

Researching Global China – Innovations and Challenges!

25th & 26th February 2025

The Open University, Milton Keynes, UK

CALL FOR PAPERS

The Context and challenge

The internationalisation of Chinese firms, institutions, and people have a long and deep history, but has risen to prominence as China's global role has intensified over the past two decades. Starting with piecemeal studies of the activities of *certain* Chinese actors in *particular* parts of the world, **the research agenda has shifted to 'Global China'** (Lee 2017, 2022ⁱ) involving 'understanding of China beyond the Chinese borders' (Lee 2022: 313). This is a broad agenda whereby 'The recent two-decade-long march of "global China" – manifested as outward flows of investment, loans, infrastructure, migrants, media, cultural programmes and international and civil society engagement – has left sweeping but variegated footprints in many parts of the world' (Lee 2022: 313). The Global China framing situates the growing role of China within a dynamic, interconnected and variegated capitalist economy. It also unpicks the geoeconomics of these processes, in that China's economic statecraft blurs the line between commercial and geopolitical imperatives. But it also reveals the multiple forms of capital and range of actors involved, many of which operate outside the ambit of the Chinese state. Given this multiplicity and variegation, a Global China approach is necessarily relational in looking at both the contexts from which Chinese actors internationalise but also the political, economic and cultural contexts in which these actors are re-embedded outside China. These relations are multi-scalar and Chinese actors interact with local/regional/national actors and institutions in the host country as well as with diaspora(s) based there. Finally, understanding the power relations between actors and institutions is central to understanding Global China and counters one-sided accounts which assume Chinese actors are omnipotent.

Since the first wave of empirical studies of China's internationalisation where much focused on interactions with African countries, there has been a wealth of studies across different continents utilising a broad range of methodologies. **Yet there have been few reflections on the methodological challenges and opportunities of researching Global China.** Heimer & Thøgersen (2006ⁱⁱ) provided an introduction to conducting fieldwork in China, but the relationality of Global China requires more multi-sited and interdisciplinary approaches. Mawdsley et al.'s (2019ⁱⁱⁱ) collection was a path-breaking foray into these methodological challenges but was focused on the more general phenomenon of South-South cooperation, even though China does feature heavily in the book. Studying Global China also produces methodological innovation involving research strategies that overcome the complexities of conducting fieldwork in diverse environments. The proposed Symposium will address both these innovations and challenges.

We welcome submissions in one or more of the following areas:

1) Methodological approaches

Researching the relationality of Global China can require multi-sited approaches that may be comparative. Single case studies deepen our understanding of embedded process but have been (mis)used by some media through a form of extrapolation which treats them as emblematic of *all* of China's internationalisation. A related problem is Chinese exceptionalism which treats Chinese actors and their methods as uniquely 'Chinese' and so lying outside the purview of established analytical categories, often linked to pejorative takes on the negativity of these activities. Researching Global China should urge us to undertake comparative research, across disciplines, in multiple locations, and using a mix of methods. Possible topics include:

- Extended case study approaches
- Multi-sited methodologies
- Comparativism

- Interdisciplinary approaches
- Quantitative, qualitative and mixed methods

2) Data collection

Operationalising such methodologies requires creativity involving sensitivity to people, places and time. Accessing respondents is rarely easy but obtaining Chinese perspectives on Chinese globalisation has become more difficult over the past decade. So too has achieving access to secondary data produced in China which means that analysis is increasingly, and potentially problematically, based on evidence from outside China. But innovative methods including network analysis, process tracing, and discourse analysis can all shed light on the architecture and outcomes of China's global activities. Possible topics include:

- Accessing actors and institutions
- Secondary data sources
- Social network analysis
- Process tracing
- Discourse analysis

3) Ethical issues

The study of Global China does not occur in an historical and political vacuum, and all social analysis is shaped by imperialism, patriarchy, class, and other divisive processes. The categories we deploy to position Global China are not fit for purpose as China is not obviously of the global North or global South. Histories of Chinese internationalisation are layered on one another so as scholars we need to appreciate these longer temporalities and the possible tensions they generate as 'new' Chinese actors seek footholds outside China. Inter-cultural relations with research subjects and/or within the teams that research them can be productive but can also generate tensions. Possible topics include:

- Intersectionality
- Postcoloniality
- Positionality
- Cross-cultural data collection
- Researching on and with Diasporas

How to Apply?

Original papers should contribute to the understanding of methodology development (broadly defined) and should take inspiration from, but are not limited to, the highlighted themes above.

Submission Guidelines: 300 to 500-word abstracts should clearly outline the paper's arguments and contribution to the Symposium's objectives.

Please also include a brief bio (100 words maximum).

Submission Link: <https://forms.office.com/e/jX71egSVG2>

Selected papers will be considered for publication in a special issue.

Limited funding will be available to support some participants.

Abstract Submission Deadline: Friday 08th November 2024

Panel Selection: Thursday 14th November 2024

Synopsis Deadline: 16th December 2024

We look forward to your proposals and to a stimulating, interdisciplinary exchange of ideas.

For any questions, please contact REDEFINE@OPEN.AC.UK

ⁱ Lee, C.K. (2022) Global China at 20: Why, How and So What? *The China Quarterly* 250: 313–331; Lee, C.K. (2017) *The Specter of Global China: Politics, Labor and Foreign Investment in Africa*, University of Chicago Press: Chicago.

ⁱⁱ Heimer, M. and Thøgersen, S. (2006) *Doing Fieldwork in China*, NIAS Press: Copenhagen

ⁱⁱⁱ Mawdsley, E., Fourie, E. and Nauta, W. (eds) (2019) *Researching South-South Development Cooperation: critical reflections on the politics of knowledge production*, Abingdon: Routledge