animal feed and input industries. It remains to be seen how swiftly innovation in cultured meats will advance. A more cautious report by Choudhury et al. (2020), "The Business of Cultured Meat", highlights the persistence of technological, regulatory and customer acceptance challenges but notes that since the first laboratory grown, cellular meat burger patty was created in 2013, some 32 clean meat companies have been identified and that publicly disclosed capital invested in clean/cultivated meat companies between 2015–2020 reached US$320 million.

In 2017, China invested US$300 million in Israeli laboratory meat technology companies, indicating a clear belief in the future of cultured meat (Surkes 2017). If we consider the "innovative food" category, according to the Agfunder (2020) "AgriFoodTech Investment Report", which includes cultured meat and plant-based proteins, finance reached US$2.3 billion in 2020, involving 260 deals.

One of the most remarkable developments in the new millennium has been the rise of vegetarianism, veganism and especially flexitarianism. The British Food Standards Agency commissioned a report on the "Future Consumer: Food and Generation Z" (Britain Thinks 2019), which reported a study of 2,000 people in supermarkets throughout Britain, of which 35% declared they were cutting down on meat consumption, 21% considered themselves flexitarian, 9.5% vegetarian and 3% vegan. Similar tendencies have been reported across Europe. An article in the *New York Times* by Londoño (2020) stated that alternative vegetarian "meat" options have now gone mainstream in Brazil, a country famous for its meat-eating culture.

In the 1960s, per capita meat consumption in China was less than 5 kilos. Since the economic reforms meat consumption has exploded and is now calculated at 63 kilos per capita, with over half of this dedicated to pork (Campbell 2021). Today, the discussion increasingly turns to the notion of "peak" meat, with 2015–2016 seeing an unprecedented two-year decline in pork consumption in China (GRO-Intelligence 2016), and there is discussion of a similar peak in beef consumption (Fickling 2019).

Since then, the combination of swine fever and COVID-19 has clouded any clear tendencies in meat consumption. A China Briefing report, on the other hand, has shown that the plant-based-meat market has been growing at an annual rate of 14.3%, well above even China's high rates of economic growth (Percy 2019). Its market for plant-based meat was valued at US$10 billion by Euromonitor International (Lai 2021). Surveys comparing consumer perceptions of plant-based and clean meat by country have produced varied results, but a comparative analysis for the United States, India and China showed both Chinese and Indian consumers significantly more open to purchasing clean meat and plant-based meat than their counterparts in the US (Bryant et al. 2019). While the rise of veganism and vegetarianism is important since it provides dynamic niche markets for vegetable protein innovations, the rise of flexitarianism and the tendency for mainstream consumers to cut down on meat consumption suggests that dominant projections of demand over the medium term may well be seriously over-estimated.

China ramps up its domestic production capacity in feed and diversifies trade in meats

In addition to diversifying its supply bases for both feed and meats, promoting policies for cutting meat consumption, supporting innovation in alternative meats and witnessing a sharp increase in vegetarian, vegan and flexitarian eating practices, China has redoubled efforts to increase the productivity of its domestic soy and other cereals, is reconstituting its pork production post swine fever in ever larger agribusiness units, including examples of high-rise farming, and is now investing in transgenics to increase productivity.[20] An important measure that will affect feed demand was the decision to lower the protein content of pig feed by 1.5% and chicken feed by 1%, which it is calculated will save 11 million tonnes of soybean meal or 14 million tonnes of soybeans, and some 4 million hectares of soy (CFIIN 2018, Cowley 2020).

20 The Chinese firm Zhong Xin Kaiwei has constructed a vertical farm for pigs, twenty-six stories high with a slaughter capacity of 1.2 million pigs per year. Muyuan Foods for its part has a similar plant with a capacity for 2.1 million pigs a year (Duarte 2021).

The USDA (2020) projects that soy production in China will increase over the next decade from 9.3 to 10.1 million hectares, with production growing at an annual average of 1.5% from 17.7 to 19 million tonnes. Soy yields, it is calculated, may increase from 1.91 to 1.96 tonnes per hectare in this same period, compared with a range of between 3.4 and 3.7 tonnes per hectare for Brazil and the US. Total consumption of soy in China, however, is estimated to increase from 104.3 to 132.6 million tonnes, a 27% increase. On this calculation, imports will grow at an annual rate of 2.8%, from 86.1 to 112.5 million tonnes, a 30.7% increase. The USDA concludes, therefore, that China's soy imports will remain relatively stable with an upward trend from 83% to 85% of total consumption by 2029. The Chinese Agricultural Outlook, published by the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs (MARA 2020), has a more optimistic projection of China's domestic soy production. The expected annual growth rate is 2.1%, expanding from 18.1 to 22.2 million tonnes, a 22.7% increase.

These expectations are based on a set of government policies laid out in the new round of its Soybean Revitalisation Plan, which includes the promotion of new varieties and cultivation techniques. According to this view, total soy consumption is expected to grow at an average annual rate of 1.6%, from 102 to 119.8 million tonnes, a 15% increase, with the conclusion that imports should grow at an average annual rate of 1.2% from 92.5 to 99.5 million tonnes, only a 7.6% increase. In this scenario, dependence on soy imports will also remain relatively stable but with a somewhat decreasing trend, in contrast to the USDA's projections.

China's greater optimism coincides with its own development of genetically modified (GM) varieties of soy (and of other food and feed crops), and its advances in the regulation of plant varieties (USDA 2020a). China has grown GM cotton since 2006, and a GM papaya variety since the late 1990s. GM corn and rice varieties, for their part, have received biosafety certificates for test trials but have not yet been allowed for commercial production. In 2019, biosafety certificates were granted for GM corn and soybean varieties developed by Beijing Dabeinong Technology Group Co Ltd, by Hangzhou Ruifeng Biotech Co Ltd, Zhaijiang University and Shanghai Jiaotong University.

Dabeinong had its GM soy seeds authorised for commercialisation in Argentina in 2019, and in 2020 China authorised the import of this GM soy for industrial use in China (Global Times 2020). If we add to this the role that Syngenta can now play, it is clear that China is planning to harness GMs to its goal of increasing domestic production and productivity. In a detailed analysis of the Chinese seed industry, Gaudreau (2019) argues that China's central concern now is to ensure that the GM seed market in China is controlled by domestic firms and Chinese global players.

China has still not recovered from the swine fever that decimated its stocks. According to USDA (2021) data, China's pig stocks declined from 441.6 million

head in 2018 to 428 million in 2019 and to 310.4 million in 2020. At the same time, the trade war with the United States led China to increase the tariffs on pigs and shift trade to other suppliers. We have already seen above the huge investments underway in Argentina specifically geared to the Chinese market. Germany, Canada (which also exported 4.8 million tonnes of canola to China in 2019, a product that competes with soy) and Spain are now also looking to the Chinese market. Although China is restructuring its pig production and accelerating this sector's industrialisation, it is now increasing its relative imports of meat products, which will also lead to a corresponding decline as animal feed in the demand for soy.

Concluding remarks

Since its decision to outsource the production of animal feed and its subsequent membership in the WTO, China has been continuously balancing its fundamental concern for food security with its increasing dependence on global resources and the global market. Chinese demand even at modest percentages has periodically sent tremors through an agricultural commodity market designed for much lower levels of demand. In terms of a single product, China's greatest demand has been for soy, and for this it has had to depend on only two players, the United States and Brazil. From the outset it has rejected passive dependence on the market and has attempted in varied manners to establish its own control of the global soy and meat supply chains. Land purchases, direct contracts and above all the growth in market share of Chinese traders, inputs suppliers and crushers, have all been put into practice to challenge the control over global markets by the traditional ABCD traders.

China's efforts to diversify sources of supply began with the new millennium as, in parallel with Brazil, it engaged in programmes of international cooperation. With the launching of the BRI, the strategies for diversifying supplies assumed a qualitatively new dimension, expressed in the huge number of bilateral and multilateral trade agreements (Zhang 2018). The involvement of food (soy) in the trade war with the US, which led China to an exclusive dependence on Brazil in a context of heightened diplomatic tensions, has certainly accelerated strategies within China to further lessen this dependence (Zhang 2020). The diversification of supply lines to include Argentina, Russia and to a much lesser extent Tanzania and Kenya,[21] and certainly in the future the countries integrated into the BRI and the RCEP, are a key component in this strategy but will not free China from dependence on the Americas (Zhang 2020, Makarov

21 China's declared objective of investing in Africa and transferring agricultural technology is not to promote exports but to increase production in Africa, which will in its turn relieve pressure on global agricultural commodity markets (Zhang 2020).

2018). In this light, the range of other measures that we have identified – increased domestic productivity, decline in the protein percentage of animal feed, promotion of alternatives to meats and policies to cut meat consumption – are equally important for China's overall food security strategy. Together, they may be sufficient to relativise the current strategic, almost monopolistic role, that soy plays in China's protein economy.

Sooner than long-term projections of demand suggest, Brazil's soybean exports may run into more turbulent waters, as demand slackens and prices become less attractive. This may be just what Brazil needs to reduce the pressures for deforestation and encroachment on the Amazon. It may also provide the needed stimulus for the adoption of more diversified farming systems in the Cerrados and for the recovery of the region's native vegetation. However, the present conviction that the demand for Brazil's soy will continue indefinitely and the current government's freeing of regulatory and institutional restraints on the expansion of agribusiness investments threaten the destruction of these biomes before global demand for these products weakens.

References

ABAG (2020): Imagem Ambiental do Brasil no Mercado Externo pode Impactar o Agronegócio no Longo Prazo. ABAG, 19 November 2020, https://abag.com.br/imagem-ambiental-do-brasil-no-mercado-externo-pode-impactar-o-agronegocio-no-longo-prazo/ (accessed 20 January 2021).

AgFunder (2020): 2020 Farm Tech Investment Report. AgFunder, https://agfunder.com/research/2020-farm-tech-investment-report/ (accessed 20 January 2021).

Araújo, Ernesto (2019): *A Nova Política Externa Brasileira. Seleção de Discursos, Artigos e Entrevistas do Ministro de Relações Exteriores*. Brasília: Fundação Alexandre Gusmão. http://funag.gov.br/biblioteca/download/anovapolextbras.pdf (accessed 20 January 2021).

Barbieri, Marcelo D. (2020): Sociedade Civil, Estado e Questão Ambiental na China. Doctoral thesis, Institute of Philosophy and Social Sciences, University of Capinas, Brazil.

Berringer, Tatiana / Belasques, Bruna (2020): As Relações Brasil-China nos Governos Lula e Dilma: Burguesia interna e Subordinação Conflitiva. *Carta Internacional* 15(3), pp.151-173. https://doi.org/10.21530/ci.v15-n3.2020.1078

Bond, Patrick / Garcia, Ana S. (eds) (2015): BRICS: *An Anti-capitalist Critique*. Johannesburg: Jacana Media.

Boyer, Robert (2017): Les Théories Économiques Contemporaines à l´Épreuve de la Trajectoire Chinoise. *Revue de la Régulation. Capitalisme, Institutions, Pouvoirs* 21(1). https://doi.org/10.4000/regulation.12319

Brito, Marcelo (2020): O Agro Precisa Falar (Diferente). Abag, 12 February 2020, https://abag.com.br/o-agro-precisa-falar-diferente-marcello-brito/ (accessed 20 January 2021).

Bryant, Christopher / Szejda, Keri / Parekh, Nishant / Deshpande, Varin / Tse, Brian (2019): A Survey of Consumer Perceptions of Plant-Based and Clean Meat in the USA, India and China. *Frontiers in Sustainable Food Systems* 3(11), pp.1-11. https://doi.org/10.3389/fsufs.2019.00011

Campbell, Charlie (2021): How China Could Change the World by Taking Meat Off the Menú. Time 2030, 3 January 2021, https://time.com/5930095/china-plant-based-meat/ (accessed 20 January 2021).

Canal Rural (2020): Aprosoja Rompe com Abag: "Estão Difamando a Imagem do Agro". Canal Rural, https://www.canalrural.com.br/noticias/agricultura/soja/aprosoja-rompe-abag-imagem-agro/ (accessed 21 January 2021).

Cariello, Tulio (2020): Investimentos Chineses no Brasil. Histórico, Tendências e Desafios Globais (2007–2020). Conselho Empresarial Brasil-China, https://www.cebc.org.br/2021/08/05/investimentos-chineses-no-brasil-historico-tendencias-e-desafios-globais-2007-2020/ (accessed 18 August 2021).

CCICED – China Council for International Cooperation on Environment and Development (2016): China's Role in Greening Global Value Chains. *China Council for International Cooperation on Environment and Development. CCICED Special Policy Study Report*. Beijing: CCIED. https://cciced.eco/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/2016-Special-Policy-Study-on-Greening-Global-Value-Chains.pdf (accessed 28 August 2020).

CFIIN – China Feed Industry Information Network (2018): China Feed Industry Association Issues Group Standards for Low Protein Compound Feed for Pigs and Chickens. CFIIN, www.chinafeed.org.cn (accessed 21 January 2021).

Choudhury, Deepak / Tseng, Ting Wei / Swartz, Elliot (2020): The Business of Cultured Meat. *Trends in Biotechnology* 38(6), pp. 573-577. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tibtec.2020.02.012

Climate Summit (2014): New York Declaration on Forests. Declaration and Action Agenda. New York: UN Headquarters. https://www.landportal.org/library/resources/new-york-declaration-forests-declaration-and-action-agenda (accessed 20 October 2020).

CNA – Confederação Nacional da Agricultura (2018): O Futuro é Agro (2018-2030). Plano de Estado. CNA e Conselho do Agro, https://www.cnabrasil.org.br/assets/arquivos/bibliotecas/Plano-de-Estado-Completo-21x28cm-WEB-12-09.pdf (accessed 20 January 2021).

CONAB – Companhia Nacional de Abastecimento (2020): Acompanhamento da Safra Brasileira. Brasília: CONAB. https://www.conab.gov.br/info-agro/safras (accessed 18 December 2020).

Conrad, Björn (2012): China in Copenhagen: Reconciling the Beijing Climate Revolution and the Copenhagen Climate Obstinacy. *The China Quarterly* 210, pp. 435–455. https://doi.org/10.107/S0305741-012000458

Cowley, Cortney (2020): Reshuffling in Soybean Markets Following Chinese Tariffs. *Economic Review* 105(1), pp. 5–30. https://doi.org/10.18651/ER/v105n1Cowley

Duarte, Daniel A. (2021): China Conclui Fazenda Vertical Mais Alta do Mundo para Suínos. www.canalrural.com.br/china-conclui-fazenda-vertical-mais-alta-do-mundo-para-suínos (accessed 21 January 2021).

Escher, Fabiano / Wilkinson, John (2019): A Economia Política do Complexo Soja-Carne Brasil-China. *Revista de Economia e Sociologia Rural* 57(4), pp. 656–678. https://doi.org/10.1590/1806-9479.2019.191017

Escher, Fabiano / Schneider, Sergio / Ye, Jingzhong (2018): The Agrifood Question and Rural Development Dynamics in Brazil and China: Towards a Protective "Countermovement". *Globalizations* 15(1), pp. 92–113. https://doi.org/10.1080/14747731.2017.1373980

Estevo, Jefferson S. (2019): O Brasil e a China no Âmbito das Mudanças Climáticas: Negociações Internacionais e Políticas Domésticas (2009–2017). *Ideas, Campinas SP* 10, pp. 1–34. https://doi.org/10.20396/ideas.v10i1.8655888

European Commission (2019): EU Communication (2019) on Stepping up EU Action to Protect and Restore the World's Forests. European Commission, Brussels, https://ec.europa.eu/info/publications/eu-communication-2019-stepping-eu-action-protect-and-restore-worlds-forests_en (accessed 21 January 2021).

Fickling, David (2019): We Could Be Approaching Peak Beef. Bloomberg, Europe Edition, 23 November 2019. https://www.bloomberg.com (accessed 4 August 2021).

Garcia, Ana S. (ed.) (2019): *Investimentos da China no Brasil, África do Sul e Índia: Arranjos Institucionais, Atores e Impactos*. Rio de Janeiro: Action Aid.

Garcia, Ana / Kato, Karina (2020): A Road to Development? The Nacala Corridor at the Intersection between Brazilian and Global Investments. In: Vishwas Satgar (ed.): *BRICS and the New American Imperialism: Global Rivalry and Resistance*. Johanesburg: Wits University Press, pp. 105–123.

Gaudreau, Matthew (2019): Constructing China's National Food Security: Power, Grain Seed Markets, and the Global Political Economy. PhD Thesis, Global Governance, University of Waterloo, Ontario, Canada.

Geall, Sam / Eli, Adrian (2018): Narratives and Pathways towards an Ecological Civilization in Contemporary China. *The China Quarterly* 236, pp. 1–22. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0305741018001315

Global Times (2020): China Approves Import of Chinese GM Soybeans for the First Time. Global Times, 28 June 2020. https://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1192850.shtml (accessed 28 January 2021).

Harlan, Tyler (2020): Green Development or Greenwashing? A Political Ecology Perspective on China's Green Belt and Road. *Eurasian Geography and Economics* 63(2), pp. 202–226. https://doi.org/10.1080/15387216.2020.1795700

Hughes, Alice C. (2019): Understanding and Minimizing Environmental Impacts of the Belt and Road Initiative. *Conservation Biology* 33(4), pp. 883–894. https://doi.org/10.1111/cobi.13317

Jullien, François (2018): *La Pensée Chinoise*. Paris: Gallimard.

Kaplinsky Robert J. / Tijaja, Julia / Terheggen, Anne (2010): What Happens When the Market Shifts to China? The Gabon Timber and Thai Cassava Value Chains. Policy Research Working Paper 5206, World Bank Group. https://doi.org/10.1596/1813-9450-5206

Kuhn, Berthold M. (2018): China's Commitment to the Sustainable Development Goals: An Analysis of Push and Pull Factors and Implementation Challenges. *China Political Science Review* 3(2), pp. 359–388. https://doi.org/10.1007/s41111-018-0108-0

Lai, Kassandra (2021): What Are the Key Drivers Behind China´s Growing Plant-based Meat Market? Lynk, 7 July 2021, https://lynk.global/insights/what-are-the-key-drivers-behind-chinas-growing-plantbased-meat-market (accessed 1 August 2021).

Lang, Tim / Vermeulen, Sonja / Garnett, Tara / Tilman, David / DeClerck, Fabrice / Wood, Amanda / Jonell, Malin / Clark, Michael / Gordon, Line J. / Fanzo, Jessica / Hawkes, Corinna / Zurayk, Rami / Rivera, Juan A. / De Vries, Wim / Sibanda, Lindiwe Majele / Afshin, Ashkan / Chaudhary, Abhishek / Herrero, Mario / Agustina, Rina / Branca, Francesco / Lartey, Anna / Fan, Shenggen / Crona, Beatrice / Fox, Elizabeth / Bignet, Victoria / Troell, Max / Lindahl, Therese / Singh, Sudhvir / Cornell, Sarah E. / Reddy, K. Srinath / Narain, Sunita / Nishtar, Sania / Murray, Christopher J. L. (2019): Food in the Anthropocene: the EAT-Lancet Commission on Healthy Diets for a Sustainable Food System. *Lancet Commissions* 393 (10170), pp 447–492. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(18)31788-4

Lemos, M. L. Freitas / Guimarães, Diego D. / Maia, Guilherme B. S. / Amaral, Gisele F. (2018): Agregação de Valor na Cadeia da Soja. *BNDES Setorial* 46, pp. 167–217.

Londoño, Ernesto (2020): Brazil is Famous for its Meat but Vegetarianism is Soaring. *New York Times*, 27 December 2020, https://www.nytimes.com/2020/12/26/world/americas/brazil-vegetarian.html (accessed 21 January 2021).

Makarov, Igor A. (2018): Russian-Chinese Cooperation in Agriculture. *Problems of Economic Transition* 60(4), pp. 286–306. https://doi.org/10.1080/10611991.2018.1497276

MAPA – Ministerio da Agricultura, Pecuária e Abastecimento (2021): *Agrostat*. Brasília: MAPA. http://indicadores.agricultura.gov.br/agrostat/index.htm (accessed 20 January 2021).

MAPA – Ministério da Agricultura, Pecuária e Abastecimento (2019): Brasil Assina Acordos Sanitários para Exportação de Carne Processada e Farelo de Algodão. MAPA, 25 October 2019, https://www.gov.br/agricultura/pt-br/assuntos/noticias/brasil-assina-acordos-sanitarios-para-exportacao-de-carne-termo-processada-e-farelo-de-algodao-para-a-china (accessed 19 January 2021).

MARA – Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs (2020): *China Agricultural Outlook (2019–2028)*. Beijing: MARA. https://aocm.agri-outlook.cn/weixin/Public/pdfjs/web/viewer_en.html?file=zznyzwbg2020en.pdf (accessed 28 January 2021).

McKay, Ben M. / Alonso-Fradejas, Alberto / Brent, Zoe W. / Sauer, Sergio / Xu, Yunan (2017): China and Latin America: Towards a New Consensus of Resource Control? *Third World Thematics* 1(5), pp. 592–611. https://doi.org/10.1080/23802014.2016.1344564

Menezes, Roberto G. / Bragatti, Milton C. (2020): Dragon in the "Backyard": China's Investment and Trade in Latin America in the Context of Crisis. *Brazilian Journal of Political Economy* 40(3), pp. 446–461. http://dx.doi.org/10.1590/01/101-31572020-2963

Mol, Arthur P. J. / Carter, Neil T. (2006): China's Environmental Governance in Transition. *Environmental Politics* 15(2), pp. 149–170. https://doi.org/10.1080/09644010600562765

MRE – Ministério das Relações Exteriores (2020a): Diplomacia do Agronegócio. 18 meses de trabalho. Brasília: MRE. https://www.gov.br/mre/pt-br/arquivos/documentos/politica-externa-comercial-e-economica/ProjetoDepartamentoAgroBACKUP2.pdf (accessed 20 January 2021).

MRE – Ministério das Relações Exteriores (2020b): Agrisustainability Matters. London: MRE (Embassy of Brazil in London). http://londres.itamaraty.gov.br/en-us/agrisustainability_matters.xml (accessed 20 January 2021).

MRE – Ministério das Relações Exteriores (2019): Visita de Estado do Presidente da República, Jair Bolsonaro, a Pequim (China), 24-26 October 2019. Brasília: MRE. http://www.itamaraty.gov.br/images/2019/Fact_Sheet_Visita_PR_a_China_out2019.pdf (accessed 21 January 2021).

Oliveira, Gustavo L. T. (2017): The South-South Question: Transforming Brazil-China Agroindustrial Partnerships. PhD Dissertation, Geography, University of California, Berkeley.

Oliveira, Gustavo L. T. / Schneider, Mindi (2016): The Politics of Flexing Soybeans: China, Brazil and Global Agroindustrial Restructuring. *Journal of Peasant Studies* 43(1), pp. 167–194. https://doi.org/10.1080/03066150.2014.993625

Pan, Chenjun (2020): New Opportunities for Animal Protein in China. Rabo Research / Food and Agribusiness, https://www.far.rabobank.com (accessed 20 January 2021).

Percy, Joseph (2019): Is a "Meatless" Revolution Really Underway in China? China Briefing, 21 August 2019, https://www.china-briefing.com/news/is-a-meatless-meat-revolution-really-underway-in-china/#:~:text=Meat%20will%20remain%20extremely%20popular,yet%20to%20sweep%20the%20nation (accessed 19 January 2021).

Pereira, Paulo R. F. (2016): Novos e Velhos Atores na Soja no Centro-Oeste e no Norte do País. Doctoral thesis, Social Sciences, Graduate Program in Development, Agriculture and Society, Federal Rural University of Rio de Janeiro, Rio de Janeiro.

Pig Progress (2020): China Invests in Huge Argentinean Pork Project. Pig Progress, 17 August 2020, www.pigprogress.net/World-of-Pigs1/Articles/2020/8/China-invests-in-huge-Argentinean-pork-project-62-7884E/ (accessed 18 January 2021).

Rajão, Raoni / Giudice, Roberta Del / Van der Hoff, Richard / Carvalho, Erli B. (2021): *Uma Breve História da Legislação Ambiental Brasileira*. Rio de Janeiro: Expressão.

Ramos, Leonardo / Garcia, Ana S. / Pautasso, Diego / Rodrigues, Fernanda (2018): A Decade of Emergence: the BRICS Institutional Densification Process. *Journal of China and International Relations* 6(1), pp. 1–15. https://doi.org/10.5278/ojs.jcir.v0i0.2262

Rosa, Bruna (2019): Estatais Chinesas Chamaram Atenção no Leilão do Pré-sal. Época, 6 November 2019, https://epoca.globo.com/economia/as-estatais-chinesas-que-chamaram-atencao-no-leilao-do-pre-sal-24066343 (accessed 20 January 2021).

Rosito, Tatiana (2020): Base Para Uma Estratégia de Longo Prazo do Brasil para a China. Rio de Janeiro: Conselho Empresarial Brasil-China, https://cebc.org.br/2020/11/26/bases-para-uma-estrategia-de-longo-prazo-do-brasil-para-a-china/ (accessed 20 January 2021).

Santoro, Maurício (2020): The Dragon and the Captain: China in the Perspective of Brazil's Nationalist Right. *Geosul* 35(77), pp. 258–269. http://doi.org/10.5007/2177-5230.2020v35n77p258

Schneider, Mindi (2017): Dragon Head Enterprises and the State of Agribusiness in China. *Journal of Agrarian Change* 17(1), pp. 3–21. https://doi.org/10.1111/joac.12151

Schlesinger, Sergio (2013): Cooperação e Investimentos do Brasil na África: O Caso do Prosavana em Moçambique. Maputo: FASE. https://fase.org.br/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/Caderno_Prosavana_FASE.pdf (accessed 19 January 2021).

SCMP – South China Morning Post (2020): China Calls for "Soybean Industry Alliance" with Strategic Partner Russia. South China Morning Post, 26 August 2020, https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/3098980/china-calls-soybean-industry-alliance-strategic-partner-russia (accessed 30 December 2020).

Sharma, Shefali (2014): *The Need for Feed: China's Demand for Industrialized Meat and Its Impacts*. Washington: Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy. https://www.iatp.org/sites/default/files/2017-05/2017_05_03_FeedReport_f_web_0.pdf (accessed 10 January 2016).

Silva, Ana Paula Moreira / Marques, Henrique Rodrigues / Sambuichi, Regina Helena Rosa (2016): *Mudanças no Código Florestal Brasileiro: Desafios para a Implementação da Nova Lei*. Brasília: IPEA.

Solidaridad (2016): China's Soy Crushing Industry: Impact on the Global Sustainability Agenda. Solidaridad Network, 20 June 2016, https://www.solidaridadnetwork.org/publications/chinas-soy-crushing-industry-impacts-on-global-sustainability-agenda/ (accessed 22 January 2021).

Spring, Jake (2018): Discurso anti-China de Bolsonaro Causa Apreensão sobre Negócios com o País. Reuters, 25 October 2018, https://noticias.uol.com.br/politica/eleicoes/2018/noticias/reuters/2018/10/25/discurso-anti-china-de-bolsonaro-causa-apreensao-sobre-negocios-com-o-pais.htm (accessed 20 January 2021).

Surkes, Sue (2017): China Makes Massive Investment in Israel Lad Meat Technology. The Times of Israel, 17 September 2017, https://www.timesofisrael.com/china-makes-massive-investment-in-israeli-lab-meat-technology/ (accessed 24 January 2021).

TRASE (2019): Hidden Deforestation in the Brazil-China Beef and Leather Trade. Global Canopy, https://globalcanopy.org/insights/publication/hidden-deforestation-in-the-brazil-china-beef-and-leather-trade/ (accessed 28 December 2020).

TRASE (2020): The State of Forest-risk Supply Chains. TRASE, http://resources.trase.earth/documents/Trase_Yearbook_Executive_Summary_2_July_2020.pdf (accessed 28 December 2020).

TRASE (2020a): A Breakthrough in Carbon Footprinting for Agricultural Commodities. TRASE, https://insights.trase.earth/insights/lca (accessed 18 January 2021)

TRASE (2020b): Illegal Deforestation and Brazilian Soy: The Case of Mato Grosso. TRASE, https://insights.trase.earth/insights/illegal-deforestation (accessed 18 January 2021)

TRASE (2020c): China's Exposure to Environmental Risks from Brazilian Beef Exports. TRASE, http://resources.trase.earth/documents/issuebriefs/IssueBrief3_EN.pdf (accessed 22 January 2021).

Tubb, Catherine / Seba, Tony (2019): Rethinking Food and Agriculture: The 2nd Domestication of Plants and Animals, the Disruption of the Cow and the Collapse of Industrial Livestock Farming. RethinkX, www.rethinkx.com (accessed 4 November 2019).

USDA – United States Department of Agriculture (2021): Livestock and Poultry: World Markets and Trade. Washington: USDA, https://apps.fas.usda.gov/psdonline/circulars/livestock_poultry.pdf (accessed 28 January 2021).

USDA – United States Department of Agriculture (2020): USDA Agricultural Projections to 2029. Washington: USDA, https://www.ers.usda.gov/webdocs/outlooks/95912/oce-2020-1.pdf?v=7268.7 (accessed 30 December 2020).

USDA – United States Department of Agriculture (2020a): China: Agricultural Biotechnology Annual. Report Number CH2020. Beijing: USDA, https://www.fas.usda.gov/data/china-agricultural-biotechnology-annual-6 (accessed 28 January 2021).

Virah-Sawmy, Malika / Duran, America P. / Green, Jonathan M. H. / Guerrero, Angela M. / Biggs, Duan / West, Chris D. (2019): Sustainability Gridlock in a Global Agricultural Commodity Chain: Reframing the Soy-Meat Food System. *Sustainable Production and Consumption* 18, pp. 210–223. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.spc.2019.01.003

Wachholz, Larissa / Ligia Dutra (2021): A Agenda Ambiental da China e a Agropecuária Brasileira. Valor Econômico, 18 Janeiro 2021, https://valor.globo.com/opiniao/coluna/a-agenda-ambiental-da-china-e-a-agropecuaria-brasileira.ghtml (accessed 20 January 2021).

Wang, Zhihe / He, Huile He / Fan, Meijun (2014): The Ecological Civilization Debate in China. *Monthly Review* 66(6), pp. 37–59. https://doi.org/10.14452/MR-066-06-2014-10_3

Wesz Jr., Valdemar J. (2016): Strategies and Hybrid Dynamics of Soy Transnational Companies in the Southern Cone. *Journal of Peasant Studies* 43, pp. 1–27. https://doi.org/10.1080/03066150.2015.1129496

Wesz Jr., Valdemar J. (2019): O Mercado da Soja no Sudeste de Mato Grosso (Brasil): Uma Análise das Relações entre Produtores Rurais e Empresas a partir da Sociologia Econômica. *DADOS Revista de Ciencias Sociais* 62, pp. 1–39. https://doi.org/10.1590/001152582019170

Wilkinson, John (2011): From Fair Trade to Responsible Soy: Social Movements and the Qualification of Agrofood Markets. *Environment Planning A* 43, pp. 2012–2026. https://doi.org/10.1068/a43254

Wilkinson, John / Wesz Jr,. Valdemar J. / Lopane, Anna R. M. (2016): Brazil and China: the Agribusiness Connection in the Southern Cone context. *Third World Thematics* 1(5), pp. 726–745. https://doi.org/10.1080/23802014.2016.1259581

Wilkinson, John / Rudi Rocha (2009): Agroindustrial Trends, Patterns and Development Impact. *Agroindustry for Development* 8(17), pp. 46–92. https://doi.org/10.1079/9781845935764.0046

Wilkinson, John / Selena Herrera (2010): Biofuels in Brazil: Debates and Impacts. *The Journal of Peasant Studies* 37(4), pp. 749–768. https://doi.org/10.1080/03066150.2010.512457

Yan, Hairong / Chen, Yiyuan / Ku, Hok B. (2016): China's Soybean Crisis: The Logic of Modernization and its Discontents. *Journal of Peasant Studies* 43(2), pp. 373–395. https://doi.org/10.1080/03066150.2015.1132205

Yang, Yue Xin / Wang, Xiao Li / Leong, Pooi Mun / Zhang, Huan Mei / Yang, Xiao Guang / Kong, Ling Zhi / Zhai, Feng Ying / Cheng, Yi Yong / Guo, Jun Sheng / Su, Yi Xiang (2018): New Chinese Dietary Guidelines: Healthy Eating Patterns and Food-based Dietary Recommendations. *Asian Pacific Journal of Clinical Nutrition* 27(4), pp. 908–913. https://doi.org/10.6133/apjcu072018.03

Zhang, Hongzhou (2020): The US-China Trade War: Is Food China's Most Powerful Weapon? *Asia Policy* 15(3), pp. 59–86. https://doi.org/10.1353/asp.2020.0044

Zhang, Hongzhou (2018): *China's "Rice Bowl": China and Global Food Security*. Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan.

IQAS Vol. 53 / 2022 ii, pp. 279–303

Claiming Space and Contesting Gendered Refugeehood in Exile

Issues and Factors of Rohingya Refugee Women's Civic Engagement in Diaspora

Anas Ansar, Abu Faisal Md. Khaled

Abstract

This article examines the emerging political and social mobilisation of Rohingya women activists in connection with the forced displacement of nearly a million Rohingya from the Rakhine state of Myanmar in August 2017. In exile, a promising number of Rohingya women have become actively engaged in social and political domains that have been historically male-dominated. The findings reveal how the internationalisation and the considerable global attention to the Rohingya refugee crisis have provided the space to navigate traditional gender roles and created an opportunity for Rohingya women to become important civic actors in this relatively nascent diaspora. Varying levels of education, age, technical and linguistic skills, along with diverse opportunities offered by the host countries, impact the (in)ability of Rohingya refugee women to play their part in diaspora activism.

Keywords: Rohingya, Myanmar, refugee women, gender, diaspora, activism, civil society

Introduction

The history of the Rohingya[1] in Myanmar has long been mired in military dictatorship, exclusion from citizenship, ethnic conflict and violence (Kyaw 2017). For decades, systematic marginalisation and protracted human rights violations have resulted in the large-scale forced displacement of the Rohingya population from Myanmar. Their recurring expulsion has progressively created a burgeoning Rohingya diaspora in different parts of Asia, which has expanded globally in recent years, particularly following the latest Rohingya exodus in August 2017 (Ansar 2020).

Anas Ansar, Bonn Center for Dependency and Slavery Studies (BCDSS), University of Bonn, Germany; anas.ansar@uni-bonn.de. Abu Faisal Md. Khaled, Department of International Relations, Bangladesh University of Professionals, Dhaka, Bangladesh; faisal.khaled@bup.edu.bd.

DOI 10.11588/iqas.2022.2.14712

The discourse around the "Rohingya diaspora" is a relatively new phenomenon compared to the longstanding discussion involving Kurdish, Jewish, Tamil, Armenian, Indian and Palestinian diasporas, to name just a few (Marat 2015). To date, nuanced research that has comprehensively evaluated the size of the exiled Burmese Rohingya population remains scarce. Existing data are limited and largely unreliable. At best, information can be collected from diverse sources (via media reports, NGO analyses, UNHCR documents on refugees and fieldwork) to make an educated guess about the number of Rohingya people living in exile. Combining sources, the best estimate this paper can propose is roughly two million Rohingya currently living outside Myanmar (Chickera 2021). The vast majority, approximately 1.5 million Rohingya (both registered and unregistered), live in sprawling refugee camps and informal settlements in Bangladesh. Another 101,530 Rohingya had registered with UNHCR in Malaysia as of August 2020 (UNHCR 2021). More recently, small but vibrant communities have also emerged in Australia, North America and several European countries, some of whom migrated there as part of the UNHCR resettlement programme or have claimed refugee status after arriving in these countries with mainly Bangladeshi passports. Two relatively recent developments in this transformation of the Rohingya diaspora motivated and guided our research direction, leading us to focus on Rohingya women.

First, there is a perceptible gendered dimension among the new refugee population. A distinctive pattern can be observed whereby a large number of women and children have been undertaking perilous journeys to escape intense violence – including mass sexual violence in Myanmar. For instance, nearly 80 per cent of the Rohingya who arrived in Bangladesh in August 2017 were women, girls and children (UNHCR 2019), including some 30,000 pregnant women (UNFPA 2018). Similarly, women made up 32 per cent of the Rohingya refugees in Malaysia and the country has also witnessed an increase in Rohingya women by 13 percent since June 2014 (UNHCR 2021).

Second, the global spotlight on the violent military crackdown on the Rohingya has invigorated the social and political activism of the Rohingya community in exile. These expanding community mobilisations have impelled many women to investigate the surrounding socio-political realities and actively engage in advancing their cause.

When examining the lives of Rohingya women in exile, it is imperative to reflect on the community's restricted social life in Myanmar and how women are positioned within such a context. Under the draconian laws dictated by the military, Rohingya people are not allowed to form groups of more than four persons in public spaces in Myanmar (Oxfam 2020). This makes community

1 The authors are aware of the contrasting opinions about the name "Rohingya". The purpose here is not to address the naming controversy, and we use this term as it is a commonly known name and also a term used by the community itself.

mobilisation practically impossible. Any type of comparatively larger social engagement carries significant safety risks, including the possibility of arrest or detention. These restrictions have profound implications, particularly on the lives of women and girls within Rohingya communities.[2] There are also perceptions of safety and security, cultural norms and religious beliefs that influence behavioural differences between women and men (Mohsin 2019). Amid the absence of basic rights, the political and social marginalisation and isolation from mainstream Burmese society, many Rohingya turn to religion and religious institutions for comfort. These arguably help to reduce psychological distress, provide spiritual shelter and improve self-actualisation (Mim 2020, Rahman 2019).

However, the conservative interpretation of religious influence in everyday life also limits women's civic participation in a society where men are considered "natural leaders", while the woman's role is mainly confined to the household. Some Rohingya women even view female leadership as a sin (Mohsin 2019: 11). Many gendered consequences of such structural barriers exacerbate women's position in society, where they are devoid of bargaining power compared to their male counterparts. In such a setting, this article examines the emerging civic engagements of Rohingya women activists in diaspora and offers a nuanced understanding of how their activism has been shaped and negotiated by multi-dimensional factors.

The study follows a qualitative approach with a threefold strategy. First, we reviewed the relevant secondary literature to provide essential contextual information. Second, a total of 20 in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with Rohingya refugee women from six countries, spanning two years from April 2019 until April 2021 (see Appendix 1 for a comprehensive overview of the respondents). The respondents were identified through the snowball method and also from the authors' close collaboration with several Rohingya-led organisations in Bangladesh and Malaysia. All the respondents were between 21 to 30 years of age. They were informed in advance about the study's aims, the voluntary basis and the anonymity of their participation. While face-to-face interviews were conducted in Bangladesh, Malaysia and Germany, as the authors were residing in these countries during the data collection phase, digital media such as Skype and WhatsApp were used to accommodate distance and allow the inclusion of respondents from Australia, the United States and Canada. One of the authors has a near-native proficiency in the Rohingya language, and the conversation often took place in both the Rohingya language and English, frequently switching from one to the other.

Third, with prior permission, the respondents' social media engagements, which have become immensely popular among the Rohingya activists, were also

2 For an extensive overview of the Rohingya's apartheid-like situation and immobility in Myanmar, see https://www.fmreview.org/sites/fmr/files/FMRdownloads/en/statelessness/lewa.pdf (accessed 3 July 2022).

observed throughout the study period. There are two precise reasons for this: digital platforms possibly compensate for the Rohingya refugees' offline constraints and many young refugee activists are becoming digital "space invaders" of locations and issues for which "they are not, in short, the somatic norm" (Puwar 2004: 1). A deductive method was then employed to create preliminary themes and categories for subsequent data analysis purposes.

Refugee women in Diaspora Studies

In conceptualising refugee women's role in exile, a growing number of studies offer a nuanced understanding of how diaspora communities and camp settings provide the space and opportunity for resistance to dominant patriarchal social systems and cultural norms.[3] Much has been written on how exile spaces and migration experiences provide opportunities for political consciousness-raising among women and act as a vehicle for women's empowerment.[4] These studies show how women persistently challenge patriarchal notions, re-negotiate their assigned domestic roles and embrace new professional and educational successes in host countries. This perspective also opposes the one-dimensional image of refugee women as homogenous, victimised and passive followers of their men (Boyd 1989, Carling 2005, Palmary et al. 2010).

Focusing on the emergence and evolution of the exiled Burmese women's movement, seminal research has been conducted, particularly on the Thai-Burma border, that portrays refugee women as "insurgent citizens" (Olivius 2019); highlights their political agency (O'Kane 2007); shows their involvement in humanitarian operations (McConnachie 2012), forms of camp-based political activism (Olivius 2017) and civic engagement through informal education and political advocacy (Maber 2016); and examines the nexus between feminism, militarism and nationalism, and refugee women's place in armed conflicts and nationalist struggles (Olivia / Hedström 2019). These studies offer a nuanced understanding of Burmese women's socio-political engagement in exile.

Nevertheless, there remain some considerable gaps in the literature. The studies cited above mainly investigated the struggles and resistence of the recognised ethnic minorities in the Thai-Myanmar borderlands, namely the Karen and Kachin. Notably, the Women's League of Burma (WLB), which was frequently mentioned in several of these studies, does not represent any Rohingya women's organisation.[5] Therefore, the multiple ways Rohingya women participate in civic activism remain largely excluded in these otherwise important studies.

3 See for example Holzer 2015, Vasta 2016, Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2014, Ghorashi 2005.

4 See for example Pande 2018, McConnachie 2018, Sánchez 2016, Pessar 2010.

5 The Women's League of Burma (http://www.womenofburma.org/) was founded in 1999, as an umbrella organisation consisting of 13 ethnic minority organisations. Rohingya are not part of this platform, and the only organisation representing this platform from the Rakhine state is the Rakhaing Women's Union (RWU).

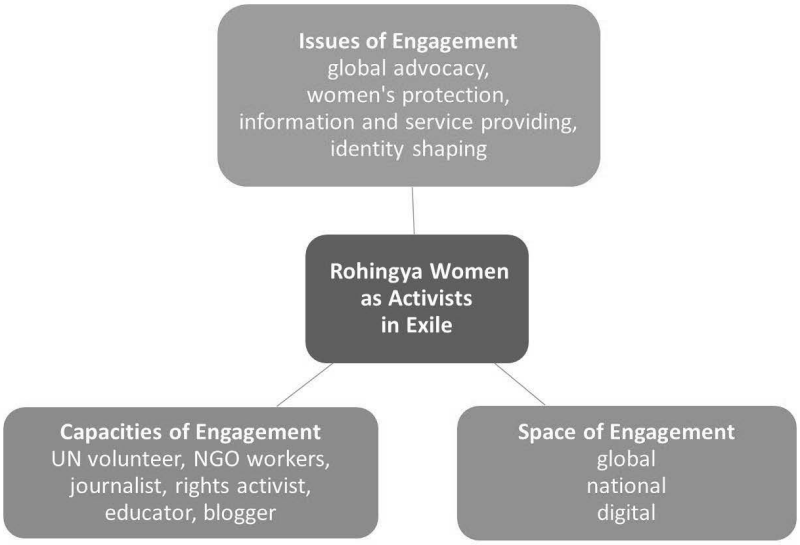
In recent years, a few studies have looked at the evolving gender dimensions within the exiled Rohingya community and how women create space and agencies while navigating their displacement (i.e., Mim 2020, Mohsin 2019, Rahman 2019). Placing a spotlight on different gender dynamics, these three studies mainly concentrated on Rohingya women living in different refugee camps in Bangladesh, however. Additionally, several recent reports have been published by UN agencies and human rights organisations (e.g., Oxfam 2020; UN Women 2017). These reports are likely to reinforce the image of Rohingya women as victims and vulnerable, presumably derived from a programme or project-oriented focus. Our study attempts to contribute to this perceived gap by taking the discussion beyond the largely homogenous camp settings in Bangladesh. Keeping women's civic activism at the core, we engage with a gendered diaspora narrative that is transnational in nature and multi-dimensional in its scope.

Our research broadly builds on the notion that diaspora provides the much-needed space for new social and political mobilisation of refugee women in exile, also sparking their capability to renegotiate perceived gender norms while navigating the various institutions and actors in this process. Accordingly, the conceptual underpinning of this study derives from the notion of "sites of refuge" (Nyers 2006: 122) that refugees inhabit in exile and that provide the required "safe space" to engage in building resilience, creating space for resistance and becoming part of a transformative politics (Olivius 2019: 765). This "exceptional space" functions as what Giorgio Agamben (1998: 187) defines as a "zone of indistinction" that moulds the ways and strategies for resistance and political mobilisation of Rohingya women activists. Borrowing from Nadje Al-Ali (2007: 140), this study also conceptualises the Rohingya in exile as a "conflict-generated diaspora" which is partly "in the making". Therefore, to attain a comprehensive understanding of Rohingya women's diaspora activism, it proposes considering the fluidity within the group as well as the conditions in the host countries.

Rohingya refugee women's civic participation: Issues of engagement

The following section presents the various patterns of Rohingya refugee women's civic engagement in their host countries and addresses factors contributing to their growing interest in and capacities to perform these activities. During the interview phase, the research participants were involved in various professions and social commitments. Nevertheless, we prefer to address them as activists throughout the paper as, regardless of their professional priorities, they remain focused and committed to drawing global attention to their cause and aspiring for a better future for their community and beyond.

Figure 1: Overview of Rohingya women's civic engagement in diaspora (compiled by the authors)



Mapping the nature of engagement

> The situation in Myanmar has not allowed me a space to contribute to my society. When the UNHCR asked me to be a part of their community volunteer team, I did not think even a minute. It was an immediate YES! (Rohingya activist, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, November 2020 via Skype)

This is the recurring experience of many women activists, particularly those who left Myanmar after 2017. Their mass exodus, the international visibility of the Rakhine crisis and the new space in exile has generated a quantitative increase in Rohingya women's civil society participation. Figure 1 presents the mapping of Rohingya women's civic engagement in exile. Broadly, the following key issues can be identified in their activism: global advocacy on refugee protection from a gender perspective, finding a just solution to the Rohingya crisis, attending to immediate community needs, providing services and shaping the Rohingya identity through various creative activities. Collaboration with national and international stakeholders, including camp management authorities, different UN bodies and non-governmental organisations and active social media campaigns, allows them to remain committed to the welfare of the community. Some of them run their own organisations, work as religious educators, journalists, online activists, human rights activists and social entrepreneurs.

The gendered and stratified nature of their refugeehood and experience of forced displacement have implications for women's emergence at the frontline

of community activism. As stakeholders, they have been actively involved in refugee protection issues, humanitarian agencies' governance and aid distribution mechanisms, as well as discussions on their safe and voluntary return to Myanmar. One young activist explains the purpose of such engagement:

> We want the current humanitarian engagements to meet our specific needs and be shaped by our voices. (Rohingya activist, Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, December 2019)

In Bangladesh, there is a formal inclusion of refugee women in the camp coordination committee that supports the relevant stakeholders in better management of the relief distribution programme. While their role and influence are subject to debate, it is an important step toward mainstreaming Rohingya women's active engagement. As Jennifer Hyndman and Wenona Giles observe, "[w]hile refugees are nominally covered by human rights covenants and refugee law, 'temporary' camps have become extra-legal spaces of liminality where rights are optional" (Hyndman / Giles 2011: 367). Due to the protracted nature of the displacement, many refugee camps and informal settlements in Southeast Asia become a living space that goes beyond the temporary aspect of such camps and the emergency nature of management in those campsites. In such protracted displacement, refugee women seek to build a new life to the best of their abilities in countries like Bangladesh, Thailand and Malaysia. This also echoes previous scholarship where refugee camps serve as political spaces where struggles continue over the right to influence life and governance structure in the camps (Olivius 2019, Agier 2011).

Outside of Southeastern Asia, Rohingya women's activities remain deeply rooted in their everyday struggles, yet they go beyond the essentialist community activism associated with their historical grievances, traumas of violence and livelihood challenges in the host countries. For instance, the activists in Germany, the United States, Canada and Australia engage with wider audiences and diverse issues, given their entitlement to certain rights as refugees:

> The plight of our (Rohingya) community is not an isolated event. It is the consequence of sheer ignorance and avoidance of collective global responsibility where we live together, and we need to extend hands, build solidarity with other people, whenever possible. (Rohingya activist, Toronto, Canada, December 2020 via WhatsApp)

Here, their civic participation does not simply consist of taking part in community activities and addressing immediate needs. They equally aspire to shape the discourse that matters to them and influence how they are represented. Emphasising self-representation, another activist from Australia shares her frustration:

> I am tired of seeing Rohingya women as nothing but a victim of war, as if their identity is synonymous to the rape victim, suppressed, sexually abused and struggling to make a living. It is much more than that. You have to open your eyes and have an honest intention to see the large picture. (Rohingya activist, Melbourne, Australia, December 2020 via Skype)

Going further, another activist who also works as a journalist in an amateur Rohingya online television channel in Malaysia clarifies why self-representation makes a significant difference:

> In most Rohingya-related articles, the international media will write religious or communal violence as a cause of the unrest in Rakhine. The Rohingya media, however, would clearly communicate this as state-sponsored violence or genocide. (Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, September 2020 via Skype)

Thus, while the nature of Rohingya women's engagement is primarily concentrated on shaping refugee-related governance and humanitarian aid delivery in refugee camps and informal settlements, a small yet notable diversity can be found in recent community engagements depending on where the women reside. These different pathways derive from their surrounding realities, available support systems and individual skills at navigating life in their host countries. This political switch from conventional community engagement of providing immediate support to becoming a rights activist also influences the international community and other stakeholders by reminding them of the rights of the Rohingya and the steps necessary to achieve their common goals.

Despite the spatial differences in activism, one notable similarity among the activists scattered across different continents is their uncompromising stance on the issues of acknowledging genocide, demanding Myanmar citizenship and asserting a distinct Rohingya identity. In addition, past trauma, the quest for justice and homeland grievances also remain interwoven. One respondent from the United States put it this way:

> This is what binds us together as a larger family with a shared memory of the suffering and a single hope for the future. To be acknowledged that we belong to Myanmar. (Rohingya activist, New York, USA, December 2019 via Skype)

Protecting women's rights: Bringing women's issues to the forefront

The discussion of refugee women's distinct vulnerabilities and gender-specific issues is one of the main themes of women's civic involvement in the diaspora. Their engagements generally revolve around the categorical needs of displaced Rohingya women, many of whom are in a perilous situation due to their experience of gender-specific violence. Moreover, women activists are vocal about issues such as inadequate gender-sensitive humanitarian support, lack of space for women to interact with humanitarian actors and, above all, a lack of self-representation, as compared to their male counterparts. An activist in Malaysia illustrates the need for a gender perspective:

> There are certain experiences that are gender-specific. While we all [men and women] are victims of genocide, it would be sheer trivialising if we cannot differentiate the pain

> of a woman who was raped, tortured, lost all the male members of her family and (in some cases) dragged into prostitution afterwards. (Rohingya activist, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, September 2020 via Skype)

Another activist from Bangladesh who works as a counsellor in the refugee camps elucidates:

> It would be a travesty of justice if women are not allowed to tell their part of the stories. It is not about telling stories but offering a way out from what she endured and becoming resilient by engaging and connecting with new possibilities and hopes in life. (Rohingya activist, Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, December 2020)

Many women activists are seeking to promote gender-sensitive humanitarian assistance in addition to advocating for policies that effectively fulfil the needs of displaced women and girls while also safeguarding broader refugee rights in their host nations. They also run non-profit organisations that promote women's empowerment and gender mainstreaming in refugee-related projects. An activist from Germany emphasises how refugee women are:

> […] victims in a double sense – as women and as refugees in the asylum system, [… therefore] we need to walk an extra mile to assert rights not only in the host society but also within the Rohingya community. (Rohingya activist, Frankfurt, Germany, November 2019)

The activists have been carefully crafting an image within and beyond the community, where they are seen as occupying an intersection between the women's movement and refugee rights. Particularly in Bangladesh and Malaysia, they play a crucial mediating role between women, men, host governments and international organisations. A Rohingya UN volunteer in Bangladesh, who mainly works with single mothers and rape victims, explains:

> Rohingya women are the most disadvantaged within a disadvantaged community. They live in fear every day – people are sympathetic, and then again, behind them, they talk about why she is carrying a *Jaroj* [father's name is unknown] baby of a Buddhist soldier. I sincerely believe that we do not talk about such things loudly within the community because of prejudice. The pain remains deep in your heart. You see how many layers of victimhood there are within one single woman? (Rohingya activist, Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, December 2020)

Underlying such "feminist engagement", as one respondent from Australia chose to frame it, there is a need to escape the "marginal space" marked by gendered violence, male dominance and a lack of voice, into which Rohingya women have been structurally confined. Many activists provide the necessary platform to escape from this marginal space by creating women's organisations and women-friendly spaces. This allows women to navigate gendered prejudice in a society where rape and violence are generally equated with a loss of honour and status for a girl in the community (Mohsin 2019: 9). With such actions, they also resist the orthodox understanding of *purdah* (a religious and social practice of female seclusion), often a male imposition that attempts to limit the scope of women's role in the society using a (mis)interpretation of religion as a pretext.

Internal advocacy: Claiming space and overcoming community gatekeeping

Political participation and civic engagement of the Rohingya women has never been easy. In Myanmar, their social and political marginalisation can be attributed to several structural constraints within the community and the state. Remarkably, a Rohingya *majhi* (community representative for the camp management), until she arrived in Bangladesh, could not even imagine a Muslim woman could be a *Raja* (the colloquial reference to the head of the state):

> When I saw Sheikh Hasina [the Prime Minister of Bangladesh] in the camp, I could not believe my eyes. She is a Muslim Woman and running the country for 15 years. (Rohingya camp representative, Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, November 2019)

These barriers are likely to derive from the population's isolation from the rest of the world and marginalisation within Myanmar. This also influences their capability and willingness to engage in the community. Another social activist who is heading a Rohingya Women's Association in Malaysia states:

> Even two years back, sitting next to a man in the front line of a community event was unthinkable for my community. To talk about the particular needs of women was a taboo topic, especially in front of the male presence. We no longer want to be invisible, because our pains are no longer veiled. (Rohingya activist, Georgetown, Malaysia, July, 2020 via WhatsApp)

Almost all the women in the study stated that they routinely encounter community gatekeepers and dogmatic views about what women can and cannot pursue. One Rohingya activist from Germany claims, "this comes from both our own people and the NGOs and humanitarian actors with whom we collaborate" (Rohingya activist, Cologne, Germany, July 2020). Critical of the international community's role, a Rohingya entrepreneur and social worker from Australia argues:

> Despite the best of their intention, they [humanitarian actors] want us to be less opinionated. They appreciate it when we follow them without asking anything. We just cannot let a vicious cycle of dependency go on. We want to prove that we can take care of ourselves – we just need a space and some support. (Rohingya social worker, Sydney, Australia, January 2021)

Women's dual responsibility as homemakers and social activists sometimes puts them in a situation that can be referred to as "priority confusion". External factors, such as the lack of adequate knowledge of different national and international platforms, language barriers, inadequate economic opportunities and mobility restrictions limit the scope of their involvement.

Nevertheless, despite having made significant inroads in civic and political engagement, Rohingya women continue to be underrepresented in the community leadership compared to their male counterparts – be it as a camp representative

in Bangladesh or in leading newly founded diaspora organisations in the Western countries.

Global advocacy: Networking beyond the Rohingya community

Rohingya women activists have also broadened their civic participation by forming networks and expressing solidarity with other marginalised populations within and beyond their host countries. This is pervasive among all the respondents who are based in Europe, Australia and North America. This inclusion in the extended civic sphere creates a learning space for partnerships, community empowerment and the accumulation of experiences in the long run. An activist from Germany, who is an active member of Fridays for Future, a youth-led and organised global climate strike movement, explains:

> Being a refugee is not a choice, rather a consequence. I try to help others to avoid enduring similar suffering. So, I must speak out and be part of that force who are there in the streets to claim a piece for everyone in this world. (Rohingya activist, Berlin, Germany, January 2021)

Several women interviewed are part of a larger civil rights movement, where their activism concerns matters related to the rights of other minorities, migrants and refugees. An activist from the United States who has been travelling across the country and taking part in activist movements, including Black Lives Matter and Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, eagerly divulges:

> What happened in Myanmar can happen tomorrow against another community somewhere else. No matter who the perpetrators are and which part of the world it is happening in, there needs to be a global consensus. For me, there is no better place than the US to make sure that our voices reach out to the right places. (Rohingya activist, Washington DC, USA, January 2021, via Skype)

Through active participation in diverse civil rights platform in the host countries, these women expand the scope of engagement, as another activist from Germany describes:

> We are fighting for the same cause, which is to establish justice, peace and equality. Be it the Rohingyas in Myanmar, Uighurs in China, or the Kurds in Turkey – we need to support each other as in the end, we are the same persecuted people. (Rohingya activist, Cologne, Germany, January 2021)

Through such demonstrations and by widening their sphere of civic actions, Rohingya women strengthen their cause and boost their confidence by tapping into this learning process of the civil rights movement. As another activist from Australia clarifies, it helps in "expanding your horizon by observing what strategy other people employ, what to say on which occasion and how to frame your argument and draw attention" (Sydney, Australia, September 2019, via Skype).

However, such extended civic participation and networking is largely absent in the refugee camps of Bangladesh and informal urban settlements in Malaysia. This is partly due to the contextual socio-cultural constraints resulting from the encampment of the refugees in Bangladesh and the restrictive policies and constant surveillance by the law enforcement agencies in Malaysia.

Providing information: Becoming digital activists

Statelessness and the resulting mobility restrictions inevitably triggered the Rohingya diaspora's online presence to mobilise around various issues, including the right to self-determination. In this context, the internet and social media offer unprecedented access to connectedness and provide a platform for a "virtual togetherness" to raise the Rohingya women's voices. There has been an exponential increase in digital advocacies in recent years, with Rohingya community members demonstrating notable engagement on Twitter, Facebook and YouTube. In another forthcoming paper on the "Rohingya Digital Diaspora", the authors examine how, through the creative constellation of socio-cultural and political issues in virtual space, exiled Rohingya practice a politics of resistance and recognition while confronting the policies of Myanmar's government.

In recent years, scholarly attention has been drawn to the rising exchanges and communications within and among diaspora communities in digital arenas.[6] Such practices are also manifested by our research participants. Women activists interviewed reaffirmed the opportunities that derive from using social media to widen the scale and scope of engagement. Social media platforms have expanded the women's opportunities and motivations to invite wider audiences to engage in online or offline mobilisation. Several issues were frequently discussed by the respondents on their social media accounts, including genocide remembrance in the Rakhine state, Rohingya identity, human rights, political developments in Myanmar, the International Court of Justice hearing on the Rohingya persecution, the living conditions in the refugee camps in Bangladesh, extrajudicial killings of the Rohingya by Bangladeshi security forces in border areas, and global advocacy for their civil and political rights.

The protracted COVID-19 pandemic has also increased this "digital dependency". In this changing global reality with its offline constraints, including mobility restrictions, the digital space emerged as a platform to continue activities to preserve and reshape the dominant narratives on and around the Rohingya issue. In this context, Rohingya women in exile are using digital

6 Cf. Alencar 2018, Kaufmann 2018, Marat 2015, Levitt / Schiller 2006.

platforms to contest the mainstream narrative while claiming a significant position in the digital sphere, for example by offering webinar series.[7]

In their country of origin, the Rohingya are denied education in their native language and the ability to fully practice their cultural rites, including religious rites, thereby weakening their culture. An in-depth retention of the Rohingya language has never been a priority for the Myanmar government (O'Brien / Hoffstaedter 2020). This is where the role of digital platforms becomes crucial to fight the gradual disappearance of language and culture following the dispersal of Rohingya to many countries in the world. A Rohingya activist, who has been working as a UNHCR volunteer and educator in Malaysia, sees digital activism in this way:

> We want to be a part of a generation of Rohingya youth embracing the Rohingya language, our identity and heritage with pride and there is not much of a scope in traditional media, which we try to compensate for through our online engagement in our language. (Rohingya activist, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, July 2020, via WhatsApp)

This growing civic engagement in the digital space also serves several purposes, including transnational political engagements, developing distinct forms of local and global consciousness and new forms of relations and constructions of place, and reimagining homeland through remembrance and digital representation.

Conditional solidarity with other Burmese ethnic groups

On February 2021, the *Tatmadaw*, Myanmar's military, toppled the democratically elected government of the National League for Democracy (NLD) and seized power, once again. Since then any opposition to the military coup has been ruthlessly suppressed by the ruling regime. Following the coup, Myanmar entered a violent new chapter. The opposition formed a shadow government in exile, known as the National Unity Government (NUG). Many ethnic minority groups who were part of the semi-democratic unity government under Aung Sun Suu Kyi between 2016 to 2020 relaunched their armed conflict to resist the military junta.

In this new political reality, the Rohingya seem to be reluctant to engage and join hands with other ethnic groups and civil society activists in diaspora who have been at the forefront in protesting the military takeover. There remains a deep resentment amongst the Rohingya as illustrated by the following quote of a Rohingya activist:

> We are neither Burmese nor Bangladeshi [with anger]. When our people [Rohingya] were slaughtered, they [Burmese civilians] did not stand up for us, what shall we do for them now? (Rohingya activist, Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, March 2021)

7 See for example https://hervoicesherjourney.wordpress.com/ (accessed 1 July 2022) and https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCz7i6uQeOIAMYCUc-B0ApLA (accessed 1 July 2022).

As the above statement indicates, this disinclination largely stems from the lack of support from Myanmar's civil society, other ethnic groups and above all, from the semi-democratic transition government during 2016–2020, when the state-sponsored anti-Rohingya violence and persecution took place in Rakhine state.

Still, many Rohingya activists consider the coup as an opportunity for national reconciliation and to build a wider consensus on their struggle. As the coup represented an important political development during the course of the study, it seems pertinent to understand the perspective of the Rohingya activists, who have been divergent, critical yet loosely optimistic about the new political situation in Myanmar. A mix of reactions can be observed depending on respondents' location and the scale of their suffering. There seems to be strong reluctance to collaborate with other ethnic groups and political actors in Myanmar among the activists in Bangladesh, as compared to among those living in Western countries. For many interviewed Rohingya women in the camps, with their raw memory of violence and current everyday struggles, the military coup and subsequent violence against the Burmese protesters are seen as "God's punishment for them [the civilians who supported military atrocity against the Rohingya]" (Rohingya Activist, Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, March 2021).

Another respondent from Malaysia highlights the absence of Rohingya persecution narratives in the anti-coup protests:

> I have been closely observing whether the coup was making my countrymen rethink their indifference during the Rakhine massacre. I wish to hear a few words about our predicament, about our future, as they speak about democracy and democratic rights. However, it is nowhere there in their placards and banners. (Rohingya activist, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, March 2021, via Skype)

On the other hand, given the exiled National Unity Government's (NUG)[8] promise to restore Rohingya citizenship, there is a cautious optimism among respondents in the United States, Germany and Canada. A Rohingya activist in Germany, who is already in collaboration with other exiled Burmese groups, sees the recent events as a positive momentum:

> The term "Rohingya" was taboo, even Suu Kyi carefully avoided calling us Rohingya. Mentioning the term "Rohingya" and promising to restore our citizenship by the NUG is a small but a significant step of acknowledgement, finally. (Rohingya activist, Berlin, Germany, April 2021, via WhatsApp)

Another respondent from Australia sees the possibility of a new channel of communication and of reconnecting with Burmese youth in the frontline of anti-coup processions:

8 NUG is a group of ousted National League for Democracy (NLD) politicians who formed an exiled civilian government following the military coup in Myanmar in February 2021. In a policy statement released on 3 June 2021, this government says that the Rohingya are "entitled to citizenship by laws that will accord with fundamental human rights and democratic federal principles" (see https://twitter.com/NUGMyanmar/status/1400471485697781768, accessed 3 July 2022).

> They [the young Burmese] now see the worst of their Army whom they praised during the crackdown [on the Rohingya]. They can feel the pain [...] at least I believe so. (Rohingya activist, Melbourne, Australia, April 2021, via Skype)

As a result, a new form of solidarity is being formed where Rohingya activists regularly tweet and share political developments inside Myanmar using hashtags such as *#whatshappeninginMyanmar* and also take part in exchanges between Rohingya community leaders and NUG officials. It seem that they want to capitalise on this opportunity by connecting the Rohingya plight to this broader resistance within and outside Myanmar.

Contributing factors in diasporic civic activism

Different quantities and qualities of factors contribute to mobilisation and participation in civic activism by Rohingya refugee women. Since 2017, the growing international solidarity and humanitarian support, evolving Rohingya diaspora, host country situations and the concomitant socio-economic and political transformations have led to a meaningful increase in Rohingya women's civic engagement. Furthermore, a combination of age, education, language skills and technological know-how among young Rohingya in diaspora also shapes this growing civic activism. This confirms previous study findings on how various intersecting personal factors place refugee women in varying positions of privilege or disadvantage (Al Munajed 2020). Based on the study findings, Figure 2 shows the various factors that determine Rohingya refugee women's civic engagement in exile.

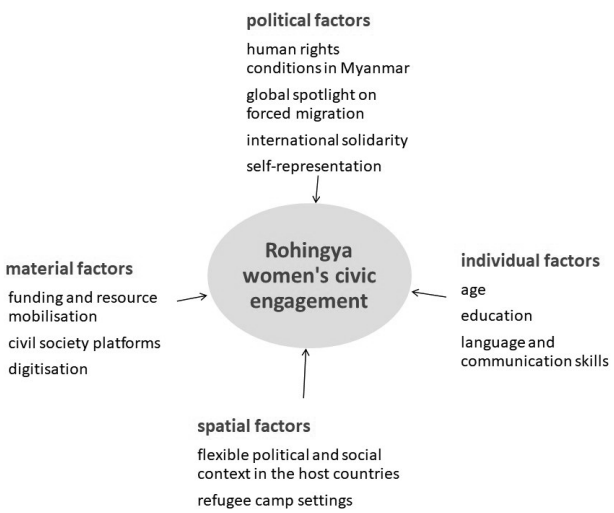


Figure 2: Contributing factors in Rohingya women's growing civic engagement (compiled by the authors)

Broadly, four factors have been identified that have contributed to Rohingya women's expanding civic engagement: individual, material, spatial and political features. It is important to note that the ability of Rohingya refugee women in diaspora to mobilise and actively engage in civic activism is highly context-specific. The following section offers a detailed illustration of these factors.

Individual factors: Age, educational background and language skills

Our study showed that without a certain level of education, language skills and other relevant skills, Rohingya women find it challenging to take advantage of the opportunities in their host countries. An examination of the educational background of the women activists and their diverse commitment to social and community development abroad reveals that a process of selfhood and political identity is being created within them. This derives from their personalised skills based on various factors, including education, age, language, duration of living in the host countries and familiarity with communication technologies. Except for two participants from Bangladesh, all of the other Rohingya women interviewed have commendable linguistic skills. They are fluent in more than four languages, including English, which has become the most extensively used language across international platforms. This skill has indubitably helped them navigate the host countries' institutions and become a natural choice for representing and speaking on the community's behalf on national, regional and international stages. Furthermore, most of the respondents have a decent educational background, ranging from a higher secondary school certificate to a university degree. However, this may also trigger the question of how representative they are when looking at the varied conditions of the Rohingya refugee women. Another noteworthy fact is that all of the activists interviewed in this study are from 20 to 30 years of age. This young profile has doubtless helped them to better correlate and coordinate between online and offline domains of activism. They also bring a wide array of new strategies to make their voices heard, as we have seen in their diverse forms of engagement, especially among those in the Western countries.

Material factors: Access to communication technology

Social media has a profound influence on Rohingya diaspora women's capacity to establish and become part of transnational diaspora networks. Their disappointment with the portrayal of Rohingya women in mainstream regional and global media, in which they are largely characterised as passive victims of the

conflict, has given rise to a new, independent and more grounded perspective on refugee activism through digital platforms, as participants in this study reiterate. Social media plays a decisive role in connecting, streamlining and shaping the community narratives of violence and discrimination while providing an alternative platform for making their voices heard. This facilitates material and imaginative connections, a phenomenon observed in previous scholarship (Blunt 2007, Marat 2015). Our interviewees also emphasised the importance of the internet and social media when aiming to link up with different social movements. Most of the interviewees were active on social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter. Five of them have over a thousand followers on their Twitter accounts, which testifies to the scale and scope of their digital engagement. The rising presence of diaspora women in cyberspace and social media has thus opened new paths for mobilisation, leading to transnational forms of participation.

Nevertheless, the question remains as to how digitalisation complements the everyday struggle of refugees trapped in the camps and makeshift settlements in different parts of South and Southeast Asia. For instance, in both Malaysia and Bangladesh, in addition to the logistical constraints, refugees face an array of challenges to freedom of expression on digital platforms, which restricts many Rohingya activists to remaining less assertive, even as the host country's policies have detrimental consequences on the refugees living there.[9] Despite such predicaments, digitisation has emerged as a salient feature in current Rohingya diaspora engagement and transnational connectedness, albeit the extent of such impacts remains a topic to be explored further. Digital platforms obscure many local features to accommodate a more globalist view on the Rohingya. This homogenisation often lacks contextual analysis and ignores the influence of other factors, such as class, education, age and the rural or urban origins of Rohingya refugee women. The online discussions also largely exclude non-Muslim Rohingya in their process of narrative making. To what extent this digital togetherness in /excludes multidimensional features of the Rohingya community and how a new transnational identity is being constructed and negotiated needs to be researched further.

Spatial factors: Host countries' asylum policies

The host country's environment facilitates opportunities to build local and international networks while also supporting economic and political exchanges. For instance, in Bangladesh and Malaysia, the current refugee situation and camp-

9 For Malaysia, see https://www.arabnews.com/node/1673766/world (accessed 5 July 2022). For Bangladesh, see https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/rights/news/digital-security-act-threatens-press-freedom-needs-reformation-editors-council-3016776 (accessed 5 July 2022).

centric humanitarian assistance provide an opportunity for many women to be part of the ongoing humanitarian programmes that, besides other objectives, also aim to empower refugee women in different capacities. For example, in the sprawling refugee camps of Cox's Bazar in Bangladesh, where the great majority of Rohingya are currently concentrated, so-called Camp Management Committees (CMC) provide the key leadership and decision-making bodies within the camp. The CMC representatives are the key focal point for people to communicate their needs and issues, and CMCs, in turn, are expected to communicate these concerns with service providers and government departments. While at the beginning of 2018 almost all CMC representatives were men, as of February 2020, women occupied approximately 20 per cent of CMC positions, as the camp management strategy ensures such compulsory participation for women in camp management leadership (Action Against Hunger et al. 2020). This is but one example of how host country refugee policies and other related factors are crucial in determining women's visible and meaningful engagement in community development initiatives. The women's newfound freedom, which was lacking in Myanmar, thereby reaffirms the interconnection between the situation of the host country and the refugee women's access to civil society participation.

In the Western host countries, freedom of movement, multiculturalism, acceptance of certain rights for refugees and asylum seekers, and relatively higher employment and social service opportunities have enabled more and more Rohingya women to participate in civil and political spaces. The importance of multiculturalism and flexible asylum policy can easily be identified when analysing significant differences among the countries they represent. For example, in countries like Canada, Germany and Australia, Rohingya women activists are engaged in various civil and political platforms. On the other hand, in Bangladesh or Malaysia, the civil and political space for refugees is limited, and the women activists interviewed primarily concentrate on representing issues that are predominantly gendered.

Political factors: Internationalisation and global solidarity

The August 2017 mass exodus of the Rohingya from Myanmar led to profound international solidarity, large-scale humanitarian support and access to funding.[10] This overwhelming global solidarity has provided a new opportunity for

10 Just to give a few examples of international initiatives: 1) In 2019, the United Nations General Assembly approved a resolution condemning rights abuses against Rohingya Muslims and other minority groups in Myanmar; https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/un-documents/myanmar/ (accessed 4 July 2022). 2) UN and other international agencies launched a Joint Response Plan (JRP) for the Rohingya Refugee Humanitarian Crisis in 2018. See the latest JRP: https://reporting.unhcr.org/2022-jrp-rohingya (accessed 4 July 2022). 3) Myanmar is currently facing a genocide charge at the International Court of Justice; https://www.icj-cij.org/en/case/178 (accessed 4 July 2022). 4) There is a global initiative for Rohingya Justice, Truth and Reconciliation; https://gijtr.org/our-work/rohingya/ (accessed 4 July 2022).

many Rohingya activists to take an active part in social and political endeavours. The massive arrival of Rohingya in 2017 in Bangladesh and neighbouring Asian countries also triggered varied consequences that humanitarian actors needed to tackle carefully. Specifically, as many refugees were female victims of sexual and gender-based violence in Myanmar, there was a need for women to be in the frontline and confront such issues.

The issues of transnationality and multiculturalism also emerged as prominent factors in facilitating diaspora activism in the host countries. Multiculturalism provides diaspora groups with a much-needed community space to discuss their various needs, and such positionality activates diaspora civic engagement (Blunt 2007). In Malaysia, Germany, the United States, Canada and Australia, Rohingya people settle mainly in urban and multicultural settings that provide much needed socio-economic space and support mechanisms. This eventually allows community building in the host countries and transnational network development. Similar solidarity is also found in Bangladesh, as for instance in the Joint Response Plan (JRP) by the UN, which is designed to address the camp-based Rohingya in Bangladesh. Yet restrictive government policies and the official ban on any form of refugee-led political processions and events limit the scope of active engagement.

The effects of forced migration on selfhood and subjectivity are integral in understanding how women reimagine their space and renegotiate their gender identity (Rahman 2019). For the Rohingya, a community primarily defined by conflict-driven migration, the diaspora engagement is concentrated on campaigning for basic human rights in Myanmar and abroad, coupled with the claim for a distinct Rohingya identity and Myanmar citizenship. Nonetheless, it can be observed that a dominant narrative is emerging amid the activism, which broadly embraces a notion of Muslim victimhood while defining the Rohingya identity. This could well be the ramification of their alienation and exclusion from mainstream Burmese social, political and cultural narratives. Such a limited portrayal of the Rohingya community may become an obstacle to facilitating a more inclusive and pluralist conception of the Rohingya community and hinder future outreach and reconciliation towards wider and diverse Burmese society in Myanmar and beyond.

One cannot discard the marginalisation and vulnerability of most refugee women, who suffer severe uncertainty in the refugee camps in Bangladesh or informal settlements in Malaysia. Their historically disadvantaged position – as women, Muslims and refugees – and systemic discrimination hamper their social mobility. Nevertheless, the impressive engagement of Rohingya women activists fighting for better rights for themselves as women and for their community as a whole, reveals promising civic and political prospects for the foreseeable future. First, Rohingya refugee women are slowly but surely becoming key actors in the host countries' civic space, and their participation goes beyond the con-

ventional gendered dynamics of civic engagement. Second, their involvement shows characteristics that may resemble the experiences of other marginalised groups and resistance movements in the host countries, and there is growing solidarity and interconnectedness among them. Third, the formation of refugee-led civil society organisations and their relations with the host country and other state structures are overwhelmingly driven by the receiving country's migration, citizenship and civil society dynamics. Fourth, they use both formal and informal pathways to claim their rights and to fight for justice. They are active in cities, digital spaces, refugee camps in the borderland, and at the discussion table in international forums and sites of global visibility. Thus, they employ a diverse spectrum of spaces and strategies, as observed in this study.

Summary

After enduring decades of persecution, the Rohingya community effected a noticeable political and social mobilisation following their forced displacement from Myanmar in 2017. Within this new socio-political landscape, Rohingya women are carving out a space of influence through civic activism in the host countries under challenging conditions. Diverse motives, opportunities, limitations, social processes and interactions with the broader international community have created a space for the flourishing of their civic activism in exile. Highlighting their claiming of this space, the paper illustrates how geographically dispersed Rohingya refugee women have been working towards developing shared values and setting agendas for the community's future, both as future citizens in Myanmar and as refugees in exile. In this evolving process, growing transnationalism, multiculturalism, digital transformation and the crisis's internationalisation have paved the way for asserting rights and creating a sense of community across borders.

The study's findings also stress how Rohingya women embody and navigate between multiple marginalised subject positions, claiming rights as refugees, ethnic minorities and women while constituting themselves as important political and social actors. The context of exiled life provides a degree of freedom for many women and motivates them to be a part of the political, social and cultural struggle of the Rohingya community. This profound civic involvement is an important step forward and "long overdue", yet this diaspora activism is conditional and subject to access to resources, the policy of the host countries and support mechanisms offered by the international community. The paper thus shows how times of crisis can have positive transformational impacts on gender norms and women's lives. Actions taken by external stakeholders and unconditional global solidarity can make a tremendous difference in the lives of many Rohingya women, be it as a camp representative in Bangladesh, a free-

lance journalist in Malaysia, a climate activist in Germany or as a social worker in the United States. Therefore, the growing landscape where women are taking up a decisive social and political role deserves greater attention.

This study makes a novel contribution to migration and diaspora studies in several ways. Highlighting a rather unconventional community in diaspora studies, we bring perspectives of a nascent diaspora scattered across different continents, one that is still in the process of formation. We attempt to offer diaspora women's experiences from various spatial contexts, including the Global South and the Global North, and to show how this spatiality influences and shapes the women's civic role.

Through these observations, this paper sheds light on an emerging diaspora community that deserves greater and diversified attention in the years to come. There is still work to be done to incorporate a gendered history of the Rohingya diaspora, shifting demographics and spaces, and the diverse nature of Rohingya diaspora women's engagement. Given the limited scope of this research, this paper is an important step forward that hopes to encourage further research on Rohingya diasporic politics and their potential leverage as agents of change.

References

Action Against Hunger / Oxfam / Save the Children (2018): Rohingya Refugee Response Gender Analysis: Recognising and Responding to Gender Inequalities. Oxfam, https://policy-practice.oxfam.org/resources/rohingya-refugee-response-gender-analysis-recognizing-and-responding-to-gender-inequalities/ (accessed 20 March 2021).

Agamben, Giorgio (1998): *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*. California: Stanford University Press.

Agier, Michel (2011): *Managing the Undesirables: Refugee Camps and Humanitarian Government*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Aksela, Damla B. (2014): Kins, Distant Workers, Diasporas: Constructing Turkey's Transnational Members Abroad. *Turkish Studies* 15(2), pp. 195–219.

Al-Ali, Nadje (2007): Iraqi Women in Diasporic Spaces: Political Mobilization, Gender & Citizenship. *Revue des Mondes Musulmans et de la Méditerranée* 117–118, pp. 137–154. https://doi.org/10.4000/remmm.3371

Alencar, Amanda (2018): Refugee Integration and Social Media: A Local and Experiential Perspective. *Information, Communication & Society* 21(11), pp. 1588–1603.

Al Munajed, Dima (2020): An Intersectional Analysis of Syrian Women's Participation in Civil Society in the Post-2011 Context. *Middle East-Topics & Arguments* 14, pp. 103–116.

Ansar, Anas (2020): The Unfolding of Belonging, Exclusion and Exile: A Reflection on the History of Rohingya Refugee Crisis in Southeast Asia. *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 40(3), pp. 441–456.

Azmi, Shaheen (2007): Canadian Social Service Provision and the Muslim Community in Metropolitan Toronto. *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 17(1), pp. 153–166.

Binder, Susanne / Tošić, Jelena (2005): Refugees as a Particular Form of Transnational Migrations and Social Transformations: Socioanthropological and Gender Aspects. *Current Sociology* 53(4), pp. 607–624.

Blunt, Alison (2007): Cultural Geographies of Migration: Mobility, Transnationality and Diaspora. *Progress in Human Geography* 31(5), pp. 648–694.

Blunt, Alison (2005): *Domicile and Diaspora Anglo-Indian Women and the Spatial Politics of Home*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.

Bloch, Alice / Galvin, Treasa / Harrell-Bond, Barbara (2002): Refugee Women in Europe: Some Aspects of the Legal and Policy Dimensions. *International Migration* 38(2), pp. 169–190.

Boyd, Monica (1989): Family and Personal Networks in International Migration: Recent Developments and New Agendas. *International Migration Review* 23(3), pp. 638–670.

Carling, Jørgen (2005): Gender Dimensions of International Migration. Global Migration Perspectives 35, Global Commission on International Migration (GCIM).

Chickera, Amal de (2021): Stateless and Persecuted: What Next for the Rohingya? Migration Policy, https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/stateless-persecuted-rohingya (accessed 14 December 2021).

Fathi, Mastoureh (2017): *Intersectionality, Class and Migration Narratives of Iranian Women Migrants in the U.K.* New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, Elena (2014): *The Ideal Refugees: Gender, Islam, and the Sahrawi Politics of Survival*. New York: Syracuse University Press.

Ghorashi, Halleh (2005): Agents of Change or Passive Victims: The Impact of Welfare States (the Case of the Netherlands) on Refugees. *Journal of Refugee Studies* 18(2), pp. 181–198.

Hajdukowski-Ahmed, Maroussia / Khanlou, Nazilla / Moussa, Helene (2008): Introduction. In: Hajdukowski-Ahmed, Maroussia / Khanlou, Nazilla / Moussa, Helene (eds): *Not Born a Refugee Woman: Contesting Identities, Rethinking Practices*. New York: Berghahn Books, pp. 1–24.

Hanafi, Sari (2005): Reshaping Geography: Palestinian Community Networks in Europe and the New Media. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 31(3), pp. 581–598.

Holzer, Elizabeth (2015): *The Concerned Women of Buduburam: Refugee Activists and Humanitarian Dilemmas*. New York: Cornell University Press.

Hyndman, Jennifer / Giles, Wenona (2011): Waiting for What? The Feminisation of Asylum in Protracted Situations. *Gender, Place & Culture* 18(3), pp. 361–379.

Kaufmann, Katja (2018): Navigating a New Life: Syrian Refugees and their Smartphones in Vienna. *Information, Communication & Society* 21(6), pp. 882–898.

Kyaw, Nyi Nyi (2017): Unpacking the Presumed Statelessness of Rohingyas. *Journal of Immigrant & Refugee Studies* 15(3), pp. 269–286.

Lamba, Navjot K. / Krahn, Harvey (2003): Social Capital and Refugee Resettlement: The Social Networks of Refugees in Canada. *Journal of International Migration and Integration / Revue de L'integration et de La Migration Internationale* 4(3), pp. 335–360.

Levitt, Peggy / Schiller, Nina Glick (2006): Conceptualising Simultaneity: A Transnational Social Field Perspective on Society. *International Migration Review* 38(3), pp. 1002–1039.

Maber, Elizabeth J.T. (2016): Cross-border Transitions: Navigating Conflict and Political Change through Community Education Practices in Myanmar and the Thai Border. *Globalisation, Societies and Education* 14(3), pp. 374–389. https://doi.org/10.1080/14767724.2016.1175923

Marat, Aizhamal (2015): Uyghur Digital Diaspora in Kyrgyzstan. *Diaspora Studies* 9(1), pp. 53–63.

McConnachie, Kirsten (2012): Rethinking the "Refugee Warrior": The Karen National Union and Refugee Protection on the Thai-Burma Border. *Journal of Human Rights Practice* 4(1), pp. 30–56. https://doi.org/10.1093/jhuman/hus005

McConnachie, Kirsten (2018): Boundaries and Belonging in the Indo-Myanmar Borderlands: Chin Refugees in Mizoram. *Journal of Refugee Studies* 31(3), pp. 314–333. https://doi.org/10.1093/jrs/fey012

Mim, Nusrat Jahan (2020): Religion at the Margins: Resistance to Secular Humanitarianism at the Rohingya Refugee Camps in Bangladesh. *Religions* 11(8), pp. 1–17.

Mohsin, Amena (2019): Caught between the Nation and the State: Voices of Rohingya Refugee Women in Bangladesh. *Asian Journal of Comparative Politics* 4(2), pp. 144–157.

Nyers, Peter (2006): *Rethinking Refugees Beyond State of Emergency*. New York: Routledge.

O'Brien, Melanie / Hoffstaedter, Gerhard (2020): There We Are Nothing, Here We Are Nothing! The Enduring Effects of the Rohingya Genocide. *Social Sciences* 9(11), pp. 1–16.

O'Kane, Mary (2007): Blood, Sweat and Tears: The Political Agency of Women Activist-Refugees of Burma. *Intersections: Gender and Sexuality in Asia and the Pacific* 15, pp. 1–10.

Olivius, Elisabeth (2017): Sites of Repression and Resistance: Political Space in Refugee Camps in Thailand. *Critical Asian Studies* 49(3), pp. 289–307. https://doi.org/10.1080/14672715.2017.1333268

Olivius, Elisabeth (2019): Claiming Rights in Exile: Women's Insurgent Citizenship Practices in the Thai-Myanmar Borderlands. *Citizenship Studies* 23(8), pp. 761–779.

Olivius, Elisabeth / Hedström, Jenny (2019): Militarised Nationalism as a Platform for Feminist Mobilisation? The Case of the Exiled Burmese Women's Movement. *Women's Studies International Forum* 76, pp. 1–10. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2019.102263

Oxfam (2020): Voices Rising: Rohingya Women's Priorities and Leadership in Myanmar and Bangladesh. Oxfam, https://www.oxfam.org/en/research/voices-rising (accessed 27 March 2021).

Palmary, Ingrid / Burman, Erica / Chantler, Khatidja / Kiguwa, Peace (2010): Gender and Migration: Feminist Interventions. In: Ingrid Palmary / Erica Burman / Chantler Khatidja / Peace Kiguwa (eds): *Gender and Migration: Feminist Interventions*. London: Zed Books, pp. 1–12.

Pande, Amba (2018): Women in Indian Diaspora: Redefining Self Between Dislocation and Relocation. In: Amba Pande (eds): *Women in the Indian Diaspora: Historical Narratives and Contemporary Challenges*. Singapore: Springer, pp. 1–12.

Parham, Angel Adams (2004): Diaspora, Community and Communication: Internet Use in Transnational Haiti. *Global Networks* 4(2), pp. 199–217.

Pessar, R. Patricia (2010): Women's Political Consciousness and Empowerment in Local, National, and Transnational Contexts: Guatemalan Refugees and Returnees. *Identities: Global Studies in Culture and Power* 7(4), pp. 461–500.

Puwar, Nirmal (2004): *Space Invaders: Race, Gender and Bodies Out of Place*. New York: Berg.

Sánchez, Jorge Diego (2016): Arranged Marriages and Interracial Love Relationships in Women's Cinema of the South Asian Diaspora. *Feminismo/s* 27, pp. 79–99. 10.14198/fem.2016.27.05

Rahman, Farhana (2019): "I Find Comfort Here": Rohingya Women and Taleems in Bangladesh's Refugee Camps. *Journal of Refugee Studies* 34(1), pp. 874–889. https://doi.org/10.1093/jrs/fez054

Rayaprol, Aparna (2014): Religion and Identity in the South Asian Diaspora. *Diaspora Studies* 8(1), pp. 80–81.

Seu, Bruna Irene (2003): The Woman with the Baby: Exploring Narratives of Female Refugees. *Feminist Review* 73(1), pp. 158–165.

Sloan, Lacey / Joyner, Mildred / Stakeman, Catherine / Schmitz, Cathryne (2018): *Critical Multiculturalism and Intersectionality in a Complex World*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Tölölyan, Khachig (1991): The Nation-State and Its Others: In Lieu of a Preface. *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies* 1(1), pp. 3–7.

UNHCR (2019): Refugee Movements in South East Asia. 2018 to June 2019. UNHCR, https://www.unhcr.org/protection/migration/5d91e2564/refugee-movements-south-east-asia-2018-june-2019.html (accessed 27 March 2021).

UNHCR (2021): Figures at a Glance in Malaysia. UNHCR, https://www.unhcr.org/figures-at-a-glance-in-malaysia.html%20accessed%20on%20October%2021 (accessed 7 March 2021).

UNFPA (2018): Sexual and Reproductive Health Needs Immense among Rohingya Refugees. UNFPA, https://www.unfpa.org/news/sexual-and-reproductive-health-needs-immense-among-rohingya-refugees (accessed 7 March 2021).

UN Women (2017): Gender Brief on Rohingya Refugee Crisis Response in Bangladesh. UN Women, https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/-/media/field%20office%20eseasia/docs/publications/2017/10/gender-advocacy-paper-for-rohingya-refugee-crisis-response-in-bangladesh-r10.pdf?la=en&vs=2521 (accessed 27 March 2021).

Vasta, Apala (2016): Women in a Multicultural Diaspora: Dilemmas of Gender and Culture. *Diaspora Studies* 9(1), pp. 64–75.

Wahlbeck, Östen (2002): The Concept of Diaspora as an Analytical Tool in the Study of Refugee Communities. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 28(2), pp. 221–238.

Wahlbeck, Östen (2012): The Kurdish Refugee Diaspora in Finland. *Diaspora Studies* 5(1), pp. 44–57.

Walter, Bronwen (2001): *Outsiders inside: Whiteness, Place and Irish Women*. London: Routledge.

Waters, Johanna L. (2005): Transnational Family Strategies and Education in the Contemporary Chinese Diaspora. *Global Networks* 5(4), pp. 359–377.

Appendix 1: Rohingya refugee women's activism in diaspora (study respondents April 2019 – April 2021)

Location	Number of respondents	Age (average)	Level of eductaion (average)	Marital status	Languages spoken	Average years of living in exile	Professional engagement
Australia	3	22	highest: university graduate lowest: high school degree (grade 9)	all unmarried	all: Rohingya, Burmese, English	6	social and business entrepreneur, INGO worker, educator
Banglagesh	5	24	highest: primary school (grade 5) lowest: no formal education	married with children (3) widow (1) unmarried (1)	all: Rohingya, Bengali, English (1)	3	NGO worker, UN volunteer, religious school teacher, journalist, coordinator of a camp refugee women's network
Canada	3	25	highest: university graduate lowest: high school degree (grade 10)	unmarried (2) married (1)	all: Rohingya, English French (1)	8	moderator of a global Rohingya online platform, coordinator of a Rohingya women's association, editor of an online diaspora magazine, INGO worker
Germany	2	22	all: technical training	all unmarried	all: Rohingya, German, English	5	climate activist, women's NGO worker and member of a platform for refugee women in Germany
Malaysia	5	25	highest: high school degree lowest: no formal education	married (2) unmarried (2) divorced (1)	three: English, Rohingya, Malay one: English, Rohingya one: Rohingya only	5	online educator, journalist, teacher in a refugee school, coordinator of a Rohingya refugee women's network, NGO worker, UN volunteer
USA	2	27	highest: university graduate lowest: high school degree (grade 10)	married (2) with children (1)	all: Rohingya English	8	social entrepreneur, women rights activist, NGO worker and coordinator of a Rohingya rights platform in North America

Source: Compiled by the authors

IQAS Vol. 53 / 2022 ii, pp. 305–320

Book Reviews

Yifei Li / Judith Shapiro, *China Goes Green: Coercive Environmentalism for a Troubled Planet*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2020. 240 pages, 1 map, £15.99. ISBN 978-1-5095-4312-0 (pb)

China's role in addressing environmental challenges is widely reported and speculated upon. This is not only because China's participation is essential to effectively address global environmental problems, but also because China seems to be observing a green rhetoric and regulatory shift. The rise of China and its arrival in the environmental realm have prompted both hope and caution. Yifei Li and Judith Shapiro have engaged in this discussion by investigating the mechanisms of China's approach to environmental protection, which they have termed "state-led authoritarian environmentalism" (p. 20). Drawing on their own experiences and knowledge of scholarly and policy literature, the authors have examined the unstated agendas behind China's environmental protection slogans – and have investigated the real consequences of state-led activities in the name of environmental protection. They have found that political and strategic considerations often ride over environmental protection agendas, which has produced mixed results for the environment and society.

In the main body of the book, Yifei Li and Judith Shapiro provide a comprehensive analysis of the concrete mechanisms and tools of Chinese state-led coercive environmentalism domestically and internationally, on the planet and in outer space. In chapters 1 and 2, Yifei Li and Judith Shapiro begin with investigations of campaigns, target setting and mandatory behaviour modification in the developed east of China, and with one-size-fits-all policymaking, green grabbing and forcible relocation in the less developed western regions and border areas. The authors provide up-to-date empirical evidence to show how the heavy-handed actions led by the state have given rise to even thornier problems. Some methods of state-sponsored environmentalism have benefitted the privileged and harmed the already vulnerable, perpetuating systemic inequality without substantial environmental protection gains.

The authors proceed to delve into China's increasingly assertive actions in the international and outer space arena. In chapter 3, the authors examine the tools and techniques used by the Chinese government to promote the Belt and Road Initiative, such as the win-win framing of green developmentalism, the projection of ecologically friendly soft power and the use of green technocracy in transnational governance. By elaborating how the Chinese state has strategically taken advantage of green discourse in the Belt and Road Initiative, the authors join the discourse on the strategic factors driving the evolution of China's envi-

ronmental and foreign policies. The fourth chapter discusses China's authoritarian tools on the global and planetary stage – including manipulating global trade, engineering the atmosphere for blue skies and rain, utilising outer space environmentalism to gather big data and researching geoengineering to combat climate change – which are closely "linked to strategic and geopolitical agendas" (p. 152). However, the authors also admit that the pace of change is extremely rapid and there is little settled evidence in highly technical sectors.

Yifei Li and Judith Shapiro question whether China's approach can effectively address environmental challenges. They claim that environmental authoritarianism, rather than authoritarian environmentalism, is a more accurate term to describe the Chinese state activities presented in the book. The state is grabbing more and more power in the name of environmental protection, which has led to problematic or even devastating consequences in some cases. The authors thus challenge and deconstruct two assertions: first, that the Chinese state has genuinely gone green; and second, that radical solutions and non-democratic measures are justified to protect the earth.

This book conceptualises China's approach to environmental protection and reveals the coercive face of the state-led activities pursued with this aim. In establishing a platform for further discussion and debate, the volume provides a timely evaluation of the specific practices of Chinese state-led environmentalism and their consequences. The analysis speaks to several on-going discourses, such as the implications of the increasing centralisation of power since Xi Jinping took office, and the overly optimistic expectation for China to save the world from global environmental challenges. An important takeaway is that the effectiveness of Chinese state-led environmentalism lies in mechanisms that hold state power in check and in broad consultation with non-state actors. Without such measures, the resulting policies often advance state consolidation of power and produce mixed records in environmental and social terms.

In their analysis, Yifei Li and Judith Shapiro assume a monolithic state pursuing a coherent strategy for power, with the capacity to enforce its will at its discretion. That assumption merits careful consideration. Scholars who study China have convincingly documented competition and conflicts along the vertical and horizontal lines in the party-state system. Since the Open and Reform policy introduced in 1978, the Chinese state has experienced significant transformation, becoming increasingly fragmented, decentralised and also internationalised. The ways in which the party-state system has transformed and the implications this has for environmental protection deserve more attention. For example, the Ministry of Ecology and Environment has gained more power to advance an environmental agenda and cannot be compared to the weak bureau it was when first established in 1988. And non-state actors such as NGOs have been granted the right to sue polluters under the new Environmental Protection Law.

Yifei Li and Judith Shapiro could also have sharpened their argument by examining alternative explanations. Contradictions between state behaviour and mixed results might emerge out of conflicts between different actors within and outside of the complex party-state system, rather than from the coherent coercion imposed by a single state. This hypothesis is worth testing because the central government does not always have control over local officials to enforce policies fully. The inconsistencies of China's dealings with international environmental issues could also result from conflicts and negotiations between various actors in the government system and international actors.

In summary, this book provides a convincing analysis of the coercive practices of China's state-led environmentalism, with rich empirical evidence. The authors' critical analysis has both practical and theoretical relevance. With a clear structure and accessible language, it provides an excellent overview of China's environmental protection approach.

Dongping Wang

Graeme Smith / Terence Wesley-Smith (eds), *The China Alternative. Changing Regional Order in the Pacific Islands*. (Pacific Series). Canberra: Australian National University Press, 2021. 504 pages, $70.00 (print). ISBN 978-1-7604-6416-5 (print), 978-1-7604-6417-2 (online). The book is available to download for free at press.anu.edu.au.

The present volume discusses the rising influence of China in the Pacific. Although previously competition with Taiwan for diplomatic recognition ("chequebook diplomacy") prompted foreign policy initiatives from both Asian countries, over the past ten years the People's Republic of China (PRC) has pulled ahead by a substantial margin. These initiatives have made China the most important trading partner of Australia, New Zealand and other Pacific Island states and thus the second largest trading partner in the region. After Australia, China is the most important donor country in bilateral development cooperation in the Pacific region. This cooperation is being broadened through the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which, so far, New Zealand and 10 of 14 sovereign Pacific Island countries in the region have joined. In addition to the Solomon Islands and Kiribati, which switched diplomatic recognition from Taiwan to China in 2019, these countries are Fiji (diplomatic relations since 1975), Samoa (1976), Papua New Guinea (1976), Vanuatu (1982), the Federated States of Micronesia (1989), Cook Islands (1997), Tonga (1998) and Niue (2007). The Marshall Islands, Nauru, Palau and Tuvalu number among the 15 mostly small countries which currently still recognise Taiwan.

This edited volume is the result of a workshop and symposium in February 2019 on the campus of the University of the South Pacific in the Vanuatu capital of Port Vila. Seventeen researchers from Fiji, Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands, Australia, New Zealand, the United States, China and Timor-Leste explore this rise of China in 16 chapters and an introductory chapter, and the book also includes the opening remarks of the then Foreign Minister of Vanuatu, Ralph Regenvanu, and those of the general secretary of the most important organisation in the region, the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF), Dame Meg Taylor. The contributors analyse the most important factors in changing relations and reflect on the economic, political, diplomatic and strategic implications for dominance in the region on this transformation of Pacific Island states.

The presence of China poses a challenge to the dominance of Western powers and their allies, who have set the agenda in the Pacific since the end of the Second World War. Until today, the region has been characterised by (post-)colonial power structures. In the South Pacific these are Australia, which sees itself as a regional stabilising power representing the United States and views the Melanesian countries as its backyard or "patch"; New Zealand, which as a Pacific country has close relations with the Polynesian island states (the independent Cook Islands and Niue are freely associated with Wellington and, unlike the other countries in Polynesia, not members of the UN); and France, which still control the colonies of New Caledonia, French Polynesia (both PIF members) and Wallis and Futuna. Even now, the EU member state still sees itself as a Pacific power with control over an exclusive economic zone covering 7 million square kilometres and regulates China's access to the three countries.

In the North Pacific (Micronesia) the predominance of the United States is ubiquitous for primarily strategic reasons. In that region, the Federated States of Micronesia, the Republic of the Marshall Islands and Palau are part of the Compact of Free Association, which gives the US exclusive control of an area covering 5.59 million square kilometres. To this can be added the unincorporated US territory of Guam, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands and American Samoa in the South Pacific. The citizens of these nations can move freely between the United States and their home countries. Hawaii and Easter Island belong to the US and Chile respectively. New international actors such as Indonesia, Russia, India and Israel are also involved, as well as old partners such as Great Britain (with its only remaining colony, the Pitcairn Islands).

In her opening remarks, Dame Meg Taylor clearly states that the Pacific Island states regard the presence of China in the region as a positive development because it gives PIF countries access to markets, technology, financing and infrastructure. This presence offers opportunities but also poses significant risks. Dame Meg rejects the binary view that the Pacific has to choose between China, and thus a one-China policy, and traditional partners. The concept of the "Blue Pacific" or "Blue Pacific Continent" is deliberately emphasised as dis-

tinct from the dominant narrative of a marginalized region and is viewed by state leaders as an alternative empowering development path and the most important driver of collective action in the context of Pacific regionalism. The Boe Declaration of the PIF meeting in 2018, which states that "climate change remains the single greatest threat to the livelihoods, security and wellbeing of the peoples of the Pacific" (ix) – is the principal element of efforts by Pacific Island state leaders to implement the "Blue Pacific" concept and stands in stark contrast to the environmental and security policy of PIF member country Australia as well as that of the previous Trump administration.

The introduction by the editors and the first two chapters explore the return of great power competition, the mapping of the "Blue Pacific" in a changing regional order as well as the danger of a new Cold War. It is obvious that China's claim of sovereignty over a large portion of the South China Sea and the announced reunification of Taiwan with the "mother country" have heralded a new phase of uncertainty and possible destabilisation in the region, although, unlike the countries of East and Southeast Asia, the Pacific is not currently situated at the front line of the conflict. To this can be added security-policy initiatives and the military arms buildup, which is unfolding especially in the form of US bases in the North Pacific and in Australia, which are covered by security treaties (ANZUS, "Quad", "Five Eyes").

The arguments presented in chapters three to six show how Australia, New Zealand, the United States and France are faced with differing kinds of issues about China and have changed their policy in response to China's activity. Discussion here focuses in particular on investment programmes worth billions of dollars for developing the infrastructure of Pacific Island countries (Australia's "Pacific Step-up", New Zealand's "Pacific Reset", Washington's "Pacific Pledge" and Great Britain's "Pacific Uplift"). It is above all Canberra that views Beijing as an ultimate strategic threat at the national, regional and global level. Beijing's debt-trap diplomacy and debt-for-equity lever, for example with Sri Lanka, are criticised and said to be decimating Canberra's influence as the anchor of South Pacific stability. In addition, there is also aggressive diplomacy (in contrast to courting the Pacific heads of state) as well as massive economic and domestic political infiltration by China (in a milder form also in New Zealand). In Australia alone, economic damage caused each year by Beijing's punitive actions in response to bans on Huawei equipment (Australia excludes the Chinese company from the country's 5G roll-out) and COVID-19 demands (Canberra's call for an independent investigation into the origins of the virus) runs into the billions annually. But Palau and the Marshall Islands are also exposed to economic sanctions because of their close relations with Taiwan.

Chapters seven to twelve present the views of a Chinese scholar (according to whom Beijing does not give the Pacific a high priority) and and discuss China's development aid and the inclusion of the Pacific in the Belt and Road Initiative

(in 2015 the BRI was extended to the Pacific as the "21st Century Maritime Silk Road Initiative"), the influence of China in the Solomon Islands and Fiji, Taiwan's misunderstood efforts to draw attention to its shared Austronesian identity with the Pacific, and the advantages and disadvantages of the BRI in Papua New Guinea. The last three chapters deal with the Chinese communities ("old" integrated diaspora versus "new" migrants) and the resulting conflicts in Vanuatu, Papua New Guinea and Timor-Leste, which is increasingly identifying with the Pacific region.

In summary, it can be said that the Pacific as the sole domain of the West is a thing of the past. China has used the disinterest and declining development aid of longstanding partners to establish itself in the Pacific. However, there is no discernible grand strategy that specifically focuses on Beijing's hegemony, nor are there any indications of a preference for the Chinese development model. This also shows that China's soft power qualities are limited in the region. The granting of concessional credits is unconditional ("no strings attached"). This increases the lack of transparency and worsens mismanagement, corruption and bad governance. There is also concern that Beijing's low-interest loans are subject to the laws of China and are interpreted in accordance with these. In addition, Chinese companies import their own workforce, concepts and resources for projects. In the Pacific, a debt trap can be ruled out as China's strategy. Although several countries are endangered by debt, only Tonga has a high level of overindebtedness to China. As far as Chinese corporate investments are concerned – around USD 5 billion has been invested so far, mainly in mining, construction, real estate and retail – violations of landowners' rights, late payments of royalties and major environmental damage are the norm, something which is also the case with Western companies.

It is also clear that Chinese involvement can have a massive influence on the domestic policies of the Pacific states. The difference in the structure of the relationships is the competence and sovereignty of governments. This can be seen, for example, in Fiji and the Solomon Islands. Fiji has used the sanctions of Western partners – in response to the abolition of its constitution in 2009 following the coup d'état of 2006 – to proactively approach China as a stopgap and to shape bilateral relations according to its own ideas. With the constitution of 2014 and the end of the sanctions, Suva opened up again to its Western partners and benefited from development aid. Fiji has now emerged as the most important regional player with a broad international impact. The Solomon Islands, on the other hand, are completely different. With fragile and corrupt state institutions, the country is barely able to manage relationships effectively. As with Papua New Guinea, financial support from China could come at the cost of a further opening up of the raw materials sector to Chinese corporations and could further undermine weak governance.

The 47th session of the Human Rights Council in Geneva in June 2021 showed that China's international relations with the Pacific and the rest of the world are developing extremely dynamically. While Canada, on behalf of 44 countries including the Pacific states of Palau and Nauru, expressed concern about China's human rights violations in Xinjiang, Tibet and Hong Kong, 68 developing countries led by Belarus, including the Pacific nations of Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Kiribati and Tonga, sided with Beijing and rejected interference in China's internal affairs. The anthology presents an excellent analysis of China's relations with the Pacific, the multidimensionality of which cannot be adequately depicted here, even in part. This volume has considerable importance given the relatively limited scientific scholarship thus far on this topic.

Roland Seib

Keyuan Zou (ed.), *The Belt and Road Initiative and the Law of the Sea*. (Maritime Cooperation in East Asia 9). Boston: Brill, 2020. XVIII, 220 pages, €125.00. ISBN 978-9-0044-2204-9 (hc)

This edited volume presents a collection of writings that aims to assess the maritime implications of the nascent, China-led Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which was officially announced by China's President Xi Jinping in 2013, within the framework of the international law of the sea. The "Road" portion of the BRI somewhat confusingly refers to the 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road (MSR), which is ocean based. The MSR is envisioned as using China's coastal ports to link China's economy with Europe and with the South Pacific Ocean via maritime passageways including the South China Sea and the Indian Ocean (p. 1). The book is organised into five parts, which consider the BRI in relation to: the use of the oceans; sea lanes of communication and navigational safety; maritime energy and sea ports; maritime law enforcement and cooperation; and access of land-locked states to the sea. Taken together, the overall thesis of this timely contribution involves assessing and understanding the economic and legal challenges that exist in the maritime domain with regards to fulfilling the lofty economic and development promises of the BRI in the near and long term.

While Chapter 1 provides a concise overview of each contribution in the volume, Chapter 2 discusses the BRI in relation to maritime economic cooperation in East Asia, specifically from a South Korean perspective. Authors Seokwoo Lee and Hee Eun Lee assess the BRI in terms of its potential to enhance regional connectivity in East Asia and clearly consider its growth to be a model for potential South Korean-led regional development. Nevertheless, the BRI is viewed

as paradox – where participant states must balance "the economic rewards and benefits" (p. 15) of the BRI with concerns over financial dependency on China or even being "subject to Chinese military intervention" (p. 15). In Chapter 3, Renping Zhang provides historical background and contemporary facts about the legal implications of the BRI as it pertains to ocean use.

Chapters 4, 5 and 6 look at specific sub-areas of international maritime law including the Polar Code, two new Artic Agreements, the safety of passenger ships in Korea and the geopolitical dilemma of the Chinese government's attempt to convince new participant states to enrol in the BRI, while at the same time defending Chinese claims to national sovereignty over vast swathes of the South China Sea. All three of these chapters provide rich detail for scholars seeking more in-depth assessments of these relatively narrow legal concerns.

The chapters in part three touch on the policy and potential legal implications of the Global Energy Interconnection Initiative, the role of sea ports, and harmonisation of transport law within the context of the BRI. With regard to transport law (see Chapter 9), author Zhihua Zheng explains the role that the harmonisation of transport law plays in strengthening closer economic ties between China and other BRI-participant states.

The chapters in the fourth part examine maritime law enforcement and cooperation from the perspective of bilateral cooperation in fisheries law enforcement, ocean-based cooperation in the Mediterranean and Red Seas, as well as the very important role played by nine memorandums of understanding (MoUs) on state port control – the most important of which are the Paris MoU and the Tokyo MoU, discussed in Chapter 12. In that chapter, author Chen-ju Chen emphasises the key role in ocean-based cooperation and enforcement played by the International Maritime Organization (IMO) conventions, most of which have been accepted by China (p. 170).

Of all of the parts of this volume, part 5, which focuses on the (economic and political) access opportunities of land-locked states to the sea, is perhaps the most understudied and presents questions that have only recently begun to be discussed in scholarly circles. In Chapter 13, Helmut Tuerk provides a very accessible overview of the rights of land-locked states in relation to ocean and sea access in terms of international maritime law. The discussion of a state's right to the resources of Exclusive Economic Zones (p. 191) is perhaps the most compelling section of this chapter. Equally timely and seemingly unknown to much of the BRI scholarly community is Anastasia Telesetsky's exploration of the use of regional fisheries management organisations to allow land-locked countries to partially benefit from the marine resources afforded to those nearby states that do have direct access to the coast.

This volume combines established as well as emerging concerns relating to the implications for the BRI of international maritime law. While ideally the writing in this volume could have been focused more toward a general social

science audience – rather than a legal audience – this book achieves an admirable feat. It engages with a broad range of important and emerging policy issues that lie at the crossroads of the BRI and the law of the sea and serves as one of the few publications to address this research area, which will continue to grow in significance.

Tom Narins

Christophe Jaffrelot, *Modi's India: Hindu Nationalism and the Rise of Ethnic Democracy*. Translated by Cynthia Schoch. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2021. 656 pages, $35.00. ISBN 978-0-6912-2309-4 (eBook)

Christophe Jaffrelot is among those scholars who have acutely analysed, and been critical of, the changes in the realm of politics and society in India over the last three decades. His book *Modi's India: Hindu Nationalism and the Rise of Ethnic Democracy* is an extensive reflection on the historical curve and rise of Hindu nationalism, as one of the longest sustained campaigns in Indian democracy, culminating in the triumph of Hindutva, the saffronisation of institutions as well as the state apparatus, and the making of a populist and divisive politician in Narendra Modi, the current Prime Minister of India. Therefore, any assessment by Jaffrelot of Hindu nationalism and the rise of Modi must be located in a much broader space; political, social or cultural spaces alone will not help us to understand the expanse, ideology and the actual working of the Hindutva ideology that remains key to Modi's success.

Modi's India is equally useful in tracing Jaffrelot's articulation of "the rise of ethnic democracy", which is not only a consequence of deficiencies in the acceptance of democratic frameworks, but is also the product of a series of intensely fought elections, fierce battles over sites, rituals and spaces, and a polarising debate over the meaning of secularism and democracy. The book details that in India the decay of inclusive democracy and rise of ethnic democracy is not just a feature of the past few years or even decades but is the result of a long drawn-out campaign and the socio-political assertion of Hindu majoritarian notions supported by fundamentalists as well as self-proclaimed non-partisan Hindus.

The book is divided into three parts and eleven chapters. The first part of the book begins by giving a brief account of shifts in democratic politics and further outlines almost every major political issue linked with the Hindu nationalist movement from the 1990s onwards and the rise of Narendra Modi as a populist leader from the early 2000s. Jaffrelot emphasises that the intertwining

of Hindutva with populism has become more evident since Narendra Modi was projected as the prime face of the BJP in electoral politics.

Part two of the book, focusing on the alchemy of Hindutva and populism, meticulously details the creation of an ethnic democracy on the premise of the homogenisation project in the nation-state. This form of homogenisation has been assertively dividing Indian society into "pure people (nationalist)" and "corrupt citizens (anti-nationalist)", furthering the discourse of "Us vs Them". In the post-2014 era, after the election of Narendra Modi to the office of prime minister, democratic principles have been washed away with the establishment an ethnicisation model in which a majority enjoys more rights than the minorities, both de facto and de jure.

The central argument of the third part of the book focuses on a form of authoritarianism, founded on the principles of majoritarian nationalism, that has communally polarised Indian society by manipulating independent institutions, using media for political propaganda and unleashing campaigns for the further marginalisation and terrorisation of Muslims, in particular, and any other group or individual that contests the authoritarians of the Hindu *rastra* (nation).

The strength of the book lies in Jaffrelot's impressive scholarship, distinctive documentation and rich observation of changes that have taken place in the social, political, cultural and economic realm. The book is not a mere description of events or even an analysis of democracy in decline but an extremely poignant take on the deterioration of social morality, institutional values and republican principles. However, while the author expounds in detail on the centralisation of power and the attacks on the proponents of secularism, free speech, social justice and liberal values in universities, the book does not adequately cover the forms and extent of resistance against the neutralisation of the opposition, a neutralisation that is carried out in the name of promoting Hindu nationalism.

PM Modi's policies have been challenged and torn apart by several academics and free thinkers in India, and their efforts to oppose a malicious and increasingly authoritarian regime deserve elaboration. At the same time, students at many universities in India have been combating the onslaught of an institutionalised Hindutva. Protests against Modi's most ambitious project, the Citizenship Amendment Act of 2019, in combination with the proposed all-India National Register of Citizens, have been not just political and intellectual opposition but also a form of defiance of an unconstitutional law by the commoners, spearheaded by women and students.[1]

It is in this sense that the book is a one-sided (yet extremely meticulous and extensively researched) narration by the author, who portrays the very harsh reality of present-day India and a decidedly worrisome future. Undeniably Jaffrelot is correct in pointing out that in the Indian version of ethnic democracy the state promotes a majoritarian version of history, identity construction and legal

interpretation – even as non-state actors, such as vigilante groups from the Hindu majority, have become coercive agents of cultural policing, trolling and religious fundamentalism in both physical and virtual spaces.

He also notes that the longer the Modi regime remains in power, the higher the chances that the separation between the actions of the majoritarian state and of non-state actors will further diminish. Thus, the book stimulates questions that need to be addressed by those Indian citizens who believe in the foundations of a righteous republic: Can there be a concrete opposition to this form of authoritarianism? What forms of socio-political alliances are required to stall the ethnicisation of democracy? And how do we contribute to a compassionate humanitarian society?

Aniket Nandan

1 The Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) of 2019 provides citizenship to religious minorities from Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan, but it excludes Muslims from these countries. The Act also defines illegal immigrants as foreigners without valid documents and subject to punitive action. Opponents of the bill view it as exclusionary and a violation of the secular principles enshrined in the constitution. According to them religious faith cannot be made a condition of citizenship or its refusal. The CAA is also linked to the National Register of Citizens (NRC) which is a list of people who can prove citizenship of India. A large section of scholars of Indian politics have viewed that the implementation of the nationwide NRC will divide the immigrant population into two categories: (predominantly) Muslims, who will be deemed illegal migrants, and all others, who would have been deemed illegal migrants, but are now immunised by the Citizenship Amendment Bill if they can prove that their country of origin is Afghanistan, Bangladesh or Pakistan. For more information on these acts, please see: https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-citizenship-amendment-act-nrc-caa-means-6180033 (accessed 15 July 2022).

Jyoti Gulati Balachandran, *Narrative Pasts: The Making of a Muslim Community in Gujarat, c. 1400–1650*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2020. 248 pages, £45.00. ISBN 978-0-1901-2399-4

Narrative Pasts studies the different ways in which Muslim communities of medieval Gujarat imagined their history through commemorative texts, spiritual networks and architectural monuments. The book moves beyond the Delhi-centric historiography and the state-focused narratives of the Muslim past. Jyoti Balachandran fully acknowledges the importance of the formation of the Gujarat Sultanate as central to the functioning of the Muslim community in the region, but she rightly adds that there were multiple historical processes – Sufi textual production, organisation of Sufi orders, construction of shrine complexes – that impacted each other and are therefore equally significant for understanding the history and experiences of Muslims in medieval Gujarat.

The book provides a social history of the region, a history in which centre stage is taken not by those in political power, but by the Sufis, their disciples and

descendants. The key figures include Aḥmad Khattū (d. 1445), of the Maghrabi order, and his two Suhrawardi contemporaries (descendants of the famous Jalāl al-Dīn Bukhārī) Burhān al-Dīn ʿAbdullāh (d. 1452) and his son Sirāj al-Dīn Muḥammad (d. 1475), who settled in eastern Gujarat in the 15th century. It is around these figures, their social relations, their shrines, disciples and descendants, and the narrative power of their texts, that the story revolves.

The book consists of an introduction and five chapters, followed by a conclusion and an appendix. Chapter 1 prepares the backdrop for the 15th century: Balachandran notes the long presence of Muslims in pre-15th century Gujarat in places such as Khambayat, Bharuch, Rander, Veraval and Somnath, among others. These included trading communities, *qāzīs* and *khatībs*, some of which received stipends from the Rasulid Sultans in Yemen (pp. 40–43). Muslim settlement in the region increased when the Delhi Sultan ʿAlā al-Dīn Khaljī (r. 1296–1316) made Patan a provincial capital. There was also a Chishtī and Suhrawardī presence in the region from the 14th century, but our knowledge of their role among the Muslim communities of Gujarat remains limited. Unlike their counterparts in other regions, who were engaged in producing a variety of texts, no such textualisation is evident in 14th century Gujarat. This changes with the establishment of the Gujarat Sultanate in the 15th century and the settlement of Sufis (such as Aḥmad Khattū and his Suhrawardi contemporaries), who received patronage from the nascent Sultanate. "It was this fortuitous conjuncture," writes Balachandran, "that produced the beginnings of sustained reflections on the Muslim past in Gujarat" (p. 55).

At the heart of these reflections was Aḥmad Khattū, who settled at Sarkhej and whose disciples Muḥammad Qāsim and Maḥmūd Īrajī wrote the two texts – *Mirqāt* and *Tuḥfat al-majālis*, respectively – that mark the beginnings of what Balachandran calls "the first narrative moment" (p. 69). While far inferior in their literary standards compared to those of early Chishtīs, the two texts drew upon rich Indo-Persian Sufi literary traditions to bolster the charisma and piety of Aḥmad Khattū, gave legitimacy to his spiritual lineage and established his centrality for the Muslim communities in Gujarat. Equally important was their role in creating a textual and oral history of Aḥmad Khattū, which later writers would refer to, incorporate and even build upon.

In addition to these texts, the shrine of Aḥmad Khattū and those of others became prominent "spatial zones for the oral dissemination of textual narratives about the Sufis and the production of new narrative remembrances" (p. 94). These shrines were venerated by the Gujarat Sultans, particularly Maḥmūd Begarha (r. 1458–1511), who converted Khattū's shrine into a tomb complex with palatial structures. Chapter 3 explains this joint Sufi-state participation in the creation of sacral geography in medieval Gujarat. Besides Khattū, memories of his Suhrawardi contemporaries Burhān al-Dīn and Sirāj al-Dīn also became intertwined with the formation of the Gujarat Sultanate. Their shrines

became places of pilgrimage over the 16th century, testifying to their successful management by the family's descendants. Textual narratives of the two men became abundant in the 16th and 17th centuries, even though no contemporary records exist.

Chapter 4 explores the later Suhrawardi texts, particularly Ḥāshim Quṭbī's Ṣaḥāʾif al-sādāt, that attempt to give historical depth and validity to the Suhrawardi establishment in Gujarat by providing long chains of transmission (*shajra*) inherited by Burhān al-Dīn. This is what Balachandran calls "the second narrative moment in the long-term articulation of the history of state and community in Gujarat" (p. 118). These later accounts (written in the 17th century) emphasise Burhān al-Dīn's and Sirāj al-Dīn's connections with Jalāl al-Dīn Bukhārī and with Aḥmad Khattū, who emerges as a conduit for the transfer of investiture from Bukhārī to the two Suhrawardi figures.

The production by the descendants of Sirāj al-Dīn (known as the "Shahi" branch) far outstripped the texts produced by the "Quṭbī" branch (from Burhān al-Dīn's eldest son Nāṣir al-Dīn Maḥmūd). This point becomes clear in the final chapter, which focuses on Ṣafī al-Dīn Jaʿfar's (d. 1674) *Ṣad Ḥikāyat* (a collection of 100 episodes relating to Sirāj al-Dīn) – the last significant contribution to 17th century Suhrawardi textual production. Here we see a clear attempt to reconfigure the relationships between the early Suhrawardis in Gujarat, Aḥmad Khattū, and Jalāl al-Dīn Bukhārī. In *Ṣad Ḥikāyat*, Khattū emerges as a disciple of Bukhārī, who essentially waited to transfer the *khirqa-i mahbūbiyat* (the ceremonial grant of a robe signifying spiritual succession; translated as "Robe of Divine Proximity"), which he received from Bukhārī, to Sirāj al-Dīn. With this explanation, Ṣafī al-Dīn was able to achieve the twin tasks of connecting the Suhrawardis to their famed ancestor (Jalāl al-Dīn Bukhārī) without ignoring the medium of Aḥmad Khattū, who had captured the imagination of the later generations.

The book is well written, well referenced, offers a lucid reading, is free from typographical errors and includes a useful appendix. What one might find lacking is any discussion of the Shaṭṭārī order, which had a marked presence in Gujarat, particularly from Wajīh al-Dīn ʿAlawī's (d. 1590) time. Places in Gujarat such as Baroda, Mahmudabad, Champaner and Ahmadabad had a Shaṭṭārī presence from the 16th century. What place did the Shaṭṭārīs have in such narrative articulations of the past? Did they have any interactions with their Suhrawardi counterparts? Why did Aḥmad Khattū, a lesser-known figure affiliated to the relatively unknown Maghrabi order, with an unknown familial ancestry and with no spiritual successors or descendants, become so central for later Suhrawardis? Why did the Suhrawardi descendants of Jalāl al-Dīn Bukhārī considered it important to connect to him through Khattū, but did not seek any connections to the Shaṭṭārīs? Some of these questions may well be beyond the scope of the present study, but the absence of the Shaṭṭārīs from the narrative is quite noticeable.

These minor shortcomings should not distract the reader from the strengths of this book. Given the recent studies on regional experiences of Sufi orders, particularly in Bengal and Deccan, by Richard Eaton, Carl Ernst and Nile Green among others, this book is a welcome addition to the growing field. Focusing on Gujarat and utilising several rare and under-utilised manuscripts, Jyoti Balachandran has produced a wonderful study on how the past was remembered and transcribed in texts. Although the historical authenticity of such later accounts may be questioned, they nevertheless help us in understanding how posterity imagined the ancestral past, imparted historical depth to their lineages and employed the authority of prominent figures in new ways.

The study reminds one of the Chishtī-Ṣābrī order, where accounts of the 13th–14th century figures are initially meagre but become abundant and extensive in 17th century and later *tazkirahs*, linking the founder of the order (ʿAlī Ṣābir, ca. d. 1291) more closely to his spiritual mentor Farīd al-Dīn "Ganj-i Shakar" and providing copious amounts of information, mainly based on oral traditions or intuition (*kashf*) of his immediate successors. Balachandran's book will enable scholars to have a more nuanced approach towards such later accounts, often side-lined as apocryphal or unhistorical. It is certainly a book to be recommended.

Moin Ahmad Nizami

Giuseppe Bolotta, *Belittled Citizens. The Cultural Politics of Childhood on Bangkok's Margins*. (Monograph Series 154). Copenhagen: NIAS Press, 2021. 252 pages, 9 illustrations, 1 map, £22.50. ISBN 978-8-7769-4301-1 (pb)

Giuseppe Bolotta's *Belittled Citizens* is an academic work about the politics of childhood for urban poor children in Bangkok. Based on extensive fieldwork over the past decade, during which the author spent long stretches of time in a "living-in experience" among the urban poor in slums over various visits, the writing provides a holistic and intimate picture of the multitude of lives of *dek salam* (slum children) vis-à-vis the authoritarian monarchical and tendentially militaristic paternalism of "Thainess". Having conducted extensive fieldwork of a similar kind among urban poor activists in Jakarta myself, I know what a taxing as well as rewarding task it is.

To my knowledge, the book is among very few academic works published on urban poor children generally and is therefore very relevant as a new publication shedding light on the most forgotten among the most marginalised in Bangkok's slums. Moreover, the author is able to bring about a very colourful,

sometimes cheerful, account of children's lives – thereby carrying a note of hope throughout the entire book, despite describing extremely precarious conditions.

The first of two parts of the work looks into the cultural politics of children's lives in Thailand by referring to concepts of the "good Thai child", the Buddhist concept of karma in respect to poverty, the Catholic / Christian understanding of God's love for the poor as well as the cosmopolitan-humanitarian NGO-based discourses of victimhood. Part two is about Thai children's multiple selves as well as how Thai children perform, contest and go beyond the "Thai Self" that is related to the concept of the good Thai child. Throughout the chapters, Giuseppe Bolotta constructs, de-constructs, re- and co-constructs *dek salam* identity (politics) vis-à-vis the Thai state, society and military – a scholarly solid and very organised treatise.

With great attention to detail, the author describes the concept of Thainess and what this means for the *dek salam* in relation to or in opposition to *phu yai* (big persons). I agree with the author when he constructs the Thai Self in light of a Thai society that has now become thoroughly militarised. The author attempts to show how *dek salam* challenge the conditions of Thai Self and militarisation, yet his explanation remains only superficial. Bolotta could have taken a step into theory by including civil-military relations (CMR) theory, and perhaps even made a potentially ground-breaking theoretical contribution. CMR theory suggests that there is an ongoing struggle for democratic control of the citizens of a state vis-à-vis the military and is based on the assumption that citizens of legal age (civil society) are the most important stakeholders in that democratic exercise of citizens' duty. In fact, Bolotta's work suggests otherwise: from an early age on, children already play the role of challenging, contesting and criticising military ideology, discourse and actions (such as "show of force", etc.).

An additional minor criticism of the book is that it often seems to emphasise the very positive impact of one particular Catholic organisation. The work thereby seems to suggest that there is some sort of Christian-only solution to accommodating *dek salam* and giving them prospects for a brighter future. As a core object of analysis, the organisation itself could have been reviewed more critically, in my opinion. In the same vein, an Italian priest, referred to as Father Nicola, seems to be the undoubted hero and saviour of the urban poor children. I do not wish to imply that the author is replicating here the trope of the white(-man) as saviour, but he could have inserted a healthy critique of religion here as well as of the Catholic church as a patriarchal institution involved in child sex abuse around the world, despite its obviously beneficial role for Bangkok's urban poor and the Thai education system. Moreover, it would have been better to refer to more than just Buddhist and Catholic (religious) institutions. The book seems to suggest a binary religious choice, yet in Thailand there is a sizeable Muslim minority and there are certainly some Protestant Christian communities

as well as other religious minorities. Involving those, albeit briefly, would have painted a more inclusive picture.

All in all, the author has managed to produce both an empirical study with strong data collected over a long period of time as well as, by referring to a huge number of sources, a theoretical study of the humanities that will serve the field of Thai/Southeast Asian Studies over a long time. The great achievement of Giuseppe Bolotta is that he gives attention and agency to those who might hardly have been given any say in any discourse whatsoever before: urban poor children – the future adults of tomorrow. Academic discourses on the urban poor are in need of more research of this sort. That is why I highly recommend this book for teaching in the field of Southeast Asian Studies as well as in poverty and migration research. Giuseppe Bolotta's work has the potential to become a core reading for these fields. Despite my minor criticisms, the book deserves a wide readership outside of academia as well, because the (urban) poor need to be given more attention and their voices need to be documented and heard.

Mark Philip Stadler

IQAS Vol. 53 / 2022 ii, pp. 321–322

Authors

Anas Ansar, M.A., Bonn Center for Dependency and Slavery Studies (BCDSS), University of Bonn, Niebuhrstraße 5, 53113 Bonn, Germany
anas.ansar@uni-bonn.de

Prof. Dr. Dan Banik, Centre for Development and the Environment, University of Oslo, Postboks 1116, Blindern, 0317 Oslo, Norway
dan.banik@sum.uio.no

Prof. Dr. Benedicte Bull, Centre for Development and the Environment, University of Oslo, Postboks 1116, Blindern, 0317 Oslo, Norway
benedicte.bull@sum.uio.no

Prof. Dr. Fabiano Escher, Department of Development, Agriculture and Society, Federal Rural University of Rio de Janeiro, Avenue Presidente Vargas 417, Rio de Janeiro, Postal Code 20.071-003, Brazil
escher_fab@hotmail

Dr. Ana Garcia, International Relations Institute, Rua Marquês de São Vicente 225, Rio de Janeiro, Postal Code 22451-900, Brazil
anasaggioro@puc-rio.br

Dr. Julia Gurol, Department of Political Sciences, University of Freiburg, Seminar für Wissenschaftliche Politik, Rempartstraße 15, 79085 Freiburg, Germany
julia.gurol@politik.uni-freiburg.de

Dr. Ping Huang, Faculty of Social Sciences, Interdisciplinary Centre of the Social Sciences (ICOSS), 219 Portobello, Sheffield, S1 4DP, UK
p.huang@sheffield.ac.uk

Abu Faisal Md. Khaled, M.A., Department of International Relations, Bangladesh University of Professionals, Dhaka 1000, Bangladesh
faisal.khaled@bup.edu.bd

Dr. Aniket Nandan, Department of Sociology, National Law School of India University, Gnana Bharathi Main Rd, Naagarabhaavi, Bengaluru, Karnataka 560072, India
aniket.nandan@nls.ac.in

Dr. Tom Narins, Department of Geography and Planning, University at Albany, 1400 Washington Avenue, Albany, New York 12222, USA
tnarins@albany.edu

Dr. Moin Ahmad Nizami, Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies, Marston Road, Oxford OX3 0EE, UK
moin.nizami@oxcis.ac.uk

Dr. Fabricio Rodríguez, Arnold Bergstraesser Institute, Windausstraße 16, 79110 Freiburg, Germany
fabricio.rodriguez@abi.uni-freiburg.de

Dr. Benjamin Schütze, Arnold Bergstraesser Institute, Windausstraße 16, 79110 Freiburg, Germany
benjamin.schuetze@abi.uni-freiburg.de

Dr. Roland Seib, Hobrechtstrasse 28, 64285 Darmstadt, Germany
rseib@t-online.de

Mark Philip Stadler, M.A., Master of Theology, University of Marburg, Lahntor 3, 35032 Marburg, Germany
markphilipstadler@gmail.com

Prof. Dr. David Tyfield, Lancaster Environment Centre, Lancaster University, Lancaster, LA1 4YQ, UK
d.tyfield@lancaster.ac.uk

Dr. Dongping Wang, Graduate School of Global Politics, Freie Universität Berlin, Kaiserswerther Str. 16-18, 14195 Berlin, Germany
dongping.wang@fu-berlin.de

Dr. Linda Westman, Faculty of Social Sciences, Interdisciplinary Centre of the Social Sciences (ICOSS), 219 Portobello, Sheffield, S1 4DP, UK
l.westman@sheffield.ac.uk

Prof. Dr. John Wilkinson, Department of Development, Agriculture and Society, Federal Rural University of Rio de Janeiro, Avenue Presidente Vargas 417, Rio de Janeiro, Postal Code 20.071-003, Brazil
jhn.wlknsn@gmail.com

Notes for Contributors

The editors request contributors to kindly observe the following guidelines:

1. Please send your manuscript to the Editorial Manager, Ann-Elisabeth Philipp, International Quarterly for Asian Studies, Arnold Bergstraesser Institute, email: asianstudies@abi.uni-freiburg.de.

2. An article manuscript should not exceed 8,000 words (without footnotes, references, etc.) and must be written in (British) English, using double, not single, quotation marks.

3. In addition, an abstract of the text should be submitted in English; it should be between 150 and 180 words in length. Please provide five keywords, a short running title, your email address, institutional affiliation and postal address for the list of authors (will be published).

4. Kindly submit your manuscript in plain text using a Word document with as little formatting as possible.

5. We ask you not to use endnotes; footnotes for additional information should be numbered consecutively. For references to literature cited kindly use in-text citation: references should be placed within the text in parentheses and chronologically, e.g. (Willson 1964: 57; Adams / Meyer 1983: 60–67). For more than two authors use "et al." after the first author's name. References, to be placed after the text under the heading "References", should be listed alphabetically by author and chronologically for each author. A more detailed style sheet is available on request and online at www.asianstudies.arnold-bergstraesser.de.

6. Tables and figures should be kept to a minimum and numbered consecutively. They must be cited in the text and followed by a clear indication of where the table or figure should be placed in the text. Each table and figure should have a self-contained title. These titles should be placed at the end of the text, with each table and figure provided in a separate document and provided in Microsoft Excel or Microsoft Word format only (no pdfs or elements copied from pdfs). They must not be created using colour – instead simple but easily distinguished patterns should be used.

7. We do not accept articles that have been previously published or are under review elsewhere.

8. After the submission of your manuscript to our journal, the document will be anonymised and forwarded to the editors. They will decide if the article is to be submitted for external peer-review. At least two reviewers will then give a feedback on your article and recommend its acceptance for publication using four categories: acceptance without any changes, acceptance with minor changes, revise and resubmit (major changes) and rejection. Kindly note that due to this procedure it may take up to three months before we can give a final answer regarding the acceptance of your manuscript.

9. Once a manuscript has been accepted for publication, the author grants the publisher the simple and non-exclusive right to reproduce and disseminate his or her contribution in physical form, and to make it accessible to the public in print and free online versions (open access). All articles are protected by copyright (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0), all rights remain with the author.

10. Your article should be orientated toward a readership composed of scholars working in various disciplines, but written to be accessible to non-specialists as well.

11. Material appearing in the International Quarterly for Asian Studies does not represent the views of the editors or of the publisher. Responsibility for opinions expressed and the accuracy of facts published in articles rests solely with the individual authors.

International Quarterly for Asian Studies
Volume 53, Summer 2022

Design by Miriam Awe, www.miriamawe.de
Typeset by Ann Philipp
Proofread by Penelope Krumm
Cover: background vector by Twins Design Studio / stock.adobe.com
Printed by Gutenbergdruckerei Benedikt Oberkirch, Freiburg

ISSN 2566-686x (print)
ISSN 2566-6878 (online)

China beyond China, Part I

Infrastructuring and Ecologising a New Global Hegemony?

Special Issue edited by David Tyfield and Fabricio Rodríguez

ARNOLD BERGSTRAESSER INSTITUT

International Quarterly for Asian Studies

This journal is available in an open access version.
For further information please go to the website at:
asianstudies.arnold-bergstraesser.de