

“Greater China”: A Conceptual Approach

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For many Asians, “Greater China” conjures up images of Japan’s wartime “Greater East Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere”. Consensus eventually emerged, however, that if “greater” was equated with “larger”, it was an adequate term to describe the activities in, and interactions between, mainland China, Hong Kong, Macao, Taiwan and the offshore islands, and Chinese overseas.¹

Greater China, then, is better understood as a heterotopia than as a geopolitical entity. Rather than territorial units, it is composed of highly mobile populations, involved in contradictions and contestations about identity, community and civilization. Greater China is not a place; it is a bundle of concepts and practices.²

Introduction

Thirty years ago, Harry Harding noted a “rapidly increasing interaction of Chinese societies around the world as the political and administrative barriers to their intercourse fall.”

This process, he argued, was the driving force behind an emerging Greater China, which for some “is simply a way of summarizing the new links among the far-flung international Chinese community” while for others “it is a recipe for the institutions that should govern those links.”³ More than a decade after the start of China’s economic reforms and the enthusiastic response they generated among Chinese around the world, many international observers, like Harding, speculated about the possible formation of a global Chinese community, bound together by a deeply rooted cultural and linguistic tradition, a Confucian ethic of thrift, self-perfection and status (as measured primarily by material well-being and economic success), and a shared belief in the narrative that all Chinese were sons and daughters of the “Yellow Emperor” and belonged to an eternal Chinese nation that transcended space and time. The underlying assumption, based on an old saying, was simply this: Birds of a feather flock together, and Chinese birds do so more than any others.⁴ At the same time, *Greater China* became a catchword hotly debated in Western media and academic circles in the 1980s and 1990s to capture the cultural and political dynamics of economic development in southern China, spurred by investment from Hong Kong, Taiwan, and overseas ethnic Chinese entrepreneurs in response to China’s opening-up policy.

In fact, the term Greater China had been used sporadically long before that, both in the West and in China itself. It referred to an entity called China that was not clearly demarcated by nation-state borders but had fluid frontiers, reflecting imperial China’s civilizational ideology and Western uncertainties about China’s territorial reach. This historical trajectory informs an epistemological inquiry inherent in the concept of Greater China about what China is – a critical question for Sinologists to this day. This essay explores the dimensions of Greater China in modern and contemporary China studies, highlighting its continued relevance in our thinking about China and discussing its multiple meanings. In doing so, the essay also explains the epistemological underpinnings of Greater China Studies at the University of Tübingen, past and present.

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1 Shambaugh 1993, 654.

2 Calahan 2004, 67.

3 Harding 1993, 661.

4 The saying “Wu yi lei ju, ren yi qun fen” 物以類聚，人以群分, more correctly translated as “things of the same kind come together, and people group by their kind”, takes its roots from the *Yi Jing* (Book of Changes), where a similar expression is found: *fang yi lei ju, wu yi qun fen* 方以類聚，物以群分.

A Brief History of the Concept of Greater China

Outer and Inner China

At first glance, the concept of Greater China (Da Zhonghua⁵ 大中華, Da Zhonghua diqu 大中華地區) seems rather recent, as the idea of an emerging growth region, mainly in East Asia, gained increasing media and academic attention in the 1980s and 1990s. However, the underlying concept is much older and closely linked to ancient Chinese ideas about China's geography, history and culture. Very early on, in the Zhou period (c. 1122–256 BC), the Chinese heartland was referred to as Zhongguo 中國 (the "Middle Kingdom"), which, bounded by the waters of the Huanghe 黃河 (Yellow River) and the Yangzi jiang 揚子江 (Yangzi River), was fertile and the area where Han civilization developed. Beyond this, there was only a geographically undefined periphery, the Chinese frontier(s) – the inhospitable, uncontrollable and culturally inferior areas of the south-west, north-west and desert north. Thus, even in the early imperial period, a distinction was made between "China proper" (*Zhongguo benbu* 中国本部),⁶ or Inner China, which referred to the 18 provinces predominantly populated by Han Chinese and administered directly by the imperial bureaucracy; and the "dependencies" (*shudi* 屬地/ *fanshu* 番屬), or Outer China, referring to the "Barbarian Lands" inhabited by other ethnic groups or peoples of a separate kingdom who accepted, at least symbolically, the suzerainty of the Chinese empire by bowing to the emperor on the occasion of tribute missions they made at irregular intervals to the "Middle Kingdom". Over the centuries, this distinction has been essential for Chinese geographers to visualize their ideas of the spatial extent of the Chinese empire.⁷

Western geographers followed suit, but by the 1930s at the latest they had begun to combine Inner and Outer China into Greater China. In the 1940s, Greater China was imprinted on US government maps in either a political or topographical context. This pointed to inconsistencies in the conceptualization of China, reflecting traditional Chinese thinking: For example, a map published in the US in 1944 included Outer Mongolia, Manchuria, Tibet and Xinjiang as part of Greater China, even though not all of these areas were part of the Republic of China, which had been founded in 1912. Other maps of the time included geographical areas associated with the old Chinese empire, such as the Himalayas, the Tianshan Mountains and the Shikote Akin Range, which were again only partially or not at all under the control of the newly formed Chinese state.⁸ Clearly, there was no consistent understanding of what China meant – the existing new nation-state or something more. The relationship between China's territorial borders and its geographical extent was therefore also "flexible" in the West and characterized by divergent historical, political, and geographical ideas about China. Greater China was thus from the outset a dazzling construct.

Greater China and the Overseas Chinese

A particular facet of the history of the concept of Greater China is the incorporation of the overseas Chinese into the declining Qing Empire in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.⁹ Emigration, i.e. detachment from the empire and its civilizational self-image, had previously been incompatible with the traditional Chinese claim to rule based on Confucian orthodoxy. Anyone who left China was no longer considered Chinese because they had abandoned their filial piety to the family and their loyalty to the emperor, both of which were foundational principles for maintaining social and political order. For the imperial court, the emigrants thus forfeited their Chinese identity. However, the pressure of Western nationalism, with its powerful ideology that every human community must constitute itself as a nation, led the imperial court in the second half of the nineteenth century to take a new look at the overseas Chinese: With the unified term *huaqiao* 华侨, the Qing government promoted a common Chinese identity that would bind the overseas Chinese not only to their home provinces but also (and above all) to the empire, which was to be reformed into a new nation based on a deep-seated Chinese cultural nationalism. Kang Youwei, Liang Qichao, Sun Yat-sen and many other public intellectuals and revolutionaries sought the patriotic and not

5 This article uses *Pinyin* as the standard system of romanization, deviating from it only where certain terms are conventionally rendered in the literature using other romanization systems.

6 As Ge Zhaoguang (2018, 24, fn. 4) has pointed out, the term "China proper" has very early origins, but only became an important concept among Japanese scholars in the Meiji era (1868–1912) to criticize the Qing Empire for unjustly claiming the Manchu, Mongolian, Hui, Tibetan, and Korean areas as its constituent parts

7 See Harding 1993, 662 and fn. 2.

8 Ebd.

9 See e.g. Townsend 1992, Wang 2002.

least the financial support of the overseas Chinese for their reform goals, thus laying the foundation for a policy towards the *huaqiao* that would shape the ideological confrontation between the Chinese Communist Party and the Kuomintang (KMT) for decades to come. The Nationality Law of the Republic of China, established in 1912, was consequently based on the legal principle of *ius sanguinis*, so that any ethnic Chinese living abroad had a natural right to a Chinese passport. Moreover, overseas Chinese were given constitutional rights to parliamentary representation and special government commissions to protect their interests abroad.

After taking power in 1949, the Chinese Communist Party initially made no changes to this policy. In principle, all overseas Chinese were citizens of the new state. From the 1950s, however, the Chinese Citizenship Law was gradually revised. In the 1980 version, overseas Chinese lost their natural right to Chinese nationality if they already held a passport from another country. It was no longer acceptable, especially for countries in Southeast Asia with large Chinese populations and anti-Communist governments, to give the impression that the PRC claimed the political loyalty of the Chinese living there, implicitly denying these states full sovereignty. In addition, China's earlier interpretation of nationality law led to a strong distrust of the Chinese throughout Southeast Asia, who were seen as Beijing's "fifth column" in their host countries and were often discriminated against. However, relations between the overseas Chinese – particularly in Southeast Asia – and China have remained ambivalent to this day. This can be seen in the many instances in recent years when overseas Chinese have been called upon to serve the "motherland" or have asserted their Chinese identity in public debate by speaking out against what they see as illegitimate encroachments on PRC sovereignty and disrespect for the Chinese nation. It is obvious that many overseas Chinese, no matter what their nationality, have a sense of being part of Greater China, of being Chinese.

Contemporary Greater China

The more recent use of Greater China in "Western" media and academic circles goes back to the period following the introduction of economic reforms in the People's Republic of China in the late 1970s and the resulting intensification of economic interaction between China's dynamic southern provinces of Zhejiang, Fujian and Guangdong on the one hand, and Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan on the other. This development was expected to create an economic powerhouse for the coming "21st Asia century".¹⁰ As early as 1979, an article in the Taiwanese magazine *Changqiao* promoted a "common Chinese market" that would include Taiwan, Hong Kong, Macau, Singapore and mainland China. For some, the *Nanyang* 南洋¹¹ – which roughly translates as Southeast Asia – was also included in Greater China because of the substantial capital investment in mainland China by ethnic Chinese entrepreneurs from the region.¹²

Greater China soon took on a political dimension. The Economist noted in 1987 that Taiwan could join a "Greater China Confederation" in the future. An article in *Business Week* in 1988 referred to "Greater China" as the result of economic integration between Hong Kong, Taiwan and mainland China, which was seen as a more practical way of reunifying China than a formal agreement between the entities concerned. With Hong Kong and Macau unable to claim national sovereignty and their return to Beijing a foregone conclusion, and Singapore's sovereignty unchallenged by Beijing, the Greater China debate in the 1980s focused on the future shape of political relations between mainland China and Taiwan. In the 1990s and early 2000s, when relations between Beijing and Taipei were relatively stable, some scholars proposed a (con)federalist system as a solution to the "Taiwan question", but this thinking never developed into anything seriously debated by the political mainstream on either side of the Taiwan Strait.¹³ Greater China remained primarily a metaphor for an economically emerging region in East Asia based on market-driven integration between culturally compatible (Confucian-capitalist) entities.¹⁴

10 One of the more recent publications on this subject is Mahbubani 2022.

11 Nanyang, meaning "Southern Ocean", refers to the region encompassing Southeast Asia. Historically, it was used by Chinese people to describe maritime territories to the south of China, including Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore, and other surrounding areas. The term reflects both geographic and cultural connections, emphasizing Chinese diaspora identity in Southeast Asia.

12 See Callahan 2005.

13 See Harding 1993, 681f. Chang Ya-chung (2000), who is considered a "unification" hardliner in contemporary Taiwan, has developed a full-fledged confederalist model in his theory on cross-strait integration.

14 See e.g. Redding 1993, Lewis and Rowley 1996 and Herrmann-Pillath 1998.

Finally, with the end of the Cold War, Greater China came to be equated with the idea of a modern Pax Sinica (peace “by the grace of China”) in the Asia-Pacific region, giving the term an expansionist, if not imperialist, undertone. Greater China now referred to the rise of China, which was perceived as a threat to the international balance of power and world peace. Despite efforts at more systematic Asian security cooperation in the 1990s and 2000s, in which China participated, conservative intellectuals and policymakers in the United States promoted a “China threat theory”, countered by a mainstream of optimistic advocates of “engagement” on both sides of the Atlantic. This changed soon after Xi Jinping 習近平 came to power in 2012.¹⁵ Since then, the “China threat” has been taken for granted across the “West”, albeit in different ways, as “strategic competition”, “revisionist challenge” or an “authoritarian model” targeting its democratic Western counterpart and has thus informed much of China-related power transition theory.¹⁶

Obviously, Greater China as a term and concept is historically and politically biased and needs to be discussed in an informed manner when it is used. From the perspective of Greater China Studies, as they have been conducted in Tübingen for more than two decades now, the use of the concept makes sense in a fundamental way - as a provocative challenge to our understanding of China and as a conceptual guideline for the academic operationalization of *China*, which is the core business of contemporary Sinology.

Conceptualizing Greater China

As explained above, the term “Greater China” (GC) has been used in the past to refer to different observations (or beliefs) and inferred trends, namely

- a geographically defined economic space, defined as (South) China + X;
- an integrated political space encompassing mainland China, Hong Kong, Macau, and Taiwan;
- extensive capital relations between globally active Chinese entrepreneurs, giving rise to a new type of transnational economic practice called *guanxi* capitalism;
- a common cultural identity connecting all (ethnic) Chinese worldwide as the core driver of economic and political integration in Greater China.

This list already shows that Greater China has been assigned both a local and a global (or transnational) dimension. It has also been closely associated with the idea of interaction and communication, as well as regionalization and integration. At the same time, Greater China has been associated with a sense of economic, political and cultural unity or *homogeneity* in past and present *Chineseness*.¹⁷ Put differently, the concept of Greater China suggests that there is a unity within *Chineseness* that manifests itself at different levels, namely locally and/or globally; economically and/or culturally; and (ethno)politically, in terms of a shared commitment to being Chinese (as *Huaren* 華人 or *Zhongguo ren* 中國人) and belonging to the Chinese nation (*Zhonghua minzu* 中華民族), a lived community that transcends state boundaries.¹⁸ This “homogeneity hypothesis”, however, is opposed by a resistant reality, as there are many centrifugal forces that counteract the idea of Greater China’s unity and point to much difference, or *heterogeneity*. This leads us to the core questions guiding the study of Greater China in the contemporary era:

- Is Greater China a useful concept for examining contemporary *Chineseness*?
- What specific phenomena of *Chineseness* could or should be meaningfully subsumed and studied under the concept of Greater China?

Against this background, there are three ways to study Greater China: a) by conducting research that starts from the “homogeneity hypothesis”, which assumes that there is more unity than difference in contemporary *Chineseness*; b) by conducting research that starts from the “heterogeneity hypothesis”, which assumes that there is more difference than unity in contemporary *Chineseness*, or refuses to treat *Chineseness* as a plausible analytical category at all; and c) by conducting research based on an open, inductive approach that searches for

¹⁵ See e.g. Yee and Storey 2002.

¹⁶ See Yang 2013, Kim and Gates 2015.

¹⁷ *Chineseness*, like the concept of Greater China, is a multi-layered idea that intertwines culture, ethnicity, history, and identity, varying greatly depending on who defines it and in what context. The term describes the qualities, characteristics, and cultural identity associated with being Chinese. It can only be meaningfully understood by examining the self-ascriptions of those who are called, or who call themselves, Chinese.

¹⁸ Note that in official Chinese texts on national minorities within China, *Zhongguo minzu* 中國民族 is used, highlighting a different conception of the Chinese nation informed by China’s state (multicultural) nationalism (Schubert 2002).

what is common and what is divisive in contemporary Chineseness in order to assess the plausibility of Greater China as an analytical term, even as a theoretical concept. The most promising approach is to focus on the third track, i.e. to ask pragmatically if and how it makes sense to use Greater China to understand contemporary Chineseness in its economic, political and cultural dimensions. This is the approach taken by the Chair of Greater China Studies in Tübingen.

To summarize: Contemporary Greater China studies distinguish between different dimensions or spaces of Greater China. Globally, Greater China refers to a transnationally defined Chinese space of cultural identity and economic practice in which ethnic Chinese around the world communicate with each other. Locally, Greater China refers to a geographically defined space or core area, which in turn can be differentiated into an economic, political, and historical-cultural space. Both the global and the local dimensions are studied in Tübingen with the overarching goal of deconstructing Greater China and, if sufficiently supported by empirical data, reconstructing it as far as this reconstruction can be scientifically justified and argued.

Greater China Spaces

Greater China as an Economic Space

In economic terms, Greater China refers to a core area comprising the southern and south-eastern Chinese coastal provinces of Guangdong, Fujian, Zhejiang and Jiangsu, including Shanghai, the two Chinese Special Administrative Regions of Hong Kong and Macau, and Taiwan (Republic of China). Singapore, which is predominantly ethnic Chinese, is often included, as are the countries of Southeast Asia with their various Chinese populations who have been sending money and capital to China since the early days of Chinese immigration to the *Nanyang* region. When the definitional framework is broadened to include a specifically Chinese form of economic activity, and Greater China is thus defined globally, it refers to the assumption of a totality of (informal) interactions of all Chinese economic entities operating worldwide – often referred to as *guanxi* capitalism. This brings into focus the phenomenon of a transnational network economy, which is widely believed to be based on the ethno-cultural ties of global Chineseness and seems to follow the principle: “Chinese prefer to do business with Chinese!”

Much research has been conducted on the Chinese network economy and its significance for the mainland’s economic miracle that unfolded since the 1980s. Imagining homogeneity in the economic Greater China, most of the work done emphasized how Chinese entrepreneurs accumulated capital by activating cultural ties and personal relationships with other Chinese, and how they worked through various institutional channels that connected them globally.¹⁹ Recent studies of the economic Greater China have focused on the contribution of Taiwanese (*Taishang* 臺商) entrepreneurs, as well as Hong Kong and overseas Chinese investors from Southeast Asia to China’s economic rise since the late 1980s, critically assessing the importance of cultural compatibilities in terms of language, religion, and moral values.²⁰ *Taishang*’s economic engagement in a changing Chinese economy, their corporate strategies in the face of U.S. demands for decoupling from China, and their entrenchment in a still vital and huge Chinese market are ongoing issues to be addressed in the study of the economic Greater China. Other work has highlighted the Chinese government’s fervent invocation of nationalism and ethno-cultural identity to attract highly skilled professionals from Taiwan and the overseas Chinese to the “motherland” to help build an innovation economy, one of the key pillars of the “Chinese Dream” promulgated by Xi Jinping.²¹

Greater China as a Political Space

In political terms, Greater China refers to the territorial whole of the People’s Republic of China (mainland China), Hong Kong and Macau, which became part of the PRC in 1997 and 1999 respectively, and Taiwan (Republic of China), which is considered part of China by the Chinese government and most other states²² – but

¹⁹ See e.g. Herzbach 2007, Rühle 2012.

²⁰ See e.g. Wang 2014, Schubert 2025. These and other studies show that while the cultural factor is important in facilitating interaction between Taiwanese and (mainland) Chinese, it does not foster an overarching political identity on the part of the Taiwanese, i.e. a desire to become united in a single nation-state. In fact, most Taiwanese would categorically reject the term Greater China if it implied such a claim.

²¹ See e.g. Liu and van Dongen 2016.

²² However, an increasing number of states are drawing a distinction between the “one China policy”, which they claim to adhere to, and the “one China principle”, which they do not necessarily support. While the former leaves open what

not by the current DPP government nor by many Taiwanese. Singapore, which gained independence in 1965, is also sometimes considered part of the political Greater China – the only state outside the geographical core of Greater China where ethnic Chinese make up most of the population and form the political and economic ruling elite. This thinking is largely due to Singapore's past role as a bridgehead for communication and mediation between the PRC and Taiwan.²³

To this day, scholarship on the political Greater China is dominated by the question of cross-strait integration, if not unification. In the 1990s and early 2000s, some scholars invoked the idea of (con)federalism as a compromise to resolve the competing sovereignty claims of Beijing and Taipei, to little avail. Today, there is a consensus among scholars, at least outside the PRC, that there are more differences than (aspirations for) unity in cross-strait relations, and the narrative of a Chinese nation that forces culture and politics into congruence is hotly contested in Taiwan. The fringe debate on federalist solutions had already faded before China became more assertive under Xi Jinping, and Taiwan more nationalistic in the process of democratic consolidation. For the Chinese government, "reunification" must lead to the incorporation of Taiwan into the PRC as a province or another special administrative region, thus annihilating the resisting existence of a "non-existent" Republic of China. In Taiwan, no matter how the "blue" and "green" party camps disagree on a reasonable China policy, they share an overarching consensus on the indisputable sovereignty of the Republic of China (on Taiwan) and will not succumb to Beijing's claim that a Chinese nation can only exist in a unified state represented by the People's Republic of China.²⁴ Indeed, the PRC's irredentist claim to Taiwan has led to a diminishing identification with what China means in Taiwan, thus exacerbating a conflict that has unwisely become the mainstay of the Chinese party-state's legitimacy. How cross-strait relations will evolve over time is a central concern in the study of Greater China.

Greater China as a Historical-Cultural Space

Historically and culturally, Greater China refers to a space – geographical as well as transnational and communicative – that includes mainland China, Hong Kong and Macau, Taiwan, and the countries of Southeast Asia with their Chinese populations. On the other hand, there is a transnational variant according to which Greater China includes all overseas Chinese (*Huaqiao* 華僑, or *haiwai Huaren* 海外華人, in official PRC speak). In this sense, Greater China refers to the totality of worldwide Chineseness, i.e. a global identity space called China. It is assumed that Chinese people, regardless of their nationality and socialization, understand their historical-cultural (ethnic) Chineseness as a meaningful reference to their individual and collective identity. It is further assumed that the influence of a Chinese cultural heritage propagated by the Chinese state over millennia and ingrained in the social upbringing of most ethnic Chinese continues to shape the thinking and behavior of Chinese people around the world, leading to their identification (or rejection) of China, while they are likely to have very different Chinas in mind.

"Cultural China" has been promoted by Chinese public intellectuals since the 1990s as an effort to constitute a transnational Chineseness. According to Tu Wei-ming, the latter would not be determined by an authoritarian Chinese state, but rather by local Chinese cultures in Hong Kong, Taipei, Singapore, and among overseas Chinese communities in the near and far abroad. Chinese identity would be decentered and modernized from the periphery – the periphery thus becoming the center (of Chinese culture).²⁵ This rather abstract debate never had a profound impact in the decades after it emerged. In fact, the discourse of "cultural China" has been appropriated by the Chinese state since the Jiang Zemin era, when Chinese politics took a nationalist turn to bolster the legitimacy of one-party rule. Today, Xi Jinping's lofty goal of building a "community of shared future for mankind" is linked to the idea of a global Chinese culture that benefits the world as a normative framework for order, benevolence, and peacemaking. It is the accompanying tune of a rising China that claims to reshape the international order to suit its so-called national interests. But this project of underpinning the party-state's claim to unchallenged rule with cultural nationalism is being challenged outside China by the millions of Taiwanese and overseas Chinese who identify with Chinese

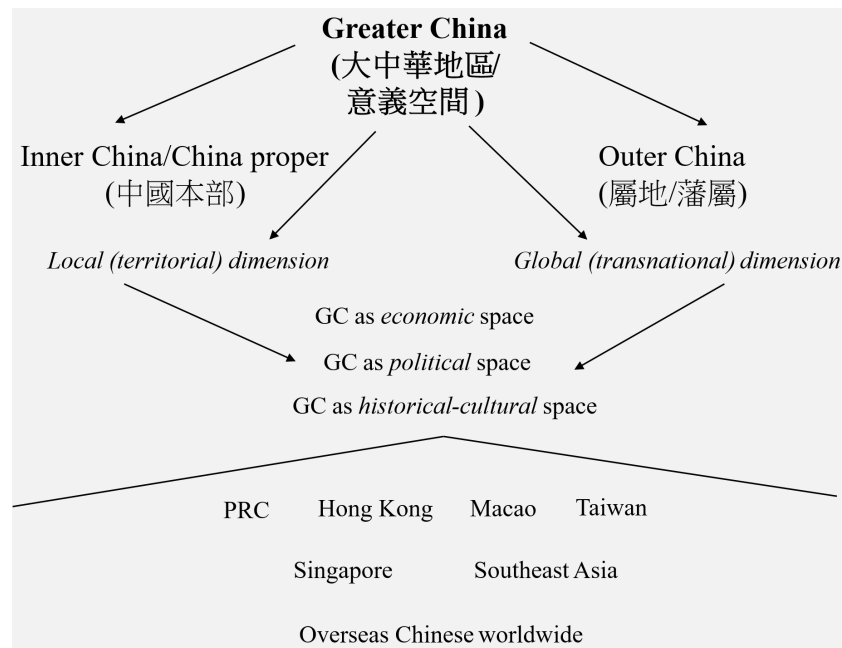
China means, the latter is understood to imply that Taiwan is part of the People's Republic of China. Of course, the Chinese government insists that the "one China policy" and the "one China principle" mean the same thing.

23 Consider the first meeting between the heads of the Association of Relations Across the Taiwan Strait (ARATS) and the Straits Exchange Foundation (SEF) in April 1993, and the first meeting between Xi Jinping and then ROC President Ma Ying-jeou in September 2015, both hosted by the Singapore government.

24 See Schubert 2004.

25 Tu 1991.

culture (to varying degrees and with varying references) but reject its appropriation by an authoritarian state. It is their understanding of what constitutes global cultural Chineseness, beyond any connection to political authority, that is central to the study of the historical-cultural Greater China.



Graph 1: The Conceptualization of Greater China

Greater China and Global China

There are some similarities between the concepts of Greater China and Global China, the latter of which has gained traction in academic circles over the past twenty years. Research on Global China seeks to understand “China beyond its borders” since the party-state began promoting its “going out” policy after the 2008 global financial crisis to solve a number of serious economic problems stemming from domestic overaccumulation after three decades of rapid economic development. After Xi Jinping came to power in 2012, this policy was underpinned by a new assertive approach to international politics, with China showing a determination to change the institutions of global governance to suit the party-state’s aspirations for great power status. Foreign investment and corporate takeovers, infrastructure megaprojects framed by the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), Chinese loans to governments across Asia and beyond, and the interplay of state and private economic interests abroad have been the main pillars of China’s foreign policy over the past decade, informing much of the empirical work in the field of Global China studies. This has been accompanied by research on the various ways in which China creates “dependence and loyalty among foreign nationals, political elites, and overseas Chinese,” and on the ways in which China projects “soft power” by systematic efforts to spread the “Chinese story” around the world – through television and radio stations, “people-to-people” diplomacy, exchange programs of all kinds, and Confucius Institutes.²⁶ Global China Studies take stock of these processes and attempt to make sense of the results of China’s going global in an interdisciplinary effort:

“From Africa to South-East Asia and Latin America”, from analyses of policy, official discourse and grand strategies to granular ethnographies of class, gender and race dynamics between Chinese and local actors, from state investment in commodities to private industrialists, diaspora, cultural and medical diplomacy, global China studies has taken off, especially among the younger generation of China scholars”.²⁷

Most interestingly, as Lee Ching Kwan notes, behind all this is the question of what is “Chinese” about China – “that is, what are the peculiarities of Chinese practices, processes, patterns, and policies?”²⁸ This, she points out,

²⁶ For Ching Kwan Lee, who is the spiritus rector of the Global China concept, *economic statecraft*, *patron clientelism* and *symbolic domination* constitute “three analytically distinct but empirically intertwined power mechanisms” or strategies that inform China’s going global (Lee 2022: 317).

²⁷ Lee 2022, 326.

²⁸ Lee 2022, 327.

can only be assessed through systematic comparison, because only then can it be determined what is not “Chinese” about China, but rather reflects global features that can also be observed in other countries and cultures. Thus, Global China aims to analytically overcome the “methodological nationalism” that many scholars have long identified as the major predicament of contemporary China studies.²⁹

This is where Greater China studies and Global China studies meet: While the former critically examines (global) Chineseness from within, by comparing Chinese communities across space, the latter assesses Chineseness from without, by comparing Chinese state behavior and social practices with those of other countries. While Greater China studies focus on the Chinese world, Global China studies focus on the PRC in relation to the international society. In both approaches, however, Chineseness is deconstructed in order to reveal what can justifiably be called Chinese. Their objectives are similar, but their analytical perspectives are different.

Final Remarks: A Greater China Research Program?

Although much of what scholars have said about Greater China belongs to the past, the concept is still useful for addressing the hypothesis of homogeneity/heterogeneity in global Chineseness. Thus, the key question that underlies all research conducted under the rubric of Greater China studies is: what do our empirical observations tell us about the degree of homogeneity or heterogeneity among Chinese people, including those of Chinese descent, required to make meaningful arguments about global Chineseness – and how can we possibly theorize it? This is not a question that determines the choice of research topics at the Chair of Greater China Studies in Tübingen. Rather, it describes an intellectual effort to combine the empirical findings of these topics with a constant search for an adequate understanding of Chineseness and China in the contemporary era. From this perspective, there is no specific research program attached to “Greater China studies” in terms of topic selection. Rather, all of the topics studied have been inherently linked to an investigation of the contemporary manifestations of the economic, political, and historical-cultural “Greater China” and to a critical reflection on the meaning of *China* in the contemporary era. Greater China studies must therefore be understood as a constant evaluation and deconstruction of Chineseness – and in this sense also as a challenge to the Chinese Communist Party’s claim to subjugate the Chinese nation to its authoritarian state. The tension between what is ideologically claimed by the Chinese party state and what is individually and collectively felt as a constitutive identity in the “Chinese world” is at the heart of what makes the study of Greater China past and present.

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29 See Franceschini and Loubere 2022 who speak of *Global China as Method*.

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