SEVEN CHINAS

A POLICY FRAMEWORK

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DAVID KELLY leads research at the Beijing consultancy China Policy, which specializes in following, introducing, and analyzing the domestic Chinese debate over a wide range of public policy issues. Over 30 years Kelly's work has ranged widely across issues affecting China's economic, political, and social institutions. These threads combine in his current work on China's strategic positioning, political risk, and the external impact of domestic policy. He is a regular media commentator on Chinese affairs, including for the BBC, ABC, *Financial Times*, *The Economist*, Al Jazeera, Sky News, and Voice of America. He holds a Ph.D. in Chinese studies from the University of Sydney, has held a Fulbright Fellowship at the University of Chicago, and worked at the Australian National University, University of New South Wales, National University of Singapore, and Peking University. David Kelly can be contacted at david.kelly@policycn.com.

EDITOR'S NOTE

The debate about China's changing role in global affairs is often framed as a dichotomous choice between a peacefully rising China that seeks to be a constructive stakeholder and an increasingly dangerous China challenging the status quo, in terms of both its norms and the place of the United States. The reality is more complicated. There are not only signs of both elements, but the foundations shaping Chinese behavior are multifold. Most international relations scholars examine China through one or another version of realism or liberalism. David Kelly offers an alternative approach that examines the nature of Chinese identity—or, rather, Chinese identities (plural)—and how they exhibit themselves in Chinese foreign policy. Using his renowned skills in reading Chinese-language official documents and the broader commentary, Kelly teases out seven narratives that the Chinese tell themselves and the world, and he provides a codebook for explicating shifting Chinese behavior in different arenas. Kelly concludes that some of these narratives facilitate cooperation, but most point toward deep-seated tensions between China and the West in the years ahead.

INTRODUCTION

International analysis of China's foreign policy is often too simple, too binary. Is China expansionist? Or will it preserve the status quo? Has it dropped the pretense of "peaceful rise"? This essay presents an alternative approach to understanding how China conducts its global affairs.

Foreign policy was traditionally the most consensus-driven policy sector in China. It emanated from a tiny elite; the broader intellectual chorus of official and unofficial agencies, scholars, media, and public opinion added their voices, but rarely changed the tune. This has changed in recent years, with trade and investment "going global," a discernible realm of public diplomacy opening, and the national interest reshaped by new trajectories and strategies.

Some macro-level shaping forces are well-known, ranging from great-power nationalism to economic resource security, to social and political stability. But these typical "realist" concerns are powerfully shaped as well by shared narratives. Let us call them the *seven Chinas*.[1] Often drawn on to shape and justify policy, they sometimes cohere well, sometimes not. Some of the seven narratives blend together to support expansion, others to defend the status quo. But there are several other possibilities.

Passing white light through a prism reveals a spectrum of colors. The seven Chinas are a dispersed spectrum of sorts. They can be arranged in chronological order, starting with the ancient idea of China as the "self-sufficient civilization," and culminating, for now, with that of China as "herald of the high frontier," safeguarding a new world order. But the narratives all interact in the present. The behavior of actors within the foreign policy elite depends on which blends of the seven Chinas come to the fore in particular arenas, at particular junctures, and in particular minds.

Describing the seven Chinas is preferable to defining them, but we can loosely introduce the seven as identities: answers to such

1 The number seven is a minimum. More narratives can always be found, but are quickly subsumed by the existing set. As explained by Randall Collins, the "intellectual law of small numbers" predicts that "at any period there are at least three but usually no more than six schools of thought in mutual contention." Randall Collins, *The Sociology of Philosophies: A Global Theory of Intellectual Change* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press/Harvard University Press, 1998): 82.

questions as who am I, to whom do I belong, and what is my/our primary mission or purpose. They are also ideal types—analytic constructs that deliberately filter out some details in order to present a clear basis for comparison. Those subscribing to the seven Chinas may deny that they are separable—or are contradictory—in the terms used here; they may deny entertaining them at all. That's fine: the proof of the pudding is in the eating—that is to say, the understanding. *Bon appetit!*

I. THE SEVEN CHINAS

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Self-Sufficient Civilization	Most Humiliated Nation	Leader of the Developing World	Champion of Plurality	Sovereign Survivor	Last Man Standing	Herald of the High Frontier

CHINA 1: SELF-SUFFICIENT CIVILIZATION (GENERATING OUR OWN VALUES, MARCHING TO THE BEAT OF OUR OWN DRUM)

Most deep-rooted and influential of the narratives is the story of China as a self-sufficient civilization. The ancient term "all under heaven" (*tianxia*天下) presents China as a borderless realm that incorporates the known world. Not simply one of many, China was the *sole* civilization, beyond which barbarians dwelled. Similar mindsets can be found in all civilizations, but size and distance reinforced China's image of being self-sufficient, going beyond being unique. Evidence of interaction with or learning from other civilizations could be dialed down to zero.

The idea of a self-sufficient civilization plays out in a number of ways. Modern China is an ark containing an unrivaled cultural, political, and social repository whose values are *self-validating*.

A *People's Daily* commentary appearing after the 19th Party Congress, convened in 2017, illustrates this image:

> **With its unique road, unique theory, unique institutions and unique culture, the Chinese road that has been enriched and developed by Xi Jinping's New Era Socialism with Chinese Characteristics transcends "Western centrism" and greatly stimulates development of the broad range of developing countries' self-confidence in "going their own way."**[2]

In today's China, this narrative is carefully constructed and curated. State media miss no opportunities to emphasize cultural and institutional self-confidence, together with unique "national conditions." The latter term (*guoqing* 国情) justifies many policies with its subtext of being long-standing, unchanging, and, once again, self-validating.

Many commentators in China realize that self-sufficiency, even were it factually true, is a questionable standard: why is it better than cultural hybridity or institutional sharing? And, as observers both within and outside of China like to point out, it's not even true: Marxism and Buddhism, as well as Arabic numerals, are hardly domestic inventions. But the idea that modernity can be realized solely on the basis of Chinese cultural values now invokes a further claim that others can emulate it only with the aid of the "Chinese system of discourse" (*Zhongguo huayu xitong* 中国话语系统). Even Marxism, it is implied, can be understood only on Chinese terms.[3]

"National conditions" justify dismissing a long list of institutions (democracy, rule of law, human rights, civil society) and their supporting values as pernicious, fake universals generated by the West. China could have achieved a modernity of its own, the narrative goes, in which these "fabrications" would have been absent. Nothing the West has brought to the world in recent times is, in this view, really needed for China's modernization.

2 "CPC creates Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era," Xinhua, October 19, 2017, http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2017-10/19/c_136689808.htm.

3 Ren Zhongping, "The mission and the path of rejuvenation begin a new march," *Renmin wang*, December 6, 2017 [任仲平:"使命, 复兴的道路开启新征程", 人民网, 2017年12月 6日], http://paper.people.com.cn/rmrb/html/2017-12/06/nw.D110000renmrb_20171206_8-01.htm.

The claim is sometimes used to deny foreign actors the right even to comment on China's internal standards, moral values, or policies. Western authorities as different as Henry Kissinger and Martin Jacques have a tendency to fall for this gambit. It features in Beijing's official response to the arbitration ruling on its territorial claims in the South China Sea: the latter rest on a basis, insists Beijing, that the court, lacking China's unique historical knowledge, was incapable of adjudicating.

From this flows the assumption that it is the duty of the Chinese state to instruct others (and its own subjects) in the proper way. This assumption is at work in the idea of a China solution (or solutions) to issues of world governance, including Middle East peace, climate change, and human rights.[4]

CHINA 2: MOST HUMILIATED NATION (A SENIOR CIVILIZATION, CONQUERED AND DESPISED)

China's modern history has been traumatic. Starting with the First Opium War (1839–1842) and ending with the full-scale Japanese invasion and occupation of China (1931–1945), few were spared suffering at the hands of foreigners. From this rose the powerful narrative of a "century of humiliation."

The fierce drive to end this humiliation needs little explanation. Not all international observers, however, are aware of its depth: it is constantly reiterated in propaganda, media, and the arts. The drive goes beyond neutralizing the enemy; instead, it requires overturning the enemy's value system. In Chinese political contests, it is inadvisable to leave a loser to lick his wounds in dignity. To mop up all the benefit, the winner is expected to pronounce himself a sage and his vanquished rival a villain and hypocrite.

A limit to sympathy is reached when it is claimed or implied that China is the most humiliated nation. What of African states? India? Thailand? Scotland and Ireland? The Philippines or Vietnam, close neighbors who suffered outright conquest and colonization? Measure the relative depth of the fall, goes the implicit answer. Other nations lacked China's degree of civilization, the identity conferred by an indigenous written history, or had vastly less to lose, and so on.

CHINA 3: LEADER OF THE DEVELOPING WORLD (AMONG THE LATE DEVELOPERS, WE LEAD)

During the Cold War, the Communist Party under Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping defined its position in the socialist bloc in ideological campaigns against "great-power chauvinism" and superpower bullying, targeting both the United States and Soviet Union. Beijing's stated policy was to stand with the exploited nations of the Third World.

The rubric of the developing world's struggle against oppression by both superpowers harmonized with Lenin's theory that the victims of imperialist aggression were a new, globalized version of Marx's proletariat. For Mao and Deng, China shared with the rest of the developing world a vulnerability to domination. As fellow victim of what Deng labeled big-power hegemony, it was logical for China to lead the fight. The Asian-African Bandung Conference of April 1955 saw China solemnize this viewpoint.

China as "leader of the developing world" remains in use, in concepts like "south-south cooperation," the Belt and Road Initiative, the World Trade Organization, Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank and other ventures in geo-economics. But this comes at the cost of disregarding the now dramatic disparity between China's economic clout and that of the rest of the developing world. While China's official GDP per capita is 83rd in the world, it has a middle-class population larger than that of the United States, and it ranks second in the number of international mergers and acquisitions. Measures of development, that is to say, no longer line up; in the narrative of the "leader of the developing world" it is assumed they do.

4 David Kelly, "The 'China Solution': Beijing responds to Trump," *Lowy Interpreter*, February 17, 2017, https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/china-solution-beijing-responds-trump; and David Kelly, "Winding back the China Solution," *Lowy Interpreter*, July 6, 2017, https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/winding-back-the-china-solution.

CHINA 4: CHAMPION OF PLURALITY (WE END THE ERA OF WESTERN/AMERICAN HEGEMONY)

By no means synonyms, the policy term "multilateral" (*duobian* 多边) and the strategic term "multipolar" (*duoji* 多极) are blended in pluralism. Both of these operate in Chinese to morally censure a posited unipolar, unilateral great power—the United States.

The narrative of China as champion of plurality, like "leader of the developing world," appeals to a broad church of opponents of American hegemony. Finding common ground with developed as well as developing states, it sidesteps the defect of the previous narrative, that China is leaving the developing world behind. An ideal international system is imagined in which no one power is able to exert an overwhelming influence over global affairs. Simpler but more idealistic than a balance of power, a pluralist system nonetheless entails creation of such a balance, a shared aim of the greatest powers rather than a *modus vivendi* reflected in the Western term "concert of powers." This is often contrasted with the "Cold War mentality," which China claims to have eliminated.

With the rapid economic and military rise of emerging nations like China, India, Indonesia, Nigeria, and Brazil, claims this narrative, the domination of the "West over the rest" is ending. The once-great singular pole of power—the United States—must accept plurality, not just because it will contribute to international public goods, but also because it is inevitable, given the growing economic weight of China and other emerging economies. This rubric is in the background of the "community of shared future for mankind" (literally, "community of shared human destiny"), heavily canvassed in the 19th Party Congress report and its official elaborations.[5]

CHINA 5: SOVEREIGN SURVIVOR (LEAVE US TO SURVIVE AS A COMMUNIST POWER)

Glasnost and *perestroika*, war in Afghanistan, and much else led the Communist Party of the Soviet Union to progressively lose control over state and society, and eventually, the capacity or will to rule. The socialist bloc dissolved and Communist parties either wound themselves up, or they redefined themselves to survive in multiparty electoral democracies.

The Chinese Communist Party (CCP), tested to breaking point by the 1989 Tiananmen crisis, contrived to avoid this fate. Harsh as his repression of dissent was, Deng Xiaoping in his 1992 "Southern tour" solemnized reform as the summit of policy, replacing revolution. But the Gorbachev example showed how reform could easily lead to political demise. Deng and his successors headed off the fate of the Soviet regime in two main ways. First, they reinforced the CCP-led model of market Leninism. This was achieved through "patriotic education," leaning heavily on the self-sufficiency and humiliation narratives, without relaxing the iron fist of the Leninist one-party state.

Spectacularly brought to world attention at the 19th Party Congress in live broadcasts with simultaneous translation on China's China Global Television Network (CGTN), the "new era Socialism with Chinese characteristics" was infused with a self-confidence previously reserved for domestic audiences. This narrative has a secondary function of rebuffing attempts by outsiders to interfere in China's internal affairs. Standing alone as survivor, the CCP deflects criticism under the shield of sovereignty. U.S., EU, and UN delegates, who still are inclined to speak down to China, encounter an ever-more-passionate Chinese defense of its ethical standards in international forums.

CHINA 6: LAST MAN STANDING (THE WEST IS IN DECLINE, WHILE WE HAVE DEEP POCKETS)

The global financial crisis of 2008–2009 gave a new twist to the "sovereign survivor" narrative. Collapse of the Communist Bloc was overtaken by unexpected crisis in capitalist liberal economies. Beyond merely surviving, the "China model," as it was increasingly labeled, now seemed capable of outperforming and indeed rescuing

5 Zhongsheng, "Open up a global governance of joint deliberation, building and sharing," *Renmin wang*, December 5, 2017 [钟声："开辟共商共建共享的全球治理之道，" 人民网, 2017年12月5日], http://world.people.com.cn/n1/2017/1205/c1002-29685480.html.

the neoliberal world order—an idea widely accepted in China, and increasingly assumed in think tank analyses where "declinism" became virtual dogma.[6]

The neo-statist Vladimir Putin could now be courted as a counterpart to Xi, as he turned to China to compensate for Russia's estrangement from the United States and the NATO powers. China's foreign policy hawks were buttressed by a sense of having even surpassed in economic clout the debt-ridden capitalist-liberal democratic powers of the North Atlantic, including even the United States. The once dominant Western powers rarely raised concerns about Chinese foreign policy for fear of offending Beijing, preferring to entice Chinese investment. China's foreign exchange reserves and "going global" policies helped trigger a global boom in resources.

Taken as fact, this rubric readily supports a chorus of opinion in China that a celebrated saying of Deng Xiaoping's, "Hide our light and bide our time" (*taoguang yanghui* 韬光养晦), should be revisited and reinterpreted for the New Era. That China's time has come is greatly elaborated in the Xi Jinping Thought announced at the 19th Party Congress and the revised Party Constitution.

CHINA 7: HERALD OF THE HIGH FRONTIER (WE SHARE IN AND SAFEGUARD THE GLOBAL COMMONS)

Initially treated with suspicion by its leaders, the idea that China should be a "responsible stakeholder" in the actually existing world order has gained acceptance over time. Initial domestic resistance focused on the potential costs, both political and financial. The "self-sufficient civilization" motif described above operated in the background, reminiscent of American isolationism: we mind our own business and do not need external distractions.

As this yielded to the imperatives of "rising," domestic theorists saw the need to generate international public goods, going beyond regional conflicts to contribute to global security. This is another thread in China's justification for its South China Sea policy: while safeguarding its sovereignty, it is providing freedom of navigation. No sovereign claim is involved in the polar regions; instead, China speaks as a protector of the global commons. Beijing's contribution to research will qualify it for a share of resulting economic benefits.

The costs of a proactive role in the "high frontiers" of space, the open seas, the polar regions, and even cyberspace are high, and critics in China echo popular demands that foreign aid be directed back home.[7] Yet global public goods are justified by gaining an "international right to be heard" (*guoji huayu quan* 国际话语权), another major claim of Xi Jinping's in the lead-up to his midterm rite of passage in 2017.

II. BLENDING THE SEVEN CHINAS: BEYOND THE RISING CHINA NARRATIVE

The seven Chinas blend with each other in different ways. Some of the elements combine badly, resulting in confused claims like "a responsible developing major power"[8] or "multilateral major power diplomacy with Chinese characteristics."[9] China-2, "most humiliated nation," readily combines with China-1, "self-sufficient civilization," to interpret China's rise as a manifest destiny, ethically beyond question. Others' combinations display "elective affinity": they cohere well, to the point of being felt as one and the same story.

When combined in these ways, the seven Chinas move policy in more directions than the familiar expansionist–status quo dualism. The framework helps our understanding of the most important foreign policy issues at stake today.

6 Niu Xinchun, "Collective blindness: on China's scholars' predictions of the Iraq and Afghan wars," 爱思想, July 4, 2014 [牛新春："集体性失明：反思中国学界对伊战、阿战的预测," 现代国际关系, 2014年7月4日], http://www.aisixiang.com/data/90012.html.

7 Commentary, "'Feng duiwai touzi he waiyuan bifan' shi mincuizhuyi" ["Overseas investment and foreign aid must be opposed" is a populist slogan], *Huanqiu shibao*, June 23, 2016 [社评："'逢对外投资和外援必反'是民粹主义," 环球时报, 2016年6月23日], http://opinion.huanqiu.com/editorial/2016-06/9072155.html.

8 Meng Hua, Li Kun, and Mao Zhenhua, "China is a responsible developing major power," Xinhua, September 9, 2014 [孟华、李鲲、毛振华："中国是负责任的发展中大国," 新华网, 2014年9月9日], http://politics.people.com.cn/n/2014/0909/c1024-25628524.html.

9 Liu Jieyi, "Expecting China to take on a greater mission in the UN," *Renmin wang*, September 20, 2016 [刘结一："瞩望中国在联合国展现更大担当," 人民网, 2016年9月20日], http://world.people.com.cn/n1/2016/0920/c1002-28725279.html.

CHINA AND RUSSIA

"Last man standing" (China-6) and "leader of the developing world' (China-3) might seem relevant, but suffer fatal defects. Russians may agree that the Soviet Union was lost to Gorbachev's tragic folly, defending Stalin as a "good manager," but a China that signs strategic partnerships with Kazakhstan and the Ukraine can hardly engage Russia with enthusiasm for its former dominion. Neither Russia nor China fit comfortably in the duality of developed/developing worlds. Beijing often frames the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa) grouping as sharing a developing status, allowing use of "South-South" rhetoric, but as noted, China's financial muscle is on a different level to its BRICS partners. It drives hard bargains with Russia, for example, notoriously in natural gas deals.

Hence "champion of pluralism" (China-4) and "herald of the high frontier" (China-7) best encompass China-Russia relations. Their partnership works best as an anti-American alliance of convenience; and they share many strategic goals in relation to the global commons, not least the polar regions and cyberspace.

SOUTH CHINA SEA

Often noted by analysts, the "most humiliated nation" (China-2) narrative is nonetheless secondary to "self-sufficient civilization" (China-1). This is because rival claimants in the South China Sea case were arguably more humiliated than China. China dismisses the claims on the basis of unique historical knowledge. Neither external authority nor regional power can, so it is intimated, overturn China's self-sufficient knowledge.

CHINA AND THE KOREAS

"Sovereign survivor" (China-5) works for China-North Korea relations, but not vis-à-vis South Korea. As China's rise to economic major power status aligns it much more closely with South Korea, its ties with the latter depend more on the "last man standing" (China-6): able to dictate economic terms and sharing interests in high-end innovation. "Self-sufficient civilization" (China-1) is ever-more important as China draws on Confucian themes, relatively stronger in South Korea than in the North, to project a "Sinitic community"[10] in which Korea returns to tributary status.

CHINA IN MULTILATERAL ORGANIZATIONS

"Champion of plurality" (China-4) is, unsurprisingly, in its natural element here. Thus in the Commission for the Conservation of the Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR), China does not present itself as the unique, humiliated leader of the developing world, or the wealthy "last man standing," Rather, China buttresses its membership with reference to the "herald of the high frontier" narrative, claiming a share in the global commons on the basis of its research output.

BELT & ROAD AND BRICS

The Belt and Road Initiative draws heavily on the unique civilization motif, presenting the original Silk Road as a Chinese creation, and Chinese civilizational values as a suitable basis for its extension in the Maritime Silk Road. It is also dependent on the "last man standing" (China-6): only China has the resources to attempt this. As noted earlier, BRICS, of which China is a member, draws additionally on "champion of plurality" (China-4).

III. WHEN NARRATIVES SUPPORT EACH OTHER

As a complete package, these seven Chinas do not fully add up: there are too many contradictions and opposing narratives. In China, they cause cognitive dissonance and increasing fears that they will lead to a dangerous state of strategic overreach.

Nonetheless, overlapping narratives allow some of these policy inconsistencies to be overlooked internally, even if not presenting a consistent picture internationally. In the South China Sea, for example, the idea of China as "last man standing" and "most humiliated nation" work together. The mutual reinforcement supports doubling down on the

10 Wang Liwei, "Scholars propose 'Sinitic community'," Caixin wang, September 30, 2016 [王力为:"学者建言构思'华夏共同体'", 财新网, 2016年9月30日, http://finance.caixin.com/2016-09-30/100993464.html.

claims, with the classic realist syndrome of capabilities transforming intentions: being the last man standing justifies China in exercising a unilateral claim; being the most humiliated nation means you are just making good a deficit when you do.

Similarly, the narratives of self-sufficient civilization and sovereign survivor often move in unison. The self-sufficient civilization and its inherent strengths imbue the China model with virtues that, it is claimed, will equip it to outlive other political and economic systems. Meanwhile, the CCP has outlived its Soviet counterpart. This evidence of manifest destiny is underwritten by the superiority of the Chinese civilization state.

The "century of humiliation" clearly supports China's claim to lead the post-colonial nations of the developing world. At the same time, leading and speaking on behalf of the developing world provides a convenient avenue for Beijing to air its own historical grievances associated with its past mistreatment at the hands of the globe's great powers.

IV. REINTERPRETING CHINA'S FOREIGN POLICY

In early 2018, many see China as standing at the threshold of world mastery.[11] How will the world respond? The approach offered here is not the realpolitik kind, as if we were considering North Korea. China does not have to wield nukes to achieve its interests. For the foreseeable future, it must construct deals.

The seven Chinas may be thought of as submerged tectonic plates that shape formation of China's complex interests, and thus the deals that are made. Each has a factual and a mythic pole. Observers may well diverge bitterly over where the line between fact and myth is drawn. All things being equal, those dealing with China should frame dialogue to widen consensus on the factual and reduce dependence on the mythic dimension of each of the seven Chinas. As China deals with the world, it needs to clarify its interests in global, not purely Chinese, terms.

"Self-sufficient civilization" and "most humiliated nation" appear intractable in this regard. Maintained by the state, they bond tightly, support each other, are felt viscerally, and scare people. So also "sovereign survivor." Upholding the economic and political institutions defining communism (or "socialism with Chinese characteristics") is inviolable, joined at the hip to Party supremacy.

Yet some lines *have* altered. Climate change pertains to the global commons and hence the "herald of the high frontier" (China-7). Once regarded as a Western hoax, it ceased to have official Chinese denialists over a short period between the Copenhagen and Paris climate summits.[12] The Paris Agreement owed a lot to consensus reached between Presidents Obama and Xi.

Possibly *the* most conducive to cooperation of the seven Chinas, the "herald of the high frontier" is also a marker of what is possible. Not far behind is "principled pluralist." Perceived U.S. hegemony operates in the subtext as the villain against whom all unite. Yet a pluralism that *includes* the United States cannot be ruled out. This emerges in a tendency to "wind back the China solution" in mid-2017, and the recent argument that:

> **It is easy for people to criticize the hegemony of the US and the West. But it is often forgotten that establishing order is actually not easy. . . Today, desire for a multi-polar world derives more from people's dissatisfaction and hatred toward the US and the West. The final outcome may be more similar to the era of coexistence with the previous empire.**[13]

Another line of approach is to consider the blends described before. How does "herald of the high frontier" interact with "principled pluralist"? What implications does this have for dialogue and cooperation? For national interests?

11 Evan Osnos, "Making China Great Again," *New Yorker*, January 8, 2018, https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2018/01/08/making-china-great-again; Enda Curran, "2018 feels ripe for 'Big Unexpected Crisis', Eurasia Group Says," Bloomberg, January 2, 2018 (comments by Ian Bremmer), https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2018-01-02/2018-feels-ripe-for-big-unexpected-crisis-eurasia-group-says.

12 Geoff Dembicki, "The Convenient Disappearance of Climate Change Denial in China," *Foreign Affairs*, May 31, 2017, http://foreignpolicy.com/2017/05/31/the-convenient-disappearance-of-climate-change-denial-in-china/.

13 Zheng Yongnian, "Changing world order and rise of the 'Indo-Pacific,'" *Aisixiang*, January 1, 2018 [郑永年:"世界秩序的变迁与印太概念的兴起", 爱思想, 2018年1月1日], http://www.aisixiang.com/data/107473.html.

The dualism raised at the outset—expansionist versus status quo China—offers little help here. Instead of building knowledge of China's understanding of its own national interests, the questions presuppose what these interests are.

The seven Chinas are presented here for policymakers to use as tools for building this knowledge. Each of them exists for clear historical reasons, about which there is little debate. To ignore them risks misunderstanding, to be avoided as rhetoric heats up around the world. What bears deeper questioning is their coherence: their mutual reinforcement, or as shown in many cases, their incoherence. It is not possible to entertain all seven Chinas at once without severe cognitive dissonance; several of them are implicated in current flashpoints. Policymakers would do well to look more deeply into the interactions of all seven.

What also emerges from this review is that none of the seven Chinas describes the country as a member of an international community in the same way Western countries identify as partners in a liberal international order reflective of their pluralistic domestic societies and values. This dims the prospects for sustained cooperation, or at least peaceful coexistence, with the United States and other Western countries. It may depend on finding ways to help China draw on the narrative of the "high frontier" (China-7) while limiting the incentives to see issues through other narratives that more inherently place it in opposition to the United States. Needless to say, the combination of narratives through which Chinese view issues can only be marginally affected by foreign interlocutors.

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