

CHINA AND EURASIA RELATIONS IN MULTIPOLAR WORLD ORDER 2.0

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Chinese and Eurasian relations have undergone profound changes in recent years. Some influences come from systemic factors, particularly geopolitical shifts like the Russia-Ukraine war or intensifying tensions between the United States and China. One of the linchpins of such transformation is China's rise and expansion in Eurasia due to its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which created pathways across Eurasia, bolstering connectivity and economic cooperation. Though China's expansion has had many positive effects, there is a growing concern and criticism regarding environmental impacts and financial sustainability (Benyon and Fukuyama 2023; Hughes 2019; Tarrósy 2020). Furthermore, many questions arise regarding China's political and security influence in Eurasian countries amid the changing world order. Therefore, the *Routledge Handbook of Chinese and Eurasian International Relations*, edited by Mher Sahakyan, has been published just in time to provide critical insights into the complexities of these transformations and their implications, offering a comprehensive and in-depth analysis of China's presence and relations across Eurasia in the context of the emerging multipolar world order. The Handbook is the result of a collaborative effort by 37 scholars from China, Russia, Serbia, Turkey, Kazakhstan, Pakistan, Poland, the United States, Armenia, Kyrgyzstan, France, Germany, Croatia, Hungary, Greece, Czechia, Sri Lanka, and Sweden. It is worth mentioning that this volume builds on themes explored in *China and Eurasian Powers in a Multipolar World Order 2.0: Security, Diplomacy, Economy and Cybersecurity*, also edited by Mher Sahakyan and previously published by Routledge (see Sahakyan 2023). This latest Handbook expands on topics such as China's strategies regarding Central Asia, Russia, and Europe. It also introduces new themes such as high-tech development, digitalisation, and environmental governance, enriching its scope and relevance and filling the existing gaps in the literature.

This Handbook consists of ten parts and thirty chapters, covering various regions like Central Asia, the Middle East, Europe, the Asia-Pacific, and the Arctic, as well as different themes such as digitalisation, environmental politics, China's relations with the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), and the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO). In the introductory remarks to this Routledge Handbook, Mher Sahakyan and Anahit Parzyan set the context for understanding subsequent chapters connected by the Multipolar World Order 2.0 Concept and the Realism approach (in most chapters). Furthermore, these authors explain the importance of exploring China's growing economic and political relations, particularly with Eurasian countries. China is a "young superpower" whose presence in "the centre of the world" (Eurasia) is of utmost importance, as this is the continent where the battle for world hegemony takes place in the multipolar world order 2.0 (Sahakyan and Parzyan 2024, 1). With that in mind, the BRI is China's vital asset and tool for securing the leading role.

The first part explores the issue of the collision of great powers' interests in Eurasia in a multipolar era. This section delves into power plays in Eurasia, highlighting the diverse impacts of the Russo-Ukrainian war. The first chapter, authored by the editor, focuses on issues China has been facing due to the Russo-Ukrainian war, especially losses in the areas of transportation and trade. In that light, the author analyses China's stance on the war and its actions towards the political settlement. Greg Simons is the author of the second chapter, dealing with the competition between the United States (US) and China in Eurasia and the Western containment of China, which primarily relies on AUKUS and the Quad. The author uses a constructivist paradigm and qualitative research approach. He stresses the changing nature of the international system, which is moving from a US-centric to a multipolar (emerging non-Western-centric) system (Simons 2024, 40). Simons also reflects upon the Russo-Ukrainian war in the context of China-US tensions.

The second part focuses on Central Asia and China's position in the region. It examines its politics, as well as the convergence and divergence of China's interests with other powers in the region, particularly Russia and India. The overall conclusion of the section is that time is on China's side. The third chapter delves into the relationship between Russia and China in this region, particularly regarding natural gas. It also explores the energy policies of China and several countries in the region. The author concludes that China could get in a more advantageous position over Russia despite the two countries having decided to give priority to cooperation. The fourth chapter analyses India's renowned engagement and growing role in Central Asia (especially after 2015) and its competition with China. The fifth chapter focuses on the BRI and how China gradually expands its footprint in the region, including the security realm. The author uses Kazakhstan as a case study. His main argument is that this country

is of vital interest for China's march to the West (via the BRI). Relying on the Multipolar World Order 2.0 concept, he argues that the best option for Kazakhstan would be a multi-vector foreign policy, thus avoiding dependence on China only (Izimov 2024, 99). In the sixth chapter, the author exhaustively explores the relationship between Kyrgyzstan and China, highlighting Kyrgyzstan's debt to China as an obstacle. The author also reflects on green energy and high-tech as fields in which their cooperation could be increased.

The third part examines various aspects of China's increased presence in the Middle East and expanding politico-economic relations with the countries in this region. Selçuk Çolakoğlu, the author of the seventh chapter, examines the relationship between China and Türkiye. The author claims that Türkiye is balancing the Western allies with the "China card" (Çolakoğlu 2024, 133). Despite Chinese investments and Turkish participation in the BRI, the author concludes that, eventually, Türkiye will not align with China but with the West due to its NATO status and mutual dependence in economic, security, and political domains. The eighth chapter has Iran as the focus of the analysis, particularly its "Look to the East Policy" and the reasons behind it. The author explores the mutual benefits of Iran's cooperation with Russia and China. He presents three scenarios for the future and concludes that a neutral position is the best option for Iran in a multipolar era. The ninth chapter, authored by Máté Szalai, focuses on China's growing footprint in the Middle East through its cooperation with the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries. The author examines the topic through power asymmetry and hierarchy in international relations, particularly between great powers and small states.

The fourth part provides a deeper analysis of China's relations with different European countries in the context of the emerging multipolar world order. The main argument of this section is that European countries will eventually have to choose between the East and the West. This section starts with exploring China's relations with Germany in the tenth chapter. The authors explain opposing attitudes towards China in the German government and conclude that Berlin's hedging with Beijing for economic interests might not be an option in the multipolar world as "the space to do so has considerably shrunk" (Ohle, Cook, and Han 2024, 178). The eleventh chapter deals with different aspects of Sino-Italian relations and Italy's engagement in the BRI. Chapter twelve, authored by Šárka Waisová, focuses on the Czech Republic and fluctuations in relations with China. Based on media content analysis, the author argues that there is a negative attitude towards China in the public, partly due to the lack of expected Chinese investments under the 16+1 framework. The crucial factor is the Russo-Ukrainian war and China's rapprochement with Russia. Additionally, the West-East divide in the multipolar era will push Chechia, a NATO member state, more towards its Western allies. Chapter thirteen, authored by Nenad

Stekić, delves into Sino-Serbian relations, particularly since the pandemic, and their comprehensive strategic partnership. The analysis is focused on economic, political, and military-technical cooperation between Serbia and China and the factors behind fostering such collaboration. The author particularly highlights the role of China's cultural and soft power diplomacy in Serbia. He further explains Serbia's multi-vector foreign policy, based on "four pillars of the world order" (European Union, Russia, China, and the United States) (Stekić 2024, 216). Despite its position as a European Union (EU) candidate country and strong pressures to side with the West, Serbia has not imposed sanctions on Russia. Likewise, Serbia keeps nurturing an "ironclad" friendship with China. The author concludes that strategic hedging will keep shaping Serbia's strategic calculus in the emerging multipolar era (Stekić 2024, 225). The subject of the fourteenth chapter focuses on Poland and its changing foreign policy towards China in a multipolar world order 2.0. The author concludes that Poland's siding with its Western allies impacts its relationship with China, thus preventing their deeper ties. Chapter fifteen deals with China's relations with Greece, especially their cooperation under the BRI, focusing on the vital importance of the Piraeus port. The author considers the China-US competition in Greece and its impact on Greece's efforts to cooperate with both sides.

The fifth part of the Handbook is focused on the Asia-Pacific region and patterns of conflict and cooperation when it comes to China and other great powers in this area. This section considers the China-US competition in different domains, such as maritime routes, natural resources, or geopolitical influence. This part opens with chapter sixteen, which deals with the position of Hong Kong towards China and the United States, particularly in the context of the negative effects of decoupling. Chapter seventeen analyses new security architecture in the region and argues the need for prioritising peace over conflict in the relations between China and the United States. The authors explore China-Pakistan and US-India cooperation, as well as the role of the Quad in containing China. The South China Sea dispute is the focus of chapters eighteen and nineteen, which approach the subject from different perspectives. Relying on critical discourse analysis, Éric Pomès and Matthieu Grandpierron explore the narratives and official Chinese discourse regarding its position and claims in the South China Sea. Yulong Dai focuses on Sino-Malaysian relations in the context of conditions for settlement of the South China Sea dispute. Tony Tai-Ting Liu, the author of the twentieth chapter, explores the competition between China and Japan through the prism of the battle between tellurocracy and thalassocracy. China's rise prompts Japan's strategic response to balance it through the Quad and other regional partnerships. The following chapter discusses the growing cooperation between Sri Lanka and China, particularly focusing on its significance for the Maritime Silk Road. The author highlights

the geopolitical struggle for Sri Lanka and the counterbalancing strategies of the United States and India. The last chapter explains the increasing role of Mongolia in China's BRI, which enhances China's position in the region.

The sixth section contains only one chapter, which delves into the partnership between Russia and China in the Arctic region. Jan Železný provides a detailed analysis of the interests, strategies, and weaknesses of both countries in this resource-abundant region. The author further argues that the control of the Northern Sea Route and the related competition with the West push Moscow and Beijing closer together. However, some obstacles hinder the development of such cooperation: Moscow is a "gatekeeper", while Beijing "advocates for internationalisation and the right of non-Arctic states" (Železný 2024, 374).

China's relations with the EAEU and NATO are explored in the seventh part of the Handbook. Gohar Barseghyan argues that current geopolitical conditions create various opportunities for greater alignment between the BRI and the EAEU and that China should seize such a moment. On the other hand, Armine Arzumanyan, the author of chapter twenty-five, analyses the official Chinese discourse regarding NATO, the United States, and the EU, concluding that NATO is represented as an American instrument of military dominance while the EU is seen as a mere junior partner.

Parts eight and nine of this Handbook are thematically organised. The eighth section deals with digitalisation and cyberspace, particularly from a geopolitical perspective, exploring different aspects of China's Digital Silk Road (DSR). Chapter twenty-six, authored by Magdalena Łągiewska, explores China's superpower ambitions in cyberspace, focusing on legal aspects of its DSR. The following chapter builds on the previous one, giving priority to the DSR in the countries of the EAEU in the context of technology decoupling between the United States and China. The ninth section of the Handbook delves into environmental issues and geopolitics in Eurasia. Kevin Lo, the author of chapter twenty-eight, highlights the need to improve environmental protection measures in BRI-related projects, stressing the importance of incorporating green technology. The following chapter, authored by Giorgio Caridi, offers a comparative empirical analysis of e-governments' impact on effectively dealing with environmental issues in China and Italy. The author argues that social tensions are caused, *inter alia*, by environmental issues and that e-governments can decrease social dissatisfaction.

The tenth part of the Handbook offers concluding remarks by the editor, Mher Sahakyan. The US lost its position of dominant power, though it still has an important role thanks to military bases and alliances such as the Quad, AUKUS, and NATO. In that context, the author discusses different challenges for

Eurasian international relations in a multipolar era, particularly addressing weapons production, finance, and high-technology issues.

The *Routledge Handbook of Chinese and Eurasian International Relations* significantly contributes to studying China's expanding role in Eurasia amid the evolving multipolar world order. The breadth and depth of its analysis, reflected in an extensive geographical scope of the research and thematic diversity, provide readers with a comprehensive understanding of the complex dynamics shaping Eurasia. Furthermore, the chapters offer rich insights into China's relations with many Eurasian countries from a historical perspective, which makes it useful for diplomats as well. What enriches the perspectives and enhances the book's value is the authors' use of sources in multiple languages. Drawing on insights from an impressive array of scholars from around the globe, the Handbook also skilfully integrates geopolitical frameworks with emerging themes such as digitalisation and environmental governance. Its balanced approach to analysing opportunities and challenges posed by China's rise and its Belt and Road Initiative makes it a valuable resource for researchers, students of international relations, and policymakers. Despite the breadth of its coverage, the book leaves room for future exploration of China's strategies in other regions and the interplay between economic ambitions and geopolitical rivalries. The volume is recommended to anyone seeking to explore the multifaceted and rapidly changing landscape of Chinese-Eurasian relations.

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