China's Role in a Shared Human Future

Towards Theory for Global Leadership

Martin Albrow
Foreword by Anthony Giddens

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About the Author

Martin Albrow has served as Emeritus Professor of the University of Wales; Fellow of the Academy of Social Sciences, UK; Honorary Vice-President and former President of the British Sociological Association; Senior Fellow, Käte Hamburger Kolleg, University of Bonn; Visiting Professor at Beijing Foreign Studies University; Professor of Sociological Theory, University College, Cardiff; and Fellow of the Woodrow Wilson International Centre for Scholars, Washington DC. He also served as Visiting Professor at the State University of New York (SUNY – Stonybrook), London School of Economics, and University of Munich. He pioneered the study of the social and cultural aspects of globalization. Among his books are *The Global Age: State and Society beyond Modernity* (1996, in English, German, and Chinese), *Max Weber's Construction of Social Theory* (1990), and *Bureaucracy* (1970, in English and German). Mr. Albrow has authored over 100 publications in many languages.

This book is jointly published by New World Press (NWP) and Global China Press (GCP). NWP was founded in 1951, and is a member of the China International Publishing Group (CIPG). It publishes multilingual books on social sciences, literature, management, and other disciplines that serve to introduce China to the world. As early as the 1980s, NWP published the China Study series in English, covering China's economy, politics, ethnicity, population, history, and sociology. GCP is the first UK-based publisher specializing in dual-language publications that focus both on Chinese perspectives of the world and human knowledge and on non-Chinese perspectives of China in a global context. This book is edited by Xiangqun Chang, GCP founder, Director of the Global China Institute, and Honorary Professor at the University College, London, UK.

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by Martin Albrow

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Foreword

Anthony Giddens

Professor Martin Albrow is one of the foremost sociologists in the English-speaking world and one of the greatest experts on globalization, perhaps the most significant driving force of our times. In his pioneering work *The Global Age* (1996), written when the term 'globalization' itself was quite new, he set out the main dimensions of the profound changes that had begun to transform world society. In its most fundamental meaning, 'globalization' refers to the intensifying interdependence of individuals, institutions and states across the globe.

One dimension is economic – the spread of a world marketplace, a massively complex division of labour between and within companies and their workforces, coupled with financial institutions of global scope. However, globalization is also political and cultural. Increasing globalization confers many benefits, at the same time as it opens up new stresses and strains. Think, for example, of the case of China itself which, when the country opened itself out to the wider world some three decades ago, travelled all the way from mass starvation to a level of prosperity that once would have seemed inconceivable. There are still many who live close to the breadline. Yet in China's prospering cities today one of the main health issues is the very opposite: rising levels of obesity, a condition not of scarcity but of abundance.

Many in current times speak of globalization going into reverse. The reverberations of the global economic crisis are still being felt, especially in Western countries. Whole segments of those countries have not shared in the rising levels of abundance experienced by the majority. There are significant cultural divisions too. Cosmopolitan values – a welcoming of cultural diversity, equality between the sexes and a comfort with geographical mobility – have flowered in many larger cities. In other regions, especially those that have not shared in rising prosperity, there has been a marked reaction against these values. Resentment against immigration, hostile or racist attitudes towards 'foreigners', and towards ethnic or cultural minorities, has again become commonplace. These are the attitudes that have helped fuel the rise of populist parties in the West, parties which explicitly set themselves against globalization and wish to return to the more traditional nation-state. The most significant consequence in global terms is the ascent of Donald Trump to power in the United States, a leader who wants to reverse what he sees as America's declining power and who blames globalization for the US's problems rather than seeing it as the source of its relative prosperity.

Make no mistake, however: globalization has not gone into reverse and short of calamity there is no chance of its doing so. Whatever its stresses and strains, the world is more and more interdependent every day. One of the prime reasons

is the rise of the digital revolution, which has moved globalization – i.e. interdependence - to a wholly different level. The celebrated Canadian thinker Marshall McLuhan, writing many years ago at the outset of the digital revolution, coined the term 'global village' to describe the trajectory of world society. How right he was, but even he could never have guessed how far that process would develop. Consider on the level of everyday life. Someone takes a plane to London. That trip takes only some ten hours or so, an everyday miracle which depends upon global satellite systems circling high above the earth. On arrival she calls her parents on her smartphone. It is another everyday miracle. She can see them and vice versa; and they can talk almost as if they were in the same room. Moreover, they can do so almost for nothing. And of course political leaders and billions of other ordinary people can do the same thing.

The global village is what I call a 'high opportunity, high risk' world, where we do not know in advance how that balance of opportunity and risk will play out. The opportunities are everywhere, China's rise to world influence, and probably world leadership, being among them. They are of a scale that human beings have not experienced before, as witnessed in myriad scientific and technological advances, moving faster than ever before precisely because of globalization. To take just one example, this could be an era of massive innovation in medicine, because of the capacity of scientists to collaborate across the world and be in instantaneous communication with one another. Yet the risks are also without precedent in previous periods of history, in some large part because they too are globalized – we just do not know at this point whether as a species we can deal with the combined threats of climate change, a world population approaching ten billion, the proliferation of nuclear weapons, mass migration and the potential for global pandemics.

In this book Albrow does a remarkable job of shedding light on these extraordinary changes and on the pivotal role that China is likely to have in shaping their further evolution. As the United States pulls back from its former global role, China not only can, but must, assume a pivotal position in shaping world society for the better. The progress of the 'Belt and Road' initiative will be only one element in determining whether China's new world role will help heal divisions and promote peaceful global cooperation. That initiative has to demonstrate that it is a vehicle for free cooperation, not an imposition of sectional power.

Albrow fruitfully deploys the thinking of Xi Jinping in showing how all this might be achieved, but links that thinking in an impressive way with Western traditions, old and new. Max Weber, who a century ago sought to pinpoint the cultural origins of Western capitalism, at the same time was fascinated with Eastern religion and culture. His writings, the author shows, still provide core ideas for a rethinking of global cooperation today. We should reject the idea that our hypermodern world can be stabilized and pacified only by hypermodern concepts and technologies. Almost the contrary is the case. In rediscovering the deep roots of shared civilizational values, we can shape a global ethics that can be the foundation of a resurgence of global cooperation.

Author's Preface

China's rise has astonished the world. Since 1978, plan after plan has been realized. The 13th Five-Year Plan extends to 2020. It then achieves a 'moderately prosperous society', fulfilling the goal to mark the centenary of the founding of the Communist Party of China in 1921.

The next great centenary, the founding of the People's Republic of China, comes in 2049. The goal to be achieved by then is a modern socialist country, prosperous, strong, democratic, culturally advanced and harmonious. President Xi Jinping has called this progress the realization of the Chinese Dream of national rejuvenation.

The West looks on with fascination, apprehension and scepticism. It also seeks endlessly to satisfy itself how and why China has fulfilled plan after plan. After all, according to the dominant liberal ideology of the West, it should not work.

So Western explanations for Chinese exceptionalism range over any number of factors: the sheer size of the population and the internal market, rigid authoritarianism, rigorous education, close family ties, importing capitalism, stealing ideas and commercial secrets, the excessive generosity of the West in opening its markets, and so on.

Very rarely mentioned is the quality of Chinese leadership. Even less often cited is that this leadership constantly develops its theory for shaping society and guiding public policy. It includes, but is broader than Marxism, and their phrase 'philosophical social science' captures it better for Western readers.

It is close to what used to be called public philosophy in the West. That has long lost any hold on the direction of public policy in a political climate where opinion is driven by tweets and media headlines. The nearest thing to a coherent set of ideas to guide public policy, Clinton's and Blair's 'Third Way', was eclipsed very soon after by George W. Bush's and Blair's 'War on Terror', and there has been nothing to fill its place.

The passive acceptance of globalization by Western elites has prompted a populist reaction and there is a complete loss of intellectual confidence, or indeed trust in ideas on the part of the political class.

A truly global perspective, on the other hand, actively looks to shape globalization for human purposes and focuses on global issues that threaten the human future. It is neither for nor against globalization, simply wants to make it work for the public good both for countries but also for the world as a whole.

There is so much in China today that leads in that direction. Chinese theory today is work in progress along that road, continually being updated, from Mao Zedong through Deng Xiaoping to Xi Jinping, whose speeches provide the

thought leadership that directs China's public policy. In developing policy for engagement in global affairs, it is now moving explicitly towards a 'New Partnership of Mutual Benefit and a Community of Shared Future'.[1]

Leadership for a common human future requires theory that is free from national prejudices and outdated ideologies and can deliver solutions to problems that confront us all. There is an urgent need to explore the theoretical issues that the future world society is bound to face.

The starkness of the contrast between China's activism and Western resignation in the face of globalization was impressed on me when I first read *Xi Jinping: The Governance of China*. It was my privilege to be invited to speak at its launch in London in April 2015.

Then I expressed the hope that 'the ideas behind the governance of China may sometime soon be extended to rethinking the governance of the globe'.[2] Since then I have returned to the theme of China's potential contribution to theory for global governance on several occasions in China and in Europe.

The collection of speeches and journal articles in this book is an outcome and I hope an encouragement to the Chinese leadership and to scholars to have no hesitation in offering their ideas for a new global order.

The reader will find no blueprint for global governance in the following pages. My intention is to point to directions in Chinese thought and policies and in relations with other countries that can lead to benefits for the whole world.

The prompting in this book to Chinese thinkers to continue forward in those directions stems, of course, from my own theoretical standpoint. In brief, this is that I try to write as a citizen of the world, not as a Western academic sympathetic to China, though naturally I am that.

But there is good reason to distance oneself from Western outlooks on China. They have a history. It is not encouraging: from awe and admiration in the eighteenth century; to contempt and exploitation in the nineteenth; to fear and astonishment in the twentieth.

But in common in those reactions has been the conviction that the West has access to universal truths that the rest of the world only needs to learn. I disagree. The world does not need a total universalism. Every culture, each country has its own version.

The results when they clash over universal principles are often devastating. By contrast the future of human society depends on cooperation in tackling global issues that threaten its very existence.

The global outlook invites every culture to contribute to what is necessary to secure a future for human beings on this earth. It involves dialogue between civilizations, across boundaries, and arises from shared perceptions of human need. It

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[1] Speech to the 70th Session of the General Assembly of the United Nations, 28 September 2015.

[2] The text of the speech is reprinted below as Chapter One.

treats universal principles as yet another factor to be negotiated between cultures. It is a pragmatic universalism for material purposes.

The global outlook is then, at one and the same time, materialist (even Marxist) and idealist, (even religious). China is already well prepared to contribute, since in its own theory it combines Marxism with Confucian and religious ideas and its result is 'socialism with Chinese characteristics'. But it goes still further in calmly assimilating theory and research from Western economic and social sciences too.

This readiness to appreciate and absorb ideas from other cultures and from advancing social sciences is a huge strength in China's development, and I hope the following pages provide helpful illustration. It means too that I hope the idea of transculturality that is advanced in several chapters will gain from serious Chinese examination of its potential contribution to the theory of global governance.

The chapters that follow originally were presented to varied audiences on different occasions. At one extreme, they are fully developed journal papers, at the other, speeches for a wider public. They are arranged in three parts, but the sequence is less important than the reader's interest and the book can be entered at any point.

To aid selective reading, the list of chapters with the details of their original presentation or publication is available at the end of the book, along with abstracts and key terms when they were provided.

President Xi's thought is the starting point for my discussions in Part One, China's Role in the Globalizing World. Part Two, Theory for the Global Social Order, aims to encourage new thinking about global governance, in particular with the ideas of transculturality and pragmatic universalism. Part Three, From Max Weber to Global Sociology, considers the extent and limits of Western understanding of China in the classic account of Max Weber and asks how far his approach can illuminate our world today.

The growing exchanges between Western and Chinese sociology are work in progress, illustrated from the past in my Postscript, developed for the present by Professor Xiangqun Chang who rounds off this volume in an Appendix that shows how the Book Series in which it is included drives the agenda forward.

Just as global leadership requires a standpoint that is valid beyond national boundaries so too theory for the coming age infringes old disciplinary boundaries. The author therefore makes no apology for trespassing into fields beyond his own, only regrets the limitations that an academic specialism imposes on anyone like me who has been privileged enough to enjoy a career serving sociology.

Specialists in history, religion, philosophy, languages, biology, environment, physics, mathematics, economics and the social sciences all must contribute to theory for the new global order. But it will only be validated by the practical efforts of citizens of the world to create a new world social order, and it is to them this book is dedicated.

Acknowledgments

No work on China by a foreign scholar with only a few words of Mandarin would be possible without the generous cooperation, inspiration and advice from Chinese scholars. I am glad to have this chance to record my belated and deep gratitude to those I worked with in the 1980s and 1990s. Dai Kejing and Lu Xueyi, who sadly passed away in 2013, were immensely helpful as the Postscript to this volume details. Li Yong was both my student and indispensable guide for the State Family Planning programme.

In more recent years Sun Youzhong, Li Xuetao, Wang Yuechen, and Jin Wei have all helped me in many different and more ways than they realize, from giving practical advice to sharing philosophical insights. I am grateful to them all.

Officials in the London Embassy of the PRC have taught me that people to people diplomacy is also about making friends. Minister Ma Hui and Minister Counsellor Xiang Xiaowei have been generous both in sharing their knowledge and giving invaluable advice. Second Secretary Ma Lei in the Embassy Cultural Office has been unfailingly helpful, both in London and for my visits to China. In Beijing, Zhu Qi and his staff in the Bureau for External Relations of the Ministry of Culture have been exceptionally hospitable to me and other delegates who had the good fortune to attend the Symposia on China Studies that they organized with the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences.

The Chinese media have taken unusual (to me) interest in my views on China and are courteous in the extreme, to the extent that I feel it is I who learns more from their interviews than they do. I thank Qu Shang (CCTV), Yingqi Li (*People's Daily*), Huang Yong and Zhang Dailei (Xinhua), in particular.

It is to two outstanding Chinese scholars I owe the greatest debt. Over recent years our discussions have led to close collaboration and friendship.

Zhang Xiaoying both heads the School of International Journalism and Communication at the Beijing Foreign Studies University and finds time to join with me in the study of Max Weber, of which our joint authorship of Chapters Twelve and Thirteen is just one of the important results of her work.

Xiangqun Chang has founded the Global China Institute, the *Journal of China in Comparative Perspective*, the Global China Dialogues and the Global China Press. Evidence of my reliance on and participation in these scholarly enterprises will be found in the pages of this book. Without her persistence and commitment to this book it could not have been published.

I want too to express my appreciation not just to the editors but also the staffs of the journals *Max Weber Studies*, *Journal of China in Comparative Perspective* and *Global Communication*, whose earlier efforts to publish my work in their

journals enable the publication of this book now. To Ingrid Cranfield I owe particular thanks for her meticulous copyediting.

All the following friends from academe and from personal life have from time to time been readers of drafts of a text or texts that this volume includes. They have over the years made me sit up and think, removed many defects in my writing, but bear no responsibility for those that remain: Michael Banton, Colin Bradford, Hugh Canham, Olaf Corry, Anthony Giddens, Stephen Kalberg, Graham Leicester, John Nurser, Geoffrey Pleyers, Hakan Seckinelgin, Sam Whimster and Joy Zhang.

Sue Owen has done all these things, and much more besides, in sharing the joys and sorrows of domestic life. To all of them I give my heartfelt thanks and I look forward to many more equally satisfying exchanges in the years to come.

Martin Albrow
London
13 March 2018