

Preface: China, Eurasia and global order

This book provides a critical overview of China's engagement with Eurasia, focusing on major issues that are emerging in the 21st century – issues that will need careful management over the next two decades. The Eurasian aspects of China's evolution into a global power (and its attendant risks) have not been systematically or sufficiently analysed in popular or academic publications, owing in large measure to a tendency to position these debates alongside recurring China-threat narratives. China's emerging role goes well beyond the standard 'geopolitics' of the Eurasian 'chessboard'. China is seeking to evolve new agendas and relationships that avoid the dilemma posed by its 'maturing' (and slowing) economy and potential containment by the United States. Likewise, China's current leadership has no wish to be captured by Russia's assertive security policies. This gives the People's Republic of China (PRC) a tight timeframe to establish itself as an essential arbiter in Eurasian integrative processes.

Ongoing tensions between the United States and China have overshadowed the great drama that will be played out to mid-century: China's potential evolution from an Asian regional player to a 'new type' of global power. The sustainability of this transition rests largely on how well China manages its 'Eurasian footprint', including economic, environmental and security factors. This will be a challenging task given divergent perceptions of global issues by Russia and China and a changing balance of power only partly moderated by the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). The integration of the Silk Road Economic Belt and the Maritime Silk Road into 'One Belt, One Road' – now officially translated into English as the Belt and Road Initiative (see Bērziņa-Čerenkova and Una 2016) – will be a complex task, forcing China into intensified engagement with conflict-prone regions including wider Central Asia, South Asia, the Middle East and Eastern Europe. This is complicated by the failure of any single organization to manage Eurasian affairs as a whole: the SCO's leadership potential is reduced by different visions of the organization by China and Russia, while Russia's key regional organizations (the Collective Security Treaty Organization,

CSTO and the Eurasian Economic Union, EEU) are largely aligned towards the west of the Eurasian landmass.

Improved relations with other developing powers are central to China's future agenda. China has been keen to use a nuanced vision of functional multipolarity as a way of not only reducing tensions with the United States but also positioning its future relations with Russia in a wider context. The BRICS grouping, comprising Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa, is useful in this agenda, but by itself is not enough to ensure a multipolar Eurasia. Here, a new wave of positive diplomacy towards the European Union (EU) and key European states, including Germany, the UK and France, has provided a more comprehensive approach to Eurasian cooperation. In spite of past tensions (over human rights and trade issues), China is increasingly seen as a potential partner in dealing with a wide range of governance issues which are central to Europe, for example global economic growth, sustainable development, environmental management, the continued stabilization of Afghanistan, and future energy security. However, a more active phase of managed and interdependent multipolarity may need to emerge before a balanced multilateral system can emerge in wider Eurasia, let alone on the global stage.

China's prosperity and security rests on its ability to moderate these aspects of the 'Eurasian process'. The sustainability of China's global role depends on how well it can manage new cooperative relationships that have so far eluded Russia and the United States. The book addresses these issues by first assessing how well China's 'Eurasian footprint' can serve as a basis for its evolution as a cooperative global power without ensnaring it into security dilemmas attendant on the need to reform regional and global institutions (see Chapter 1). Chapter 2 assesses two crucial organizations that provide important but limited security roles, the Russian-led CSTO and the SCO, where China has more influence. The need for these groups, and their operational insufficiency, is demonstrated in Chapter 3, where great power miscalculations have led to ongoing conflict in Afghanistan, uneven or fragile governance across Central Asia, and have set limits on Eurasian economic integration. These limits are influenced by different visions of future order held by China and Russia, in spite of their strategic partnership and evolving leadership dynamics (as explored in Chapters 4 and 5). Chapter 6 analyses the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) as an economic and geopolitical project, now linked to security, sustainability and environmental concerns in an expanded network that will have enduring influence on the future global economy. An important aspect of this dynamic is the deepening engagement with Europe as a potential co-balancer in Eurasian affairs, thereby reducing

tensions that have emerged with both Russia and the US (Chapter 7). The outcomes of these processes are explored in Chapter 8 and Chapter 9, with China needing to engage in serious institutional learning to avoid a dystopic Eurasian future or a new bipolar order dividing Eurasian networks from US alliances. If Eurasia is not merely a Chinese affair, then in turn China's interests and needs have now become a global concern.