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# Introduction

## Chinese Investments in Europe

Power, Influence, and the Liberal International Order

*Indrajit Roy and Ran Hu*

As one of the world's largest economies, the influence of the People's Republic of China on the international order has generated much attention. Since its reform and opening-up in 1978, China has transformed itself from a poor and relatively isolated country into an economic powerhouse with a strong military capability and technological sophistication. With decades of strong economic growth, China surpassed Japan in 2010, becoming the world's second largest economy. It is predicted to overtake the United States (US) and become world's largest economy in 2028 (CEBR, 2020). China's rise<sup>1</sup> has been interpreted as the emergence of a Chinese world order or a Chinese century, at the expense of Western domination.<sup>2</sup> Though these visions of Chinese domination have yet to be realized (Kai, 2015; Thurow, 2007), China's rise seems to have taken on a new meaning: its long-established discourse of a 'peaceful rise' appears less tenable. For the first time since the Industrial Revolution, the West is confronted by a military and economic power that is not White.

<sup>1</sup> Publications referring to China's rise have proliferated over the last three decades. See, for example, Kristof's (1993) *The Rise of China*; Ikenberry's (2008) *The Rise of China and the Future of the West*; and De Graaff et al. (2020)'s *China's Rise in a Liberal World Order in Transition*, among others. More recently, Doshi's (2021) *The Long Game* claims to unearth 'China's grand strategy to displace American order'. China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has offered the occasion for growing commentary of such purported grand strategies (Cavanna, 2019; Fallon, 2015; Macaes, 2018; Scobell et al., 2018)

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, *The Economist*, 2018; Jacques, 2009; Rees-Mogg, 2005; and Stiglitz, 2014. Others have described this process as a 're-emergence' of China, see (Nye, 1997; Rapkin and Thompson, 2003); or the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation (Yan, 2001).

## The Puzzle of Chinese Power: Growing Resources vs Limited Influence

The rise of China's economic, military, and political power and its likely impact on the behaviour of other states has been documented by several studies. These works suggest that China's rise is influencing not only the behaviour of other states, but also the character of the international order. Although this scholarship undoubtedly offers a crucial foundation for an enriched understanding of the global distribution of power, it tells us little about how effectively China uses its power, if at all. While much has been written about whether and how China seeks to influence the Liberal International Order (LIO), the debates tend to be bounded by assumptions of relative power shifts generating certain responses from others or claims about the resilience of the international order. Consequently, the ensemble of China's actions, other countries' responses, and the influence—if any—of these relationships on the international order remains neglected.

Indeed, as prescient observers of China's rise have noted, its growing economic and military might do not mechanically translate into either an enhanced influence on the international order or the ability to prevail over other countries. Despite its recent pandemic diplomacy, China was unable to exercise any meaningful leverage over the policies of recipient countries. Its sprawling investments across 120 countries via the Belt and Road Initiative have had limited impact in shaping host countries' attitudes towards China. In Europe, Africa, and South-East Asia, China's ascendance has hardly been welcomed with the enthusiasm that critics feared and supporters hoped for. Against neighbours with whom it has had long-standing territorial disputes—including Japan, the Philippines, Vietnam, and India—China's obvious military and economic superiority have not translated into any meaningful influence on them or the broader international order. Nevertheless, critical assessments (Segal, 1999) that China is no more than 'overrated', a 'second-rank middle power', or a 'theoretical power' do not account for the country's growing footprint across the globe (Doshi, 2021; Macaes, 2018; and Chhabra et al., 2021). As David Shambaugh (2013) notes in his much-acclaimed study, China's global spread in the realms of diplomacy, global governance, and economic, cultural, and security networks is a fact. And yet even he concludes that despite China's active presence in different parts of the globe, its inability to shape actors or events means that it is, at the end of the day, a partial power.

This volume is motivated by a significant puzzle that lies at the heart of China's ascendance: the gap between its growing economic, military, and cultural resources and the conversion of those resources into meaningful global influence. This puzzle in turn leads to at least three crucial questions: (1) Does China, in fact, intend to challenge the international order? (2) Do China's expanding overseas investments have unintended consequences for the international order? And (3) How does European agency interact with Chinese influence to (re-)shape the Liberal International Order? Answering these questions requires us to direct detailed attention to the ways in which China uses its power to affect the policy choices and decisions of other countries, instead of focusing on scorecards that enumerate its political, economic, and cultural resources. Reflecting on these questions on China's power requires us to move away from understandings of power as resource to power as influence, which relates resources to outcomes. The contributors to this volume assert that to assess China's impact on the international order, we must appreciate the ways in which its growing power resources are translated into actual policy influence. Here, we find helpful the crucial distinction offered by Evelyn Goh (2014; 2016) between an understanding of power that is limited to enumeration of resources and latent capability, towards an understanding of power that focuses on its effective exercise, or influence, on the preferences and behaviour of other actors.

## Case Selection

In this volume we investigate the puzzle of China's growing resources against its limited influence on the international order. We do so by exploring the three questions noted above in the context of the politics of Chinese investments in Europe. Three core reasons motivate the selection of European countries as empirical cases for this study. First, Chinese investments in Europe upend the usual direction of financial flows from the 'developed countries' of the Global North to the 'developing countries' of the Global South, which have underpinned the international order. Second, the growing volume of overseas investments originating in China, which continues to be labelled a 'developing economy', is unabashedly authoritarian and, where the state permeates its economy, threatens to disrupt the liberal foundations of the international order. Third, Europe prides itself upon and is widely considered the champion of the Liberal International Order, if not its forebear. The increasing volume of economic investments originating in one of the world's most resilient authoritarian regimes towards a Europe where liberal

values are increasingly besieged provide us with useful entry points into the ways in which China's actions interact with responses from other states to influence the international order.

China's OFDI in 2020 stood at USD 153.71 billion, ranking first globally for the first time.<sup>3</sup> Since 2012, China has come in the top three countries in terms of the OFDI flows. Driven by its 'Going Out' strategy and Belt and Road Initiative, China is expected to continue the expansion of its OFDI footprints. Through overseas investment, China can not only boost its economy, but also further project its power by leveraging its economic strength. Between 2003 and 2012, China's OFDI flow to Europe tripled with a general uptrend, standing at USD 7.04 billion in 2012. Between 2013 and 2019, the flow fluctuated. China's OFDI flow in Europe recorded its lowest of USD 5.95 billion in 2013 and the highest of USD 18.46 billion in 2017, but it still registered at USD 12.69 billion in 2021. Due to the opacity of the Chinese Communist regime, there is a serious concern that the Chinese OFDI may pose certain 'existential' political problems to Europe (Meunier, Burgoon, and Jacoby, 2014: 119). For instance, Godement and Parello-Plesner (2011: 1) sounded an alarm by asserting that China was 'buying up Europe', calling it a 'scramble for Europe'. Other narratives such as China 'invading' (L'Express, 2011) or 'taking over Europe' (Bordet, 2011) also emerged.

Despite these alarms, the *politics* of Chinese investment in Europe remains under-researched: most literature on China's OFDI has focused on the types of the Chinese OFDI and investors, investment behaviour, patterns, and rationale (Hanemann, 2014; Knoerich and Miedtank, 2018; Meunier, 2014b, 2014c; Meunier, Burgoon, and Jacoby, 2014; Pavličević, 2019; Zhang and Van Den Bulcke, 2014). A preliminary research agenda on the politics of Chinese investments in Europe is emerging and growing (Meunier, Burgoon, and Jacoby, 2014). Meunier (2014a) discusses the most the issue concerning political implications with regards to European domestic politics, institutional process, and transatlantic relations. Zhang and Van Den Bulcke (2014) focus on security and institutions, and Burgoon and Raess (2014) on labour regulation.

The collection of papers in Meunier et al., (2014) are valuable for their granular perspectives on Chinese investments in Europe. Their volume is framed by five questions: (1) What is the true magnitude of Chinese FDI in Europe? (2) Should Europeans see Chinese investments as malign or benign?

<sup>3</sup> All the data for this introduction are taken from the Statistical Bulletin of China's Outward Foreign Direct Investment, an annual report compiled jointly by the Ministry of Commerce of the People's Republic of China, National Bureau of Statistics, and State Administration of Foreign Exchange. Data refers to mainland China only, Hong Kong and Macao excluded.

(3) Are national and European perspectives on Chinese FDI in conflict? (4) Are political reactions to Chinese FDI different in Western and in CEE countries? And (5) Is the influx of Chinese FDI into Europe a security threat? In responding to these questions, they lay the agenda for further research on the political impact of China's investments in Europe. However, the scope of the articles precludes an exploration of the influence of Chinese European investments *on the world order*, an important area of investigation in light of the vast and growing literature on the topic. This volume builds on the research agenda proposed by Meunier and her colleagues while also making distinct empirical, conceptual, and theoretical contributions outlined below.

## China's Influence on the International Order: Prevalent Perspectives in IR

The growing attention being paid to China's influence on the international order has been motivated by a number of recent Chinese actions. Since 2012, the Chinese government led by President Xi Jinping has largely abandoned its traditional foreign policy strategy of *taoguang yanghui* (keeping a low profile) and embraced a new strategy of *fenfa youwei* (striving for achievement) (Foot, 2014; Renminwang, 2013; Sørensen, 2015; Yan, 2014). In recent years, the country has portrayed itself as a staunch champion of liberal globalization. The Belt and Road Initiative was, for instance, framed by the Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi (2018) as 'a public good China offers the world ... [that] has grown into the largest platform for international cooperation'. During the 2017 World Economic Forum, Chinese President Xi Jinping defended multilateralism, globalization, and free trade, and championed a commitment to 'growing an open global economy'. Four years later, Xi (2021) re-emphasized that 'upholding multilateralism' is the way to address the challenges and problems the world is facing.

At the same time, contradictions abound. China's domestic behaviour is not always an endorsement of liberal globalization, given its high degree of state intervention in the economy, the limited market access for foreign investors, and its human rights violations. Moreover, China has become more assertive, if not completely aggressive, particularly regarding the issues and events taking place in the Asia-Pacific region. A recent example is the growing tension between China and the US in the South China Sea, where China continues to build artificial islands and conduct military exercises whilst the US strengthens its cooperation with other countries in the region (Geaney, 2020; Tangen, 2020).

Meanwhile in Europe, a new consensus among EU members on China appears to have emerged (Oertel, 2020), frustrated by lack of progress on improvement in China's market access and human rights practices. A survey on the character of EU-China relations in 2020 shows that all but three EU member states now regard 'China, pragmatically, as rival and partner' (Busse et al., 2020).<sup>4</sup> In 2019 the EU labelled China as 'a systemic rival promoting alternative models of governance' (EU Commission, 2019: 1). Bilateral relations between China and different European nations are troubled. The UK-China relationship is now in a deep freeze, with the UK public opinion about China plunging (Ford and Hughes, 2020). France and Germany were also compelled to reappraise their ties with China, given China's growing assertive approach to international affairs (Oertel, 2020; Solomon and Chazan, 2020). According to Pew Research Centre, negative views of China prevailed in all fourteen countries surveyed (Silver, Devlin, and Huang, 2020). Public perceptions favourable to China have nosedived in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

These contradictory dynamics have understandably led to a proliferation of studies on the influence of China's ascendance on the international order. Following Ikenberry (2018), we identify five features of the LIO. One concerns openness in trade and exchange. The second relates to rules-based relations between states. The third pertains to collective security. The fourth conviction that underpins the LIO is the belief that international society can be reformed: states can work together to achieve mutual gains rather than being embroiled in zero-sum power contests. Last but not least, the LIO is animated by a conviction that internationalization will nudge states towards liberal democracy: liberal democracies will become more liberal and authoritarian states will become democratic.

In broadest terms, studies on the influence of China's rise on the LIO fall into two categories. The first draws on realist theoretical approaches to analyse the motivations, actions, and reactions of individual states. Their considerations include China as well as other states with whom China interacts, considering their relative intentions, preferences, and actions. The second draws on liberal theoretical approaches to foreground the global institutions within which different states are embedded, with a focus on how these institutions shape the behaviour of states. As we shall see, both categories share an understanding of power that is limited to resources.

<sup>4</sup> Only Bulgaria, Greece, and Cyprus categorize China 'as strategic partner', according to the survey (Busse et al., 2020).

According to realists, China's rise is bound to trigger a conflict between itself and the West (Allan, Vucetic, and Hopf, 2018; Allison, 2017; Goh, 2014; Khalilzad, 2017; Krickovic, 2017; Layne, 2018; Liff, 2016; Mearsheimer, 2001, 2010, 2019; Schake, 2017; Yan, 2010), thus threatening the LIO. Analysts writing in this vein present two interlinked visions for the future of the LIO. The first vision focuses on China's challenges to regional orders in East and South-East Asia by establishing its predominance in the region and further pushing the US out of Asia (Larson, 2015; Mearsheimer, 2001, 2019; Montgomery, 2014; Shambaugh, 2004). The second vision looks beyond Asia and pivots to a worldwide systemic competition, signalling the return of great-power rivalry (Allison, 2017; Fravel, 2010; Schweller and Pu, 2011; Wright, 2018), this time 'between the U.S.-led and Chinese-led orders' (Mearsheimer, 2019: 47).

By contrast, liberals anticipate China's full integration into the LIO (Buzan, 2010, 2018; Deudney and Ikenberry, 2018; Ikenberry, 2008, 2009, 2011, 2014, 2017, 2018; Lieber, 2014; Zeng and Liang, 2013). Analysts writing in this vein make three claims. First, the LIO is highly institutionalized, open, and resilient (Ikenberry, 2017). Second, despite China's continued rise, the US and its Western allies remain highly influential players (Tang, 2018; Zakaria, 2020). Third, China is either unwilling or unable to offer an appealing alternative to the LIO (Breslin, 2013; Cooley and Nexon, 2020; Mitter, 2021). Therefore, scholars who focus on structures claim that the LIO will endure in an updated and reformed form and that China will continue being socialized into 'this broad framework of ordering rules and institutions' (Ikenberry, 2018: 24).

Despite their different assessments of the rise of China in relation to the LIO, both strands rely, explicitly and implicitly, on notions of power that focus on economic, military, and ideational resources. For realists, Chinese power, largely defined in material terms, is overwhelming and able to overcome the power of the LIO. A stronger China would translate its newly acquired economic and military power into geopolitical clout (Foot, 2006; Glaser, 2011). It will become 'bolder, more demanding, and less inclined to cooperate' (Roy, 1994: 160) and eventually overthrow the existing order and create a new one. For liberals, Chinese power, understood largely in economic terms, is derived from and subjected to the LIO. China derives its economic power from its embeddedness into this order. Should China renege on this rules-based order (Fravel, 2010; Glaser, 2011), its disruption would inflict wide-ranging costs, both politically and economically, upon it. Important differences between them notwithstanding, both groups of scholars rely on the relative distributions of resources as the starting point of their analysis.



Whilst these analyses—one drawing on realism and the other inspired by liberalism—shed light on the changing global distribution of power and the evolving LIO, their conclusions about the influence of China's rise on the LIO are, at best, speculative. For instance, against the scenarios predicted by realists, China and the US have managed to avoid war with each other. However, against the assumptions of liberal analysts who believe that economic growth and international socialization foment political democratization, China resolutely remains a one-party authoritarian state. As we have seen, despite its growing economic, military, and cultural resources, and the endurance of its political regime, China's rise has not, in practice, overthrown the LIO and established a new Chinese-led order. The overwhelming focus in the literature on the power possessed by China (or the LIO, for that matter) has led to a neglect of the effect of that power, or what it actually yields. The assumption in the literature is that China's material power or the ideational power of the LIO would automatically generate certain responses (Goh, 2014). Departing from such focus on power as resources, we investigate power as influence: How does China's influence over European states influence the LIO, if at all?

## **Our Arguments: Growing Resources, Limited Influence**

The contributions to the volume interrogate assumptions of China's growing economy, bringing it into conflict with the LIO as well as presumptions about the LIO's resilience coopting China's rise. We caution against the widely prevalent assumption that growing Chinese investments in Europe inevitably challenge the LIO (Bhattacharya, 2016; Callahan, 2016; Chen, 2016; Du and Ma, 2014; Godement and Kratz, 2015; Fallon, 2015; Fasslabend, 2015; Leverett and Wu, 2017; Miller, 2017; Xu and Wang, 2016). Against such assumptions of inevitable conflict, we argue that China's European investments do not necessarily undermine liberal internationalism. At the same time, against assumptions celebrating the resilience of the LIO, we remain open to the possibility that China's growing economic footprint may well align with illiberal preferences of domestic European actors. Alternatively, its increasing economic might may allow it to induce players to behave in a certain way to the detriment of liberal internationalism. With scholars who contest flattened narratives that highlight conflict with or cooption into the LIO (de Graaff, 2020; de Graaff, ten Brink, and Parmar, 2020; Huo and Parmar, 2020; Jones and Zeng, 2019; Knoerich and Miedtank, 2018; McNally, 2020; Weinhardt and ten Brink, 2020), we offer a nuanced account of the influence of China's economic investments in Europe on the global order.

A related analytical argument has to do with the domestic factors threatening the liberal underpinnings of the international order. China's growing economic and military resources are often held to be directly responsible for the challenges to the LIO. Such analysis ignores the other notable sources of such challenges. The rising tide of authoritarianism, populism, and nationalism in the liberal heartlands of Europe and North America poses important ideational and political challenges to the LIO. The social and economic difficulties associated with neoliberal economic policies offer another set of challenges to the LIO. Our focus on the influence of China's European investments on the LIO recognizes these endogenous challenges, thereby foregrounding the importance of European agency.

These two arguments are based on a conceptual argument about power. We contend that assessments of China's impact on the international order require us to appreciate how its growing power resources are translated into actual influence. Such an endeavour entails focusing on the actual *effect* of resources rather than enumerating the latent capabilities of China's growing material and economic resources. Our conceptual argument contributes to broader discussions on power in global politics, and emphasizes its relational rather than material dimension.

An understanding of China's influence on different countries is impossible without appreciating the underlying relations between states and societies. This broader theoretical argument undergirds our conceptual argument. We depart from actor-orientated concepts as well as structural approaches to situate states within their broader social relations. In this vein, the volume directs attention to interactions between state-society relations in China and state-society relations in the countries towards which Chinese investments are directed: an exclusive focus on what the Chinese state wants or does is inadequate. State-society relations in the countries subject to Chinese influence matter. Our theoretical argument thus contributes to widening discussions on influence in global politics by incorporating the role of state-society relations.

## **Our Conceptual Framework: Power as Resources vs Power as Influence**

To reflect on the influence of Chinese investments in Europe and their implications for the global order, we adopt a sharper and narrower focus on influence away from broader understandings of power. We draw on Max Weber's notion of power as the 'opportunity to have one's will prevail within

a social relationship' (Berenskoetter and Williams, 2007: 3). Weber further reminds us that power may or may not be converted into influence: power may only partially translate into influence. Cox and Jacobson (1973: 465) add more specificity: for them, influence refers to the actual 'modification of one actor's behavior by that of another'.

Our reflections on power as influence build on, but also depart from, Bachrach and Baratz's (1962) landmark study. Departing from elitist (Mills, 1956), pluralist (Dahl, 1957), and hegemonic (Lukes, 1974) notions of power that emphasized the importance of (material, social, and symbolic) resources, their scholarship insists on highlighting the importance of influence in establishing and sustaining power. Agents wield influence by setting agendas, excluding potential decision items, and preventing opposition from emerging at all. Such an understanding of power is broad enough to consider circumstances where direct conflict is absent. It is also narrow enough to preclude structural and institutional operations of power where agents' actions don't matter.

These foundations enable us to outline two key components of influence (Dahl and Stinebriker, 2003). First, causality: a causal relationship is discernible between the wielder of influence and their target. Second, attainment of consequences: the causal relationship results in behaviours that may or may not be consistent with the preferences, or wants, of those wielding influence. The attainment of consequences can be graded or partial, rather than dichotomous binaries: for this volume, the consequence we are interested in studying is the impact on the Liberal International Order. These two components of influence—viz. causality and attainment of consequences—frame the conceptual framework to enable us to examine our empirical cases and their impact on the LIO.

The conceptual framework of influence deployed in this volume is narrower than the vast spectrum of analysis on power that characterizes the scholarship in social theory, political science, and international relations. By focusing on causality and attainment of preferences as our starting point, we preclude meta-structural understandings of power relations. Our attempt to identify and trace the processes of change (or the lack thereof) on the subjects of influence generates a dynamic relational analysis, thereby allowing us the opportunity to explore in greater detail causal relationships that tend to be neglected in structural studies of power.

At the same time, the framework of influence adopted for this volume departs from understandings (including Bachrach and Baratz) that centre intentionality, or the concerted set of actions aiming to attain a certain preference. Such studies take as their starting point the intentionality of those

who wield influence. They then proceed to trace the pathways through which influence-wielders effect the behaviour of subjects in line with their intentions. The identification of intentions is always a fraught project, since intentions are often unstated. Intentions of states and social actors are even more difficult to discern. Moreover, a focus on intentionality while studying China's influence on the international order is unnecessarily narrow: irrespective of whether China intends to overthrow, reshape, or comply with the LIO, its actions have consequences for this order.

Indeed, the relationship between intentionality and action is far from straightforward. This holds true for so-called Rising Powers that may seek a relatively limited set of goals but whose actions may result in different, and expansive, outcomes. A 'Rising Power' may intend to improve its status in the international system. Alternatively, it may intend to secure its neighbourhood. Or, the country might intend to better the economic prospects of key domestic constituencies. In each of these cases, its actions may, however, trigger broader processes that result in changing the status quo (or entrenching it) without the country in question intending to do so.

A second key departure from Bachrach and Baratz is our resistance to the assumption that influence always entails a conflict of interests, or preferences. We do not endorse the view that the exercise of influence requires that one agent prevails over the preferences of the other. It is possible that the preferences of two (or more) agents align, and the influence of one agent amplifies those aligned preferences. Alternatively, preferences may be undetermined. Under such circumstances, the influence of one agent may well shape the (as yet undetermined) agent or persuade them to adopt certain preferences over others. Such an agent may well attempt to shape broader institutions, which in turn could set the agenda that limits the remit within which individual subjects operate.

The approach adopted in this volume and the broader findings of the study resonate with recent research on the scope of China's power. Drawing on cases from Chinese engagements with South-East Asia, Evelyn Goh (2014) outlines three modes through which the country seeks to influence outcomes in its neighbouring region. The first, and most prominent, mode of influence is through a 'multiplier' effect that intensifies and mobilizes converging preferences. In this vein, China marshals its growing structural power to promote economic regionalism in the interest of its Association of South-east Asian Nations (ASEAN) neighbours. The second mode of influence is through 'persuasion', which entails economic inducement: this helps China to influence perceptions in its favour when South-East Asian countries are undecided as to whether or not China is a threat. The third mode of influence,

invoked when China confronts divergent or opposing interests, is the ‘ability to prevail’. This is the approach to China’s territorial disputes with its neighbours. A fourth approach, which is explored in the extended volume edited by Goh (2016), pertains to the ways in which China shapes regional and global institutions in its own favour (Ciorciari, 2016; Foot and Inboden, 2016).

Arguably, demonstrating China’s influence on Europe and through it on the liberal world order invites very different challenges to undertaking a similar exercise in South-East Asia. China’s South-East Asian neighbours are poorer and relatively weaker. The relationship between China and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations is imbalanced in China’s favour. Furthermore, China has direct territorial conflicts with several of its neighbours. By contrast, the European cases discussed in this volume are richer and stronger than China’s South-East Asian neighbours. The geographical distance rules out direct territorial disputes of the sort that China has with the Philippines, Vietnam, or Taiwan. The European countries can balance any Chinese transgressions by turning to the European Union in a way that ASEAN countries cannot turn either to the regional bloc or to the USA. As Goh demonstrates, Chinese actions in South-East Asia are intended to generate policies, norms, and public opinion in its own favour: this demonstration of intentionality is key to her argument. By contrast, whether China intends its investments in Europe to challenge the LIO is quite unnecessary to demonstrate for us to analyse its *effect* on this order.

This volume thus departs from the contributions to the excellent volume edited by Everlyn Goh (2016) in three key ways. *First*, its empirical focus on Europe is quite distinct from their focus on South-East Asia. *Second*, we are agnostic on the question of China’s intentionality vis-à-vis the international order. To us, the effects of Chinese investments in Europe are not solely caused by its intentions: irrespective of whether China *intends* to overthrow, reshape, or comply with the LIO, the impacts of its investments in Europe are shaped by emerging alignments in European political economies. *Third*, we take seriously the complexes of ‘state-society relations’ while reflecting on the effects of China’s investments in Europe on the LIO. In doing this, we depart from the otherwise insightful contributions to Goh’s (2016) volume which singularly focus on state actors.

Blending these insights on power with emerging perspectives on agency in international relations (Lampert and Mohan, 2018), these contributions urge us not to neglect the accountability, intentionality, and subjectivity of actors in international relations. Such actors refer not only to political elites, bureaucrats, and others in government as the prevailing literature tends to assume (Wight, 2004); they also refer to diverse actors beyond formal state institutions such as business interests, civil society groups, and trade unions,

among others (Hagmann and Péclard, 2010). Furthermore, an agent is also ‘an agent of something’ (Wight, 1999: 133), a perspective that recognizes the ways in which they are embedded in broader socio-cultural systems.

Europe (or any other region for that matter) cannot be seen as simply a passive space increasingly subject to intervention by and investments from China. Likewise, strains and stresses on the LIO cannot be simplistically attributed to the actions and attitudes of a singularly conceptualized Chinese state. Reinserting European agency into the dominant discourse of China-in-Europe exposes Sino-European relationships that tend to be more locally mediated and driven by domestic politics than is usually recognized. In a similar vein, the agency of diverse actors within China needs to be recognized in terms of how they shape that country’s overseas investments.

## **Our Theoretical Foundations: The Role of State-Society Relations in IR**

The contributions to this volume depart from prevailing interpretations of China’s rise and its impact on the global order that tend to focus on the roles and motivations of state actors: our emphasis on the agency of domestic actors is analytically reliant on appreciating the underlying state-society relations. Our approach resonates with the work of scholars who draw on the Comparative Capitalism (Jackson and Deeg, 2006) literature and extend it to the study of emerging markets such as Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa (BRICS) and beyond (Nölke, 2012). In this vein, Nölke et al. (2015) highlight the extent to which states permeate the market economies of emerging markets such as China and the implications of such permeation on the global order. China’s state-heavy form of development and its potential challenge to the norms preached by the Washington Consensus has invited much commentary (Arrighi, 2007; Breslin, 2013; McNally, 2012; Strange, 2011; Wade, 2003). An interesting question here is the extent to which the growing importance of China may be expected to lead to a ‘more statist model of global capitalist regulation’ (Nölke, 2015) and the stripping away of the liberal elements of the prevailing global order (Stephen, 2014a, 2014b). One useful response to this question has been offered by de Graaf et al. (2020), who argue that

the outcome and future direction of China’s interplay with the liberal order, first, should be seen in a longer-term historical perspective and not treated as static and uni-directional but as an essentially dynamic and contested transitory process, which, second, can best be conceptualized as leading to an increasingly hybrid

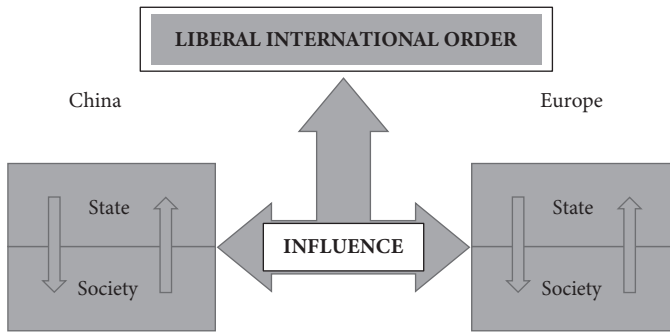
order—more fragmented in certain respects, but not necessarily less integrated in other domains. (de Graaf et al., 2020: 200)

The focus on ‘state-society relations’ distinguishes our contributions from the established actor-orientated concepts (Helleiner and Malkin, 2012; Schirm, 2013) as well as the more widely used two-level game approach (da Conceição-Heldt, 2013; Putnam, 1988). Against the tendency of both approaches to limit attention to the roles and motivations of states abstracted from underlying social relations, our volume builds on a broader political economy literature that instead situates states within the ‘broader field of social relations’ (Overbeek, 2004: 114), thus lending them sociological depth. Such an approach corrects against the assumption that states are unrelated to social forces without, at the same time, presuming that states are merely a reflection of social struggles without any autonomy whatsoever. The concept of ‘state-society complexes’ (Stephen, 2014b: 919) emphasizes that states are embedded in

configurations of social forces upon which state power ultimately rests. A particular configuration of social forces defines in practice the limits or parameters of state purposes, and the *modus operandi* of state action, defines, in other words, the *raison d’etat* for a particular state. (Cox, 1987: 105)

In emphasizing the value of state-society relations to the liberal world order, our contributors implicitly endorse ‘second image’ explanations that highlight domestic politics as a source of cooperation and conflict in global politics (Waltz, 1959). This approach contrasts with ‘first image’ and ‘third image’ perspectives which emphasize, respectively, the role of human nature and the structure of the international system. The second image approach has been elaborated by Katzenstein (1976, 1978, 1985) and recently favoured by scholars studying the importance of domestic politics in the emerging markets to the global order, with an understandable focus on China (de Graaf et al., 2020; Helleiner and Kirshner, 2014; Nölke, 2015).

Where scholars have incorporated state-society relations in their analyses, they have tended to focus exclusively on China and treated it as a monolith. We depart from this exclusive focus on state-society relations in China. Instead, we situate the implications of Chinese investments in Europe by drawing together reflections on state-society relations in *both* origin and destination contexts. In other words, our analysis reflects on the impact of Chinese investments on the LIO by considering their interaction with



**Figure I.1** State-society relations and the influence of Chinese investments in Europe on the LIO

state-society relations in *both* China and Europe. Such an approach not only brings China specialists into conversation with European country specialists; it enables us to reflect on the interactions between state-society complexes in China and state-society complexes in Europe in influencing the international order (see Figure I.1).

## Methodology

The modes of influence explored in this volume emerged through empirical observation and process-tracing. Given the access to and knowledge of target actors, complex decision-making processes within states, and the underlying state-society complexes required by the analysis offered here, most of our contributors are country specialists. They investigate the impact of China's presence in their respective countries of specialization and chart the influence of these impacts on the LIO. Additionally, we have a group of China specialists among our contributors who help us understand China's intentions and the underlying state-society complexes. Far from aspiring to be comprehensive in our coverage, we have aimed to focus on one aspect of China's presence in Europe: its economic investments in the different countries of that continent. The reason for this focus is straightforward: China's overseas economic investments are the origin of the whole debate on its rise. As shown above, China's economic power is the key underlying assumption of the analyses of Chinese power in relation to the LIO, as it is fungible and can potentially be translated into other forms of power, most noticeably military power.



Contributing authors were tasked with six undertakings:

- (1) Identify, based on their specialist knowledge of specific countries, the extent to which their *extant* preferences converge with, or diverge from, the LIO;
- (2) Examine, based on their expertise on the bilateral relations between China and the relevant country, the extent to which Chinese investments in that country translate into political influence over the extant preference (whatever that is);
- (3) Trace the processes through which key actors in states and societies of the target countries negotiate China's influence;
- (4) Analyse whether political influence exerted by China results in the formation of new preferences or the consolidation of existing preferences within the target countries;
- (5) Establish whether these new preferences (if any) diverge from or converge with China's preferences;
- (6) Analyse their implications on the liberal underpinnings of the international order.

The aim through the contributions is to examine the implications of Chinese investments in Europe for the LIO. This aim is achieved by uncovering connecting and causal processes between applications of Chinese resources and the shaping of preferences among states and societies in Europe, where liberal ideals, norms, and practices are expected to be strongest. Each case study specifies the domain of Chinese investments, describes China's objectives, identifies the Chinese and European actors involved, and explores China's intentionality vis-à-vis the outcomes of its specific European investments and the broader Liberal International Order. In exploring causality, each study directs close attention to the *targets* of Chinese influence to examine the extent to which their extant preferences converge with, or diverge from, the LIO, and the specific ways in which these preferences may be consolidated, undermined, or unaffected by Chinese investments.

Two sets of dynamics recur throughout the chapters: the role of domestic state-society relationships in the bilateral relationships, and the broader question of Chinese intentionality vis-à-vis the international order. Each study analyses the role of state-society relations in shaping the influence of Chinese investments on bilateral relations. Every single one of the authors also reflects, side by side, on China's intentionality (if any) vis-à-vis the LIO, driving home the larger point that such intentionality cannot be taken for granted. Our methodological approach of studying influence through

process-tracing alerts us to its mutually generative aspect rather than it being uni-directional. Influence does not always bring about new change, as the cases reveal, but it may reinforce continuity or consolidate changes already in progress.

The cases analysed in this volume range from major developed economies in western Europe, such as Britain and Germany, to other less developed economies in southern and eastern Europe, such as Hungary and Greece. These cases exemplify a 'diverse' approach to descriptive case studies (Gerling and Cojocaru, 2016) in which a small basket of diverse cases is selected from a larger population of potential cases in order to capture variations. The diversity of cases examined in this volume includes countries as varied as the Visegrad group, the Western Balkans, Italy, and Romania. The cases illustrate the impact of China's engagements with diverse 'varieties of capitalism' (Hall and Soskice, 2001).

## The Contribution of this Volume

This volume is structured in three parts. Its structure is consistent with our conceptual framing of power as influence. The contributions by Yu Jie and Ran Hu in Part One reflect on the ways in which China's domestic politics influence its foreign investments and, by extension, the LIO. These two chapters adopt an inside-out approach and examine the actual policymaking process with reference to BRI. Yu's chapter utilizes a Bureaucratic Politics Model to explain the intricate relations among the party, policymaking institutions, and policy execution entities. Hu's chapter employs the concept of state transformation to lay bare the fragmented and contested emerging process of BRI. Both chapters recognize that the 'intricate' or 'contested' domestic politics have complicated China's effort to challenge the LIO and that how other states respond to China's strategies also shape the future of the LIO. These responses are explored by contributors in Parts Two and Three of the volume.

The contributions in Part Two investigate the ways in which China's bilateral investments in Europe contribute to straining the liberal aspects of the international order. Ágnes Szunomár's study of the 'special relationship' between China and Hungary demonstrates the 'alignment and amplification of preferences' between the illiberal rationales of the two countries. Filippo Boni's study finds an uptake among some (not all) political elites in Italy of China's narratives on key issues such as Xinjiang and Hong Kong, suggesting that the operation of 'discursive persuasion' is at work. Elements of

‘preference multiplying’ and ‘persuasion’ are evident in Dimitrios Stroiikos’s study of China-Greece relations from 2016 to 2019, when on a few occasions Greece’s position diverged greatly from EU’s China policy. Drawing on her study of China’s involvement in the Visegrad group of Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries, Malgorzata Jakimów’s study finds evidence of ‘institutional shaping’ through the adoption by these countries of some (not all) China-promoted norms. Similar evidence of ‘institution shaping’ is offered by Nicholas Crawford’s study of the Western Balkans, although it is only Serbia’s foreign policy that appears to converge with China’s. Each of these studies is careful to point out the limits to China’s influence: even as Chinese investments in Europe may be contributing to straining the liberal elements of the international order, they are (yet) far from successful.

The contributions in Part Three examine the alternative position: that China’s bilateral investments in Europe strengthen, rather than strain, the international order, *including* its liberal aspects. Through an analysis of the bilateral energy relations between China and the UK and China and Romania, Simona Davidescu’s study offers evidence of how China’s investments were initially framed in purely economic terms, as a way to strengthen liberal institutional commitments to sustainability. Jan Knoerich’s study on Chinese foreign direct investments demonstrates China’s commitment to rules-based financial transactions. Taking a broader view, Catherine Jones’s study shows that China’s presence as a development actor means that it acts as a catalyst to enable the continuation of liberal patterns of aid and investment.

The conclusion distils key findings from across the three sections and explores ways in which the influence of Chinese investments entwines with the agency of state and social actors in Europe to impact the Liberal International Order. It reiterates the disjunctions between China’s global intentions, its actions in Europe, and its effects on the LIO. The conclusion outlines these varied impacts, reminding us of the ways in which Chinese investments in Europe could strain as well as strengthen the LIO, without intending to do either. It will also propose areas of future focus based on the theoretical, conceptual, and empirical arguments of the contributions.

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