

Preface

Already in 1960 the historian and journalist Guy Wint wrote about China's rapid rise and its objective to become a great power in terms of economic and political weight and influence only comparable to the United States and the former Soviet Union: a country, whose policies have an enormous impact on and consequences for the balance of power in Asia, Africa and even Europe.¹ Guy Wint, as it turned out, was right. China, has after its economic opening under Deng Xiaoping in the late 1970, indeed become a great power, the world's second biggest economy and its foreign and security as well as its foreign economic policies in Africa, Asia and Europe have an increasingly visible impact on geopolitical and geo-economic balances in all of the above-mentioned regions.

The analysis of Chinese foreign and security policies, Chinese domestic policies, China's economy and finance, China's judicial system, demography, the so-called 'Chinese Dream', history and culture: all of this is covered by Italian (plus one German and Chinese) Asia and China scholars in this edited volume. Needless to say that the analysis of China presented in this volume is not exhaustive and does not cover all there is to cover on China's domestic, economic, social and foreign policy agendas. However, the volume does nonetheless undertake an ambitious attempt to put together a relatively large group of Italian China and Asia scholars writing on their respective areas of China-related work and research.

The book is divided into four parts: 1. 'China in World Politics', 2. 'China in the International Economy', 3. 'Chinese Politics and Culture' and 4. 'Italian Views on China.' The part 'China in World Politics' starts off with Axel Berkofsky writing on the relations between China and the European Union, which since 2003 refer to each other as 'strategic partners.' His Chapter "[The EU and China-Myth Versus Reality of a \(not so\) 'Strategic Partnership'](#)" provides a (very) critical analysis of relations between the European Union and China and concludes that cooperation in international politics and security takes much more place on paper than in reality.

¹Guy Wint, *Common Sense about China*, London, Macmillan 1960 (translated into Italian as *La Cina e noi*, Milano, Bompiani 1961).

In fact, the ‘strategic partnership’ Brussels and Beijing entertain in official EU documents and declarations, Berkofsky concludes, is often neither a ‘partnership’ nor ‘strategic’ and there are far more problems and disagreements than achievements and results on the bilateral EU-China political and economic agendas.

Sandro Bordone analyses in his Chapter “[The Relations between China and India from Bandung to the ‘New Silk Road’](#)” the history of China’s bumpy relations with India starting in the 1950s and the Bandung Conference. In Bandung, Bordone explains, it seemed that China and India could join forces and counter the influence and dominance of the two superpowers United States and Soviet Union. However, geopolitical and geo-strategic rivalry, a border war in the early 1960s and Mao Zedong’s chaotic and indeed disastrous domestic and foreign policies made sure that Beijing and Delhi never became overly friendly with each other, let alone allies. Today, Bordone explains, there is a lot of talk about ‘Chindia’ and the idea that China and India could pool their enormous economic resources and benefit from each other’s skills and capabilities. Whether or not, the author concludes, the Chinese dragon will tightly embrace the Indian elephant, among other through India’s inclusion in China’s very ambitious ‘New Silk Road’ project, however, remains yet to be seen.

Silvana Malle examines in her Chapter “[Russia and China: Partners or Competitors? Views from Russia](#)” the state and quality of Sino-Russian relations, providing the reader with a fascinating insight into how Russian policymakers and scholars view Moscow’s so-called ‘Pivot to China’, i.e. Russia’s attempt to intensify and expand relations with Beijing on all levels. Russia under President Vladimir Putin has indeed invested enormous resources into expanding relations with Beijing over the last two years in order to render Russia less dependent on Western technology, know-how as well as imports from and exports to the West (which imposed economic onto Russia after Moscow’s annexation of Crimea in 2014). Not all Russian policymakers and scholars, Malle explains, are convinced that expanding trade and investment, energy, financial and technology ties with China is the answer to all of Russia’s current economic and financial problems and Malle has in her chapter all the details on who says and writes what in Russia on that topic.

Matteo Dian analyses in his Chapter “[Sino-Japanese Relations in the Xi-Abe Era. Can Two Tigers Live on the Same Mountain?](#)” the state of fragile and more often than not tense Chinese–Japanese relations. Put bluntly, political relations between Beijing and Tokyo, Dian concludes, are close to as bad as they could be and the prospects for improved relations are very bleak. Both China and Japan, Dian explains, are to blame that bilateral political relations can hardly be referred to as such. China’s territorial ambitions in the East and South China Seas, its apparent plan to ‘re-conquer’ the Japanese-controlled Senkaku Islands in the East China Sea continue to alarm Tokyo’s policymakers, who will continue to invest significant resources into defending Japan against the perceived Chinese military threat. Beijing—often with the support of an army of Chinese scholars, who complement government-induced anti-Japan propaganda—for its part gives itself concerned

about the alleged ‘militarization’ of Japanese foreign and security policies,² Japanese historical revisionism—practiced and propagated by Japan’s Prime Minister Shinzo Abe—and (probably most importantly) Tokyo’s expansion of regional bilateral and multilateral defence ties, which Beijing fears is part of a US—driven China containment strategy. Indeed, despite enormous bilateral trade and investment ties, China under Xi Jinping and Japan under the (nationalist) Prime Minister Shinzo Abe will continue to invest as many resources into the bilateral geopolitical rivalry, disagreements over the interpretation of World War II history and a territorial dispute in the East China Sea as into expanding their bilateral trade and investment relations. Nationalism and at times historical revisionism in both China and Japan, Dian concludes, will continue to add their share to make sure that bilateral ties will continue to remain prone to conflict and tension.

Prone to conflict are also the ties between Washington and Beijing, writes Giovanni Salvini in his Chapter “[The Relations between the People’s Republic of China \(PRC\) and the United States \(US\)](#)”. Salvini analyses the ups and downs of relations between Beijing and Washington since 1949 until today and while the US and China, the author explains, have come a long way since adopting diplomatic relations in 1979, today US—Chinese geopolitical and geo-strategic rivalry is here to stay and indeed is likely to increase in the years ahead. In fact, against the background of China’s economic and more importantly military rise, rivalry and indeed military conflict between Washington and Beijing, be it over Taiwan or over territorial disputes in the East and South China Seas, can no longer be completely excluded. What Salvini did not know when he wrote the chapter was that new US President Donald Trump could in the months and indeed years ahead unravel a lot of the achievements on the already difficult and controversial bilateral economic and political US-Chinese agenda. To be sure, by the time of this writing it is too early to tell whether Washington under Trump has embarked on an evitable course of confrontation with China, but what has emerged from the early days of the Trump’s China policy agenda does not sound encouraging and points to rough years ahead on the US-Chinese agenda under an unpredictable and indeed erratic US president.

Filippo Fasulo in his Chapter “[Coping with the Rising Dragon: Italy–China Relations Beyond Business](#)” analyses Italian ideas and strategies on how to expand old and create new relations with China in geographical regions where Italy and China share interests (e.g. Africa and the Middle East). While Italy, Fasulo concludes, has a lot of catching-up to do with other (Western) countries as regards the scope of relations with Beijing, the potential of intensifying political and security relations is yet untapped and to be developed. Fasulo cites and elaborates on the possibilities of cooperating in areas such as international terrorism, migration, development aid in Africa and elsewhere.

²‘Alleged’ militarization of Japanese foreign and security policies as Beijing is well aware that this is not what is taking place in Tokyo.

Barbara Onnis in her Chapter “[China in Africa: Challenges and Opportunities](#)” looks into how Beijing’s policies towards Africa have evolved over the decades. China, Onnis concludes, is an actor to reckon with in Africa and rapidly increasing trade and investment ties with African countries—above all with those rich of natural resources China is badly in need of—are evidence that Beijing under Xi Jinping is indeed considering Africa a ‘strategic’ continent to expand economic and political ties with: while the West accuses Beijing of conducting so-called ‘value free diplomacy’ and of adopting ‘neo-colonial’ policies in Africa while at the same providing many African countries with ‘no-strings-attached’ economic and technical assistance. To be sure, that looks very different from where Beijing is standing: the political leadership in Beijing does not get tired of pointing out that its policies in Africa are all ‘win-win-ties’, i.e. ties through which both Beijing and its partners and host countries in Africa benefit. While the truth could lie somewhere in the middle, Onnis’ chapter presents both sides’ arguments and the jury is still out there whether China’s policies in and towards Africa exploit Africa and its resources or whether they instead help the continent to develop on a sustainable basis.

In his second Chapter “[Enemies, Friends and Comrades-in-Arms. The Awkward Relations between the GDR and China in the 1980s](#)” Axel Berkofsky analyses the relations between China and the German Democratic Republic (GDR) in the 1980s. East Berlin run by the ageing and increasingly senile Erich Honecker, he writes, was obliged to look for ‘new friends’ in the 1980s when the Socialist world Honecker knew collapsed around him. However, that friendship did not last very long when the GDR was catapulted to the dustbin of history in 1989 without a single shot fired at peacefully demonstrating East German citizens.

Silvia Menegazzi concludes the first part of the volume with her Chapter “[China’s Foreign Policy and Ideational Narratives: Key Trends and Major Challenges](#)”, in which she examines the conceptual and ideological basis shaping Chinese foreign and security policies. While Beijing, Menegazzi concludes, is slowly but surely learning and applying Western-made rules and norms of international politics and security, China under Xi Jinping’s has also a few ideas of its own on how to organize or indeed reorganize the international system. Making use of its enormous economic and financial resources and capabilities, Beijing under China’s strongman Xi is shaping the nature of global political and economic governance and China’s ‘One Belt One Road’ (OBOR) initiative, Menegazzi explains, is impressive evidence of that. To be sure, the OBOR initiative is still in its very early stages and it remains yet to be seen when and to what extent China—with among others massive funds provided for by the ‘Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank’ (AIIB)—will be able to realize all of the very ambitious infrastructure projects aimed at connecting China with Europe over land and sea.

Giuseppe Iannini and Silvio Beretta kick off the second part with their Chapter “[National Egoism or Cooperation in Providing Global Public Goods? China’s Foreign Economic Strategy under Review](#)”. The authors critically examine the possibilities and limits of China becoming a sustainable provider of ‘global public goods’ in the years ahead and conclude that the international community might

have to wait a little longer before Beijing and its institutions become a significant provider of such goods. Responsible for that, the authors conclude, are the peculiarities of China's economic and financial system, political and economic governance and its overall stage of economic development.

Patrizia Farina analyses the demographic consequences of Beijing abandoning its infamous 'One-Child Policy' in her Chapter "[Chinese Population Policies: Towards a Free Choice](#)". Revising China's 'One-Child Policy', Farina explains, was indeed very necessary against the background of a rapidly shrinking working population. The number of Chinese citizens over 60 years old today has reached 132 million and the number will climb to roughly 400 million in 2040. By the middle of this century, the author writes, China will have one of the oldest populations on the planet with a very high old-age-dependency ratio. As a consequence, the Chinese government has begun experimenting with the 'Two-Child Policy', although it remains yet to be seen whether this new policy can in the years ahead address China's demographic problems quickly and efficiently enough.

Guido Masella takes a critical look at the Chinese banking and finance sectors in his Chapter "[The Chinese Banking and Financial System: A Fast-Paced Evolution Journey](#)". A very timely chapter indeed, given the challenges and problems China's banking and financial sectors are currently confronted with. Although accurate and reliable data on China's banking and finance sectors continue to be hard to come by, analysts warn that the level of non-performing loans (NPL) in China's banking sector could already be very high and indeed unsustainable. Furthermore, the 'Economist' has recently estimated that China's overall debt (private and public) could amount to up to 300 percent of China's GDP.

Vito Amendolagine, Alessia Amighini and Roberta Rabellotti look in their Chapter "[Chinese Multinationals in Europe](#)" into how Chinese multinational companies and investors position themselves in Europe. Chinese foreign direct investments (FDIs) in Europe are concentrated in a few European host countries and in only a few strategic sectors such as automotive, communications, electronics, machinery sectors. Chinese investments in Europe, the authors explain, have experienced a boom over the last decade, an increase of Chinese FDIs in Europe much bigger than Chinese FDIs in the US. Chinese multinationals investing in Europe, the authors conclude, is not least motivated by a strategy to acquire strategic assets in Europe, among other through greenfield investments and acquisitions.

Marina Timoteo concludes the second part with her Chapter "[Sustainability and Law-Assessing: The New 'Green Rules' for Foreign Companies Doing Business in China](#)", assessing the impact of new Chinese laws and regulations aiming at facilitating Beijing's vision of sustainable economic development. Aware of heavy economic pollution as a result of decade-long rapid economic growth, Beijing, Timoteo explains, has recently begun drafting new norms and legislation related to environmental protection standards by which foreign investors are obliged to abide by. The so-called 'Catalogue for the Guidance of Foreign Investment Industries', the author explains, is aimed at among other encouraging environmental-friendly foreign investments. As part of that process, Timoteo writes, Beijing has introduced

market-based instruments, including economic and fiscal incentives for investors whose investments are environmentally friendly in support of sustainable development.

Marina Miranda's Chapter "[The Issue of Political Reform and the Evolution of the so-called 'Deng Xiaoping Model' in Hu Jintao and Xi Jinping's China](#)" kicks off the third part of the volume. Miranda examines how China's government led by Xi Jinping responds to ideas and concepts aimed at reforming governance in China suggested by the previous Chinese government led by former President Hu Jintao and Prime Minister Wen Jiabao. Towards the end of his second term as Chinese Prime Minister Wen Jiabao has repeatedly and in various speeches spoken about the necessity to adopt political reforms in China and has even mentioned the 'D-word', i.e. 'democracy', when he elaborated on where Chinese governance should eventually be heading towards. To be sure, today Chinese President Xi Jinping is not—to put it bluntly—having any of that. 'Political reforms' other than pushing ahead with his ruthless anti-corruption campaign aimed at among others politically eliminating opponents and potential challengers to his power, are not on his agenda. 'Democracy' in any shape or form does not get mentioned by Xi either, and those scholars and policymakers outside of China, who thought that Xi would further develop the sort of thinking and concepts of Wen Jiabao-style 'democracy' and 'political reforms' were proven to be too optimistic. Indeed, reading Miranda's chapter one could be tempted to conclude that China's current government under Xi Jinping is (far) less than sympathetic to what former Chinese Prime Minister Wen Jiabao towards the very end of his second term suggested is necessary for China to pursue in the years ahead: 'real' political reforms as opposed to reforms aimed at rendering the rule and governance of the Communist Party more efficient. Indeed, we do not hear anything at all on 'democracy' coming out of Xi's China today, which instead warns Chinese citizens from being 'contaminated' with Western values, including Western-style democracy.

Alessandra Lavagnino analyses the quality and impact of Chinese official slogans setting policy goals and visions in her Chapter "[From 'Chinese Characteristics' \(Zhongguo Tese 中国特色\) to 'Chinese Dream' \(Zhongguo Meng 中国梦\)-The Chinese Political Discourse Today](#)". China's political leaders have over the decades used and propagated slogans like 'Crossing the river by feeling the stones', 'Socialism with Chinese characteristics' and 'Scientific vision of development' to explain and set policy goals and visions, Lavagnino explains. While all of these slogans had their meaning and impact when they were announced by former Chinese leaders Deng Xiaoping, Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao, the 'Chinese Dream' as propagated by the country's current leader Xi Jinping since 2013, Lavagnino concludes, marks a fundamental change as regards the quality and impact of Chinese officials slogans. The 'Chinese Dream', the author argues, sets a clear and very optimistic vision for China and reaches the people in a language that is accessible and easily understandable.

Bettina Mottura in her Chapter "['Disclosure Is the Norm, Non-disclosure Is the Exception'. A Genre-Based Analysis on Institutional Discourse on the Government Information Disclosure in China](#)" examines recent developments examines recent

developments and procedures of Chinese government information disclosure practices as part of generating a steady and accountable flow of information between the Chinese state and its citizens. From 2007 to 2016, Mottura writes, China's information disclosure policies were codified by a number of official documents providing guidelines on the dos and don'ts of those policies. This, the author explains, has led to a very vivid scholarly debate within China, and both the state's institutions and the citizens, the author concludes, are now considered relevant stakeholders providing input to the process of implementing policies. China's new disclosure system, Mottura further concludes, is also designed as an instrument to consolidate the legitimacy of public institutions governing the country. Riccardo Puglisi for his part provides the reader with an analysis on the quantity and quality of coverage of foreign countries in the Chinese newspaper 'China Daily'. In his Chapter "A Portal or a Mirror? The Reporting of Foreign Countries in 'China Daily'" Puglisi's empirical research concludes that a country is covered more often and more in detail by the 'China Daily' the bigger its economy and the geographically closer it is to China. Puglisi also finds out that—like it is indeed the case for other non-Chinese newspapers too—"bad news" sell better than 'good news': there is more coverage on foreign countries with higher unemployment rates.

Guido Samarani's Chapter "Italy's Policies Towards and Relations with China from 1937 to 1945" is the first chapter of the fourth part of this volume. Samarani analyses Italian–Chinese relations in 1936/1937, at a time when also Rome and Tokyo undertook efforts to improve and indeed expand their bilateral ties. In the second half of the 1930s, Samarani explains, the 'golden years' of relations between Italy and China were *de facto* over as Rome chose Japan over China as ally in the Far East. Italy's adherence to the 'Anti-Comintern' Pact and recognition of *Manzhouguo* at the end of 1937 further confirmed that Rome supported Tokyo's increasingly aggressive and expansionist policies in Asia in general and China in particular. Consequently, after Japan invaded China in 1937, Samarani explains, Italian-Sino relations went from bad to worse. It was only in 1947, the author concludes, that bilateral relations recovered sustainably. Italy and Nationalist China signed a peace treaty in Paris in that year and Italy renounced all former colonial rights and interests in China.

Lihong Zhang's Chapter "Confucianism, Communism and Democracy: A 'Triangular' Struggle in China—Reflections on Italy's Historical Experience with Cultural Reform" argues that Beijing today struggles with how to incorporate three different ideologies and forms of governance into contemporary China: Confucianism, democracy and communism. Confucianism, Zhang explains, has after the demise of Mao Tse-Tung celebrated a 'comeback' in China and goes on to argue that no foreign ideology or form of governance—be it communism or democracy—can survive in China without harmonizing itself with Confucianism. In the second part of his chapter Zhang urges Chinese policymakers to acknowledge and protect individual rights and freedom and suggests that a political order modelled on the Roman Principate, characterized by the centralization of powers in a head of state and the rule by law, could be a realistic *interim* solution for China on its path from totalitarianism to republicanism.

Cristina Bombelli and Alessandro Arduino in their Chapter “[Human Resource Management in China: an Italian Perspective](#)” introduce the reader into human resources management (HRM) in China and explain that HRM in China is still fairly different when compared to Europe or the US. Using case studies of Italian businesses operating in China, the authors analyse different phases of Chinese HRM, beginning with HRM during recent Chinese financial and production crises.

Renzo Cavalieri concludes the volume with his Chapter “[Fa Versus Guanxi: Legality with Chinese Characteristics and Implications for Italian Business in China](#)”. Cavalieri explains the for foreigners sometimes incomprehensible differences between legal norms and ‘alternative’ systems of rules and norms: the difference between *fa* (law) and *guanxi* (personal relations, personal connections). The relationship and conflicts between *fa* and *guanxi*, the author explains, have obviously implications for Westerners doing business in China and not all of what is formulated as laws and norms in China gets actually applied and adopted. History, politics and culture are entangled, Cavalieri explains, leading to a notion of a ‘fluid’ and pragmatic concept of business in China.

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