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EDITED BY

EVELYN GOH

# RISING CHINA'S INFLUENCE IN DEVELOPING ASIA



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Evelyn Goh  
August 2015

## *List of Figures*

1.1 Approaches to analysing power	7
10.1 Value of selected currencies in U.S. dollars	235

## *List of Tables*

1.1 The influence framework	12
5.1 Top ODA sources for the Philippines, 2009–12 (US\$ billion)	105
5.2 The Philippines' top trading partners in 2014 (US\$ billion)	106
5.3 Philippines–China bilateral merchandise trade, 2009–13 (US\$ billion)	106
10.1 Reform of IMF chairs and shares	222
10.2 CMIM credit available to selected Southeast Asian states	228
10.3 China's currency swap lines in East and South Asia	232
11.1 China's importance as a top five export market among Asian HRC members	252
11.2 Two-way trade between China and Southeast Asian HRC members	252

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# Table of Contents

<i>List of Figures</i>	ix
<i>List of Tables</i>	ix
<i>List of Contributors</i>	xi
1. Introduction <i>Evelyn Goh</i>	1
2. Chinese Assessments of China's Influence in Developing Asia <i>Michael A. Glosny</i>	24
<b>Part I. Small Developing Asian States</b>	
3. Myanmar's Management of China's Influence: From Mutual Benefit to Mutual Dependence <i>Evelyn Goh and David I. Steinberg</i>	55
4. China's Influence Over Vietnam in War and Peace <i>Cheng Guan Ang</i>	80
5. The Domestic Mediations of China's Influence in the Philippines <i>Aileen S. P. Baviera</i>	101
6. China's Influence in Sri Lanka: Negotiating Development, Authoritarianism, and Regional Transformation <i>Neil DeVotta</i>	129
<b>Part II. Issues and Institutions</b>	
7. China's Influence in the South China Sea and the Failure of Joint Development <i>Ralf Emmers</i>	155
8. China's Hydropower Expansion and Influence Over Environmental Governance in Mainland Southeast Asia <i>Pichamon Yeophantong</i>	174
9. Chinese Sunshine: Beijing's Influence on Economic Change in North Korea <i>James Reilly</i>	193

10. China's Influence in Asian Monetary Policy Affairs <i>John D. Ciorciari</i>	217
11. China's Influence on Asian States During the Creation of the UN Human Rights Council: 2005–2007 <i>Rosemary Foot and Rana Siu Inboden</i>	237
 <b>Part III. Extensions</b>	
12. Analysing Chinese Influence: Challenges and Opportunities <i>Scott L. Kastner</i>	259
13. Conclusion <i>Evelyn Goh</i>	277
 <i>Index</i>	 287

## Introduction

*Evelyn Goh*

AS THE WORLD'S second largest economy and most populous nation, rising China has been reshaping international order for the last two decades. Numerous studies detail the growth of the People's Republic of China's (PRC's) economic, military, and political power and suggest that their increase is altering other states' behaviour.<sup>1</sup> While this literature provides an important foundation for understanding the changing global distribution of power, the debates are bound either by realist assumptions of relative power shifts generating certain responses from others, or claims about Chinese 'soft' power.<sup>2</sup> It tells us relatively little about how 'powerful' China actually is. How and how effectively does China make use of its expanding resources to get what it wants? To answer this question, we need to move away from scorecards enumerating its economic, political, and social resources, towards more detailed analysis of how China exercises power to affect others' policy choices and decisions, and achieve particular ends. This emphasis on relating resources to outcomes is, simply put, the study of influence.

This volume asserts that we cannot accurately assess rising China's impacts without first understanding how its growing power resources are translated into actual policy influence over other states and actors, their decisions, and outcomes. Here, we make a distinction between *power* understood as resources and latent capability; and *influence* defined as the effective exercise of this power, or *the act of modifying or otherwise having an impact upon another actor's preferences or behaviour in favour of one's own aims*.

<sup>1</sup> For instance, Hugh White, *The China Choice* (Collingwood: Black, 2012); Martin Jacques, *When China Rules the World* (London: Allen Lane, 2009); David Lampton, *The Three Faces of Chinese Power: Might, Money, and Minds* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008).

<sup>2</sup> John Mearsheimer, 'China's Unpeaceful Rise,' *Current History* 105 (April 2006), pp. 160–2; Joshua Kurlantzick, *Charm Offensive: How China's Soft Power is Transforming the World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007); Zheng Yongnian and Zhang Chi, 'Soft Power in International Politics and Observations on China's Soft Power,' *Shijie jingji yu zhengzhi* [World Economics and Politics] 7, 2007.

To many observers of China's ascendance, this intuitive distinction makes sense. China's growing capabilities often do not translate automatically or easily into desired changes in others' behaviour. For example, in spite of its position as the leading holder of U.S. debt, China was unable to exert meaningful leverage over U.S. financial policy during the 2008/9 global financial crisis.<sup>3</sup> Despite close economic and political ties, China has also had limited impact on changing North Korea's nuclear weapons policies, or shifting the territorial claims of Vietnam and the Philippines in the South China Sea; and growing dependence on China actually helped to push the military regime in Myanmar towards domestic reforms so as to allow it to diversify its external strategic options. And yet, earlier assessments that China might be an 'overrated . . . second-rank middle power' or merely a 'theoretical power' now seem out-of-date, given its notable economic and diplomatic presence all around the world.<sup>4</sup> In a recent landmark study, David Shambaugh convincingly charts China's global 'spread' in the diplomatic, global governance, economic, cultural, and security realms. However, his finding that China is '*present and active* in various parts of the globe . . . but is not (yet) *influencing* or shaping actors or events' leads him to the conclusion that China is but a 'partial power'.<sup>5</sup>

Thus, a significant empirical puzzle lies at the heart of China's rise: there is apparently considerable 'slippage' in how much China manages to—or wants to—convert its growing resources into international influence. This puzzle in turn suggests at least three important research themes: first, why does China lack the evident will or capacity to exert influence in key arenas or issue areas? Second, how might China be exercising influence in indirect ways, which we may be missing, given the conventional focus on 'hard' and 'soft' power? And third, to what extent might the explanations for China's influence (or lack thereof) be found within the actors, states, or institutions that are subjected to its power?

Shambaugh's study provides critical insight into the first theme. From his vantage point as a China specialist, his explanations for China's limited global influence centres on the partial nature of Chinese ambitions, imagination, and sense of global responsibility: its foreign policy is risk-averse and narrowly self-interested; it remains an outsider with few close friends and no allies, and without normative commitment to the international order; and its cultural and economic products are not sufficiently attractive to the rest of the world.<sup>6</sup> However, *China Goes Global* does not explicitly explore the second and third

<sup>3</sup> Daniel W. Drezner, 'Bad Debts: Assessing China's Financial Influence in Great Power Relations,' *International Security* 34:2 (2009), pp. 7–45.

<sup>4</sup> Gerald S. Segal, 'Does China Matter?' *Foreign Affairs* 78:5 (1999), pp. 24–36, at p. 24.

<sup>5</sup> David Shambaugh, *China Goes Global: The Partial Power* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 8.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 6–12, 309–11.

themes above, which would serve to unpack more completely the processes of influence. Shambaugh's definition of influence is inexact: he appears to gauge China's influence by whether China manages to get others to do what they otherwise would not have done, whether it 'shapes events', and whether it is 'actively contributing to solving problems'.<sup>7</sup> Apart from entailing different methodological challenges, these three modes of influence suggest distinct contexts of power relations and structural conditions that he does not explore. Moreover, like any other international actor, China draws upon different tools, including military might, economic benefits and interdependence, institutional authority, and ideational appeal, to purposefully coerce, induce, or persuade others to behave in a certain manner. But whether and the extent to which it succeeds is determined as much by the political context and decision-making processes of the target states, as it is by how skilfully Chinese actors deploy these tools.

In this volume, we investigate further the puzzle of China's growing power versus its apparently limited influence, with specific focus on the second and third research themes. We conceptualize the modes of Chinese influence, and interrogate the interactions between China as power wielder and the targets of its attempted influence. In other words, this volume investigates how and how effectively China has converted its growing resources and capabilities into influence over other states' preferences and behaviour. This focus helps to avoid the problem of conflating Chinese presence with actual influence. It also sets us apart from the tendency in the literature about China's rise to try to segregate various 'tools' of power—whether hard, soft, material, or ideational<sup>8</sup>—but often without explicitly analysing the effectiveness with which these tools might be employed. In so doing, we offer a clearer conceptual and analytical framework for analysing influence; we explicitly study how the targets of China's influence manage its influence; and we begin with what ought to be the easiest cases.

## CASE SELECTION

This collection of essays is distinct for the way the authors undertake the empirical legwork within clearly specified countries and issue-areas, in order to trace the processes by which China may bring to bear its power resources to try to influence other actors and how the latter respond; to assess the results;

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 8, 309.

<sup>8</sup> E.g. Lampton, *Three Faces of Chinese Power*; Phillip C. Saunders, 'China's Global Activism: Strategy, Drivers, and Tools,' Institute for National Strategic Studies Occasional Paper No. 4, October 2006.

and to explain these outcomes. In this endeavour, we focus on China's 'near abroad', where it has become the leading source of trade and aid, developed greater military reach, pursued active diplomacy, and cultivated 'soft' power. While much scholarly and policy writing tends to emphasize China's relations with the major Asia-Pacific powers (especially the United States, Japan, India, and Russia), significant proportions of China's diplomatic energy, economic diplomacy, foreign aid and investment, and political attention have been trained upon the developing countries in the region. These cases provide a range of strategic as well as developmental issues that reflect China's dual identity as a great power as well as a developing country.<sup>9</sup>

One might well ask why China pays these smaller and weaker countries such attention? Imperial China was obliged by geography, politics, and identity to engage in asymmetrical relationships with many of its immediate neighbouring polities, be it the tributary kingdoms of East Asia, trade-based seafaring sultanates in Southeast Asia, or nomadic tribes of Central Asia; and from the second half of the twentieth century, the People's Republic of China paid special attention to the 'Third World' in the Cold War ideological struggle.<sup>10</sup> Arguably, contemporary China's strategic goals in developing parts of East and South Asia stem from its overall foreign policy imperative of fostering an external environment conducive to China's economic development. Chinese policy-makers hope to pacify and assure weaker neighbouring countries in particular, often by drawing them into China's economic orbit. This entails the prospect of mutual economic gains, but also of increasing interdependence and demonstrating Chinese benignity—all key elements of a 'stable periphery'.<sup>11</sup>

As such, China's relations with the Asian developing countries present rich empirical material that can be mined for analysing its influence. Within the sizeable literature on China's strategy towards or relations with neighbouring regions like Southeast Asia (which supplies many of our cases here), the question of China's influence is rarely explicitly and systematically addressed.<sup>12</sup> Developing parts of Asia contain critical, so-called 'easy' cases;

<sup>9</sup> See Lowell Dittmer and George T. Yu, eds. *China, the Developing World and the New Global Dynamic* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2009); Joshua Eisenman, Eric Heginbotham and Derek Mitchell, eds. *China and the Developing World: Beijing's Strategy for the Twenty-first Century* (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 2007). This literature tends to offer region-by-region analysis of China's relations with developing countries.

<sup>10</sup> John King Fairbank, ed. *The Chinese World Order: Traditional China's Foreign Relations* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1968); Peter Van Ness, 'China and the Third World,' in Samuel S. Kim, ed. *China and the World: Chinese Foreign Policy Faces the New Millennium* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1998), pp. 151–71.

<sup>11</sup> Yuan Peng, 'A Harmonious World and China's New Diplomacy,' *Contemporary International Relations* [English Version] 17:3 (2007), pp. 1–26.

<sup>12</sup> Indeed, more attention has been paid to the opposite dynamic: Southeast Asia's putative influence over China in attempts to 'enmesh' or 'socialize' it into multilateral norms and

since these developing states have limited capabilities and a reasonably high degree of dependence on China, they ought to be most susceptible to Chinese influence. If China is indeed growing in both power and influence, we ought to find many good examples of it in these cases. Conversely, if China is unable to influence even these smaller developing states in a straightforward manner, then we need to explain why and to rethink our assessments of the international impacts of China's rise.

In this volume, we concentrate on the smaller Asian developing countries, which we would expect to be the 'easiest' cases where power asymmetry vis-à-vis China is greatest. Thus, India, Pakistan, and Indonesia, for instance, were considered inappropriate country cases in spite of their developing status. Half of our case studies are country-based, with the other half being thematic, examining how a variety of small developing Asian states and actors manage and respond to China's influence within key issue areas. For reasons of space and comparability, the volume's focus is on South and East Asia, with the majority of country cases from Southeast Asia.<sup>13</sup> This collection consists of the most indicative, interesting, and empirically sound cases, but it is by no means comprehensive and other potential cases remain to be explored.<sup>14</sup> Nevertheless, through these selected 'easiest' cases, this volume's empirical investigation can help to establish the nature and parameters of China's influence.

## CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

### Definition: Influence and Power

To kick off this enterprise, we adopt a sharper and narrower focus on influence (rather than power). In distinguishing between influence as actual effect, and power as potential capability, we draw from classical studies of political influence, chiefly Max Weber's notion of power (*Macht*) as the 'opportunity to have one's will prevail within a social relationship . . . no matter what this opportunity is based on', and the associated understanding that an actor's

institutions. See e.g. Evelyn Goh, 'Great Powers and Hierarchical Order: Analyzing Southeast Asian Regional Security Strategies,' *International Security* 32:3 (Winter 2007/8), pp. 113–57; Alastair Iain Johnston, *Social States: China in International Institutions, 1980–2000* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), chapter 4.

<sup>13</sup> Notably, we do not study the small developing states in Central Asia.

<sup>14</sup> For instance, explicit exploration of our theme of China's influence can build on studies such as Andrew Mertha, *Brothers in Arms: Chinese Aid to the Khmer Rouge, 1975–1979* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2014); Jeffrey Reeves and Ramon Pacheco Pardo, 'Parsing China's Power: Sino-Mongolian and Sino-DPRK Relations in Comparative Perspective,' *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific* 13 (2013), pp. 449–77.

power may be converted into influence but not necessarily at all, or to its full extent.<sup>15</sup> Also important is Cox and Jacobson's classic study of influence as an 'actuality', the actual 'modification of one actor's behaviour by that of another' for the purpose of achieving the latter's goals.<sup>16</sup>

From these foundations, we adopt as our project's starting point the understanding that influence contains three discernible components:

- (1) Causality—there is a causal relationship between the influence-wielder and its targets;
- (2) Intentionality—the influence-wielder engages in purposive behaviour towards the target; and
- (3) Goal attainment—the effects must be 'in a direction consistent with . . . the wants, preferences, or intentions of the influence-wielders'.<sup>17</sup> This can be understood in gradations (as partial goal attainment), rather than in either/or form.

Causality, intentionality, and goal attainment together provide the set of markers by which we can examine empirical cases for evidence of attempted influence. We may also understand success as being correlated with the degree to which the influencer's goals are attained.

In tracing the processes of influence, we will employ the commonly understood 'tools' of power, which include: (a) coercion, or action designed to compel another actor to do something by credibly signalling the costly consequences of his failure to comply; (b) inducement, or getting another actor to behave in a particular way by offering a reward; and (c) persuasion, by which one actor convinces another that it is in her best interest to do as he wishes.<sup>18</sup> But by themselves, these are tools rather than analytical categories of influence because all three are often used in combination in real life. By including coercion, we also resist those who would confine the notion of influence to non-coercive action.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>15</sup> The translation is from Felix Berenskoetter, 'Thinking about Power,' in Felix Berenskoetter and M. J. Williams, eds. *Power in World Politics* (London: Routledge, 2007), p. 3 (emphasis mine).

<sup>16</sup> Robert W. Cox and Harold R. Jacobson, *The Anatomy of Influence: Decision-Making in International Organization* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973). A clear statement of this distinction between power and influence is found in Peter Morriss, *Power: A Philosophical Analysis* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1987).

<sup>17</sup> Robert A. Dahl and Bruce Stinebrickner, *Modern Political Analysis*, 6th edn (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 2003), p. 17.

<sup>18</sup> John M. Rothgeb, *Defining Power: Influence and Force in the Contemporary International System* (New York: St. Martin's, 1993); Roderick Martin, *The Sociology of Power* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1977).

<sup>19</sup> For instance, Harold D. Lasswell and Abraham Kaplan, *Power and Society: A Framework for Political Inquiry* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1950); Brian Barry, ed. *Power and Political Theory* (New York: Wiley, 1976).



The understanding of influence as the effective exercise of power adopted in this volume pegs to a narrow subset of the much wider spectrum of power analyses conducted in the social and political theory and international relations literatures. Our starting point focusing on causality, intentionality, and goals particularly precludes the most indirect and ‘meta-structural’ types of power relations (as discussed below). On the other hand, our drive to identify and explain change (or the lack of it) in the *subjects* of influence prompts more dynamic relational analysis and offers opportunities to explore in greater detail causal relationships not usually afforded in studies of power.

The power literature has always encompassed the study of influence to varying extents, and the considerable advances in understanding power relations provide important insights for this project. Of particular relevance to this project is the fact that analyses of political power capture a spectrum spanning conditions determined by conflict and compulsion to situations defined more by co-optation and consent. That is, it recognizes that power and influence can be exercised in many instances where there may not be clear resistance and even when the interests or preferences of the influence-wielder and its targets actually converge. This spectrum is reflected in Figure 1.1.

The traditional starting point of analysing power and influence is to try to uncover an actor’s ability to cause other actors to behave in a manner in which they otherwise would not have done.<sup>20</sup> This Dahlian notion of the effective exercise of power as prevailing in observable conflict requires a probable counterfactual based on initially divergent interests: the demonstration that *B* started out with a different set of preferences, but upon exposure to *A*’s

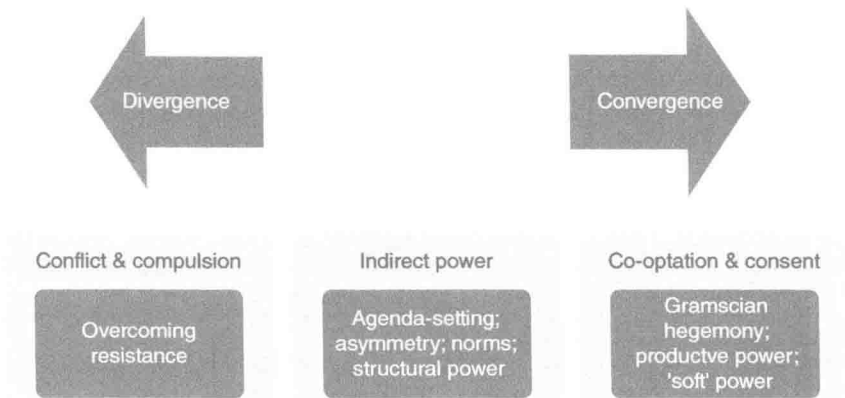


Fig. 1.1 Approaches to analysing power

<sup>20</sup> Robert A. Dahl, ‘The Concept of Power,’ *Behavioral Science* 2:3 (1957), pp. 201–15. This is Lasswell and Kaplan’s narrower definition of ‘power’ as opposed to ‘influence’.