




7-19-2019

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Garrett Bullock

Ursinus College, gabullock@ursinus.edu

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Recommended Citation

Bullock, Garrett, "Becoming a Superpower: China's Rise and the Belt and Road Initiative in Latin America" (2019). *History Summer Fellows*. 10.

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Becoming a Superpower:
China's Rise and the Belt and Road Initiative in Latin America

Garrett Bullock
Summer Fellows: History and International Relations
Professors Glenda E. Chao and Rebecca Evans
July 19, 2019

Abstract

Is China a Superpower? Will it become one? After half a century of establishing a strong international military presence, thriving economic growth, domestic/international political authority, and considerable cultural “soft power”, the PRC has emerged as a hegemon capable of competing in international geopolitics. Nevertheless, these questions remain unanswered. For this reason, this research explores what it means to be a superpower, whether China is or will be a superpower, and, importantly, what impact China’s rise has on the world. To do this, this research explores existing debates surrounding China’s current global status, the historical emergence of the PRC as a major international power, and, lastly, analyzes China’s implementation of the Belt and Road Initiative within Latin America, which is the quintessential representation of China’s continuing emergence as a 21st-Century superpower. Crucially, this research centers four axes of power—military, economic, political, and cultural power—around China’s historic memory of the “Century of Humiliation” to explain how and why Chinese leaders make the decisions they do.

Introduction

Napoleon Bonaparte once compared China to a “sleeping lion” and observed that “when she wakes, she will shake the world.” Now China the lion has awakened, but it is a peaceful, amicable and civilized lion. - Xi Jinping, Chinese President¹

In this world of ours, a world of powerful centers and subjugated outposts, there is no wealth that must not be held in some suspicion. - Eduardo Hughes Galeano, Uruguayan Journalist²

How can we understand the world? Our conventional understandings are often limited by language, metaphor, and incomplete knowledge. Indeed, we often describe the world with problematic or limiting language; Civilization, the West, the First, Second, and Third Worlds, and, the Global South are all terms created to help us better describe the economic and political position of peoples and states, but each carries a connotation that generalizes or systematizes bias and prejudice. Metaphors likewise misconstrue our understanding of the world. After making the remark quoted above, President Xi faced international backlash that capitalized on a rhetorical weakness of his metaphor—“Who has ever seen a peaceful lion?”—and raised concerns about China’s rise.³ Although unintentional, Xi’s metaphor distorted perspectives of

¹ Xi Jinping, “Speech by H.E. Mr. Xi Jinping President of the People’s Republic of China at the Meeting Commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the Establishment of China-France Diplomatic Relations” (2014), *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China*, at https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjdt_665385/zyjh_665391/t1147894.shtml.

² Eduardo Galeano, *Open Veins of Latin America: Five Centuries of the Pillage of a Continent* (London: Profile Books, 2009), pp. 267.

³ Interestingly, it is unclear that Napoleon ever even said this. Isaac Stone Fish, “Crouching Tiger, Sleeping Giant,” *Foreign Policy* (blog), accessed July 17, 2019, https://foreignpolicy.com/2016/01/19/china_shakes_the_world_cliche/.

China's foreign policy for the worse. Other famous metaphors—Clash of Civilizations, Axis of Evil, Iron Curtain—have similarly distorted perceptions of international relations through oversimplification. Even when our understanding of the world is minimally distorted, it is incomplete: knowing the inner workings of anything in its entirety is impossible. This means that all fields which seek to empirically describe our world—science, history, international relations—are using incomplete observations to make incomplete descriptions. These limitations are important to keep in mind when approaching any subject so as to avoid oversimplification and reductionism.

Unfortunately, the field of international relations is marred with examples of this same oversimplification and reductionism. Scholars are often tempted to overzealously describe a fast-approaching “Clash of Civilizations” or a utopian “End of History.”⁴ While these examples may seem hyperbolic, this theatrical rhetoric has similarly characterized the discourse surrounding China's rise in the 21st Century: whether “Sleeping Giant”, “Dragon in the Room”, or “Paper Tiger”, scholars have not hesitated to refer to China as the opponent to the United States in the “New Cold War.”⁵ However enticing these eye-catching titles may be, it is important for scholarship to distance itself from rhetorical devices in order to more accurately describe the world.

For that reason, this research attempts to address a less sweeping argument by focusing on whether China has or will become a superpower. It does so by exploring China's historic rise since 1949, assessing the current debate surrounding China's superpower status, and analyzing China's impact on the world, superpower or not. Crucially, this research distinguishes four axes

⁴ Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations: And the Remaking of World Order* (London: Simon & Schuster, 2002). Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (London: Penguin, 2012).

⁵ Robert D. Kaplan, “A New Cold War Has Begun,” *Foreign Policy* (blog), accessed July 17, 2019, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/01/07/a-new-cold-war-has-begun/>.

of power—military, economic, political, and cultural power—and connects each of these to China’s historical memory of the “Century of Humiliation” to explain how and why Chinese leaders make the decisions they do. Ultimately, it becomes clear that after half a century of establishing a strong international military presence, thriving economic growth, domestic/international political authority, and a growing cultural “soft” power, China has reemerged as a hegemon capable of competing in international geopolitics.⁶ Indeed, China now challenges the once “unipolar” power (the United States) in its own historic “backyard” (Latin America) through the Belt and Road Initiative, which is China’s comprehensive, global investment and infrastructure program. In this way, China’s implementation of the Belt and Road Initiative within Latin America is the quintessential representation of China’s continuing emergence as a 21st-Century superpower. Indeed, China claims this rise in the world will be beneficial for all.⁷ However, when assessing the intentions of the Belt and Road Initiative, the words Eduardo Hughes Galeano—“there is no wealth that must not be held in some suspicion”—should be remembered.⁸ Accordingly, this research evaluates the impact China’s Belt and Road Initiative has on the environment and social issues in Latin America, concluding that Chinese practices of predatory lending and neocolonialism threaten to exacerbate some of Latin America’s greatest on-going issues.

What is a Superpower?

Before determining whether China is a superpower, the term “superpower” should be clearly defined. Competing theories of international relations define superpower rather

⁶ Prior to the Century of Humiliation, China was undoubtedly a global power. Mark Beeson and Fujian Li, “What Consensus? Geopolitics and Policy Paradigms in China and the United States,” *International Affairs* 91, no. 1 (2015), pp. 94.

⁷ Xi Jinping, “Work Together to Build the Silk Road Economic Belt and The 21st Century Maritime Silk Road,” (2017) at http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2017-05/14/c_136282982.htm.

⁸ Galeano, pp. 267.

differently. For instance, realist John J. Mearsheimer, a renowned international relations scholar from the University of Chicago, focuses on material power. He suggests that states' levels of power "are determined largely on the basis of their relative military capability."⁹

Correspondingly, regional hegemony—the military domination of a geographic region—belongs to the state that can field the most powerful economy and military (the former is necessary to maintain the latter). Mearsheimer argues that while there could theoretically be a global hegemon, vast bodies of water inhibit regional hegemons from dominating other regions, making global dominance unlikely.¹⁰ While Mearsheimer makes a convincing argument that material power (i.e. military and economic power) is essential for a great power to become a hegemon, his definition of hegemony falls short of describing crucial aspects of a superpower. Namely, he minimizes the role of a state's ability to exert political and cultural influence over states outside its region. This ability is essential for any superpower.

Other scholars agree, similarly rejecting the view that a state is powerful merely because of its ability to fund and flex military might. Neoliberal institutionalist scholars, for example, suggest that states must also exhibit political control over international institutions in order to become a dominant power. G. John Ikenberry, neoliberal institutionalist from Princeton University, writes that a superpower is a state that "can create and enforce the rules and institutions of a stable global order in which to pursue its interests and security."¹¹ Essentially, leadership positions in international financial institutions (IFIs), the United Nations, or various regional security organizations (e.g. NATO) strengthen a state's ability to both coerce and co-opt

⁹ John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2001), pp. 5.

¹⁰ Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, pp. 40-42.

¹¹ John G. Ikenberry, "The Rise of China and the Future of the West," *Foreign Affairs*, September 15, 2015, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/asia/2008-01-01/rise-china-and-future-west>.

other states into its political agenda.¹² For instance, if a state has a seat on the International Monetary Fund, it has the ability to influence that IFI's actions so that they better align with that state's goals. Similarly, if a state is a part of a regional security organization like NATO, it can potentially co-opt other nations into supporting its military interests. While participation in an institution empowers a state, Ikenberry argues that a state can only be a superpower if these institutions are in accordance with its own values and ideology.¹³

This institutional, political power is not sufficient for a state to become a superpower, however: a state needs to have an international cultural influence too. This cultural influencing is a part of what American political scientist and former Clinton administration official Joseph S. Nye has labeled "Soft Power," or "getting others to want the outcomes that you want." Nye goes on to break cultural influencing down into components, including "the attractiveness of a country's culture, political ideas, and policies" among other state's and their populations.¹⁴ Neoliberal institutionalists support a similar view, noting the significance of socialization, which "enables the hegemon to get others to acquiesce without the use of coercive power."¹⁵ This definition of power pushes beyond Mearsheimer's material definition and better reflects the complex type of influence a state must have to become a superpower. For instance, speaking to political ideas, the globalization of American popular culture projects political values and ideas (e.g. democracy) that may be enticing to foreign audiences. According to Nye, this dissemination of political values gives the superpower more co-optive (rather than coercive) power, allowing it

¹² Brian Schmidt, "Hegemony: A Conceptual and Theoretical Analysis," *Dialogue of Civilizations Research Institute*, accessed June 24, 2019, <https://doc-research.org/2018/08/hegemony-conceptual-theoretical-analysis/>.

¹³ Ikenberry, "The Rise of China and the Future of the West."

¹⁴ Joseph S. Nye, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*. New Delhi: Knowledge World, 2012, pp. x.

¹⁵ Schmidt, "Hegemony: A Conceptual and Theoretical Analysis."

to attract other states into supporting its global agenda.¹⁶ Convincing leaders and publics that the superpower's way of life is valuable by disseminating cultural practices (i.e. customs) is also a source of soft power that can win a state allies. Meanwhile, the foreign and domestic policies of a superpower can give it "soft power" as well, and Nye cites cases in which policies have made states allies and enemies.¹⁷ These components, political ideas, culture, policies, and (as mentioned above) institutional influence, comprise the cultural, soft power vital to a superpower.

Constructivists likewise believe in the importance of cultural power, but they argue neoliberal institutionalists misattribute the target of this power. For instance, while neoliberal institutionalists do include the public in their considerations, constructivist scholars like Ted Hopf, an academic from the National University of Singapore, argue that neoliberal institutionalists focus too much on the politics of the elite. Accordingly, constructivists believe that existing literature fails to consider "mass public common sense, not just elite ideologies."¹⁸ This means that "Soft Power" cannot come solely from political elites adopting a foreign ideology or political system (e.g. democracy). Instead, if the superpower is to gain cultural power from that state, the broader public must adopt the cultural values that support that ideology or political system. Hopf essentially argues that "hegemonic power is maximized to the extent that these ideas become taken for granted by the dominated population."¹⁹ Noting the role of the public and institutions that disseminate culture (even when that effect is auxiliary) better scaffolds the cultural element of being a superpower.

¹⁶ Importantly, although a government's ability to control soft power is limited, "that does not diminish its importance": a state can still encourage or assist the spread of its culture through policy. Nye, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*, pp. 8.

¹⁷ For example, American support for human rights in Argentina during the 1980s aided the United States once the politically persecuted Peronists came to power. Conversely, African nations criticized American racial segregation in the 1950s. Nye, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*, pp. 13.

¹⁸ Ted Hopf, "Common-Sense Constructivism and Hegemony in World Politics," *International Organization* 67, no. 2 (April 2013): 317–54, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020818313000040>.

¹⁹ Hopf, "Common-Sense Constructivism and Hegemony in World Politics."

Which school of thought best captures the meaning of a superpower? In reality, whether the school downplays material power or non-material powers, each has its faults. For this reason, in order to balance the strengths and weaknesses of each school's focus, a critical definition of a superpower should be synthesized from these competing schools of thought. While this means balancing many components, such a synthesis is obtainable. For instance, Alice Lyman Miller, a scholar of the Hoover Institute, already argues that "the basic components of superpower stature may be measured along four axes of power: military, economic, political, and cultural."²⁰ This simple statement roughly comprises the same power components noted by realists, neoliberal institutionalists, and constructivists alike. In fact, as I maintain throughout this work, a superpower is a state that is regionally dominant and globally influential in all four axes of power. This definition synthesizes the military, economic, political, and cultural perspectives of realists, neoliberal institutionalists, and constructivists while retaining Mearsheimer's core realist belief that the state must be "so powerful that it dominates all the other states in [its regional] system."²¹ Crucially, this definition extends Mearsheimer's concept of a regional hegemon. To be a superpower, a dominant regional power must be able to influence external systems not just through military and economic power, but also through political and cultural power. This qualifies the regional power as a superpower, even if it cannot be completely dominant in the global system.

Is China a Superpower?

²⁰ As shown above in the discussion of the public's role in cultural power, it is important to note that all of these axes have their own quirks and complexities in both measurement and significance. For example, a country's economic power can be measured in relation to its GDP share, its level of industrialization, or even its population size, making the term "economic power" relatively vague. Despite the amorphous nature of each axis, they nonetheless comprise the basis of a state's power. Alice Lyman Miller, "SJIR: China an Emerging Superpower?," *Stanford Journal of International Relations*, accessed May 6, 2019, https://web.stanford.edu/group/sjir/6.1.03_miller.html.

²¹ Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, pp. 40.

Now, with a clear definition laid out, we can return to the original question: Is China a superpower? Although there is an overwhelming consensus that China's growth over the past half a century has been incredible, there is much debate as to whether China is on its way to becoming a superpower. In hope of better answering this question, the following sections attempt to assess whether China is "so powerful that it dominates all the other states in [its regional] system" through Miller's military, economic, political, and cultural axes of power.²² The first section contextualizes China's historical rise and evaluates to what extent China has worked to strengthen each axis of power. The subsequent section explores current scholarship surrounding the china-as-superpower debate, which (interestingly) has already self-compartmentalized itself into these four categories of power. The final section takes a stance in this debate, ultimately arguing that despite the great ambivalence surrounding its rise to power, China seems capable of overcoming the existing structural hurdles of each axis, specifically because of the Belt and Road Initiative. This not only means that there is a great chance that China will become a superpower, but also that China may increasingly influence every region of the world.

China's Rise

While the full history of what Chinese historians call "The Century of Humiliation" cannot be described here, it is important to contextualize the People's Republic of China's starting point and note how that history has impacted the choices of its leaders and its path towards strengthening the four axes of power. Beginning in 1842 with the Opium Wars, the century of humiliation marks a period from 1842-1949 in which China was subject to repeated military defeats and economic exploitation at the hands of European, American, and Japanese forces. Significant brutality inflicted upon the Chinese people and their culture defined this

²² Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, pp. 40.

period. Whether committed by outsiders—the 1860 destruction of the Summer Palace and the 1938 Nanjing Massacre are important examples—or by insiders—Jiang Jieshi’s (Chiang Kai-shek’s) brutality during the Chinese Civil War (1946-1949) is well documented—the violence of the century plagued China for generations.²³ Because of this chaotic time, the future of the country was uncertain when the Communist Party emerged from the “Century of Humiliation” in 1949. Indeed, the traumatic historical memory of the past century continues to weigh on Chinese politicians, intellectuals, and people today.²⁴ Nevertheless, the fledgling Communist party managed to establish a relatively stable political system and regain control over most of the Qing’s former land acquisitions.²⁵ Even more impressively, over the course of the following 70 years, the People’s Republic of China emerged from this humbled position as one of the most important actors in geopolitics. How?

The following sections explore how China strengthened each major axis of power since 1949. Each section focuses on its respective element of power (e.g. economy) and how the historic memory of national humiliation shaped the changes within each axis. While it may seem bold to claim that the strengthening of China’s axes is driven by historical memory, historical memory has a crucial influence on how decisions are made by state’s and their leaders. As Zheng Wang, a professor of international relations at Seton Hall University, writes, “historical memory is the prime ‘raw material’ for constructing ethnicity and national identity,” which, consequently, impacts the national interests and actions of a country.²⁶ Indeed, in strengthening each axis, the

²³ David Scott, *China and the International System, 1840-1949 : Power, Presence, and Perceptions in a Century of Humiliation*, (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press), 2008, pp. x.

<http://spectacled.ursinus.edu:3035/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=256905&site=ehost-live>.

²⁴ Zheng Wang, *Never Forget National Humiliation: Historical Memory in Chinese Politics and Foreign Relations*, Contemporary Asia in the World (New York: Columbia University Press), pp. 221-222.

²⁵ This is with the large exceptions of modern-day Mongolia and Taiwan. Jonathan D. Spence, *The Search for Modern China*, vol. 3 (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2013), pp. 470.

²⁶ Wang, *Never Forget National Humiliation : Historical Memory in Chinese Politics and Foreign Relations*, pp. 7.

historical memory of national humiliation has guided the decisions of China's leaders, resulting in an impressive yet qualified rise to international power. Moreover, the persistence of this historical memory suggests that Chinese leaders will continue to push China towards becoming a superpower.

Military

One source of modern China's rise is its powerful military, which has its origins in the end of the Chinese Civil War. After the near defeat of the Nationalists (or KMT) in 1949, the military leaders of the Chinese Communist Party emerged as battle-hardened veterans tasked with converting the People's Liberation Army (PLA) from a guerilla force into a national army. These men, like Peng Dehuai, were professional military elites who, although highly integrated with the party, usually were focused on strategic rather than political success.²⁷ Accordingly, after emerging from the conflict of 1949, the PLA's primary objectives were to establish a modern, capable military, and to restore the territory China lost following the collapse of the Qing dynasty.²⁸ These goals were existentially driven by China's determination to assuage the historic trauma of national humiliation by facilitating a dramatic strengthening in its military capabilities.²⁹

The first goal, modernization, began with the Korean War (1950-1953). Tactically speaking, during the Chinese Civil War, the PLA had relied on waging the "People's War". This essentially meant the PLA used a combination of guerrilla tactics and overwhelming numbers to

²⁷ Although technically a military leader, Mao was hardly a professional or technically skilled strategist. Dennis J. Blasko, "Always Faithful: The PLA from 1949 to 1989," in *A Military History of China*, edited by Graff David A. and Higham Robin, 249-50. University Press of Kentucky, 2012. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt2jcqw6.20>.

²⁸ Blasko, "Always Faithful: The PLA from 1949 to 1989," pp. 251; Spence, *The Search for Modern China*, pp. 471.

²⁹ Importantly, attempts to assuage this historical memory "have, at times, served to activate, not assuage, people's historical memory of past humiliation." Thus, despite leaders' intentions, policies can revitalize a feeling of national humiliation rather than assuage it. Wang, Zheng. *Never Forget National Humiliation: Historical Memory in Chinese Politics and Foreign Relations*, pp. 11.

make up for its dated equipment and limited training.³⁰ While these tactics proved effective in driving out the Japanese in the Second World War and the KMT during the Chinese Civil War, the warfare of the Korean War—in which Chinese soldiers would confront UN forces on unfamiliar, open land—made this type of fighting more difficult. Moreover, the UN forces had dramatically superior technology compared to the PLA.³¹ For this reason, although Peng Dehuai was successful in driving back the UN forces, the Chinese faced massive casualties, potentially reaching over a million.³² Thus, although the Korean War can certainly be noted as a victory for China—the once “humiliated” nation was able to drive back a coalition of Western powers—waging such a costly war was not sustainable, and PLA leaders noted the imperative need to modernize if China’s military was going to stand a fighting chance on the international stage.

To overcome this technological and strategic deficit, the PLA’s leaders turned to the Soviet Union for equipment and expertise.³³ With an initial loan of around \$300 million, the PLA adopted Soviet military structures, trained with Soviet weapons and vehicles, and established domestic military factories.³⁴ These developments fueled the modernization of Chinese conventional military power. Even after Mao initiated a demobilization of millions of PLA troops, the PLA remained an over-two-million-strong fighting force trained with Soviet

³⁰ Blasko, "Always Faithful: The PLA from 1949 to 1989," pp. 250.

³¹ This situation was historically familiar to the Chinese. At the outbreak of the Opium War, Lin Zexu, a commissioner tasked with quelling the opium trade, described the superiority of British cannons, writing “Our technology was backward. Many of our generals and soldiers were experienced servicemen, but a battle like this in which the two sides engaged in a war without seeing each other, that was what they have never experienced before.” Blasko, "Always Faithful: The PLA from 1949 to 1989," pp. 251; Jiang Tingfu, *Zhongguo jinsaiishi* [Modern History of China]. (Changsha: Shangwu) 1938, Reprint, Shanghai: Shanghai Guji Chubanshe, 2001, pp. 17.

³² While the PRC’s estimate was never released, some suggest that losses reached nearly a million. More conservative estimates favor 600,000. Regardless, the war was costly. Spence, *The Search for Modern China*, pp. 475-476.

³³ Blasko, "Always Faithful: The PLA from 1949 to 1989," pp. 251.

³⁴ Prior to this the Chinese navy and airforce had been made out of stolen and salvaged Japanese fighters and Nationalist warships. Bernard D. Cole, *The Great Wall at Sea, 2nd Edition: China’s Navy in the Twenty-First Century*. Vol. 2nd ed. (Annapolis, Md: Naval Institute Press) 2010, pp. 8.

weaponry.³⁵ Post-world-war modernization meant more than advanced conventional troops, however. Indeed, the Korean War had only ended in the face of President Eisenhower's nuclear "diplomacy" in 1953, causing the Chinese government to recognize the nuclear weapons had changed the face of warfare and that any nation seeking a modern military needed a nuclear weapon.³⁶ This lesson only became clearer as Eisenhower continued to use nuclear threats during the ensuing Taiwan crises in 1954 and 1958.³⁷ Consequently, again with the aid of Soviet technology, training, and scientists, the PRC began pursuing the development of a nuclear weapon. While development of an atomic weapon was delayed during the Sino-Soviet split, China nonetheless entered the "Nuclear Club" in 1964 after its first successful detonation. This development is crucial in China's military history not only because it reflects the PLA's general shift towards modernization, but also because it marks China's growing desire to be independent of both Soviet and American influence. Nuclear technology continued to advance in the following decades, and China proceeded to develop hydrogen bombs, nuclear submarines, and nuclear warheads.³⁸

These modernizing developments were driven by the need to assuage the historic memory of national humiliation, a sentiment which is well reflected in the leaders of the PLA. The words of Lin Biao, for instance, appeared in *The People's Daily* in 1965, praising the glory of the "People's War" and its victory over Japan in the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937-1945). Lin argued that international politics was characterized by a "fierce struggle between the people of the world on one side and U.S. imperialism and its lackeys on the other."³⁹ Ultimately, the

³⁵ Spence, *The Search for Modern China*, pp. 500.

³⁶ Spence, *The Search for Modern China*, pp. 475, 494.

³⁷ Blasko, "Always Faithful: The PLA from 1949 to 1989," pp. 252.

³⁸ Blasko, "Always Faithful: The PLA from 1949 to 1989," pp. 252-254.

³⁹ Lin Biao, "Long Live the Victory of People's War!," accessed July 8, 2019, https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/lin-biao/1965/09/peoples_war/ch08.htm.

underlying belief in Lin Biao's writing is imperialists, especially the United States, will always attempt to humiliate weaker states. Although the era of "ping-pong" diplomacy and Nixon's visit to China would cool this relationship, the United States remained the primary imperial antagonist in the eyes of the Chinese public, even after border conflicts with India and the Soviet Union ensued. This was well reflected not just by the rhetoric of elites, but of the choices of everyday Chinese people during the Cultural Revolution. Americans remaining in the country during the Cultural Revolution were detained as spies, effigies of Uncle Sam were burned, and students attacked officials who had any previous connection with the United States.⁴⁰ Such cultural rejections carried on into the 1990s, when Chinese intellectuals vehemently responded to American intellectuals such as Samuel Huntington who painted China as a threat to America. Books like *China Can Say No* reflected the persistent urge to reject American authority and culture.⁴¹

While this popular rejection of all things American may seem tangentially related to military action, the connection is strong. This is because "historical memory often serves as a major motivating factor in international conflict, especially when the confrontation is perceived by the Chinese as an assault on the nation's fundamental identity."⁴² Running through just a few examples chronologically, this connection becomes clearer. During the Korean War, for example, the PLA's high demand for grain, meat, and cotton drew resources away the general Chinese population, which was still reeling from the destruction of the Second World and Civil

⁴⁰ David L. Shambaugh, "Anti-Americanism in China" *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 497 (1988), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1045767>, pp. 148.

⁴¹ Klaus Mühlhahn, *Making China Modern: From the Great Qing to Xi Jinping*, (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press), 2019, pp. 545-546.

⁴² Zheng Wang, *Never Forget National Humiliation: Historical Memory in Chinese Politics and Foreign Relations* pp. 15.

War.⁴³ In order to maintain popular support for the war despite the hardships it induced, the CCP launched massive anti-American propaganda campaigns. These campaigns focused on the need to ward off American Imperialism and avoid the same humiliation from which China had just escaped.⁴⁴ Similarly, during the chaos of the Cultural Revolution, the Chinese government used America as a scapegoat to justify violent, military suppressions of the population.⁴⁵ Lastly, in the 1990s, surges of nationalism that rejected American media portrayal of China most likely influenced the government's decision to lay claims on the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands.⁴⁶ Indeed, these popular nationalist movements, like the government-driven campaigns before them, had the goal of emboldening and justifying military action in the name of avenging the nation's previous suffering. In sum, the modernization of China's military was existentially driven by the desire to shake off the "Century of Humiliation."

As with modernization, national humiliation drove the PLA's campaign to restore various territories lost during the Qing dynasty. These territories originally included Tibet, Taiwan, Mongolia, and various islands and waterways in the East and South China Seas. While China was able to obtain control over some of these territories and waterways, the United States continually thwarted important acquisitions, further establishing the United States main antagonist for the PRC. In Tibet, for example, the PLA had subdued most local resistance by 1950, but as late as 1959 the CIA trained Tibetan rebels to act as insurgents and resist PRC authority.⁴⁷ While in Tibet's case the United States only managed to make China's territorial authority less stable, the United States completely negated Chinese attempts to retake Taiwan by

⁴³ Mühlhahn, *Making China Modern: From the Great Qing to Xi Jinping*, pp., 379.

⁴⁴ Andrew Kuech, "The Dangerous Reprise of Chinese Korean War Propaganda," in *The Diplomat*, accessed July 10, 2019, <https://thediplomat.com/2019/06/the-dangerous-reprise-of-chinese-korean-war-propaganda/>.

⁴⁵ Spence, *The Search for Modern China*, pp. 549-550.

⁴⁶ Mühlhahn, *Making China Modern: From the Great Qing to Xi Jinping*, pp. 544-546.

⁴⁷ Spence, *The Search for Modern China*, pp. 527.

sending its Seventh Fleet to patrol the Strait of Formosa in 1950.⁴⁸ Similarly, the United States had planted “nuclear-capable Matador surface-to-surface missiles on Taiwan,” putting American nuclear weapons on China’s doorstep and rendering an assault on the island strategically impossible.⁴⁹ Other territories remained outside of China’s grasp for other reasons. The most important example of this is Mongolia, which became an independent republic in the 1950s. Although Mao had made numerous claims that Mongolia would once again become a part of China, the Soviet Union ensured Mongolia would retain its independence (within the Soviet sphere of influence).⁵⁰

In relation to maritime territory, China was able to periodically retake many of the islands controlled by the Guomintang off the coast of Taiwan, but was relatively unsuccessful in reclaiming disputed territories in the East and South China Seas.⁵¹ In the East China Sea, China looked to regain the Diaoyu/Senkaku islands, and, in the South China Sea, the Prata and Spratly Islands, all of which had been lost to Japan in either the Sino-Japanese war (Diaoyu/Senkaku) or Second World War (Prata and Spratly). Reclaiming these islands and all other islands bound between the “nine dash line”—an arbitrary line drawn around the South China Sea by the Guomintang and later adopted by the PRC—became a clear policy goal in 1953. Nevertheless, little action is taken by the Chinese government in relation to these islands until 1970 (conveniently the year after it was reported that there was most likely large deposits of oil in the South China Sea), when it begins to make claims on the Diaoyu Islands and forcibly occupies the Paracel Islands, the latter of which were owned by Vietnam.⁵² Conflict over these islands would

⁴⁸ Spence, *The Search for Modern China*, pp. 473.

⁴⁹ Blasko, "Always Faithful: The PLA from 1949 to 1989," pp. 252.

⁵⁰ Spence, *The Search for Modern China*, pp. 470.

⁵¹ Spence, *The Search for Modern China*, pp. 471-472.

⁵² Originally, it was the “eleven dash line” and included the Gulf of Tonkin. “China’s Maritime Disputes,” *Council on Foreign Relations*, accessed July 10, 2019, <https://www.cfr.org/chinasea>.

continue to escalate, and China to this day makes claims over the area bound within the “nine dash line.” The desire to restore maritime control was similarly driven by the need to avenge national humiliation, and, in 1997, the Chinese Government’s formal acquisition of Hong Kong—a crucial maritime port and symbol of national humiliation—marked another point in which the Chinese leaders believed they were “wiping out the century-old humiliation caused by its occupation.”⁵³ Thus, as China expands its military power into the South China Sea, it continues to invoke the rhetoric of national humiliation.

How have these historical developments strengthened China’s military axis of power? From its modernization standpoint, the strengthening is relatively obvious: the PLA began as a guerrilla army in the 1930s and 1940s and emerged as a nuclear power with advanced weaponry and tactics by the turn of the century. In relation to territorial acquisitions, China’s forceful occupation of various lands has facilitated numerous success—easier access to oil in the South China Sea, more comprehensive trade routes through western China, etc. Indeed, even the background presence of the need to push against humiliation has strengthened China’s military power, enabling its aggressive, outright rejections of American authority. With these historical developments in mind, China’s military rise is evident.

Economy

Running parallel and intertwined with military strengthening is China’s international rise as a formidable economic force. While many people of China suffered horribly under Maoist economic reforms—20 million people are estimated to have died as a result of a famine caused by the Great Leap Forward—many of his earlier reforms kick-started the transition from an

⁵³ Jiang Zemin, “Speech by President Jiang Zemin of The People’s Republic of China,” *Asia Society*, accessed July 10, 2019, <https://asiasociety.org/speech-president-jiang-zemin-peoples-republic-china>.

agrarian economy to an industrial economy.⁵⁴ By both extending and revising Mao's policies, the PRC leaders that came to power following his death brought extensive changes to the structure of the Chinese economy. Deng Xiaoping, in particular, championed the economic reforms that laid the groundwork for China's rapid economic growth and its continuing economic problems. Specifically, China's opening as a global market combined with its shift from an agrarian to an industrial economy facilitated China's rapid growth. Conversely, demographic imbalances and environmental degradation proved to be persistent hurdles to China's economic independence and stability. Importantly, like its impressive military growth, China's economic miracle was driven by a desire to leave its "backwardness" (a source of its national humiliation) in the past.

Speaking first to China's shift to an industrial economy, it was actually the economic reforms under Mao Zedong, not Deng Xiaoping, that pulled China's agrarian workers into an industrial labor force. During Mao's reign over the PRC (1949-1976), industrial output increased more than 30-fold, the urban proletariat grew to 18 million (originally 3 million), and China slowly began to produce heavy tractors, railway locomotives, and other important infrastructure technology.⁵⁵ While this industrial revolution came at a heavy price (namely in human lives) and had uneven success ("backyard" furnaces produced extremely low quality steel), the push for industry under Mao kicked-off China's mission to become the world's factory. For Mao, these reforms were meant "to make [their] economically and culturally *backward* country a prosperous and powerful one" (Emphasis added).⁵⁶ Although Mao saw China as a great nation with the ability to become powerful, he believed that China's economy needed to modernize and

⁵⁴ Maurice J. Meisner, *The Deng Xiaoping Era: An Inquiry into the Fate of Chinese Socialism, 1978-1994* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1996), pp. 523.

⁵⁵ Meisner, *The Deng Xiaoping Era: An Inquiry into the Fate of Chinese Socialism, 1978-1994*, pp. 189-190.

⁵⁶ Mao Zedong, "Speech at the Chinese Communist Party's National Conference on Propaganda Work," (1957), https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-5/mswv5_59.htm

industrialize before that could happen. Accordingly, the historic memory of national humiliation makes an appearance through the word “backwards” in Mao’s language. Mao, like the Qing scholars of the “Self-Strengthening” movement, believed that China succumbed to imperial powers because of its antiquated economic practices (basically, agrarianism) and that only through economic modernization could China escape humiliation.⁵⁷

These reforms, however, threatened to exacerbate the already substantial issues created by Mao’s reforms—overproduction, inefficient bureaucracy, etc.—and were quickly reverted by Deng Xiaoping once he gained control over the CCP in 1978. Indeed, after the economic disaster of Mao’s later economic plan, the Great Leap Forward, Deng Xiaoping attempted to backpedal Mao’s reforms, calling for “Socialism with Chinese Characteristics.”⁵⁸ From a pragmatic perspective, this merely meant that China needed “to pursue the policy of opening up to the outside world” economically and pursue free-market reforms. However, due to the persisting euphoria surrounding Maoism, Deng reaffirmed that such reforms would fit within the framework of Marxist-Leninist teleology: China would “advocate communism” but operate at “the socialist stage... to develop the productive forces” of the economy. Ultimately, Deng’s goal was to figure out “how China, which is still backward, is to develop the productive forces and improve the people’s living standard.”⁵⁹

⁵⁷ “Ours will no longer be a nation subject to insult and humiliation.” Mao Zedong, “On the Correct Handling of Contradictions Among the People” (1957), Section XI, found at https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-5/mswv5_58.htm#v5_99; Yan Fu, “On Strength” in *Sources of Chinese Tradition*, Vol. 2 (New York: Columbia Univ. Pr., 1999), pp. 258-259; Mao Zedong, “The Chinese People Have Stood Up!” (1949), <https://china.usc.edu/Mao-declares-founding-of-peoples-republic-of-china-chinese-people-have-stood-up>

⁵⁸ The Great Leap Forward dramatically reduced the grain available to the average peasant, resulting in the death of 20 million. Spence, *The Search for Modern China*, pp. 522-523.

⁵⁹ Theodore De Bary Wm. and Richard Lufano, *Sources of Chinese Tradition: Volume 2: From 1600 Through the Twentieth Century*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), pp. 507-510.

To do this, Deng and the leaders of the CCP continued the transition to an industrial economy and opened up China to international investors. For instance, industrial reforms carried out in urban centers from 1979-1980 decentralized capital and increased productivity. One way in which this was done was through incentivizing light industry, since Maoist reforms had created an imbalance of heavy industry. This allowed for more efficient production and higher quality products since Chinese capital was more capable of producing light goods than products like heavy steel.⁶⁰ Additionally, the CCP turned to breaking the “iron rice bowl,” a Mao-era job-security program that was deemed to create inefficiency and paternalistic dependence by the party: “If a man does not come to work, cross his name off the payroll!”⁶¹ To do this, reformers empowered industrial bosses with the ability to punish or fire workers they found to be underperforming.⁶² This empowering of individual enterprises was matched at the national level, and factory managers increasingly gained the ability to operate in accordance with market (rather than government) demands.⁶³ Such reforms had limited success in urban centers, but rural industry responded much more favorably to reforms, especially once township and village enterprises (TVEs) were established. These small industrial conglomerates were owned mostly by private owners or local governments, and their rapid success led to further deregulation and decollectivization in urban industry by 1984.⁶⁴ Importantly, these reforms carried on after Deng Xiaoping. During the 1990s, a stronger environment of healthy economic competition grew in Chinese industrial centers, the *hukou* system (which restricted Chinese citizens from migrating within the country) was relaxed to facilitate better movements of labor force, and tax reform

⁶⁰ Meisner, *The Deng Xiaoping Era: An Inquiry into the Fate of Chinese Socialism, 1978-1994*, pp. 221-222.

⁶¹ Deng Xiaoping, “Some Problems Outstanding in the Iron and Steel Industry,” (1975) in *Selected Works of Deng Xiaoping* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1984), pp 21.

⁶² Meisner, *The Deng Xiaoping Era: An Inquiry into the Fate of Chinese Socialism, 1978-1994*, pp. 259

⁶³ Meisner, *The Deng Xiaoping Era: An Inquiry into the Fate of Chinese Socialism, 1978-1994*, pp. 261.

⁶⁴ Mühlhahn, *Making China Modern: From the Great Qing to Xi Jinping*, pp. 509-510.

strengthened the central government's profit from domestic industry.⁶⁵ Subsequently, the extensive infrastructure projects of the 2000s better integrated the TVEs into China's economy, furthering China's successful transition from an agrarian to an industrial economy.⁶⁶

This transition was made possible by extensive external investments, which were an outcome of China's opening to foreign markets. These reforms are based framed in the words of the Third Plenary Session of the Eleventh Central Committee in 1978: the CCP was now "actively expanding economic cooperation on terms of equality and mutual benefit with other countries on the basis of self-reliance."⁶⁷ Essentially, the leaders of the reform movement recognized the importance of Chinese integration with the global economy to avoid "backwardness", and Deng's own rhetoric expresses the lingering historic memory of national humiliation. In a speech to the Twelfth National Congress of the Communist Party of China in 1982, Deng said:

No foreign Country can expect China to be its vassal, nor can it expect China to accept anything harmful to China's interests. [China] will unswervingly follow a policy of opening to the outside world and actively increase exchanges with foreign countries on the basis of equality and mutual benefit.⁶⁸

This distinct sentiment runs in parallel with a desire to assuage national humiliation and has driven China's cautious opening to investments and the global economy.

To balance this process of opening and independence, rather than open all of China to foreign investment, reformers created the Special Economic Zones (SEZs).⁶⁹ These four zones, which were designated in parts of Guangdong and Fujian provinces in 1979, mimicked roles of

⁶⁵ Mühlhahn, *Making China Modern: From the Great Qing to Xi Jinping*, pp. 533-535.

⁶⁶ Mühlhahn, *Making China Modern: From the Great Qing to Xi Jinping*, pp. 556.

⁶⁷ "Communique of the Third Plenary Session of the Eleventh Central Committee of the Communist Party of China," in *Sources of Chinese Tradition*, Vol. 2 (New York: Columbia Univ. Pr., 1999), pp. 489-490.

⁶⁸ Deng Xiaoping, "Opening Speech at the Twelfth National Congress of the CPC," (1982) in *Selected Works of Deng Xiaoping* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1984), pp 396.

⁶⁹ Maurice J. Meisner, *The Deng Xiaoping Era: An Inquiry into the Fate of Chinese Socialism: 1978-1994*, pp. 235.

Canton and Macao during the Qing dynasty. Like those cities, each SEZ was a deregulated zone in which domestic and foreign investment can flow relatively freely, functioning as controlled enclaves in which China could participate in global trade. Importantly, unlike their predecessors, these zones followed Chinese law, were managed by Chinese officials, and greatly benefited the Chinese economy.⁷⁰ In fact, the SEZs were so successful that were later complemented by the CCP's sweeping Coastal Development Strategy (CDS) in 1988, which further opened up China's industrial bases to foreign capital and investment.⁷¹ The SEZ in Shenzhen was perhaps the most striking example of this success: its GDP increased from 4 million U.S. dollars in 1980 to 114.7 billion U.S. dollars in 2008.⁷²

These "opening" reforms of the 1980s would carry into the 1990s, and reformers actually doubled down on transitioning to a market economy. Much of this involved making investing in China easier. For instance, China's confusing dual-currency rate—one for foreigners and one for Chinese companies—was reformed to create a more hospitable trading system. The two rates were set at essentially equal levels, resulting in a devaluation of China's currency and a massive uptick in foreign investments and exports.⁷³ Similarly, in order to qualify as a member of the World Trade Organization (which would greatly facilitate international China's trade), state-owned enterprises and wages were reformed to increase productivity.⁷⁴ When China became a WTO member in 2001, it further opened to investment, but there are important limitations to this

⁷⁰ This is, of course, in contrast to the economic ruin caused by foreign opium trade during the 19th Century, the start of the Century of Humiliation. Michael Osborne, *China's Special Economic Zones* (Paris: OECD Development Center, 1986), pp. 35.

⁷¹ Dali L. Yang, "China Adjusts to the World Economy: The Political Economy of China's Coastal Development Strategy," *Pacific Affairs* 64, no. 1 (1991), <https://doi.org/10.2307/2760362>, pp. 42.

⁷² Douglas Zhihua Zeng, ed., *Building Engines for Growth and Competitiveness in China: Experience with Special Economic Zones and Industrial Clusters*, (Herndon: World Bank Publications, 2010), accessed July 11, 2019, ProQuest Ebook Central, pp. 68.

⁷³ Mühlhahn, pp. 534.

⁷⁴ Linda Y. Yueh, "Wage Reforms in China During the 1990s," *Asian Economic Journal* 18, no. 2 (June 2004): 150-151, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8381.2004.00187.x>.

“opening”. First, China has often been criticized for not following all the WTO’s rules and regulations. This has prevented China’s designation as a market economy, which would allow China to continue to sell its low-cost goods without the threat of foreign protectionism.⁷⁵ Additionally, China has required companies that want to do business within its borders relinquish business secrets and advanced technology to Chinese companies prior.⁷⁶ While this casts doubt on the idea that China is “open” in the sense of a free-market, it certainly has aided the growth of Chinese companies like Huawei, Alibaba, and Baidu.⁷⁷ This historical opening at a measured pace is likely to continue under President Xi Jinping, who claimed at The Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation in 2017, “opening up brings progress while isolation results in backwardness.”⁷⁸

China’s economic growth was not painless, however. Such rapid expansion brought new demographic issues and environmental decay. Speaking to demographics, as China grew tremendously in population and dramatically reshaped its economic structure, the demographic imbalances between rural and urban populations increased. This is largely due to the CCP’s official reinstatement of the *hukou* system in 1958. The *hukou* system was a household registration system that divided China’s urban and rural workers by region that had existed in

⁷⁵ “China Loses Market-Economy Trade Case in Win for EU and U.S., Sources Say,” Bloomberg, April 18, 2019, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2019-04-18/china-is-said-to-lose-market-economy-trade-case-in-eu-u-s-win>.

⁷⁶ Mühlhahn, *Making China Modern: From the Great Qing to Xi Jinping*, pp. 536-537.

⁷⁷ This practice has not only brought international critique upon China, but also a number of very recent bans and tariffs in 2019 from the United States. As of this writing, major tariffs meant to punish China for violating international financial laws and norms have not been lifted, but the ban on Huawei has been relaxed. Jim Tankersley and Ana Swanson, “Trump Administration Will Allow Some Companies to Sell to Huawei,” *The New York Times*, July 9, 2019, sec. Business, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/07/09/business/huawei-donald-trump.html>. Paul Mozur and Edmund Lee, “Huawei Is Said to Demand Patent Fees From Verizon,” *The New York Times*, June 12, 2019, sec. Technology, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/06/12/technology/huawei-verizon-patent-license-fees.html>. “How China Walled Off the Internet,” *The New York Times*, November 18, 2018, sec. World, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2018/11/18/world/asia/china-internet.html>.

⁷⁸ Xi Jinping, “Work Together to Build the Silk Road Economic Belt and The 21st Century Maritime Silk Road,” (2017) at http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2017-05/14/c_136282982.htm.

China for centuries and indeed is still used today.⁷⁹ While this system has helped China's economy in many ways—namely it allowed the government to control the flow of labor and guarantee a mixed agricultural/industrial economy—the inequality created by the *hukou* system has started to take its toll on China's economy. Large, extremely underpaid migrant populations are revolting more frequently in urban centers, and rural populations are likewise destabilizing as their land is acquiesced by local authorities in the name of urbanization.⁸⁰ Worse yet, unemployment is a growing concern for the country, which often relies on “bridge to nowhere” infrastructure projects to create employment and maintain growth.⁸¹ While Chinese leaders are aware of this growing danger to social stability, their attempts to remedy the issue have had limited success. Realistically, the options of China's leaders are limited: simple repeal of the *hukou* system would likely result in a flood of migrants in coastal and urban zones, overwhelming infrastructure, sanitation, and general order.⁸²

Another self-invented demographic imbalance is gendered. Perhaps one of the CCP's most internationally infamous policies of the 20th Century was the One-Child Policy, in which the government limited Chinese families to having one child per parental couple (with limited exceptions).⁸³ Initiated in 1980 with “the goal of holding the total population in [the] country under 1.2 billion by the end of the century,” the policy led to a dramatic imbalance between Chinese men and women, with the sex ration, defined as the proportion of male live births to

⁷⁹ Kam Wing Chan, "The Chinese hukou system at 50." *Eurasian Geography and Economics* 50, no. 2 (2009), pp. 198.

⁸⁰ Kam Wing Chan, "The Chinese hukou system at 50," pp. 216; James Griffiths CNN, “China on Strike,” CNN, accessed July 16, 2019, <https://www.cnn.com/2016/03/28/asia/china-strike-worker-protest-trade-union/index.html>.

⁸¹ “China: The Road to Nowhere,” *Financial Times*, July 16, 2012, <https://www.ft.com/content/4f232cdc-cf45-11e1-bfd9-00144feabdc0>.

⁸² Jian Chen, “Regional Income Inequality and Economic Growth in China,” *Journal of Comparative Economics* 22, (1996), accessed July 16, 2019, pp. 157. <https://doi.org/10.1006/jcec.1996.0015>.

⁸³ Therese Hesketh, Li Lu, and Zhu Wei Xing, “The Effect of China's One-Child Family Policy after 25 Years,” *New England Journal of Medicine* 353, no. 11 (September 15, 2005): pp. 1171, <https://doi.org/10.1056/NEJMhpr051833>

female live births, reaching as high as 1.17 in 2001.⁸⁴ Compared to industrialized countries, which typically have a ratio of 1.03-1.07, this is a severe imbalance.⁸⁵ This imbalance is largely a result of a cultural devaluation of women, who are seen as less financially beneficial as daughters. Indeed, mothers in China were often fearful of bearing daughters due to the intense social stigma surrounding having a daughter instead of a son, especially in rural communities.⁸⁶ Beyond compounding an already deteriorating situation for women in China—who were rapidly being moved from classrooms to factories⁸⁷—the overbalance of men presented (and continues to present) a social challenge to China. This is because young, unmarried men, the population of which is increasing in China, are more likely to act violently, commit crimes, and be generally unlawful. While the Chinese government has recognized this issue and announced plans to normalize the birth-sex ratio by 2010, it is unlikely that these reforms could reverse the imbalance created by over thirty years of anti-daughter birthing practices.⁸⁸ Although the social issues created by rural and urban/gender imbalances may seem tangentially related to economic stability, the two are closely related. As China's demographic structure continues to promote domestic unrest, the government will have to further divert funds towards damage control and investors will become increasingly uncertain.

⁸⁴ Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, "Open Letter of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China to the General Membership of the Communist Party and the Membership of the Chinese Communist Youth League on the Problem of Controlling Population Growth in Our Country" (September 25, 1980), *Chinese Sociology & Anthropology*, 24:3, 11-16, DOI: 10.2753/CSA0009-4625240311

⁸⁵ Hesketh, "The Effect of China's One-Child Family Policy after 25 Years," pp. 1172.

⁸⁶ Nü qingnian 7 (1986): 29-30, trans. From *Chinese Sociology and Anthropology* 20:3 (Spring 1988), pp. 93 and 98-100, in *Chinese Civilization: A Sourcebook* (New York: New York, 1993), pp. 480-481.

⁸⁷ Patricia Buckley Ebrey and Kwang-Ching Liu, *The Cambridge Illustrated History of China* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 324-325.

⁸⁸ While it is impossible to tell exactly how these practices have materialized, selective abortion is anecdotally known to be widespread in China. Femicide is also a likely possibility. Valerie Hudson and Andrea M. Den Boer, "Missing Women and Bare Branches: Gender Balance and Conflict," *Environmental Change and Security Program Report*, Issue 11 (2005), pp. 20-24; Hesketh, "The Effect of China's One-Child Family Policy after 25 Years," pp. 1172.

China also has experienced rapid land degradation, water contamination, and air pollution over the course of its industrialization, all of which further sap China's economic progress and persist as sizable economic hurdles. Realistically, many of these problems are in no way new to China—China's unsustainable agricultural practices were taking a toll on the environment as early as the Han Dynasty—but China's miraculous growth over the past seventy years have put destructive processes into overdrive. For example, in relation to land degradation, the policies of the Great Leap Forward, which focused almost entirely on industrialization and the exclusive agricultural production of grain, irreparably damaged China's soils and forests.⁸⁹ While reforms in the 1980s introduced more sustainable farming and industrial techniques and infrastructure projects of the 21st century have limited historic flooding and energy shortages, mass urbanization has severely damaged China's potable water supply. In fact, the World Bank noted in 2002 that China had just a quarter of the global average for freshwater per capita due to the excess amounts of sewage and industrial dumping.⁹⁰ Beyond water, perhaps the most visible environmental problem for China is smog: carcinogens cause up to 1.6 million deaths in China every year, 17 percent of the mortality rate.⁹¹ Combined, these pollutants siphon significant growth from the Chinese economy—air pollutants alone cost China's economy US \$38 billion a year—and threaten to destabilize the “output legitimacy” the CCP relies on.⁹²

⁸⁹ Peter C. Perdue, *The Environmental History of China: Past, Present, and Future*, in Michael Szonyi, ed., *A Companion to Chinese History* (Hoboken NJ: John Wiley, 2017), pp. 258-261.

⁹⁰ Min Shao et al., “City Clusters in China: Air and Surface Water Pollution,” *Frontiers in Ecology and the Environment* 4, no. 7 (2006): 353–61, [https://doi.org/10.1890/1540-9295\(2006\)004\[0353:CCICAA\]2.0.CO;2](https://doi.org/10.1890/1540-9295(2006)004[0353:CCICAA]2.0.CO;2).

⁹¹ For an extremely visual representation, see the 2015 documentary “Under the Dome”. Peter C. Perdue, *The Environmental History of China: Past, Present, and Future*, in Michael Szonyi, ed., *A Companion to Chinese History* (Hoboken NJ: John Wiley, 2017), pp. 261.

⁹² Mühlhahn, *Making China Modern: From the Great Qing to Xi Jinping* pp. 542; Ernest Kao, “1 Million Dead and US\$38 Billion Lost: The Price of China's Air Pollution,” *South China Morning Post*, October 2, 2018, <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/science/article/2166542/air-pollution-killing-1-million-people-and-costing-chinese>.

Do these historical developments reflect China's status as a superpower? As mentioned before, demographic imbalances and environmental degradation proved to be persistent hurdles to China's economic independence and stability. Thus, in contrast with its military rise, the strengthening of China's economic axis of power has had mixed success. However, while demographic imbalances and environmental degradation are clear troubles for China, for the time being, its transformation into the "World Factory" and opening to global investment have enabled its economic axis to become far stronger. China's survival of the 2008 Global Financial Crisis via massive stimulus spending reflects this strength, especially when compared to other world powers caught up in the crisis.⁹³ Nevertheless, China's growth is not preordained. Whether China's economic axis will continue to become more powerful depends largely on the CCP's ability to evolve to address the complicated economic challenges of the 21st Century. Since the 11th Five Year Plan (2016-2021) specifically aims to address those challenges, it seems like China can overcome the hurdles which restrain its growth. Regardless of the outcome, the choices made by CCP leaders will certainly be driven by a desire to assuage national humiliation and escape so-called "backwardness."

Politics

Although military empowerment and economic growth were at the forefront of Chinese policymakers' minds, China's political axis of power still changed dramatically during China's rise. In fact, China's transformation into a major player in international politics has been facilitated not just by economic and military growth, but by its entry into international institutions. These institutions have paradoxically facilitated the empowerment of China's political axis of power through the formal allocation of voting rights (e.g. the United Nations

⁹³ Peter Nolan, *Re-balancing China: Essays on the Global Financial Crisis, Industrial Policy and International Relations* (London: New York: Delhi: Anthem Press, 2014) <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1gxpdm1>, pp. 2.

Security Council) and, concurrently, limited its political axis by pushing China to conform to Western practices (e.g. the World Trade Organization). Consequently, when Western institutions proved too hostile, China has been willing to participate in international initiatives that attempt to disassociate themselves from American and European spheres of influence (e.g. the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank). This mixed approach to international integration is ultimately driven by China's desire to avoid the same choices which caused the Century of Humiliation: instead of attempting isolation and over relying on the outside world economically, China would practice "self-reliance" and (cautious) integration.

While China did not practice isolation during the 1950s and 1960s—it held and participated in various regional conferences like the Bandung Conference and The Asia-Pacific Regional Meeting of the World Peace Council—China's integration into international institutions formally began with the United Nations in 1971.⁹⁴ Since the end of the second world war, the government in Taiwan, not mainland China, held one of the five United Nations Security Council seats. Accordingly, the PRC advocated relentlessly for a position on the UNSC by rallying other nonaligned voting nations. This process began in 1950 at the recommendation of Soviet Union advisors, and, despite the United States' strong resistance, China eventually replaced Taiwan as the fifth permanent member of the Security Council via a two-thirds vote in the General Assembly.⁹⁵

⁹⁴ George McTurnan Kahin, *The Asian-African Conference, Bandung, Indonesia, April 1955* (Port Washington, NY: Kennikat Press, 1972), pp. 5; "Report, Zhou Enlai to the Chairman [Mao Zedong] and the Central Committee," September 22, 1952, *History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive*, Zhonggong zhongyang wenxian yanjiushi (CPC Central Historical Documents Research Office) and Zhongyang dang'anguan (Central Archives), eds., *Jianguo yilai Zhou Enlai wengao* (Zhou Enlai's Manuscripts since the Founding of the PRC), vol. 7 (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 2018), 160-161. Translated by David Cowhig. <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/208225>

⁹⁵ "Telegram, Mao Zedong to Zhou Enlai and CCP CC," January 07, 1950, *History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive*, Zhonggong zhongyang wenxian yanjiushi, ed., *Jianguo yilai Mao Zedong wengao* (Mao Zedong's Manuscripts since the Founding of the People's Republic of China), vol. 1 (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 1987), 219-20; translation from Shuguang Zhang and Jian Chen, eds., *Chinese Communist Foreign Policy and the*

This was a pivotal change for two reasons. First, China was able to win over veto power in the Security Council, which was supplied to each permanent member of the UNSC. While China's use of the veto has been historically limited, that institutional power has strengthened China's political axis greatly, allowing it to punish countries that oppose its mission or sovereignty, as it did in 1999 against Macedonia for refusing to recognize Beijing as the capital of China (as opposed to Taipei).⁹⁶ Second, China's ascension to the UNSC marked China's first entrance into institutions created by imperial powers as an equal. China's ability to rise to this level was credited to its successful "self-reliance" by domestic and foreign observers alike. Domestically, the Communiqué of the Third Plenary Session of the Eleventh Central Committee of the Communist Party of China stated that China was now actively establishing "cooperation on terms of equality and mutual benefit with other countries on the basis of self-reliance."⁹⁷ Those terms, of course, stand in juxtaposition to the "cooperation" forced upon China during the Opium War. In this way, "self-reliance" is closely linked with the historic memory of national humiliation. Foreign observers likewise recognized China's self-reliance. In 1981, the UN Secretary-General made a toast to the Chinese Vice-Premier, stating: "Considering the formidable difficulties which China has to face in this endeavour, the self-reliance which it has shown is a source of inspiration to all."⁹⁸ Of course, it is likely that the Secretary-General picked the term "self-reliance" very diplomatically, but that nonetheless reflects the importance of the

Cold War in Asia: New Documentary Evidence, 1944-1950 (Chicago: Imprint Publications, 1996), 134-135. <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/112667>; Spence, *The Search for Modern China*, pp. 566.

⁹⁶ Paul Lewis, "Continuation of U.N. Force in Macedonia Faces a Chinese Veto," *The New York Times*, February 25, 1999, sec. World, <https://www.nytimes.com/1999/02/25/world/continuation-of-un-force-in-macedonia-faces-a-chinese-veto.html>.

⁹⁷ "Communiqué of the Third Plenary Session of the Eleventh Central Committee of the Communist Party of China," in *Sources of Chinese Tradition*, Vol. 2 (New York: Columbia Univ. Pr., 1999), pp. 489-490.

⁹⁸ "Toast by the Secretary-General to the Vice-Premier of China, Beijing, 10 June 1981," June 10, 1981, *History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive*, S-0987-0012-09, United Nations Archives and Records Management Section. Obtained by Charles Kraus. <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/118482>

phrase to his Chinese audience. At that point in 1981, it seemed as though China would be able to balance self-reliance with the cautious integration that scaffolded its international political goals.

As China became more entangled with international institutions and the global economy, however, this balance became more difficult. This difficulty is best encapsulated by China's struggles to become admitted to and an accepted market economy of the World Trade Organization (WTO). Unlike the United Nations, admission into the WTO requires a state to make significant policy changes. In China's case, this meant developing economic liberalism and stepping away from its trademark command economy. Initially, this was not much of a problem for China. The country under Deng Xiaoping had already begun economic liberalization and become a member of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund when, in 1986, CCP announced its intent to rejoin the Generally Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT, the precursor to the WTO).

However, as existing GATT members debated whether to admit a nation that barely met the economic liberalization criteria, the Tiananmen Square Massacre in 1989 brought international condemnation upon the Chinese government and slowed negotiations.⁹⁹ Consequently, it quickly became clear that China's admission would be more difficult than it had appeared originally. Indeed, even after the GATT was scrapped and converted into the WTO in 1995, China was unable to establish itself as a founding member. The following years in which China attempted to join the WTO involved grueling negotiations with the United States—which could *de facto* veto any nation's admittance into the WTO—amid consistently deteriorating

⁹⁹ Marc Lanteigne, *China and International Institutions: Alternate Paths to Global Power*, Asian Security Studies (London: Routledge), 2005, pp. 37-42.
<http://spectacled.ursinus.edu:3035/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=144106&site=ehost-live>.

political relations between the two nations.¹⁰⁰ Nevertheless, China was eventually admitted to the WTO in 2001. This was only possible, however, because China made various concessions and reforms in order to conform with the Western, liberalized economic structure the WTO and, in effect, the United States mandated.

While this lengthy process undoubtedly frustrated Chinese leaders (Chinese Premier Zhu Rongji attempted to resign three times during the process), they were determined to reap the maximum benefits of joining the WTO. This would be done, according to Chinese WTO representative Shi Guangsheng, only if the WTO was “fully reflecting the interests and requirements of all parties, including developing countries.”¹⁰¹ Jiang Zemin likewise emphasized in a 2001 speech in Hong Kong:

Following its entry into the [WTO], China will steadily expand its opening-up program in terms of commodity and services trade, create a level playing field for a fair and transparent competition between Chinese and overseas enterprises, establish and improve a foreign trade regime that is consistent with international practice and that suits China's own national conditions, and provide the overseas enterprises with more and stable access to the Chinese market so as to facilitate economic cooperation and trade between China and other countries.

This rhetoric highlights China’s desire to “expand its opening-up” while maintaining “a level playing field” so as to avoid the disasters that occurred during the Century of Humiliation.

Importantly, this would all be done using the nation’s “strong sense of self- esteem, self- confidence, *self-reliance* and self-improvement” (Emphasis added).¹⁰² Therefore, although China

¹⁰⁰ The U.S. bombing of a Chinese embassy in Yugoslavia, a congressional report known as the Cox Report which claimed Chinese spies had stolen American military technology, and America’s rejection of China’s diplomatic advances despite extensive reform are all touchpoints in this deteriorating relationship. Marc Lanteigne, *China and International Institutions: Alternate Paths to Global Power*, Asian Security Studies (London: Routledge), 2005, pp. 48-49. <http://spectacled.ursinus.edu:3035/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=144106&site=ehost-live>.

¹⁰¹ Shi Guangsheng , “Statement by Foreign Trade Minister Shi Guangsheng to the Fourth Ministerial Conference of the WTO following the adoption of the Decision on China's Accession to the WTO,” (2001) <http://www.china-un.org/eng/zt/wto/t28924.htm>

¹⁰² Jiang Zemin, “President Jiang Zemin Delivered A Speech at APEC Economic Leaders' Meeting

had to bend to extensive reforms in order to join the WTO, it would not allow those reforms to subject it to a position of submission. Indeed, China's on-going battles with the WTO over its market economy status reflect this unwillingness to fully yield to Western economic liberalism.¹⁰³ Thus, while China seems willing to make concessions in order to strengthen its political axis of power, it limits the influence of Western liberalization when possible.

Accordingly, China has often circumvented the bias of Western institutions like the WTO by creating its own. These Chinese spearheaded institutions have empowered China politically as a global leader and a regional hegemon. For instance, the New Development Bank (NDB) and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), both founded in 2014, are two Chinese-dominated financial institutions created outside the sphere of Western influence (both have their headquarters in China and the AIIB was conceived in China).¹⁰⁴ These financial institutions, which fund various global infrastructure projects and initiatives through loans, were created, according to President Xi Jinping, to “help make the global economic governance system more just, equitable and effective.”¹⁰⁵ Clearly, by saying the AIIB and NDB would make the system more just, President Xi necessarily implies that the current global economic governance system as it stands is unjust. Both the NDB and AIIB have facilitated multilateral negotiations benefiting China without requiring the extensive reforms mandated by the WTO or IMF.

Strengthen Cooperation and Meet New Challenges Together in The New Century,” (2001)

https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjdt_665385/zyjh_665391/t25043.shtml

¹⁰³ This conflict will be described in greater detail in a later section, but, put shortly, China continues to maintain a command economy and violate international intellectual property laws. For obvious reasons, the U.S. argues that these points necessitate China's exclusion from the WTO. “China Loses Market-Economy Trade Case in Win for EU and U.S., Sources Say,” Bloomberg.Com, April 18, 2019, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2019-04-18/china-is-said-to-lose-market-economy-trade-case-in-eu-u-s-win>.

¹⁰⁴ Hongying Wang, “The New Development Bank and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank: China's Ambiguous Approach to Global Financial Governance,” *Development and Change* 50, no. 1 (January 1, 2019): 221–44, <https://doi.org/10.1111/dech.12473>.

¹⁰⁵ Xi Jinping, “Chinese President Xi Jinping's address at AIIB inauguration ceremony,” (2016) http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/business/2016-01/16/content_23116718_2.htm

Indeed, it even seems increasingly possible that China will be able to reform the long-standing U.S. dominated financial institutions through the inside. One example is the World Bank, where Chinese economist Justin Yifu Lin appointed chief economist from the years 2008-2012 and had extensive control over the banks mission.¹⁰⁶ Similarly, although the International Monetary Fund (IMF) has pushed back on China's manipulation of the renminbi, China's voting share has increased beyond six percent in the past twenty years, giving it a major voice in all decisions.¹⁰⁷ While these development does not necessarily mean China is on its way to supplanting institutions like the World Bank or IMF, China's ability to champion financial institutions outside the American system has certainly strengthened its political axis of power. Whether this system counts as the "self-reliance" for which China's leaders advocate is up for debate. Regardless, by joining existing institutions, whether skewed in favor of Western powers or not, China has become a major player in the international political arena: as nations continue to join the AIIB and NDB, this power is only likely to grow.

Culture

In many ways, as China became more connected with the world politically and economically, it developed channels through which it could broadcast its cultural influence. Tracing this cultural projection is difficult, however. Much of China's culture has been in flux since 1949, resulting in inconsistent cultural messaging to the international community. Indeed, recalling the components of cultural power Nye defines, which are "the attractiveness of a country's culture, political ideas, and policies," China's cultural axis has undergone extensive

¹⁰⁶ "Sustainable Development Solutions Network | Justin Yifu Lin," accessed July 15, 2019, <http://unsdsn.org/about-us/people/justin-yifu-lin/>.

¹⁰⁷ Peter Ferdinand and Jue Wang, "China and the IMF: From Mimicry towards Pragmatic International Institutional Pluralism," *International Affairs* 89, no. 4 (July 12, 2013): 897–898, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2346.12050>.

changes in the past seventy years.¹⁰⁸ Correspondingly, this section traces the historical evolution of China's culture, political ideas, and policies. In addition, this section subsequently analyzes how these three elements of cultural power have been received by the international community and briefly previews the existing barriers to China's cultural power.

Overall, in terms of political ideas, China went to great lengths under Mao to export Communism. In contrast, China after Mao put comparatively less effort into exporting its central political ideas, namely market authoritarianism (although the economy's success has done much to sell itself). In terms of policies, China's history of human rights violations has wrought critique, and its restrictions on personal freedoms have not made it any allies abroad. Lastly, China has done very little to export that which is traditionally considered culture—"(a) observable artifacts, (b) values, and (c) basic underlying assumptions,"—until recently in the 21st Century; however, the little it has done has been relatively successful.¹⁰⁹ Like military, economic, and political power, the (limited) rise of China's culture power operated through the lens of national humiliation.

After the success of the Communist Revolution in 1949, the political ideas disseminated by China were entrenched in Marxist-Leninist-Maoist rhetoric. Chinese leaders, especially Mao, advocated for other proletariat populations around the world to rise up and overthrow the oppressive bourgeoisie and imperialist establishment. Mao's famous "little red book" was read not just all over in China, but all over the world, and quotations like "imperialism and all

¹⁰⁸ Nye, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*, pp. x.

¹⁰⁹ Edgar Schein, "Organizational culture," *American Psychologist* 45(2): 109–119 (1990), in Helen Spencer-Oatey, *What is culture? A compilation of quotations*. GlobalPAD Core Concepts (2012) Available at GlobalPAD Open House, pp. 3. <http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/al/globalpad/interculturalskills/>

reactionaries... must be seen for what they are - paper tigers” quickly became famous.¹¹⁰ In fact, Mao’s writing quickly became popular in a variety of countries, ranging from Peru to Tanzania to India.¹¹¹ While it is easy to note the popularity of Mao’s writing, this popularity does not necessarily translate into the direct exportation of China’s political ideas. After all, Communism had been around for over a century, and China was not its only champion: the Soviet Union had laid claim to that mantle since 1917.

Indeed, between 1949 and the death of Mao in 1976, China was far more focused inward than outward, and China relatively little to advocate its political model other than advocate for revolution in other developing countries. This does come with the exception of the Bandung Conference of 1955, in which Zhou Enlai, China’s foreign minister, worked with a coalition of nations—India, Burma, Indonesia, Pakistan, and Ceylon—to highlight the United States as the main enemy of the continental coalition.¹¹² Beyond assisting in the globalization of anti-Americanism, China worked to reaffirm the “Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence” enshrined in the Panchsheel Treaty of 1955: “(1) mutual respect for each other's territorial integrity and sovereignty, (2) mutual non-aggression, (3) mutual non-interference in each other's internal affairs, (4) equality and mutual benefit, and (5) peaceful co-existence.”¹¹³ China’s affirmation of these principles served a dual purpose. First, Chinese leaders wanted to assure their neighbors that their struggle against the First and Second world was unified and that China stood firmly as

¹¹⁰ Alexander C. Cook, *Mao’s Little Red Book: A Global History* (Cambridge University Press, 2014), pp. 76; Mao Zedong, Quotations from Mao Tse Tung - Chapter 6, accessed July 16, 2019, <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/works/red-book/ch06.htm>.

¹¹¹ Alexander C. Cook, *Mao’s Little Red Book: A Global History* (Cambridge University Press, 2014), pp. 96, 117, 130, respectively.

¹¹² Spence, *The Search for Modern China*, pp. 496.

¹¹³ Kahin, *The Asian-African Conference, Bandung, Indonesia, April 1955*, pp. 5; “No. 4307. AGREEMENT BETWEEN THE REPUBLIC OF INDIA AND THE PEOPLE’S REPUBLIC OF CHINA ON TRADE AND INTERCOURSE BETWEEN TIBET REGION OF CHINA AND INDIA. SIGNED AT PEKING, ON 29 APRIL 1954” *United Nations Treaty Series*, vol. 299, United Nations, pp. 70. <http://treaties.un.org/doc/publication/unts/volume%20299/v299.pdf>

a member of the Third World determined to advocate for the end of imperialism. Second, it internationally broadcasted the very issues that characterized China's historic memory. Mostly, "non-interference in each other's internal affairs" speaks directly to China's concerns of foreign nations meddling in China's domestic realm as European powers had during the Century of Humiliation. Nevertheless, beyond the Bandung Conference, China was largely focused inward, and the crisis of the Great Leap Forward would only further divert China's attention from advocating for its political ideas abroad.

After the death of Mao, the turn inward quickly became a turn outward. As discussed above, this "turning-out" was primarily an economic opening to global markets. With economic opening, however, comes the spread of ideas, and the China of the late 1970s onwards was advertising something very different from Maoism. China's new model often branded by foreign observers as "market authoritarianism" was now the selling point of China's political ideas. This market authoritarianism was defined by "the new alternative of 'going capitalist and staying autocratic,'" and "Beijing has provided the world's most compelling, high-speed demonstration of how to liberalize economically without surrendering to liberal politics."¹¹⁴ Essentially, China represented an economic and political model that could rival that of the United States, a point which had major "implications for China's sense of identity and of national pride as policy-makers and populace alike [sought] to expunge the stain of humiliation."¹¹⁵

China would go on to find its largest audience in Africa in the 1970s. This is largely due to African dissatisfaction with Western economic and political systems, which had all but failed the many African nations that had turned to liberalism during decolonization. Nonetheless,

¹¹⁴ Stefan Halper, *The Beijing Consensus: Legitimizing Authoritarianism in Our Time*, Basic Books, 2012, ProQuest Ebook Central, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/ursinus-ebooks/detail.action?docID=488068>, pp. 32-33.

¹¹⁵ Beeson and Li, "What Consensus? Geopolitics and Policy Paradigms in China and the United States," pp. 94.

although Africa seemed to be in an ideal position to adopt the Chinese “model”, very few countries did. Moreover, the countries that did attempt to emulate China’s political ideas (Tanzania and Mali) quickly failed. This failure was caused firstly by a general lack of interest on the part of African peoples in the Chinese model and secondly by a lack of interest on the part of Chinese leaders in helping African countries implement that model. Essentially, for China, although it had opened up to the world and its ideas received more attention, economic concerns still overrode any desire to spread political ideas.¹¹⁶

As China’s attempts to broadcast its political ideas floundered, its domestic policies only further diminished China’s fledging international cultural presence. The most infamous of these policies was its hard crackdown on student protesters during the Tiananmen Square Massacre in 1989. These protests had manifested for a culmination of reasons—economic slowdown, demands for greater freedoms, etc.—and, while the aims of the protesters were at times ambiguous, the response of the government was not. After weeks of demonstrations and hunger strikes, the CCP would have no more of the protests. Soldiers were sent to the square on June 3rd with permission to fire, and by the next day hundreds had died and thousands had been injured.¹¹⁷ This slaughter brought immediate condemnation from the international community, and international audiences were bombarded with violent images captured by Western reporters.¹¹⁸ This delegitimized both China and Communism in the eyes of many international observers.¹¹⁹ While no incident has been as serious as this grotesque violation of human rights,

¹¹⁶ David H. Shinn and Joshua Eisenman, “A Historical Overview of China-Africa Relations,” In *China and Africa: A Century of Engagement*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press), 2012, pp. 42. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt3fhwkz.6>.

¹¹⁷ Mühlhahn, *Making China Modern: From the Great Qing to Xi Jinping*, pp. 523-524.

¹¹⁸ Undoubtedly, the most famous of these is “Tank Man”, which is a short clip of a man standing with his groceries in front an entire tank column in the street, thereby bringing the column to a halt. Adrian Brown, “Reporting from Tiananmen Square in 1989: ‘I Saw a Lot I Will Never Forget,’” *Aljazeera*, accessed July 19, 2019, <https://www.aljazeera.com/blogs/asia/2019/06/reporting-tiananmen-square-1989-lot-forget-190604025128201.html>.

¹¹⁹ Mühlhahn, *Making China Modern: From the Great Qing to Xi Jinping*, pp. 525-526.

China's policies of the 21st century have fumbled its reputation in other ways. Whether through foreign labor exploitation, the crackdown of artists like Ai Wei Wei, or the mistreatment of minorities, namely Tibetans and Uighurs in China's western provinces, China has repeatedly sacrificed its international reputation for domestic security.¹²⁰

Otherwise, speaking to China's ability to spread what is colloquially referred to as culture—“(a) observable artifacts, (b) values, and (c) basic underlying assumptions,”—China has been for the most part successful.¹²¹ It is, of course, difficult (if not foolish) to attribute this success directly to the efforts of China's leaders. Chinese migrants have set up various communities all over the globe, Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism, all major influencers of Chinese cultural values and underlying assumptions, have spread internationally, and historic symbols of Chinese civilization (e.g. the Great Wall) are well-known. None of these developments can be attributed to CCP leaders, so China's cultural standing in this stance is relatively divorced from the PRC's control. However, Chinese leaders have found ways to reinforce or create these cultural ties through the widespread promotion of the Confucian Institute. With its first location established in Uzbekistan in 2004, the Confucius Institute was created with a rather nebulous mission of spreading Chinese language and culture. Each institution is generously funded by the Chinese government and holds Chinese language courses for local populations. These courses, while mainly language instruction, preach pro-CCP views and introduce general topics of Chinese diaspora to students. When assessing these institutes' ability to win over local populations, they appear to be effective. Empirical studies suggest a

¹²⁰ Lindsay Maizland, “China's Crackdown on Uighurs in Xinjiang,” *Council on Foreign Relations*, accessed July 19, 2019, <https://www.cfr.org/background/chinas-crackdown-uighurs-xinjiang>; Keith B. Richburg, “Chinese Artist Ai Weiwei Arrested in Ongoing Government Crackdown,” *Washington Post*, April 3, 2011, sec. World, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/chinese-artist-ai-wei-wei-arrested-in-latest-government-crackdown/2011/04/03/AFHB5PVC_story.html; Richard Aidoo, “Go Global, Meet the Locals: Pragmatism, Plunder, and Anti-Chinese Populism in Africa,” *Journal of Diplomacy*, no. 11 (Winter 2017), pp. 15.

¹²¹ Schein, “Organizational culture,” pp. 3.

positive correlation between the presence of one of these institutes and local media's positive portrayal of Chinese politics, meaning China's cultural projection programs have tangible results.¹²² It is important to note that the Confucius Institutes are often associated with Xi Jinping's conception of the Chinese Dream, which is vaguely defined as "national prosperity, the revitalization of the nation and people's happiness." This association reflects the CCP's belief that winning over foreign populations culturally is important to achieving the goals of the Chinese Dream, which are described in "the light of the miseries brought to China by Western powers during the Century of Humiliation."¹²³

When compared to its other axes of power, the growth of China's cultural axis of power seems rather limited. It would be incorrect, however, to suggest China has not grown in cultural power since 1949. China has made waves with its introduction of a potentially viable alternative to the American model, even if no other country has successfully adopted the Chinese model yet. Furthermore, China's cultural broadcasting has made Chinese culture more visible in international communities, garnering the PRC some favor among local populations. Whether these limited successes will be able to outweigh the historic devaluation of China's reputation, which, if China cannot successfully ward off neocolonialist labels (discussed in greater length below), is bound to worsen, is yet to be seen.

The Current Debate

As shown above, China's military, economic, political, and cultural axes have clearly become stronger since 1949. However, the culmination of these historical developments has left

¹²² Falk Hartig, *Chinese Public Diplomacy: The Rise of Confucius Institutes*, (London: Routledge, 2017), pp. 98-103; Samuel Brazys and Alexander Dukalskis, "Why U.S. universities are shutting down China-funded Confucius Institutes," *The Washington Post*, January 11, 2019, accessed June 10, 2019, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2019/01/11/u-s-universities-have-shut-down-confucius-institutes-heres-what-you-need-to-know/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.79aa6df8a0cf.

¹²³ Falk Hartig, *Chinese Public Diplomacy: The Rise of Confucius Institutes*, (London: Routledge, 2017), pp. 22-23.

China in an ambiguous position, and its status as a superpower is still unclear. Indeed, as was the case during Japan's economic rise in the 1980s, scholars continue to debate the current state of China's power. Can China's economy continue to legitimize the government? Will China integrate into global institutions or continue to invent its own? To contextualize these questions, the following section explores current scholarship surrounding the china-as-superpower debate. Ultimately, the current debate surrounding China's future as a superpower reinforces the historical assessment of China's rise above: although Chinese military, economic, political, and cultural power may be rising, China still must overcome existing structural hurdles within each axis before it can become a superpower.

Economy

While all four axes are essential to a superpower, current debates surrounding China's rise tend to focus on China's economic power. For example, in his article, *The Inevitable Superpower: Why China's Dominance Is a Sure Thing*, Indian economist Arvind Subramanian argues that China's economy will surpass that of the United States as early as 2030. Subramanian suggests that China's strong economic growth, its positive balance of trade, and its status as a "net creditor to the rest of the world" allow China to leverage political benefits out of its numerous debtors.¹²⁴ Meanwhile, economic scholars like Derek Scissors reject such unqualified confidence in China's rise. In fact, Scissors marks China's status as a net creditor as a creation of "its weaknesses, not its strengths."¹²⁵ Following Scissors' logic, China's closed economic system prevents the state from importing capital, which would speed its domestic development.¹²⁶

¹²⁴ Arvind Subramanian, "The Inevitable Superpower: Why China's Dominance Is a Sure Thing," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 90, No. 5 (September/October 2011), <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23041777>.

¹²⁵ Derek Scissors, "The Wobbly Dragon," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 91, No. 1 (January/February 2012), <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2011-01-01/great-china-debate>.

¹²⁶ Scissors, "The Wobbly Dragon."

Overall, Scissors seems to doubt Subramanian's prediction of nearly indefinite growth for the Chinese economy.

This debate reflects the deeper uncertainty that surrounds the future of China's economy. Indeed, China's growth has been spectacular, but scholars from the Institute for International Economics and the Center for International and Strategic Studies take a more measured perspective on China's success. In their joint publication, *China: The Balance Sheet*, these policy analysts note five sources of China's economic power—"the embrace of market forces, the opening of the economy to trade and inward direct investment, high levels of savings and investment, the structural transformation of the labor force, and investments in primary education"—and three hurdles to economic growth—reforming state-owned enterprises, developing a more efficient capital allocation, and moderating market fluctuations.¹²⁷ Moreover, these are only some of the hurdles the economy faces. In the coming decades, China will have to deal with demographic implications of the one-child policy, the environmental toll of rampant pollution, and the challenge of switching from a savings country to a consumer country.¹²⁸ While these obstacles are surmountable, they suggest China's economic rise is not preordained.

While economics are understandably at the forefront of this debate, excluding any discussion of China's military capabilities, its political influence, and its cultural power leaves a large gap in the China-as-superpower discussion. International scholars like Rosemary Foot and Andrew Walter provide a fuller description of the sources of China's growing international power by noting China's military and political power along with its economic power.

¹²⁷ C. Fred Bergsten, *China: The Balance Sheet*. (New York: Public Affairs, 2006), pp. 23.

¹²⁸ Kyle Hutzler, "The China Skeptic's Talking Points Memo | The Yale Review of International Studies," November 2012, accessed June 24, 2019, <http://yris.yira.org/essays/755>; Thomas L. Friedman, *Hot, Flat, and Crowded Why We Need a Green Revolution-- and How It Can Renew America* (Bayrūt: Akādīmiyā Intarnāshyunāl, 2009), pp. 343-367.

Contextualizing their analysis in the larger scholarly debate shows that while Chinese military and economic power are essential to China's rise, political and cultural power are also vital to China's rise as a superpower.

Military

Starting with China's military, Foot and Walter describe China's impressive military growth over the past decades. China is "a nuclear weapons state" with a rapidly growing army and navy. In fact, while its defense budget is still dwarfed by that of the United States, "over the period 1998–2007, China's military spending in real terms has been estimated to have increased by 202 percent."¹²⁹ More recent statistics show that this trend has continued as China has increased military spending by 83% between 2009 and 2018, with a planned rise of 7.5% in military expenditures for 2019.¹³⁰ This dramatic increase in military spending has led to the expansion and advancement of China's military. While all of the People's Liberation Army's developments cannot be noted here, their development of aircraft carriers, satellite-weaponry, and cyber warfare techniques are notable measures of the PLA's technological growth.¹³¹ Considerable advancements to the military structure initiated by Xi Jinping in 2015, and described in detail by a report from the Department of Defense similarly suggest a dramatic increase in China's military power.¹³² Moreover, China has increasingly shown a willingness to

¹²⁹ Rosemary Foot and Andrew Walter, *China, the United States, and Global Order* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 18 and 43.

¹³⁰ David Tweed, "China Defense Spending Set to Rise 7.5% as Xi Builds Up Military," *Bloomberg*, March 5, 2019, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2019-03-05/china-s-military-spending-slows-as-economy-cools>; "Xi Jinping Wants China's Armed Forces to Be 'World-Class' by 2050," *The Economist*, June 27, 2019, <https://www.economist.com/china/2019/06/27/xi-jinping-wants-chinas-armed-forces-to-be-world-class-by-2050>.

¹³¹ It is important to note that the PLA is the army of the Communist Party, not the government. This essentially means the PLA is technically charged with the survival of the Communist Party, not the state. "China Military Power: Modernizing a force to Fight and Win," *Defense Intelligence Agency*, November 2018, https://www.dia.mil/Portals/27/Documents/News/Military%20Power%20Publications/China_Military_Power_FINAL_5MB_20190103.pdf.

¹³² "ANNUAL REPORT TO CONGRESS Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2018," *Defense Intelligence Agency*, August 2018. <https://media.defense.gov/2018/Aug/16/2001955282/-1/-/1/2018-CHINA-MILITARY-POWER-REPORT.PDF>

use its military power aggressively. For example, the Chinese government continues to threaten its neighbors into giving up strategically and politically advantageous positions in the South China Sea like the Spratly Islands. It does this through the construction of military facilities (and the islands beneath those facilities), the encirclement of opposing states' islands, and threats to fishing boats.¹³³ Even in the face of American opposition, China has asserted its military authority over the South China Sea, highlighting its growing military power and its willingness to use that power.¹³⁴

Although these developments are impressive, other scholars argue that it is rash to suggest China's military is on its way to becoming the most powerful in the world. John G. Ikenberry, for example, notes that when compared to the United States' and its "Western" allies', China's defense budget is relatively small. Ikenberry includes the sum of the OECD's military expenditure because he sees the West's highly integrated military alliances as China's collective military opposition. Even when compared to just the United States, the Chinese military is limited in both its technology and spending power.¹³⁵ Such a comparison is crucial since, if China is to achieve some of its long proclaimed goals of reclaiming Taiwan, it will have to challenge the military authority of the United States (notwithstanding an unlikely abandonment of Taiwan on the part of the United States).

Politics

¹³³ Marco Hernández, "Conflicting Claims," *South China Morning Post*, accessed July 8, 2019, <http://multimedia.scmp.com/2016/southChinaSea/img/ConflictClaims.jpg>.

¹³⁴ "China's Sea Control Is a Done Deal, 'Short of War With the U.S.' - The New York Times," accessed July 8, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/09/20/world/asia/south-china-sea-navy.html>.

¹³⁵ The World Bank || <http://www.worldbank.org/>
<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/MS.MIL.XPND.GD.ZS?contextual=default&locations=CN-US&view=chart>.

In relation to political power, Foot and Walter note that China “has permanent UN Security Council membership and a growing development aid budget.”¹³⁶ These factors have greatly contributed to China’s political power within international politics, allowing the PRC much greater leverage over the UN’s mission as well as the allocation of development funds.¹³⁷ Beyond the United Nations, as mentioned above, China’s ascension to the World Trade Organization in 2001 has brought China greater economic protections and influence in global markets.¹³⁸ Indeed, some scholars like G. John Ikenberry and Darren J. Lim, international relations analysts writing in the Project on International Order and Strategy for the Brookings Institute, even suggest that China stands a chance at supplanting America’s long-standing seat at the top of the international order. As a matter of fact, these scholars argue that China’s chances at overtaking the existing international political order either through existing institutions or new institutions are only improved by the Trump administration’s unwillingness to maintain international order through institutional commitment.¹³⁹

While these scholars are right to note China’s growing institutional power, their assessments may be overblown. For instance, although China contributes significantly to International Financial Institutions like the WTO, it is yet to be determined as to whether such multilateral participation will significantly elevate China’s political power.¹⁴⁰ Indeed, recent developments have undermined China’s authority in the WTO, and the issue of intellectual property rights will most likely remain a point of contention between China and other WTO

¹³⁶ Rosemary Foot and Andrew Walter, *China, the United States, and Global Order*, pp. 18.

¹³⁷ Bergsten, *China: The Balance Sheet*, pp. 120.

¹³⁸ Lee Branstetter and Nicholas Lardy. “China’s Embrace of Globalization,” in *China’s Great Transformation: Origins, Mechanisms, and Consequences of the Post-Reform Economic Boom*, National Bureau of Economic Research, July 2006, <https://www.nber.org/papers/w12373.pdf>.

¹³⁹ G John Ikenberry and Darren J Lim, “China’s Emerging Institutional Statecraft,” *Project on International Order and Strategy*, The Brookings Institute, pp. 16-18.

¹⁴⁰ Beeson and Li, “What Consensus? Geopolitics and Policy Paradigms in China and the United States,” pp. 107-108.

members. These developments are not merely a political hiccup either. The WTO's repeated denial of China's ascension to market-economy status has seriously hamstrung China's economy. This is primarily because market status would unambiguously illegitimate American tariffs against Chinese goods. While the exact impact of the "Trade War" is yet to be seen, early reports indicate that the Chinese economy is suffering far more than American economy (with the exception of the American soy market).¹⁴¹ For this reason, China's status within the WTO, and in many international political institutions, is far from trivial. While Foot and Walter gloss over this issue, Ikenberry and Lim describe the daunting task China faces in more realistic terms. They write:

China's ability to wield new institutions as "instruments" of its political and economic goals has limits. Moreover, as the existing institutional order has rules and institutions that China can use to pursue and defend its interests (particularly those relating to sovereignty norms), China's struggle to gain advantage and voice may draw it further into the existing system.¹⁴²

Essentially, China is in an awkward position. The more it may attempt to assert itself into the global order, the more it may be drawn into that system and changed by its rules, rather than changing the rules themselves. Thus, although China is certainly in a position to gain political power, the deep institutionalization of the existing order may be too stable to topple.

Culture

Although Foot and Walter discuss military, economic, and political power at length, they leave China's cultural axis of power out of the discussion. Does China have the cultural "soft power" of a superpower? In *The Beijing Consensus: Legitimizing Authoritarianism in Our Time*,

¹⁴¹ Zhou Xin, "Why Is China Throwing in the Towel over Market Economy Status at the WTO?," *South China Morning Post*, June 18, 2019, <https://www.scmp.com/economy/china-economy/article/3015048/us-china-trade-war-weighed-beijings-decision-not-pursue-wto>; Daniel Bases "US Farmers Swamped by Tariffs and Unprecedented Rains," *South China Morning Post*, June 11, 2019, <https://www.scmp.com/news/world/united-states-canada/article/3013941/under-water-us-farmers-swamped-tariffs-and>.

¹⁴² Ikenberry and Lim, "China's Emerging Institutional Statecraft," pp. 2.

American foreign policy scholar Stefan Halper claims that “China is the protagonist in a clash of values, governance, and two versions of modernity in the twenty-first century.”¹⁴³ While this is vaguely reminiscent of a Huntington-esque “Clash of Civilizations” argument, Halper zeros in on the two ideational models the United States and China represent: liberal democracy and market authoritarianism. While liberal democracy is a merger of free-market capitalism and representative government, “market authoritarianism,” is made of “a liberal economic policy that opens the economy” and “the persistence of authoritarian rule, which allows the ruling party to keep a firm grip on government, the courts, the military, and the flow of information.”¹⁴⁴

Although, as Jeffery Legro suggests, China is not explicitly pushing this governing system on other nations the way the United States does through the IFIs (i.e. the “Washington Consensus”), it is certainly trying to garner support for this political system through extensive narrative dissemination.¹⁴⁵ For example, “Beijing invested \$6.8 billion in 2010 to create a global network with daily news and commentary in fifty-six languages on television, on radio, and in print,” with the purpose “to frame developing stories in a China-friendly way.”¹⁴⁶ Such advertising campaigns are bolstered by comprehensive language and culture programs like the Confucius Institute, which, as mentioned above, are sites charged with the general purpose of spreading Chinese language and culture. Consequently, Confucius Institutes have become one of the many ways in which the PRC attempts to extend its cultural component of “soft power”.¹⁴⁷

Other scholars approach claims of a “Beijing Consensus” more cautiously. Mark Beeson and Fujian Li challenge the notion of China’s growing ideational power in their piece *What*

¹⁴³ Halper, *The Beijing Consensus: Legitimizing Authoritarianism in Our Time*, pp. 3.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid. pp. 30.

¹⁴⁵ Jeffrey W. Legro, “What China Will Want: The Future Intentions of a Rising Power,” *Perspectives on Politics*, Vol. 5, No. 3 (2007), pp. 518.

¹⁴⁶ Halper, *The Beijing Consensus*, pp. xxviii.

¹⁴⁷ Hartig, *Chinese Public Diplomacy: The Rise of Confucius Institutes*, pp. 100.

Consensus? Geopolitics and Policy Paradigms in China and the United States. Beeson and Li argue that despite China's impressive growth, it is overzealous to claim China offers a model for other developing nations to emulate.¹⁴⁸ This is because the "Sino-Capitalist" model lacks "a clearly articulated set of core principles" which "has given it significantly less traction as a distinct discourse or policy paradigm" compared to America's ten, clearly outlined economic principles enshrined in the Washington Consensus.¹⁴⁹ This essentially means that despite the active cultural programs Halper notes, China will continue to struggle to export its market-authoritarian "model" to other states, thereby limiting its global ideational power. Such a barrier is only compounded by the negative reputation the PRC is accumulating abroad through its strategic and economic maneuvers. For instance, as China funds ambitious economic projects in countries in Southeast Asia, Central Asia, Africa, and Latin America, "China is continually having to fend off accusations of 'neo-colonialism'."¹⁵⁰ Whether this animosity comes from evidence of corruption and poor planning (Ecuador), dangerous working conditions and racist Chinese managers (Zambia), or predatory lending practices (Sri Lanka), China's economic ambition abroad has certainly engendered negative feelings among foreign populations, if not foreign leaders.¹⁵¹ Additionally, China's exceptionally aggressive behavior in the South China Sea has only undermined the PRC's claims of non-interference, thus pushing its neighbors closer into the sphere of American influence.¹⁵² Clearly, in relation to cultural power, China likewise

¹⁴⁸ Beeson and Li, "What Consensus?", pp. 108.

¹⁴⁹ Beeson and Li, "What Consensus?", pp. 103.

¹⁵⁰ Beeson and Li, "What Consensus?", pp. 108.

¹⁵¹ Nicholas Casey and Clifford Krauss, "It Doesn't Matter If Ecuador Can Afford This Dam. China Still Gets Paid.," *The New York Times*, December 24, 2018, sec. World, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/12/24/world/americas/ecuador-china-dam.html>; Nadège Rolland, "Reports of Belt and Road's Death Are Greatly Exaggerated," February 1, 2019, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2019-01-29/reports-belt-and-roads-death-are-greatly-exaggerated>; Aidoo, "Go Global, Meet the Locals: Pragmatism, Plunder, and Anti-Chinese Populism in Africa," pp. 16-17.

¹⁵² Beeson and Li, "What Consensus?", pp. 107-108.

has difficult ideational and reputational hurdles to overcome. Thus, when joining these cultural observations with Foot and Walter's analysis, existing scholarship suggests that *if* China is on its way to becoming a superpower, it certainly has numerous hurdles to overcome before that happens.

Does this scholarship reflect reality? Certainly, China is a powerful state, but does it have the military capacity to challenge the United States? Is its economy on its way to overcoming America's? Does China's institutional power, combined with its "soft" cultural power, amount to a "Beijing Consensus" capable of rivaling the "Washington Consensus"? In reality, the questions can only be answered by time. At this present moment, however, it is clear that China seeks to overcome these deficits in its axes of power. Especially in relation to economics, the Belt and Road Initiative seems to be China's primary solution. While this paper cannot address the full extent of the BRI in Latin America, a brief introduction is sufficient enough to demonstrate China's general goals in Latin America.

What is the Belt and Road Initiative?

Announced by President Xi Jinping in 2013, the BRI is a massive infrastructure project that seeks to revitalize the historic Silk Road and extend Chinese influence throughout the world. During his speech, Xi proclaimed the Chinese government would "build the Belt and Road into a road of opening up" not just on the Asian continent, but to all the world.¹⁵³ Although Xi relies rhetorically on the long history of the Silk Road, the BRI is hardly restricted to the Silk Road's original trade routes. In fact, Xi notes that "all countries, from either Asia, Europe, Africa or the Americas, can be international cooperation partners of the Belt and Road Initiative." This is important to note since an overwhelming majority of the maps depicting the Belt and Road

¹⁵³ "The End of Engagement," *The Economist*, October 18, 2018, <https://www.economist.com/leaders/2018/10/18/the-end-of-engagement>.

Initiative only trace paths between Eurasia and Africa.¹⁵⁴ Since its conception in 2013, the BRI has funded enormous infrastructure projects in Sri Lanka, Kazakhstan, Ecuador, and Ethiopia, to name a few. Importantly, these funds are said to come without the reforms that an organization like the IMF would request in return, such as economic liberalization. Despite these claims, nations participating in the BRI have quickly become aware of the informal strings attached to inviting the construction of a BRI project: the projects are built and overwhelmingly employed by Chinese workers, not local workers, and states that default on their loans either relinquish the project to Chinese control (Sri Lanka signed away its massive port in Hambantota for 99 years) or are cornered into making special payment deals (such as allowing payment in oil, which China desperately needs).¹⁵⁵ While these reputational hurdles have slowed the BRI, countries continue to take on Chinese investment despite stories of predatory loans.¹⁵⁶

What hurdles does it (and does it not) attempt to address? Relying on the definition of superpower used throughout this research, it seems clear that, although China has no explicit desire to degrade its political and cultural axes of power, China's economic needs supersede any

¹⁵⁴ While some would suggest that any connections beyond the Eurasian and African continents are a part of the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road, the Maritime Silk Road is actually a part of the BRI. As evidence, in 2017, President Xi said: "I proposed the building of the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road, which I call the Belt and Road Initiative" (i.e., two parts of the BRI). Xi Jinping, "Work Together to Build the Silk Road Economic Belt and The 21st Century Maritime Silk Road," (2017) at http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2017-05/14/c_136282982.htm. A few examples of maps that misportray the BRI can be found here: "Belt and Road Initiative," World Bank, accessed July 19, 2019, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/regional-integration/brief/belt-and-road-initiative>; "China Faces Resistance to a Cherished Theme of Its Foreign Policy," *The Economist*, May 4, 2017, <https://www.economist.com/china/2017/05/04/china-faces-resistance-to-a-cherished-theme-of-its-foreign-policy>; "China's Belt And Road Initiative Opens Up Unprecedented Opportunities," accessed July 19, 2019, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/greatspeculations/2018/09/04/chinas-belt-and-road-initiative-opens-up-unprecedented-opportunities/#4641f10a3e9a>.

¹⁵⁵ "Let's Talk About China," *The New York Times*, September 21, 2018, sec. Reader Center, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/admin/10000006119100.embedded.html?>; "Ecuador Faces a Huge Budget Deficit Because of Loans It Received from China," *Los Angeles Times*, December 10, 2018, <https://www.latimes.com/world/la-fg-ecuador-loans-china-20181210-story.html>.

¹⁵⁶ Christopher Balding, "Why Democracies Are Turning Against Belt and Road," *Foreign Affairs*, October 24, 2018 <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2018-10-24/why-democracies-are-turning-against-belt-and-road>.

opportunities to strengthen its other axes of power. This is most likely because of the CCP's heavy dependence on economic growth for stability, which is often labeled "output legitimacy."¹⁵⁷ If China loses cultural or political authority through hostile BRI practices, it may descend somewhat in its international standing, but the risk of an economic crisis that could delegitimize the CCP is far more dangerous. For this reason, China has used the BRI as a means of tackling its largest economic concerns of the 21st Century—energy, food dependency, and unemployment—despite these political and cultural risks.¹⁵⁸ This disregard has come at a great cost for the people of Latin America, and BRI projects are quickly ravaging the environment, and exacerbating preexisting social issues in Latin America, such as conflict over indigenous land in Nicaragua.

Conclusion

Finally, returning to the original question, is China a superpower? At the current moment, China's history suggests that, while China's historical trajectory suggests it may be on a path towards becoming a superpower, it has not yet strengthened its axes to the level of a superpower. This "could be but is not" position is well reflected in the heated debates of scholarly literature, which is comprised of small spars over whether one axis of power really is strong or not. Perhaps the most unpredictable component of China's rise is the Belt and Road Initiative, which has served to both help and hurt China's power. Independent of China's rise, however, is the growing concern about China's policies and their impact on the world. Will the BRI accelerate climate change? Does China's rise necessitate a Thucydides Trap scenario with the United States? Will Chinese operations abroad be remembered as the neocolonialism of the 21st

¹⁵⁷ Mühlhahn, *Making China Modern: From the Great Qing to Xi Jinping*, pp. 542.

¹⁵⁸ Each of these issues has been in some way created by the environmental and demographic troubles described in the historical section.

Century? While these questions cannot be addressed here, they must be considered if the world is to avoid the grievous consequences of a superpower conflict.

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