

BOOK REVIEW

The Belt Road and Beyond—State-Mobilized Globalization in China: 1998–2018 by Min Ye, published by Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, United Kingdom and New York, USA, March, 2020, xvi + 252 Pages.

With the aim of developing new trade routes, stimulating infrastructural developments and promoting economic integration by instigating new trading patterns across the world, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is by far the most ambitious foreign policy initiative by China. While BRI is a global vision promoting global development through infrastructure and investment, it is also thought to be the potential driver of energizing the new wave of globalization.¹ Amid the growth of nationalism and protectionist policies, USA and Europe tend to be withdrawing from the well-established understanding of globalization. USA cuts its funding in World Health Organization (WHO) after the emergence of COVID-19.² It has also stepped back from climate change negotiation during COP-25. All these facts reveal that USA, once a promoter of globalization, is retreating from the idea of globalization and multilateralism. On the contrary, China is emerging as strongest supporter of globalization by initiating global connectivity, investment and infrastructure through its mega plan BRI. In this regard, in *The Belt Road and Beyond—State-Mobilized Globalization in China: 1998–2018*, Min Ye attempts to analyze how China is making its policies to expedite globalization through promoting state-mobilized implementation of globalization.

This book explains how China is implementing initiatives to mobilize state and market, what are the principles behind these initiatives, and how China is making its Chinese capitalism more explicable through its state-mobilized globalization. This book runs well over 252 pages with a beautiful prologue in the beginning. The prologue tells the story of how a city named Urumqi, the capital of Xinxiang province, prepares itself to implement the ambitious plan of BRI. With the story of Urumqi, the author attempts to showcase how China launched a nationalist strategy of embracing globalization to cope with economic challenges. Urumqi's story also shows how China is implementing its nationalist strategy through mobilizing sub-national governments into growth generating programmes. Apart from the prologue, the book has three major parts namely *The Theory*, *The Strategies* and *The Subnational Actors*. Each part consists of a number of chapters. A total of eight chapters located under these three major parts.

¹ Anastas Vangeli, "Is China the potential driver of a new wave of globalization?", *The Conversation*, available at <https://theconversation.com/is-china-the-potential-driver-of-a-new-wave-of-globalisation-71575>, accessed on 26 May 2020.

² Christine Wang, "Trump threatens to permanently cut off WHO funding, withdraw U.S. membership", *CNBC*, available at <https://www.cnn.com/2020/05/19/trump-threatens-to-permanently-cut-off-who-funding-withdraw-us-membership.html>, accessed on 20 May 2020.

In the *Theory* part of the book, Min Ye introduces the State-Mobilized Globalization Framework (SMGF) as an investigative tool to unpack the origins and characteristics of all these nationalist strategies that were taken since 1990's to promote sub-national provinces and markets for embracing globalization. This part comprises of two chapters that explains why China's 'autocratic' leaders started to promote nationalist strategies and how China's sub-national and commercial actors are involving actively to implement these strategies. Min Ye demonstrates that China's BRI is not just a 'strike of pen'. Rather, it is an outcome of a continuous process of previous nationalist strategies towards globalization. And the reason behind these strategies is the high economic growth. Because of China's rapid economic growth for the past two decades³, an ideology or a general consensus develops in the Chinese state system. This general consensus is that the high growth needs market expansion and globalization. In support of this consensus, the idea of modernization in Chinese state system takes its shape.⁴ Through SMGF, Min Ye enlightens her readers about the drivers and outcomes of the strategies under this and explains major development initiatives such as BRI and other previous initiatives.

Min Ye illustrates the confluence of different interests and drivers in formulating and implementing various strategies under the SMGF. Behind the formulation of each of these strategies, she explains a critical stage that was built up by economic emergencies, pressing domestic imperative and nationalist external ambition. With this framework, the author aptly introduces the 'coordinated-capitalist' nature in the Chinese State based on the long-term study of globalization from 1998 to 2018. Economic growth and development worked as dominant drivers among all other competing issues and priorities in this nature of 'coordinated capitalist' state. The communist organization built a 'coordinated' voice that helped to mobilize fragmented state groups with the support of this idea of 'coordinated capital'. This coordination helped China's provincial leaders and commercial actors embrace nationalist strategies under this Framework and implement these strategies in a cohesive manner. The notion of Chinese capitalism started to revive and spread across China and the world through this 'coordinated-capitalist' idea under the state-mobilized framework.

The second part of the book is "*The Strategies*". It is dedicated to analyze the nationalist strategies taken under the SMGF. Min Ye discussed the strategies in three separate chapters under this part. These are devoted to evaluate three national strategies—the Western Development Programme (WDP), the China Goes Global (CGG) and the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) under the SMGF. Before BRI, the

³ Richard Herd and Sean Dougherty, "China's economy: A remarkable transformation", *OECD Observer*, available at https://oecdobserver.org/news/archivestory.php/aid/1685/China_92s_economy:_A_remarkable_transformation.html, accessed on 20 May 2020.

⁴ Joan van Heijster, "Imagining Modernization: The Symbolic Embrace of GDP in China", *Chinese Political Science Review*, Issue 5, 2020, pp. 50-73.

WDP and the CGG were two important nationalist strategies that took place under this Framework. Min Ye demonstrates these two previous nationalist strategies as empirical validation of China's State-mobilized globalization. According to Min Ye, BRI is the continuation of these two strategies under China's SMGF in the part titled *The Theory*. Under *The Strategies* part, the author relates the Framework in dissecting drivers and implementing process of the WDP that launched in 1999 and executed till 2012. How WDP transforms the economy of Western China⁵ and the role of state-market forces are well explained in this part. The analysis of the WDP uncovers the background of announcing this nationalist strategy in the time of economic crises and how this strategy changed the pattern of regional development planning in China. Although this strategy was focused on the development of Western China, Min Ye showed how this strategy helped spread the high economic growth and industrialization across China. This progression of industrialization and globalization in Western China has been done through mutual enhancement of both state and market.

The political economy of China's outbound investment⁶ has been analyzed in Chapter Four under the second part of this book. It analyzes formulations and implementation process of China's outbound investment policy of the second most important nationalist strategy—the CGG. This nationalist strategy under the SMGF propelled after the WDP and implemented till 2015. This chapter examines the CGG's origin, pattern, fragmented implementation and how it contributes in enhancing globalization process across China. Min Ye compiled important official documents throughout her research on the SMG in China. In this chapter, she scrutinizes China's outbound investment and analyzes the patterns of change in the regulatory framework based on the official documents. Author dissects various trends, distributions, problems of outward investment from China, comprehensive statistics and comparative cases in regards to the discussion on China's outbound investment. The last chapter under the 'Strategies' part discusses the latest national strategy under SMG that is BRI. Based on three specific analyses, Min Ye discusses the formulation and the execution process of BRI. First she analyses preexisting state fragmentation and prior policies and demonstrates strong evidence in instigating contexts of national strategies. Second, she examines the characteristics and nature of political mobilization in China behind all the national strategies in support of globalization. And her third analysis demonstrates the complex interaction and fragmentation among an 'autocrat' leader, national agencies, and sub-national actors in shaping the national strategy in China and abroad.

⁵ Hongyi Harry Lai, "China's Western Development Program: Its Rationale, Implementation, and Prospects", *Modern China*, Vol. 28, Issue 4, 2002, pp. 432-466.

⁶ Benesch Friedlander Coplan and Aronoff LLP, "China Goes Global: Examining China's Outbound Investment", *China Insights*, January 2010, available at https://www.beneschlaw.com/images/content/1/1/v1/112/January_2010.pdf, accessed on 27 May 2020.

Min Ye demonstrates the justification behind the birth of BRI by analyzing strategies in the second part of the book. Her analyses validate state fragmentation and economic crises as determining factors that propelled China’s leaders to go for nationalist strategies like WDP, CGG and the latest BRI.⁷ In this part, Min Ye also does comparative analyses of these three nationalist strategies. In the systematic comparison of these three strategies, she signifies some specific differences. In the WDP that is the first nationalist strategy, top-down mobilization is found as the major change. In the top-down mobilization, political leadership and the heads of national agencies converged noticeably on internal economic development priorities. This change promotes high cohesion at the top layer in the China’s state system. Later, it is seen that political leadership is promulgating outbound globalization as a national priority in the CGG.⁸ But at the same time, economic bureaucracies start to be disintegrated into different preferences. For that reason, sub-national actors reinterpret this strategy and use CGG to nourish their own needs. Therefore, sub-national actors stay away from the original intent of the CGG. This divergence between political leaders and sub-national actors promote internal investment than outbound globalization. In the latest and ongoing strategy of BRI, it is seen that a broad consensus forms in support of integrating foreign policy and domestic development. Although this convergence in China promotes Chinese implementers’ interest outside China, the recipient governments sometimes view this strategy as diplomatic moves by Beijing.

A comprehensive discussion on how sub-national actors are playing their role in China’s SMG is made in the final part of the book named “*Subnational Actors*”. This part is comprised of three separate chapters. The first chapter of this part is Chapter Six which discusses the implementation patterns of subnational actors in the nationalist strategies by assessing the involvement of three selected cities of China—Chongqing, Ningbo and Wenzhou. The discussion reveals the contribution of these three cities on local development. Although being one of the important actors in the Chinese state system, local/provincial governments are not active in international negotiations. But they are the key drivers of making successful economic growth and globalization. The market-implementation of globalized strategies of these three selected cities have been intricately discussed in this chapter. The author has chosen these cities based on different economic and local power structures. All these three cities have distinct levels of economic power authorized by national government, diverse local technocracy, varied economic structures and different corporate interests. The first city—Chongqing follows the state capitalism. Since it has state-owned enterprise (SOE); state banks and highly politicized local government; it represents the state-capitalism. Ningbo is the second city that has diverse economic structure and highly competent local

⁷ Min Ye, “Fragmentation and Mobilization: Domestic Politics of the Belt and Road in China”, *Journal of Contemporary China*, Vol. 28, Issue 119, 2019, pp. 696-711.

⁸ Benesch Friedlander Coplan and Aronoff LLP, op. cit.

bureaucracies. Therefore, this city is close to the developmental state. Wenzhou with its dominant private capital and weak local state is the third city, i.e., closer to the liberal market economy. By analyzing the different patterns of their involvement in market-based economic growth for globalization demonstrates how different political-economic systems make valuable contribution in diverse programmes and mechanisms in implementation even under the same political dynamics from the top.

The growth and globalization of Chinese companies has been discussed in the following chapter. Since different companies have different policy priorities and different political choice, they develop different types of relations with global market and home government. Therefore, Chinese companies habitually improvise the nationalist strategies in their own ways. They contribute in suggesting latest knowledge on the ideas and experiences of corporate elites in China.⁹ In this chapter, Min Ye aptly confers how these Chinese companies challenge domestic politics in the corporate circles of China. The discussion in the chapter reveals that by adopting nationalist strategies, state and market reinforce each other in the economic realm. It largely helped in maintaining high growth in China throughout the past decades. It also tells the gradual strengthening of corporate nationalism in China that makes symbiotic relations between authoritarian state and companies. The concluding Chapter blends the theoretical and empirical analyses of the earlier discussions and argues findings on economic debates related to China; state-market roles and rising China's impact on global development. The political future related to communism and the rise of Xi Jinping in the Chinese state system is also discussed in this chapter. Min Ye discusses the importance of state and market for other countries to achieve success in the globalized world, apart from China's involvement in globalization. The chapter also covers the impact on world economic development. The changing of power and its possible consequences due to China's involvement in globalization is also aptly discussed in this chapter.

Being a practitioner of authoritarian-political system, China has build a strong political order in the regime and this authoritarian-political system has been personified by the inclination of the President Xi Jinping.¹⁰ The country follows a state-controlled capitalist system in which the state controls financial sector, major infrastructure companies and local governments. Therefore, when China launched a mega global plan like BRI which is already a continuation of previous nationalist strategy under the state-mobilized globalization framework, this initiative will have a huge impact on global economic connectivity and infrastructure. It is natural that foreign policy analysts will critique this ambitious plan and express concern about Beijing's diplomatic move when

⁹ Nana de Graaff, "China Inc. goes global. Transnational and national networks of China's Globalizing business elite", *Review of International Political Economy*, Vol. 27, Issue 2, 2020, pp. 208-233.

¹⁰ "China's authoritarian turn is a challenge for the world", *Financial Times*, available at <https://www.ft.com/content/a8366500-2271-11ea-b8a1-584213ee7b2b>, accessed on 25 May 2020.

Chinese political autocrats launched this type of mega plan for global development. In this regard, Min Ye comments that foreign observers should not miss important domestic drivers, economic causes and the important contribution of internal institutions that shaped the ground for launching BRI and will continue to support its implementation process. Therefore, Min Ye clarifies that the launching of BRI is not just a ‘vision’ of a leader rather it is a combination of economic crisis and priorities.

Under SMGF, the BRI is thought to be an impressive strategy for promoting globalization in and outside China where China is playing the proactive role. The author shows that Chinese political leaders accept this strategy as their grand foreign policy initiative and will be facilitating this initiative to secure a central role in international economic governance and globalization process. Since its inception, this initiative is gaining attention and assumption that this initiative will rebalance globalization.¹¹ At the same time, critics of neoliberalism-centered globalization alert that overdoing economic rationality as a mere cost-benefit calculation for profit maximization can make marginalization and lead to enormous benefits for a small group of people.¹² Therefore, it is still a long way to go for assessing this initiative that whether this will bring common prosperity for all or not. Regarding this, Min Ye, rightly remarks on the anticipation on BRI that it will take a long time to finally understand whether this plan will make China successful in achieving win-win globalization across the world. Although this initiative managed to make a cohesive platform for Chinese capital to expand globally and gained worldwide attention toward globalized China, it needs to go a long way to assess whether China’s industrial overcapacity can lead the world’s latest industrialization.

The findings of this book is a result of well-conducted research. Running an in-depth research on China’s policy making is a difficult task since the country, in some cases, is not much willing to share information. Min Ye excels in this area and she successfully arranged notable numbers of interviews that mostly consists of retired government officials with almost 20 years of experience. She did a commendable task since conducting field research in Chinese localities is extremely complicated. Her field research covered Chongqing, Ningbo, Wenzhou, Shanghai and Urumqi where she outshined in collecting important information in adaptive and versatile manner. She predominantly focused on interviews to draw interactive roadmaps for analyzing archival collection and statistics. The author successfully developed this book, which is thematically sound and rich in empirical evidence through conducting this research for four long years from 2014 to 2018. With a reader-friendly approach, this book will undoubtedly make substantial contribution to the existing literature on China’s policy making and understanding the country’s journey towards globalization through SMGF.

¹¹ Anastas Vangeli, op.cit

¹² Zheng Xin and Hu Wenjia, “Belt and Road forges new path to inclusive globalization”, *Xinhua*, available at http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2019-04/22/c_137998244.htm, accessed on 25 May 2020.

Although Min Ye gave her best effort, this book is not free from limitations. It is a strong attempt of Min Ye on examining China's policy making regarding state-mobilized globalization established on field-based empirical evidence. Although it offers many promising sides, there are scopes to conduct empirical research on the sustainability of China's SMGF and the outcomes of the latest strategy like BRI. Her research plan's aim was to capture the policy making process in the Chinese state system regarding SMGF. To support her plan, she conducted all interviews from government officials, scholars, researchers, and market actors. But this gave the one-sided perception of the SMGF. Min Ye did not capture what locals think about China's decades-long aspiration of embracing globalization. The mass perception regarding Chinese way of globalization can broaden the understanding¹³ that might be resourceful and thought provoking for the readers. Min Ye may think of knowing the perception of BRI member countries about China's support and backing globalization regarding BRI. Since a country's domestic policy is influenced by external dynamics, the understanding of what others think about use of Chinese capitalism in backing globalization can help studying the future of power shift in the world politics. Therefore, an intense discussion might be considered to be included in the second edition on BRI member countries' views regarding China's practice of globalization in and outside of China.

In this book, Min Ye introduces the SMGF and uses this framework as an investigative tool to apprehend Chinese capitalism and the country's choice on adopting globalization. This Framework shows that all national strategies including the latest BRI helped in sustaining China's high-growth economy and social-political stability. But at the same time, these nationalist strategies also spark some political backlash. To overcome these, Min Ye suggests that this framework needs to adapt global circumstances appropriately. She suggests that China can turn back and see how it made its journey from crisis-ridden middle-income economy to an impressive global power. This example can also be replicated outside China.

As a final note, Min Ye's book *The Belt Road and Beyond—State-Mobilized Globalization in China: 1998–2018*, is certainly based on logically manifested arguments with appropriate empirical evidence except diminutive limitations. Therefore, her work can be recognized as a notable contribution in the discourse of understanding China's policy making and its journey towards globalization.

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¹³ Francis L.F. Lee, Zhou He, Chin-Chuan Lee, Wan-Ying Lin and Mike Yao, "The Attitudes of Urban Chinese Towards Globalization: A Survey Study of Media Influence", *Pacific Affairs*, Vol. 82, No. 2, 2009, pp. 211-230.