China Goes Global
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The Partial Power

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As a scholar and public intellectual, I like to try to understand, research, write about, and explain Big Subjects related to China to multiple audiences around the world. The subject of this book certainly fits these criteria: how China’s emergence as a global power is affecting the world. I decided to investigate this subject because I thought, as a specialist on both China and international relations, I might be able to shed some light on the nexus of these two phenomena—China and the world—and thereby could contribute to global public understanding of one of the key issues of our era.

There was a second reason I took on this project: because I am deeply concerned by the academic profession’s tendency to “know more and more about less and less” and its increasing inability to generalize about China’s development (in all aspects). That is, for the past three decades, the academic China community has produced studies of progressively more micro-level phenomena. Although this has perhaps allowed us to know more about the “trees,” it has not necessarily led to a better understanding of the “forest.” The excessive disaggregation has not led to better aggregate understanding of China writ large. The rise of China is the big story of our era, and it is incumbent upon scholars to be able to explain China to nonspecialist audiences worldwide. I further feel that scholars’ increasing obsession with social science theories and methodologies have been further impediments to understanding—more often blurring than clarifying the object of study. Unfortunately, testing of theories and application of methodologies has become an end, rather than a means, to furthering knowledge and understanding. As a result, the academy (universities) in the China field is becoming more and more divorced from its mission: to illuminate and educate. More and better knowledge of China now seems to reside in the professions of business, banking, consulting, law, diplomacy, intelligence, journalism, think tanks, and NGOs than in the scholarly com-
Chinese scholars are no longer the “go to” repository of knowledge on China that they once were. This may be natural, but it is regrettable.

Thus, in part, this study grows out of my frustration with the academic China field. It also grows out of the pressing need to understand China’s global emergence in its totality. As Napoleon prophetically predicted, China’s awakening is now shaking the world. But how? In what ways? Do we really understand the various dimensions, complexities, and implications of China’s “going global”? A skeptic may challenge this conventional wisdom and ask, Is China really shaking the world? Has it really become a global power? How, exactly? Or is China’s assumed international influence hollow hype?

This study wrestles with these Big Questions, and it provides a straightforward answer captured in the subtitle: China is The Partial Power. It is not as important, and it is certainly not as influential, as many believe. The following eight chapters elaborate this theme and offer a wide range of data in as intelligible a fashion for readers as possible.

China Goes Global has been five years in preparation. I began work on it in 2007, just after completing my previous book China’s Communist Party: Atrophy & Adaptation. Having delved into China’s internal political scene in that volume, I decided to devote this volume to assessing China’s external behavior. Even though I have been interested in Chinese foreign policy throughout my career, and have published a fair amount on diverse aspects of the subject, it seemed to me that China’s emergence on the global stage today consisted of far more than diplomacy. Thus, what I felt was needed was a study that examined various aspects of the totality of China’s emergence and impact on the world. This is not a book so much about China’s rise as its spread. At first I contemplated organizing the study geographically, examining China’s multifarious interactions with different countries and regions—but, on further reflection, I decided a better (albeit more difficult) way to approach the subject was functionally. That is, through individual chapters that examined a number of dimensions of China’s global “footprints”: Chinese perceptions of their global roles, Chinese diplomacy, China’s role in global governance, China’s global economic presence, China’s global cultural impact, and China’s global security presence. This approach allows readers to view China’s impact in a truly global—rather than regional—perspective.

Any study of this magnitude requires many things. First, on the part of the author, it requires tenacity and patience. There were many days and many points when I lamented the complexities of several chapters and thought it would never end. There was also a constant tension between going into depth, but not too much depth. I had to constantly remind myself to follow my own
admonition above to write “accessibly” and to try and illuminate the “Big Picture” for general readers. Second, it requires the patience, understanding, and support of family members. My wife of thirty years, Ingrid Larsen, and our two wonderful sons, Christopher and Alexander, offered steadfast support and patience throughout the protracted five-year process, and I therefore wish to gratefully dedicate the book to them. Special mention should also be made of our golden retriever, Ollie, who lay at my feet and stayed by my side—providing adoring canine company in what is an inevitably lonely writing process.

Third, writers need conducive writing spaces. I am most fortunate to have had that at our home in Arlington, Virginia—but also our apartment in Beijing, and at our family cabins near Old Mission, Michigan. The latter has been a godsend where I have retreated and written for more than thirty years while gazing out over Grand Traverse Bay. Fourth, like all professors, I had to juggle writing with the demands of undergraduate and graduate teaching, doctoral student supervision, program administration, university service, much public lecturing, conference participation, consulting, a lot of national and international travel, and writing articles and editing books unrelated to this one—all while doing my best to be a husband and parent. I even survived one computer crash in which, for a while, I thought I had lost the entire manuscript!

This study has also benefited from important financial and institutional support. Financially, I was the fortunate recipient of a number of travel grants from the Sigur Center for Asian Studies in the Elliott School of International Affairs at George Washington University (my institutional home). The China Policy Program in the Elliott School also provided supplementary funding for this fieldwork, and I am particularly grateful to Elliott School International Council Advisory Board member and GWU alumnus Christopher J. Fussner for his longstanding financial support of the program. These grants helped to facilitate fieldwork throughout Asia, Europe, Latin America, Oceania, Russia and Central Asia. Without them, I would not have been able to gain a first-hand sense of China’s activities, and how it is being perceived, in these countries and regions. Unfortunately, I was unable to travel to Africa or the Middle East for research but was fortunate to visit every other continent in the world for interviews and data collection. During a sabbatical year (2009–10) I was awarded a fellowship from the Fulbright Commission of the U.S. Department of State as a Senior Fulbright Research Scholar. Through arrangements of the Beijing office of the Council on International Educational Exchange (CIEE) and the U.S. Embassy, I spent the year based in Beijing as a senior visiting scholar (高级访问学者) at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences’ Institute of World Economics and Politics. Though I had to arrange much on my own, I am very grateful to CASS and the institute for its hospitality during that year. I traveled extensively throughout China during the year, lecturing at
many universities and research institutes. They were under no obligation to do so, but I am also extremely grateful for arrangements made to facilitate my research by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the International Department of the Central Committee, the State Council Information Office, the Foreign Affairs Office of the Ministry of Defense, the Central Party School, the China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations, the China Institute of International Studies, the Shanghai Institutes of International Studies, the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences, and China Foreign Affairs University. What CASS did not help facilitate, these other organizations did. As a result, as the text and footnotes of the book reveal, I was able to interview more than a hundred individuals (mainly in Beijing). In this book I have decided to break with the convention of not naming names of Chinese interviewees. For many years foreign scholars protected their sources from possible political persecution by granting them anonymity in interviews; I believe that those days are past, and Chinese intellectuals and officials (like those abroad) must be responsible for what they say (they are definitely responsible for what the commit to print). Thus, unless they specifically asked to speak off the record (which I honor) I have quoted my interview subjects by name. Conducting research in China still presents formidable obstacles, so I am most grateful to these institutions for facilitating it. Finally, I also benefited a great deal from interactions with various foreign embassies in Beijing (too numerous to list) and wish to acknowledge their willingness to meet with me and respond to my questions. I believe that foreign embassies and consulates in China are an important potential source for scholars on both Chinese domestic and foreign affairs.

In other parts of the world, I would particularly like to acknowledge the hospitality and research facilitation offered by the Instituto Brasileiro de Estudos da China e Asia e Pacifico (IBECAP) in Brazil; the College of Asia and the Pacific and Department of International Relations at the Australian National University; the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies at Nanyang Technological University in Singapore; the East Asia Institute and the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies of the National University of Singapore; the Contemporary China Research Center at Victoria University in New Zealand; the Institute of the Far East of the Russian Academy of Sciences; the Center for Area Studies at Keio University in Japan; the Institute of Chinese Studies of the Jawaharlal Nehru University in India; the Chile-Pacific Foundation; the Asia Research Center of the Copenhagen Business School in Denmark; the Contemporary China Studies Department of the University of Salvador in Argentina; the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Germany; the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Sweden; the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Brazil; the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Chile; the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade in Australia; the China Unit of the European Commission;
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Finally, I bear full responsibility for the contents of this book. There are, no doubt, errors of fact and issues of interpretation with which others will disagree. It would be unusual for a study of this size and complexity not to contain some, and thus I bear full responsibility for any remaining errors.

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