China and the Global South

NEW WORLD ORDERINGS

Lisa Rofel and Carlos Rojas, editors

New World Orderings

BUY

DUKE

UNIVERSITY
PRESS

Lisa Rofel and Carlos Rojas, editors

China and the Global South

NEW WORLD ORDERINGS

DUKE

UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cover art: Gao Rong, *Return*, 2015. Courtesy of the artist and Eli Klein
Gallery © Gao Rong.

CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

DUKE
UNIVERSITY
PRESS

Carlos Rojas and Lisa Rofel

INTRODUCTION

Contact, Communication,
Imagination, and Strategies
of Worldmaking

Every society exists by instituting
the world as its world, or its world
as the world, and by instituting
itself as part of the world.
—CORNELIUS CASTORIADIS,
Imaginary Institution of Society

If we proceed on the assumption
that communication is the
elementary operation whose
reproduction constitutes society,
world society is clearly implied in
every communication, regardless
of the specific topic and spatial
distance between participants. . . .
World society is the occurrence of
world in communication.
—NIKLAS LUHMANN,
Theory of Society

In the twenty-first century, China has dra-
matically expanded its economic and diplo-
matic engagement with the Global South,
including regions in Southeast Asia, Africa,
and Latin America. For instance, although
China has long maintained extensive con-
tacts with its Southeast Asian neighbors,
many of which have large ethnic Chinese
populations, its relationship with the re-
gion took a significant turn in 2000 when
it proposed a free trade region with the ten
nations that compose the Association of
Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). Signed
two years later, the resulting agreement was
implemented in several stages, ultimately
yielding the world's most populous free-trade region. In fact, in the first quar-
ter of 2020, amid the global disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic,
ASEAN temporarily overtook the European Union as China's top trading part-
ner. At the same time, robust investment networks have developed between

China and the various ASEAN nations, and by 2018 China was investing USD 150 billion a year in these countries even as the latter were investing USD 60 billion a year in China.

Although China actively cultivated its relationship with many African nations throughout the latter half of the twentieth century, this relationship entered a new phase in 2000 with the creation of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation, which established a platform for dialogue and cooperation between China and the nations of Africa. One of China's first major Africa-related initiatives following the establishment of the forum was a 2004 low-interest two-billion-dollar loan to Angola, for which Angola was able to use its oil reserves as collateral. The use of commodities or natural resources as collateral for loans came to be known as the Angola model, and China subsequently made similar arrangements with several other African nations. Thanks in part to these investments and the opportunities they created, trade between China and Africa increased substantially. China surpassed the United States as Africa's largest trade partner in 2009, and by 2016 it had established itself as the continent's largest single investor.

President Jiang Zemin's thirteen-day tour of six South American countries in 2000 symbolically marked the beginning of a new stage in China's relationship with Latin America and the Caribbean. China subsequently expanded its socioeconomic and diplomatic ties with many nations in the region, establishing strategic partnerships with Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Mexico, Peru, Uruguay, and Venezuela. As a result, in 2018 China's Ministry of Commerce announced that China had become Latin America's second-largest trade partner, after the United States, and that Latin America was also the second-largest recipient of Chinese overseas investment, after Asia.

In 2013 these multiregional engagements were aggregated into a top-level policy initiative, with President Xi Jinping's official launch of the One Belt One Road initiative, which was subsequently given a new official translation as the Belt and Road Initiative. The initiative focuses on large-scale loan-based infrastructure investment in nearly seventy countries connected to China via a combination of overland and maritime routes (i.e., the overland Silk Road Economic Belt and the Maritime Silk Road). Given that many of these countries are located in the Global South, the Belt and Road Initiative has therefore become the public face of contemporary China's engagement with the region.

Although China's recent Global South initiatives have received considerable attention around the world, there have nevertheless been sharp disagreements over whether these initiatives are inherently exploitative or

benevolent—or, as one commentator pithily put it, over whether China is acting as "monster or messiah" (Sun 2014). The resulting debate, in turn, overlaps with broader discussions of whether the twenty-first century will be viewed as the Chinese century—the same way that the twentieth century is frequently described as the American century and the nineteenth was dubbed the British imperial century—and whether the resulting power shift signals the emergence of a "new world order."

The first prominent usage of a version of the phrase *new world order* was by Woodrow Wilson after World War I, when he predicted the end of large-scale global conflict and a prioritization of collective security within the international community. The phrase was subsequently used to describe the geopolitical realignment that followed World War II, and was also invoked by both Mikhail Gorbachev and George H. W. Bush at the end of the Cold War. In almost every instance, these invocations of a new world order combined an emphasis on reciprocal relationships between sovereign nation-states, on one hand, with an allusion to how this would facilitate the growth of global capitalism, on the other. Many discussions of China's engagement with the Global South engage with different facets of this earlier new world order discourse. For instance, the perception that China is acting benevolently in providing developing nations with much-needed funding (i.e., the "messiah" thesis) views China as following either the liberal new world order model, or its own mid-twentieth-century model centered around cultivating relationships with nations in the Global South in order to promote a network of Non-Aligned third world nations that were nominally outside of the Cold War struggle between capitalist and socialist nations. Alternatively, the perception that China is acting rapaciously in using developing nations to guarantee its own continued access to valuable resources and profitable markets (i.e., the "monster" thesis) may be viewed as a twist on the underlying logic of the earlier new world order discourses, wherein the United States' advocacy of reciprocal relationships between autonomous nation-states was actually intended to maximize its ability to profit from the global economy and wherein America's post–Cold War insistence on neoliberal deregulation of national development projects, thus ending the Bretton Woods agreements, is intended to find new ways to maximize its ability to profit.

Although both the "monster" and the "messiah" theses offer some explanatory value, they are limited by their reliance on a set of dichotomous views of geopolitics based on a twentieth-century Cold War logic and the new world order discourse with which it was inextricably intertwined. Moreover,

both of these lines of analysis prioritize economic and diplomatic considerations over other disciplinary methodologies that might offer different perspectives on the transregional phenomena in question, and on the assumptions about the nature of worlds and processes of worldmaking on which they are grounded. Accordingly, rather than focusing on whether China's current engagement with the Global South represents an extension of the nation's mid-century attempts to provide an alternative to the US-led post–World War II new world order or is an embrace of a post–Cold War neoliberal world order, we instead emphasize the processes of worldmaking that this engagement is helping to bring about.

It is important to note that *Global South* does not refer to a fixed geographic configuration, but rather one that is at once contextually situated and collectively imagined. Similar to its predecessor, *the third world*, the label *Global South* highlights the post–Cold War geopolitical and economic relations of globally contested inequalities, along with the historical and cultural processes that shape these inequalities. The terms *Global North* and *Global South* arose out of the Brandt Commission's (named after its first chair, the former German chancellor Willy Brandt) report, *North-South: A Programme for Survival*. Reviewing international development issues in the midst of neoliberal worlding processes, the commission found that developing countries were economically dependent on rich countries, which dominate the international rules of trade and finance, and further, that the former are located largely in the Southern Hemisphere while the latter can be found in the Northern Hemisphere (Bullard 2012).

Each of the regions corresponding to what we now refer to as the Global South has a much longer history, and we are specifically interested in how the emergence of the term coincides roughly with a new set of worlding processes. China, in a modern and contemporary context, has functioned as a crucial fulcrum between the Global South and the Global North. It has long cultivated a set of strategic alliances with nations considered to be in the Global South, even as more recently its own economic heft and approach to international relations has increasingly come to resemble those of some nations typically viewed as part of the Global North. The concept of the Global South, accordingly, underscores the formative transregional relations of domination and resistance, in contradistinction to the nation-state focus of modernization ideologies. As we argue here, many transregional relations of entanglement in the Global South—social, economic, and cultural—occur at a level below that of formal political relations.

ROJAS AND ROFEL

The philosopher Cornelius Castoriadis theorizes the central role of the creative imagination in constructing worlds and strengthening their capacity for transformation. Castoriadis's approach developed out of his participation in the French Marxist collective Socialisme ou Barbarie and was informed by his later critique of Marxist thought, on one hand, and by his reevaluation of the human capacity for transformation that he found to be occluded in the Western philosophical tradition, on the other. Castoriadis draws from Marxism a critique of the naturalization of given world orders and an emphasis on historical transformations of them, but he critiques Marxism for its insufficient attention to open-ended and indeterminate creativity—or what he terms self-creation. In his view, the philosophical tradition has had a similar tendency to reduce "being" to "determinacy." He argues that the imaginary element, or self-creation, is the basis of the human condition. For Castoriadis, self-creation emerges in the sociohistorical (what he called nomos) and is manifest in social institutions, culture, and meaning. Castoriadis thus emphasizes both the omnipresence of the creative imagination—its ontology—and the heterogeneity of its modes of enactment. He stressed that the creative imagination emerges ex nihilo, meaning it is not determined by external institutions or powers, be they theological ideas of the divine or the naturalization of social power.

If the social imaginary and hence sociohistorical institutions emerge from self-creation, they also produce an intercultural articulation of the world as a shared horizon. Castoriadis thus imagines the world as both a creative endeavor and as a given context to be encountered. Every society, Castoriadis argues, "develops an image of . . . the universe in which it lives, attempting in every instance to make of it a signifying whole." In this signifying whole, "a place has to be made not only for the natural objects and beings important for the life of the collectivity, but also for the collectivity itself, establishing, finally, a certain 'world-order'" (Castoriadis 1987, 149). Given the creative imagination's ability to produce change, this encounter with a world horizon leads to the possibility of transformed worlds.

The sociologist Niklas Luhmann, meanwhile, similarly emphasizes processes of worldmaking in his description of a transition from a premodern "thing-centered concept of the world," in which communities were relatively autonomous from one another and communication became more difficult as the distance between different communities increased, to a modern world oriented around not things but social relationships, and characterized by a "background indeterminacy ('unmarked space') that allows objects to appear

and subjects to act" (Luhmann 2012, 84–85). Luhmann argues that a key factor enabling this transition from a premodern to a modern "world order" was the discovery of the globe "as a closed sphere of meaningful communication" (2012, 85). Just as Benedict Anderson famously contends that the development of print capitalism helped people imagine their position within geographically vast and socially heterogeneous nations (Anderson 2016), Luhmann similarly argues that modern technological developments have effectively linked the globe into a single communicative network, thereby allowing people to imagine their position within a unified "world society." For Luhmann, accordingly, communication is "the elementary operation whose reproduction constitutes society," and by extension "world society is clearly implied in *every* communication, regardless of the specific topic and spatial distance between participants" (Luhmann 2012, 86).

One important implication of Luhmann's emphasis on communication as the grounding of modern world society is that communication generates difference even as it simultaneously provides a shared ground that transcends difference—or, as Luhmann succinctly puts it, "Communication is the difference that makes no difference in the system." This insight applies, in particular, to the various subsystems of which society is composed: "For all subsystems of society, boundaries of communication (as opposed to noncommunication) constitute the external boundaries of society. In this, and only in this, do these systems coincide. . . . [Insofar] as they communicate, all subsystems participate in society. Insofar as they communicate in different ways, they differ" (Luhmann 2012, 86). Communication, here, is being used not in the sense of a Habermasian idealized plane of mutual intelligibility (Habermas 1984, 1985), but rather what might be viewed as a more Derridean sense, in which communication is grounded in the necessary possibility of miscommunication (Derrida 1978). At the same time, however, it is precisely the resulting transcommunicative space—which includes not only conventional communication but also the inevitable possibility of miscommunication—that yields a vision of a collective imaginary that is ultimately more consonant with a Habermasian vision of communicative action and collective worldmaking than with a conventional Luhmannian understanding of systems theory.

The worldmaking processes underlying contemporary China's engagement with the Global South may be viewed within the context of three overlapping historical horizons. First, despite the popular perception of premodern China as having been insular and isolated from the rest of the world, the reality is that China has a long tradition of actively engaging with other regions,

including regions in what is now called the Global South. This longer history of transregional and transnational contacts, in turn, encouraged the processes of imaginative self-creation that Castoriadis describes. Second, contemporary China's engagement with the Global South may also be viewed within the more specific context of the nation's twentieth-century efforts to cultivate relationships with other developing nations in the name of socialist internationalism. Not only was socialist internationalism a politically novel concept in its own right but it also emerged at a moment when, as Luhmann argues, people's ability to imagine the world itself as a single, unified entity was undergoing a qualitative change. Third, the developments that have unfolded since the beginning of the twenty-first century appear to constitute a new phase in China's engagement with the Global South, which may in turn mark the emergence of a new global configuration, and a corresponding logic of global engagement, that diverges from the twentieth century's Cold War and post–Cold War new world order models.

Even as contemporary China's engagements with the Global South play out against visions of a world society and world order that have their roots in earlier periods, these engagements are simultaneously enabling a myriad of new processes of imaginative worldmaking. These worldmaking processes are inspired by—and intervene with—existing realities, while relying on a variety of ways of understanding and imagining sociocultural relations that underlie and are imbricated in shifting geopolitical orders and the attendant transnational circulations of people, commodities, and cultures. The contemporary engagements between China and the Global South, in other words, reflect a dialectic of unified and heterogeneous visions of the world, insofar as they implicitly rely on a notion of a singular world while enabling a multitude of disparate, and potentially divergent, processes of imaginative worldmaking. In political terms, meanwhile, this dialectic of unified and heterogeneous worlds is reflected in the concept of a new world order, which is explicitly predicated on a vision of a singular world even as the actual processes of worldmaking that unfold in its shadow are similarly multiple and heterogeneous.

Rather than ask whether China's actions are inherently benevolent or exploitative, we instead borrow Laura Doyle's (2014) concept of interimperiality to emphasize the ongoing, multidirectional maneuvers and struggles among competing hegemonic processes. Doyle underscores how people often inhabit spaces where different worlds become mutually entangled, and how people living in these interstices engage and produce the hybridities of interimperial

Introduction

worlds. More generally, we are interested in the processual nature of China's relationship with the Global South, whereby China relies on a wide array of processes to consolidate and extend its influence. As Antonio Gramsci has observed, power needs to be constantly reasserted through hegemonies of rule that pull people into believing what power asserts about itself (Gramsci 1972).

Beyond this emphasis on how communication and imaginative capacities generate a dialectic of commonality and difference, we also attend to how existing processes of worldmaking may foreclose the emergence of alternative worldmaking processes. For instance, Mei Zhan, in her study of the worlding of traditional Chinese medicine (TCM), theorizes the distinction between a process of worlding or worldmaking, with its ruptures and displacements, and of globalism, with its assumption of totality. Zhan illustrates how TCM has been transformed into Western medicine's Other, thereby marginalizing other interpretations of Chinese medicine that avoid such a binary (Zhan 2009). Similarly, we consider how contemporary China's engagement with the Global South not only has the potential to make some novel worlds thinkable but may also simultaneously render other worlding processes nearly impossible to imagine. We place as much emphasis on worldmaking from below as from the state, focusing on what Mary Pratt has called "contact zones"—which is to say, sites of sociocultural transformation where agents negotiate engagements across difference (Pratt 1992).

Worldmaking, in short, is a dynamic process, and the convergence of and ongoing negotiation over various life projects shapes the possible outcomes of worldmaking processes. Our approach does not discount geopolitical considerations, but rather emphasizes the centrality of history, culture, and imaginative processes. Even as powers that expand globally and build new worlds seek wealth and power, these economic and political desires are intricately intertwined with imaginative visions. Expansionist economic and political practices, such as transnational capitalism, are thus contingent—and frequently unstable—assemblages of heterogeneous visions of accumulation, inequality, and personhood that are continually being reformulated (Rofel and Yanagisako 2019).

World Histories

Worldmaking processes in relation to what we now refer to as the Global South long predate the use of the term itself and the geopolitical configurations that it references. Our focus in this volume involves how the emergence

of the designation of *Global South* and its lived, imaginative experiences coincide roughly with a new set of transregional political and economic configurations in which China has become an increasingly visible presence. A brief overview of these earlier prehistories will help contextualize the contemporary phenomena we examine here.

The multifarious processes of worldmaking that are enabled by China's contemporary engagement with the Global South build on a long tradition of early processes of worldmaking and corresponding concepts of worlds. In early China, for instance, the closest equivalent to the modern concept of *world* (*shijie* in modern Chinese) was *tianxia*, which literally means "all under heaven." Tianxia foregrounds some of the paradoxes that are embedded within the contemporary concept of the world. Just as the modern concept of world is nominally global in its coverage but in fact is delimited by a narrower set of assumptions that have shaped its development, tianxia is similarly both a paradigmatic figure of universality while at the same time underscoring its own limits. Embedded within a cosmological framework that came to be identified with Confucianism, tianxia theoretically encompassed "*all* under heaven," though in practice it only included those populations who accepted an understanding of the sociopolitical world that was grounded in sociopolitical values associated with China (or, in Chinese, with Zhongguo, which could be translated literally as "Central Kingdom") (Wang, Ban 2017). Unlike the modern system of nation-states, however, this traditional concept of tianxia did not imply a geographically bounded entity. Instead, it was conceived as an outwardly radiating sphere of influence, into which outsiders could become incorporated so long as they embraced Chinese civilizational assumptions and values.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, this tianxia paradigm was largely replaced by that of the modern nation-state system, as China's imperial project was overshadowed by Europe's own. While China had long been connected to Europe through trade, in the nineteenth century it was aggressively pulled into a network of Western political ideologies and corresponding political realities, as well as an industrial commodity chain producing mainly textile goods for the European metropoles. European colonialism also resulted in the establishment of foreign communities within China that included British, French, Germans, Americans, Russians, Jews, and non-Chinese Asians. These developments decentered China's own imperial realms and introduced Western-inflected ideas about sovereignty, nationalism, development, progress, and political governance, as well as anti-imperialism, anarchism, and socialism.

Following its mid-twentieth-century socialist revolution, China joined the world of international socialism. In particular, under Mao Zedong China strategically shifted its focus from contacts with what was known as the first world, and instead sought to develop its influence with nations located in the second and third worlds—including not only the Soviet Union and other socialist states, but also an array of developing nations, many of which had until recently been under Western imperial control. Most notably, China played a major role in a landmark 1955 conference held in Bandung, Indonesia, which included representatives from twenty-nine Asian and African countries that collectively accounted for more than half of the world's population. The Bandung Conference played a pivotal role in encouraging alliances between nations in Africa and Asia, just as international socialism sought to transcend national boundaries with a shared political vision.

Mao's death in 1976 marked the official end of the Cultural Revolution (1966–76), and of the Mao era. In 1978 Mao's successor Deng Xiaoping launched the Reform and Opening Up campaign, which sought to stimulate the nation's economic development by transitioning from a socialist planned economy to a hybrid system that was dubbed "socialism with Chinese characteristics." The resulting postsocialist period can be divided into two phases. In the first, beginning in the late 1970s, China focused on attracting foreign direct investment and helped make the nation the proverbial workshop of the world, while during the second phase, beginning in the late 1990s, the nation shifted its attention to securing natural resources necessary for continued economic development. Both phases resulted from China's attempts to reassess its relationship to a socialist project following Mao's death and the subsequent collapse of the Eastern Bloc in 1989 and the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991. China's response to these developments was to adopt a hybrid capitalist-socialist economic structure and aggressively pursue economic development, thereby requiring that it enter the global capitalist economy.

Loosely paralleling (but also partially inverting) the Chinese concept of tianxia is the Western concept of empire. In what we might call the era of empires, empires were built on the logic of an expansionist, hierarchical, and incorporative structure that enables a metropole to exercise power over the periphery—a periphery of largely contiguous territories. Empires use presumptions of civilizational superiority to justify their rule, while simultaneously positing unequal distinctions among their imperial subjects to justify differential governing strategies. Empires are established through military conquest, but they are maintained through a broad range of differ-

ent mechanisms—including economic, bureaucratic, ideological, and socio-cultural processes. Empires tended to share an imagined vision of political rule as a pyramid, with imperial power residing in the apex, radiating down the hierarchy and outward across the territories they worked to incorporate. Imperial borders tended to be indeterminate, such that world "regions" as we have come to know them were not precisely delineated until the last centuries of empire building, when European powers vied for control with one another in an attempt to consolidate disparate geographic regions into a singular world.

Starting roughly in the eighteenth century, colonial strategies of expansion and rule were enhanced by new technologies that enabled domination of more distant lands, located largely in what we now call the Global South, and informed by emerging racial ideologies invoked to manage the production of unequal difference. Racialized distinctions were brought to bear in distinguishing between the metropole and the colonies, as well as to reconfigure local social relations, often hardening differences among peoples living in the same location.

Growing resistance to imperial rule within empires, along with conflict among empires, eventually led to the new political imagination of nationalism. Nationalism is built on the idea of sovereignty and self-rule over a clearly delineated territory. Within each bounded space, nationalism dreams of equality, along with a shared common culture among its population (Anderson 2016). At the same time, nation-states exclude those who are deemed not to fit into their "national culture." Nation-states have incorporated the racialized hierarchies of the previous era, and while there is formal international recognition that all nation-states are equal, earlier colonial powers never ceded their economic dominance over their former colonies. These powers insisted that acceptance of the political sovereignty of these new states be predicated on maintaining their hold on economic power, thus laying the basis for today's transregional inequalities, what now we call neocolonialism or dependency theory and what Ann Stoler calls "imperial debris" (Stoler 2008). At the same time, new imperial powers, especially the United States, grappled with the contradictions of being a sovereign nation-state ruling indirectly over regions of the world that claim political sovereignty of their own.

These ongoing transnational relations of inequality informed the world-making processes of the Cold War, in which countries were roughly grouped into first, second, and third worlds. The first world designated the capitalist

nations under the orbit of the United States, the second world referred to the Soviet Union and its socialist allies, while the third world encompassed postcolonial nations that were not aligned with either camp. These divisions by no means implied equality within each "world," but rather suggested different imaginations about how worlds should be formed.

A recent point of intersection of these two historical worlding processes (namely, ones grounded on concepts of tianxia and empire, respectively) can be observed in the moment when Xi Jinping—in his first official trip out of Beijing as the newly appointed leader of the Communist Party—visited the southern Chinese city of Shenzhen in December 2012, clearly inviting comparisons with the celebrated Southern Tour (nanxun) that his predecessor Deng Xiaoping had made almost exactly twenty years earlier. In January and February 1992, in the last major act of his own political career, Deng had traveled to the southern Chinese cities of Shanghai, Zhuhai, Shenzhen, and Guangzhou in an attempt to shore up support for the economic reforms he promoted in his Reform and Opening Up campaign. Deng's 1992 Southern Tour, in turn, mirrored yet another trip that Deng himself had undertaken fourteen years earlier, at the very beginning of his term as China's highest leader. At that time, in November 1978, Deng had traveled to Bangkok, Kuala Lumpur, and Singapore to strengthen China's ties with these Southeast Asian cities. A month after returning to Beijing, Deng was anointed China's paramount leader, and proceeded to launch the Reform and Opening Up campaign that would define China's economic and political trajectory in the post-Mao period.

On the surface, Xi Jinping's 2012 and Deng Xiaoping's 1992 trips might appear to be quite different from Deng's 1978 trip. After all, the 1992 and 2012 trips were to southern China, while Deng's was to Southeast Asia. Moreover, the 1992 and 2012 trips were to some of contemporary China's most prosperous and rapidly developing metropolises, while two of the three cities Deng visited in 1978 were located in so-called third world nations. At the same time, however, the symbolic parallels between these three trips (each of which occurred at a pivotal moment in the leader's political career) point to underlying parallels among the southern regions themselves. In particular, the extraordinary wealth and prosperity of the southern Chinese cities in question derive in large part from their ability to capitalize on China's rich network of international contacts—including its contacts with Southeast Asia. Conversely, it is no coincidence that the three nations Deng Xiaoping visited in 1978 all had large ethnically Chinese communities that played an

important role in the nations' economies. Collectively, Deng's and Xi's visits to southern China and Southeast Asia reflect the historical significance of economic and cultural contacts between southern China and Southeast Asia, together with the two leaders' expectations that China's future development would be predicated on a continued pattern of international exchange with this broader region.

Since the mid-1980s, China's government has shifted to a socioeconomic structure featuring a market economy, systematic privatization, and the end of social welfare—all of which have contributed to the emergence of a new bourgeois consumer culture and have substantially increased the nation's social inequality. With these initiatives, China has abandoned the objective of world revolution, and instead has begun promoting a stable international environment that would facilitate its own economic development (Z. Chen 2008; Hao, Wei, and Dittmer 2009). China joined the World Trade Organization in December 2001, and by the following year it had surpassed the United States as the most favored destination for foreign direct investment. Hong Kong and Taiwan are currently the nation's largest investors, with Japan and the United States not far behind. China, in turn, has invested heavily in Latin America, Africa, the Middle East, and Asia, while at the same time becoming the largest single holder of US government debt. It has been active in BRICS (a group consisting of the world's five major emerging national economies), has contributed to the development of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), and in 2013 it launched the ambitious Belt and Road Initiative to strengthen commercial and economic ties with other Eurasian nations. In the process, China is not only reinventing itself but is also reshaping the world.

These long durée worldmaking histories continue to motivate China's current projects of going out into the world, even as they are revised to distance the nation from previous European, American, and Soviet colonial projects. Historical legacies of civilizational centrality, colonial subordination, nationalist resistance, and socialist internationalism and nonaligned movements continue to shape practices, memories, and narratives. As a result, China and its interlocutors in the Global South continuously invoke, assess, debate, and revise the import of these histories, such that these historical legacies and their revisionist interpretations help shape China's transnational capitalist activities and its ideological portrayal of them.

Contemporary China's engagement with the Global South, accordingly, builds on these earlier traditions of transregional engagement, together

with their corresponding concepts of the world and attendant processes of worldmaking. But this raises the question of whether China is displacing the United States as the linchpin of the global economy, or is it simply adapting an existing world order for its own purposes? This question, of course, rehearses the "monster or messiah" debate, which itself is really simply a dispute over whether China is trying to position itself as an exploitative capitalist superpower (on the model of twentieth-century America) or as a benevolent ally of developing, non-allied nations (on the model of mid-twentieth-century China). We suggest that both of these dichotomous visions are overly reductive, and that in order to appreciate the implications of contemporary China's engagement with the Global South, it is not sufficient to ask whether these contemporary engagements are a direct extension of the twentieth-century new world order model (and its discontents) or mark the emergence of a *new* "new world order." Instead, it is important to view these engagements as part of a multiple, heterogeneous, and ongoing process of "new world orderings."

Organization

In the 1980s two influential slogans used to describe contemporary China's attempts to reposition itself on the world stage alluded to the nation's attempts to zouxiang shijie and to yu shijie tonggui. The first phrase means "to enter the world," but could be translated more literally as "to walk or march into the world," while the second means "to match up with the world," but could be translated more literally as "to match the gauge of the world's tracks." While the first slogan offers an inverse version of the paradox inherent in the Chinese concept of tianxia discussed earlier, in that it relies on a concept of shijie that designates both a universal ideal and a delimited sociopolitical space from which China had been structurally excluded, the second instead gestures more specifically to the role of state-driven initiatives in facilitating these same processes of worldbuilding and political realignment.

In particular, the latter reference is to a famous description in Sima Qian's first-century BCE historiographic work *Records of the Historian* (Shiji), of how the First Emperor of the Qin dynasty, after uniting the various Warring States into a single imperial polity in 221 BCE, proceeded to standardize the newly unified empire's units of measurement, its writing system, and even the width of its cart and carriage axles—so that the ruts in the road produced by the cartwheels would be of uniform width (che tonggui). Although

Sima Qian's description of the First Emperor's accomplishments more than a century earlier should be taken with a grain of salt, it is nevertheless worth noting that he suggests the emperor believed such seemingly minor details as carriage axles and wheel ruts could contribute to the consolidation of a new "world" (tianxia).

These concerns with the relationship between broad understandings of the world and the details involved in attendant processes of governance and representation are the focus of Part I of this volume, which examines some of the ways the Chinese state has sought to reconfigure the nation's position in the world in the contemporary period, as well as the narratives and discourses that underlie these geopolitical relations. In the first two chapters, Nicolai Volland and Luciano Bolinaga analyze modern and contemporary China's relationship with Africa and Latin America, with Volland focusing on China's cultural diplomacy with the Africa region during the post-Bandung period, and particularly during the period following the Sino-Soviet split in the late 1950s, and Bolinaga examining the transition, in Latin America, from the so-called Washington Consensus of the 1980s, to the new Beijing Consensus in the twenty-first century. Although both of these chapters focus primarily on state-level diplomatic and economic initiatives, their primary interest is not so much on the strictly political or financial implications of these initiatives, but rather the gaps and disjunctions between the perspectives promoted by these policies, on one hand, and the ways in which these policies actually play out in reality, on the other.

Next, Derek Sheridan argues that the question of whether or not China's actions are imperialistic necessarily relies on a set of state-centric historical analogies, and suggests that we can derive a more nuanced understanding of the implications of contemporary Chinese capital and migration (including but not encompassed by state agendas) if we consider a set of historical precedents that extend beyond European imperialism. Finally, Ng Kim Chew suggests that the literary scholar Pascale Casanova's model of world literature as a "world republic of letters" can be strategically redeployed to help explain the distinctiveness of Southeast Asian Sinophone literature, or what he calls a "World Republic of Southern Letters."

One result of contemporary China's investment in the Global South is a rapidly growing circulation of people and commodities between the regions in question. Many of these individuals are laborers and merchants, and the complex relationships they establish in their adopted communities (either in China or in countries throughout the Global South) constitute an important,

and often overlooked, dimension of the larger investment and trade initiatives of which they are a critical component. Part II, accordingly, explores how individuals positioned at different points of contact between the Chinese economy and those of various nations in Africa and Latin America understand their relationship to these local and global economies.

The first two chapters in Part II consider issues relating to communities of West Africans living and working in Guangzhou. First, T. Tu Huynh looks at a community of Africans engaged in small-scale trading in Guangzhou. Arguing that this small-scale trading can be viewed as a form of "globalization from below," Huynh examines the gendered connotations of this practice in Nigeria and other African countries, and how those connotations are transformed in immigrant communities in southern China, where African men are much more highly represented among the small-scale traders. Huynh's primary focus, however, is on the women, and specifically on how they imagine themselves as global entrepreneurs within the context of constantly shifting markets. Next, Nellie Chu turns to a community of West African and South Korean church leaders attempting to establish Christian communities in Guangzhou, focusing on a set of intertwined evangelical and entrepreneurial discourses and activities. In particular, Chu combines ethnographic observation with an analysis of actual sermons to reflect on how these religious figures promote a prosperity gospel that has the effect of helping mask growing socioeconomic uncertainties and inequalities.

The following two chapters focus on China's relationship not with Africa, but rather with Latin America. First, Rachel Cypher and Lisa Rofel examine China's recent investments in Argentina's soybean economy, focusing on the ways in which a set of local narratives about China and the Chinese are generated and circulate. Next, Andrea Bachner considers several literary and cinematic works that address the Chinese presence in Argentina, focusing on how these cultural representations strategically place under erasure the increasingly precarious economic position Argentina and other Latin American nations find themselves in vis-à-vis China.

In his books *Routes* (1997) and *Returns* (2013), the anthropologist James Clifford famously puns on the English terms *routes* and *roots* to reflect on the relationship between migrational trajectories (routes) and the sites of belonging (roots) with which they are intricately intertwined. In particular, Clifford emphasizes the degree to which migration not merely functions as a movement away from a space of the home and homeland but also has the potential to permit migrants to establish new sites of belonging within

the very routes they traverse and the foreign regions where they end up. It is precisely this sort of dialectics of displacement and belonging that is the focus of Part III, which examines patterns of migration between China and the Global South, with particular attention to corresponding issues of gender, religion, and culture.

First, Mingwei Huang considers Chinese in Johannesburg, the home of the oldest and largest overseas Chinese community in Africa. To be more precise, Huang examines the relationship between two different Johannesburg Chinatowns—an older one, the history of which is closely tied with the earlier wave of Chinese immigrant labor that helped make Johannesburg's current prosperity possible in the first place, and a much newer one that was established in 2013 in a different part of the city. Huang reflects on how a newer wave of Chinese immigrants to the city actively engage in a process of worldmaking grounded in a set of intertwined beliefs about race and development—a process that Huang also calls globalization from below. In the next chapter Yulin Lee turns from Africa to Southeast Asia, and specifically representations of Chinese migrants in Myanmar in the cinema of the Myanmar-born director Midi Z. Although Midi Z subsequently immigrated to Taiwan and developed a cinematic technique strongly influenced by Taiwan New Cinema, the focus of his films nevertheless is primarily on ethnically Chinese communities from his homeland of Myanmar, many of whom enter into transnational migratory circuits through other regions of Southeast Asia. A theme that runs through Lee's analysis involves a tension, on the part of these displaced migrant laborers, between a desire to return to Myanmar, on one hand, and a nostalgic yearning for a more abstract Chinese homeland, on the other.

The final two chapters examine how literature and literary representations can be used to affirm local identities and to reinforce connections between different communities. First, Carlos Rojas uses a close reading of a short story by the ethnically Malaysian Chinese author and scholar Ng Kim Chew to reflect on a set of intertwined discourses of homeland and diaspora as they pertain to Chinese communities in Southeast Asia while also considering the symbolic and affective significance of the circulation of Chinese-language texts (and of Chinese characters themselves) within a Southeast Asian diasporic space. Finally, Shuang Shen then looks at several case studies from the Cold War period to help illustrate some of the processes that led to the development of Ng's Republic of Southern Chinese Letters. More specifically, Shen considers the writings of Zeng Shengti, who was born in

Guangdong, China, but subsequently immigrated to Singapore in the 1920s, and Wei Beihua, an ethnically Chinese author from Malaya (now Malaysia). Both Zeng and Wei visited Tagore in India, and subsequently wrote extensively about literary, cultural, and political relations between India, China, Singapore, Malaysia, and other regions in Southeast Asia.

In sum, in this volume we attempt to disrupt facile assumptions about China's rising global influence. Instead, our emphasis on multiple histories, cultural representations, and ethnographic narratives of complex negotiations underscores a process by which worlds are continually being made and remade. At the same time, however, we are equally committed to marking the inequalities and disparities that China's engagement with the Global South may produce, and with which peoples throughout the Global South will be forced to engage.

Notes

Epigraphs: Cornelius Castoriadis, *Imaginary Institution of Society*, 186; Niklas Luhmann, *Theory of Society*, 1:86–87.

ROJAS AND ROFEL