

its last non-revolutionary resort: forcing the communist party and state to stick to its original legitimacy” (p. 227). The final section takes up “the impasse of ideological defeatism” and addresses the “farewell to revolution” argument of the 1990s, which recast the revolutionary radicalism that had gripped China since the May Fourth Movement as the “‘mistake of the century’ as the impulse for national salvation was allowed to overwhelm cultural enlightenment” (p. 269). To the contrary, Lin asserts that “China has paid a terrible price for its participation in the reconfiguration of global capital, and that only reinforces existing power relations: partial dependency, extreme inequalities, labour deprivation, environmental degradation – imposed from the outside, but duly internalized” (p. 325). Even still, Lin believes that not all hope is lost: socialist critics must “maintain the very synchrony of socialism and criticism,” while at the same time they work to “reclaim the fundamental justice and historicity of revolutionary and socialist practice” (p. 333).

Which brings us back to Karl’s engagement with the modern – and, by extension, the concomitant revolutions that brought it into being – as “a form of historical becoming – a historicity” (p. 2). The Conclusion that ends her story of China’s “nine years” (1919, 1949, 1959, 1969, 1979, 1989 and 2009) includes the mobilization of workers at Jasic Technology by student activists at the end of 2018 and the Hong Kong protest movement that was ignited in 2019. Karl reminds us that “modern revolutions aimed to establish a permanent principle through which radical transformations in individual quotidian life would help animate collective sociopolitical transformations at a national and global scale” (p. 207). Embedded within that notion was an understanding of “‘the world’ as a malleable revolutionary opportunity rather than as a settled normative principle,” which, if surrendered, means that “China is condemned, along with all of us, to ever more dystopian versions of the future” (p. 208). These two volumes, traversing much of the same territory and interrelated themes in very different ways, arrive at similarly disturbing conclusions: if the age of revolutions has indeed now come to an end, then what of the possibilities for the past, and for the future? Perhaps it may be worth remembering that, just as the Taiping rebels were gathering strength sufficient to found their “Heavenly Kingdom” in China, Marx observed: “Thus the awakening of the dead in those revolutions served the purpose of glorifying the new struggles, not of parodying the old; of magnifying the given task in the imagination, not recoiling from its solution in reality; of finding once more the spirit of revolution, not making its ghost walk again” (*The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* [1852]).

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*The World According to China*

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304 pp. \$29.95

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What are China’s global ambitions, and how is it pursuing them under Xi Jinping? In this meticulously documented account of China’s actions over the past decade in global politics, Elizabeth Economy argues that Xi Jinping and the Chinese leadership seek to “reorder the world order” (p. 2) by challenging the values, norms and institutions that

underpin the US-led liberal global order. Gaining “reunification” with Taiwan and pre-eminence in East Asia are often cited as China’s security objectives. Economy claims that China also seeks to supplant regimes of global governance by presenting alternatives to the liberal order that America and its allies have enshrined in international law and institutions. Benign-sounding ambiguities issued from Beijing to pursue “a community of common destiny for all humankind” have the potential to bring “radical change in the values currently expressed in international institutions on issues such as human rights, internet governance, and trade and investment” (p. 9).

Economy, a prominent China scholar and policymaking insider whose 2018 book chronicled China’s “third revolution” under Xi Jinping, now serves as an advisor to the US Commerce Department in the Biden Administration. Her implicit advice to those puzzling over China’s intentions as a global power is to look at China’s actions more than its words as it pursues what she terms a “global governance gambit” (p. 171). In a fascinating chapter detailing this strategy, she documents China’s approach to global forums on human rights; on resource sharing in the Arctic; on cyber-governance and global technology standards; and on development finance. Across the cases, a pattern emerges in which China influences institutions of global governance by placing Chinese officials in leadership positions of multilateral agencies, by stacking experts’ committees with those who will take China’s position, and by strong-arming weaker countries represented in such global forums.

But China’s bid to upend and replace the liberal global order is far from assured. The methods China has deployed to pursue its global objectives – combinations of soft power, sharp power and coercion – have triggered a backlash against China among the governments and people it seeks to influence. (Most chapters include illuminating interviews with key actors and targets of Chinese influence, from officials managing China’s ports and infrastructure investments in Greece to a Hollywood executive at the frontlines of Chinese efforts to influence the content of American films.) The book opens with an account of the “diplomatic debacle” that occurred with China’s initial responses to the Covid-19 pandemic, including a triumphalist narrative in which it sought to bestow aid to vulnerable countries and then to compel statements of gratitude from them. China’s handling of the pandemic showed the world a “concerning picture” (p. 9) of how Chinese global leadership would look. The book was published before China suffered even greater reputational damage as the world witnessed shocking scenes of food scarcity and coercive lockdown measures in Shanghai and other cities in the spring of 2022.

A concluding chapter calls for a better calibration of America’s China policy that takes into account China’s challenges to the global order as well as the vulnerabilities that have been exposed in China’s global strategy. Calling China a “strategic competitor” to be countered and contained – first adopted by the Trump administration and basically renewed under President Biden – is counterproductive, Economy argues. For the rest of the world, such a framing converts a global concern over China’s influence into a bipolar conflict, forcing them to choose sides. America’s China policy, Economy asserts, will be more effective if it is “not about China” but about the defence of the rules-based international order. But how satisfied are states in the Middle East, South Asia, Latin America and Africa with the America’s leadership role in global governance, or more recently the lack thereof (i.e. “the world according to America”)? As the Biden administration mobilizes European allies to confront and sanction Russia over its invasion of Ukraine, it has the potential to rally global support for basic principles of international law regarding territorial integrity of states. But it has undercut this potential by framing the conflict as a battle between democracy and dictatorship.

One question raised by *The World According to China* is the extent to which Xi Jinping has pushed this assertive challenge to global governance norms, underpinned by the assumptions of America in decline and a rising China with legitimate claims to alter the US-led global order. For the near and medium-term, Xi's ambitions will be China's ambitions. But as Economy demonstrates in this highly readable account, China's actions in global forums (more than its words) can reveal continuities and shifts as it either ramps up or reins in efforts to "reorder the world order."

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*China's Political Worldview and Chinese Exceptionalism*

BENJAMIN HO

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Observers of China's party-state will have noticed the increasing references to discourses of exceptionalism under Xi Jinping: China's institutional superiority versus the West; China's peaceful DNA; China's whole-process democracy as a new form of political civilization. While all nations are exceptional, Xi's effort to shore up the Party's ideological resilience emphasizes that China is more exceptional than most.

In *China's Political Worldview and Chinese Exceptionalism*, Benjamin Ho conducts a timely and in-depth study of the role of exceptionalism – being good and different from the West – in forming the worldview of Chinese political elite. Ho argues that only by incorporating China's desire for exceptionalism can we truly understand China's behaviour on the global stage. Using discourse analysis and expert interviews, each chapter unpacks how exceptionalism manifests itself in various aspects of China's worldview and political practice.

Chapter two deals with three prominent "Chinese" international relations (IR) theories: Yan Xuetong's moral realism, Qin Yaqing and Feng Zhang's constructivist relationality, and Zhao Tingyang's *tianxia*. What cuts through these various attempts at indigenizing IR theory is the effort to present China's approach to global politics as both unique and superior to Western thinking. However, compartmentalizing national forms of thinking is undercut by what the Polish-born sociologist Zygmunt Bauman calls "liquid modernity," a condition of impermanence and fluidity of identity in the modern world. As Ho argues in chapter three, the distinction between Chinese/non-Chinese, local/foreign, is difficult to discern in a liquid world where ideas and bodies cross borders more easily than ever before. Forging a coherent and unified national identity has come under stress. But this hasn't stopped the Party from trying. With an eye towards ensuring the stability of the Party, Chinese propagandists have focused on Chinese-ness, using nationalism to foster cohesiveness and projecting an image of the goodness of the Chinese state while vilifying the West in order to generate suspicion among its own citizens. Ho uses a range of data to highlight his argument. Deconstructing the 2008 Beijing Olympics theme song "Beijing Welcomes You," with non-PRC born celebrities such as JJ Lin, Wang Lee Hom and Stephanie Sun, Ho argues "China's cultural hegemony means that there is no difference between mainland Chinese citizens and foreign-born Chinese" (p. 76). For the Party, to be Chinese is to be supportive of the PRC.