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Conceptual and theoretical debates in modern geopolitics and their implications for Chinese geopolitics

Ning An  and Hong Zhu

ABSTRACT

An outline of modern geopolitics identifies its development as a critique of classical geopolitics, linking international political action to the subjective production of geographical knowledge and points to its intellectual roots in the Foucauldian notion of 'discourse'. Three sub-fields of formal and practical geopolitics, popular geopolitics, and non-representational geopolitics are summarized. A consideration of the location of geopolitical explanations identifies spaces where future geopolitical research could be developed, and leads to an argument for greater concern with the geopolitical issues associated with the rise of a pluri-centric world. The discursive marginalization of non-Western voices maps uneasily onto the increasingly prominent economic and political role of the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) and other emerging powers and points to the need for further theorizations to guide the analysis of the positioning of the Global South in a post-Cold War and post-colonial world.

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摘要

关于现代地缘政治学概念与理论的争论及其对中国地缘政治学的启示. *Area Development and Policy*. 现代地缘政治学研究在很大程度上是被认为建立在对古典地缘政治学说的批判基础之上发展而来的. 具体来讲, 现代地缘政治研究更加注重地理知识的生产与国际政治活动之间的关系, 其知识体系是植根于福柯对'话语权'概念的论述. 其主要分为三个方向, 包括科班和应用地缘政治学、流行文化地缘政治学和非表征地缘政治学. 然而, 基于对当今世界格局的日渐多元化的现象以及地缘政治知识生产的视野的局限性的考量, 本文认为未来地缘政治研究可以从地缘政治知识生产和解释多元化的方向来拓展. 已有的地缘政治知识对非西方话语的边缘化明显已经不能够对当今世界日渐兴起的新兴的政治和经济力量(如金砖五国等)对当今世界格局的影响等现象做出恰当的解释. 因此, 本文强调了在后冷战时代和后殖民时代的语境下对南半球国家在世界地缘政治和经济格局中的角色和定位做出合理的解释和理论化的必要性.

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关键词

现代地缘政治；福柯；地点；中国地缘政治

RESUMEN

Debates conceptuales y teóricos en la geopolítica moderna y sus repercusiones para la geopolítica china *Area Development and Policy*. En este artículo se describe el desarrollo de la geopolítica moderna en términos generales como una crítica a la geopolítica clásica, vinculando la acción política internacional con la producción subjetiva del conocimiento geográfico, y se destacan sus raíces intelectuales en la noción foucauldiana del 'discurso'. Se presenta un resumen de tres subcampos: geopolítica formal y práctica, geopolítica popular y geopolítica no representativa. Al considerar la ubicación de las explicaciones geopolíticas se identifican los espacios donde se podría desarrollar la futura investigación geopolítica, lo que nos lleva a un argumento más centrado en las cuestiones geopolíticas relacionadas con el auge de un mundo pluricéntrico. La marginación discursiva de voces no occidentales no cuadra con el papel económico y político cada vez más relevante de los países BRICS y otros poderes emergentes y señala que son necesarias más teorizaciones para guiar el análisis de la posición del hemisferio sur en un mundo de posguerra fría y poscolonial.

PALABRAS CLAVE

geopolítica moderna, Michel Foucault, ubicación, geopolítica china

АННОТАЦИЯ

Концептуальные и теоретические дебаты в современной геополитике и их значение для китайской геополитики *Area Development and Policy*. Развитие взглядов на современную геополитику связано с критикой классической геополитики, связывающей международные политические действия с субъективным производством географических знаний и указывает на ее интеллектуальные корни в понятии 'дискурса' Фуко. Систематизированы три подраздела формальной и практической геополитики, популярной геополитики и нерепрезентационной геополитики. Рассмотрение местоположения геополитических объяснений определяет места, где возможны будущие геополитические исследования, и обосновывает большую озабоченность геополитическими вопросами в связи с формированием полицентричного мира. Дискурсивная маргинализация незападных голосов выглядит все более неадекватно на фоне все более заметной экономической и политической роли БРИКС и других формирующихся держав и указывает на необходимость развития теории для анализа позиционирования глобального Юга после Холодной войны и в пост-колониальном мире.

КЛЮЧЕВЫЕ СЛОВА

современная геополитика, Фуко, местоположение, китайская геополитика

INTRODUCTION

Geopolitical research dates from 1899 when the Swedish political scientist Rudolf Kjellen coined the notion 'geopolitics', a combination of the terms 'geo' and 'politics' (Dalby, Routledge, & Toal, 2006). The existence of different ontologies, epistemologies and methodologies in geopolitical research permits the division of this field of study into two branches: classical geopolitics; and modern, new or critical geopolitics (Parker, 1998). In the past 30 years or so, modern geopolitics seems to have occupied a dominant position, particularly in the Western academies (Dittmer & Gray, 2010). However, modern geopolitics still has a

number of weaknesses, in particular when it is incorporated with the non-Western context. This paper will, therefore, focus on the conceptual debates in the evolving theories of modern geopolitics, and then point out the possible and potential directions for future geopolitical study, especially in the non-Western and particularly in the Chinese context.

More specifically, this paper first examines the notion of modern geopolitics by investigating its intellectual roots and its recent developments. On this basis, it focuses more particularly on the lines of enquiry and debate that future modern geopolitical research could expand upon. In this part, the location of geopolitical knowledge and the agenda of geopolitical research in an emerging pluri-centric world are discussed. The third part presents a critical review of Chinese geopolitical practices and relevant analysis. Finally, integrating this review with a much wider background, this paper considers potential directions for a pluri-centric geopolitics conducted by non-Western scholars, including scholars with Chinese backgrounds, those from other BRICS countries (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) and scholars in other post-Cold War, post-colonial and Global South contexts, and which merges modern and non-Western geopolitics.

MODERN GEOPOLITICS

The intellectual roots of modern geopolitics

Research into the impact of geographical elements upon the conduct of politics has drawn on the notion of geopolitics (Agnew, 2003; Dalby et al., 2006; Dodds, 2007). In the framework of 'classical geopolitics', the relevant studies have been concerned with the assumption that physical geographical facts have a significant impact upon the exercise of international politics (Parker, 1998, p. 5). That is, geopolitical research is often involved in examining how physical geographical realities, such as location, position, topography and resources, impact upon state strategic policies. For instance, Halford Mackinder's heartland theory, one of the classics of classical geopolitics, revealed his anxiety about the position of Britain in European politics (Toal, 1996a), while Karl Haushofer sought to highlight the significances of '*Lebensraum*' (living space) and an 'organic state' for the destiny of a country (Bassin, 1987, pp. 115–116).

Modern geopolitics is largely based on the *criticism* of classical geopolitical ideas. In classical geopolitics, geography is considered to be a '*noun*' referring to a series of physical and material realities waiting to be discovered and, on this basis, geography is regarded as one of the most important factors impacting upon the exercise of power (Kelly, 2006). In modern geopolitics geographical knowledge is not only about neutral and pre-given physical geographical facts but also involves subjective factors (Agnew, 2003). Geography is often viewed as a '*verb*' referring to a process of 'geo-graphing' or 'geo-writing' that is conducted by political actors who attempt to 'seize space and organize it to fit their own cultural visions and material interests' (Toal, 1996a, p. 2). In this way, the physical geographical environment is no longer the only factor that impacts upon the exercise of world politics. Instead humanity-centred imaginary geographies, subjectively produced by politicians, statecraft intellectuals and related institutions, also impact upon the making of state strategies. In this sense, modern geopolitics doubts the possibility of 'objective and scientific knowledge', and argues that the purpose of doing a geopolitical research is 'to recover the discourses governing the geography of political practice rather than searching for an ontologically independent "reality" beyond the limits of theorizing' (Agnew, 1997, p. 2).

In modern geopolitics, the notion of 'geopolitics' is closely involved with the notion of 'discourse', which links subjective knowledge production to political acts (Dalby, 1990; Müller, 2008; Toal, 1996a; Tuathail & Agnew, 1992). Specifically, modern geopolitics focuses intimately on how the intellectuals and institutions of statecraft script spatial features and

how they place such scripting into the exercise of power. This approach draws on the Foucauldian concept of 'discourse' that underlines the nexus of 'power/knowledge' (Foucault, 1980). In offering this core concept, Michel Foucault is viewed as the single most influential scholar in modern (in particular critical) geopolitics (Dodds & Sidaway, 1994). For him, the nexus of 'power/knowledge' often operates in a geopolitical way:

The longer I continue, the more it seems to me that the formation of discourses and the genealogy of knowledge need to be analyzed, not in terms of types of consciousness, modes of perception and forms of ideology, but in terms of tactics and strategies of power. Tactics and strategies deployed through implantations, distributions, demarcations, control of territories and organizations of domains which could well make up a sort of geopolitics where my preoccupations would link up with your methods. One theme I would like to study in the next few years is that of the army as a matrix of organization and knowledge; one would need to study the history of the fortress, the 'campaign', the 'movement', the colony, the territory. Geography must indeed necessarily lie at the heart of my concerns.

(Foucault, 1980, p. 182)

It can be seen that Foucault views geography as a form of discourse and knowledge that stands in a relation to power in terms of 'tactics and strategies of power' deployed through practices involving 'implantations, distributions, demarcations, control of territories and organizations of domains'. Therefore, it can be suggested that one of his greatest contributions to modern geopolitics is the understanding of geography as a form of discourse and knowledge and as having a close relationship with power. This insight affords the key point of enquiry for modern geopolitics.

To recap: modern geopolitics offers a significantly different interpretation of geography and politics from classical geopolitics. It encourages readings of geography and politics via texts, embodiment, emotions, affects, practices, performativity, materiality and objects in which humanity rather than physical geographical facts plays a much more important role in shaping geopolitical maps. This type of worldview still plays an important part in understanding the world around us, and this is also why we still put an emphasis on the theoretical framework of modern geopolitics in this review. However, modern geopolitics is not a static theory but has evolved in different ways in the past several decades, which will be outlined in the next section.

The evolving theories of modern geopolitics

Emphasizing that geographical knowledge can be subjectively produced and used for the exercise of power, modern geopolitics has for a long time engaged in the examination of geo-writings and relevant political activities. Texts that are controlled by certain people or institutions for the knitting together of narratives as vehicles through which power can be exercised (Müller, 2008) and 'things' beyond texts, including emotions (Anderson & Smith, 2001; Pain, 2009; Pile, 2010; Sharp, 2009; Tuathail, 2003), practices/performances (Lorimer, 2008; Thrift, 2008), materialities (Shaw, 2013) and assemblages (Dittmer, 2014), which are themselves closely related to human geographical and political acts have all been incorporated into understandings of the geopolitical. The different recent modern geopolitical ways of approaching geopolitics can be divided into (but are not limited to) the following three branches.

Formal and practical geopolitics

Many modern geopolitical studies have been based on the assumption that world politics can be read through textual evidence (Müller, 2008). On this basis, a number of modern

geopolitical studies have examined various texts and writings about geopolitics. Owing to the conspicuous role of national leaders, military officers, think-tanks, strategists, experts and scholars, in writing geography and politics, one of the most important sets of textual resources for modern geopolitical studies are those manipulated by elites. As Toal and Dalby (1998, p. 5) point out, modern geopolitical research that draws on elite texts, such as governmental files, specialists' reports, leaders' speeches and policy documents, is known as 'formal geopolitics' and 'practical geopolitics'. Formal geopolitics is closely related to the spatializing practices of authorities, such as experts and scholars; while practical geopolitics is more involved in the spatializing practices of practitioners of statecraft, such as politicians, policy-makers and military officers (Toal & Dalby, 1998). Both are bound up with the manipulation of texts by elites for political purposes.

From an empirical perspective, Dalby (1990) examined how geographical knowledge of the Soviet Union was produced in US public speeches during the Cold War. Constructing the Soviet Union as a totalitarian and expansionist 'Other' rooted in its history, geography, economy, politics and ideology provided the Ronald Reagan administration with a practical way of describing, explaining and legitimating its foreign policies towards the Soviet Union, such as the doctrines of 'containment', 'deterrence' and the provision of national security. Tuathail and Agnew (1992) explored the geopolitical reasoning behind Soviet-US Cold War rivalry, emphasizing the significance of imaginary elitist geographies in the making of foreign policy. More specifically, Tuathail and Agnew (1992, pp. 199–201) discuss George Kennan's (a US diplomat) 'Long Telegram' and 'Mr. X' articles in which the Soviet Union is depicted as an 'Orientalist' state, a 'potential rapist' and part of 'the red flood', and suggest that such imaginings helped codify 'what became Cold War discourse' and justify the US's foreign policy of 'containment'.

Formal and practical geopolitics have done well in recording the roles of think-tanks, national leaders, military officers and academic authorities in producing and disseminating types of knowledge that help understand geography and politics around us. However, due to their excessive attention to elite texts, formal and practical geopolitics have not helped investigate the significance of popular culture in producing and disseminating geopolitical knowledge, in particular from the bottom up. A concern with public perspectives pushed modern geopolitics into the realms of popular culture and the everyday life and towards what is called 'popular geopolitics'.

Popular geopolitics

Lamenting the paucities of geopolitical voices beyond the elite, a number of modern geopolitical scholars turned their attention to texts beyond those of high culture (Dodds, 2007). Given the strong capacity of popular culture to represent global space, a wide range of popular texts have been discussed in modern geopolitical research in recent decades, including magazines (Sharp, 2000), journalists' biographies (Toal, 1996b), mass newspapers (MacDonald, 2006), films (Carter & McCormack, 2006; Crampton & Power, 2005; Dalby, 2008; Dodds, 2003, 2005), music (Boulton, 2008; Liu, An, & Zhu, 2015), comics (Dittmer, 2005, 2007, 2011) and video games (Shaw, 2010). In Dodds' (2007, p. 146) understanding, the resulting field of 'popular geopolitics' explores 'the role and potential impact of popular geopolitical representations of territory, resources, identity politics' in the taking shape of people's understanding of geography and politics.

Empirically, Sharp (2000) studied the mass American magazine *Reader's Digest* as a form of popular culture where Cold War knowledge of the Soviet Union was produced and where the US's national identity was constructed so as to legitimate US foreign policies towards the Soviet Union. Focusing on comics, Dittmer (2005) discussed the role and the significance of popular culture in reaching a manufactural consent with elite culture. Specifically, Dittmer

focused on Captain American as a popular space where US foreign policies during the Cold War were justified. Moreover, Dodds (2008) discussed how US foreign policies found expression in Hollywood films following 9/11. Specially, Dodds was concerned with how films are employed by certain cultural institutions as popular texts to describe the terrorist as an immoral other and, thus, to legitimate US security strategies in the Global War on Terror. The examination of the significance of popular texts in shaping our understanding of geography and politics provides a special way to understand the geopolitical.

However, Early Modern geopolitical research, including formal, practical and popular geopolitics, seems to have paid too much attention to texts and too little attention to the significance of 'things' beyond texts in producing our understanding of the geopolitical. To a significant extent, modern geopolitics limits the understanding of the geopolitical to the realm of discursive, signifying and linguistic practices, considering that geography and world politics can be represented through symbols. Therefore, it has neglected the elements that cannot be grasped and represented through texts, such as the embodiment, emotion, materiality and flow of practice. These 'things' beyond texts also play important roles in writing about spatiality and world politics. In what follows, we shall outline the impact of recent developments in non-representational theory in human geography and other social sciences on understandings of the geopolitical.

Non-representational geopolitics

Non-representational theory has integrated 'things' beyond texts into the way geopolitics is understood. This theory, in Anderson and Smith's (2001, p. 9) words, is a non-constructivist perspective that is 'associated with being and doing, with participation and performance, with ways of knowing that depend on direct experience more so than reflection, abstraction, translation and representation'. This theory can largely be read as a direct critique on representational logics. In contrast to the post-structural analytical framework that privileges understandings of geography and geopolitics that depend on cognitive, textual and visual experience, as in previous modern geopolitical research (Agnew, 1997), non-representational theory puts more emphasis on inexpressible, changing and ungraspable experience in understanding the world (Lorimer, 2008). In this approach, the affect, emotion, materiality, object, practice, performance and assemblage that often lie beyond the focus of representations have increasingly entered understandings of geopolitics.

In highlighting non-representational ways of understanding global space, recent geopolitical studies have primarily focused on the significance of affect and emotion. Affect is viewed as a capacity of human bodies and other post-human objects to influence and be influenced by other people (Lorimer, 2008). Emotion is a form of 'cognitive, conscious and expressed' human experience that offers a fluid perspective for understanding the world around us (Pile, 2010, p. 9). Based on these definitions, affect and emotion are considered to have extended the ontology and epistemology of geography from 'rational and predictable logics' into 'visceral and instinctive' arenas (Lorimer, 2008, p. 2). On this basis, affect/emotion have been widely involved in the production of geopolitical knowledges in non-representational ways. For example, Tuathail (2003) identified an affectual/emotional project of the United States through the examination of 9/11. Focusing on how affect/emotion (e.g., pain, fear, horror, grief and patriotism) were projected through media networks, eyewitness experiences, spectacles, movies and music, Tuathail (2003, p. 858) suggested that 9/11 has become an 'obsessive collective experience of trauma and loss'. In such affectual/emotional projects, the circulation of affects and the arousing of emotions are all enacted in the demarcation of a boundary between the United States and terrorists, and utilized to justify 'affect-fueled' desires and/or actions for revenge, such as a desire to 'Fight Terrorism' (p. 858).

More recently, an object-oriented approach to understanding the geopolitical has been put on the agenda, criticizing representation-oriented approaches. Meehan, Shaw, et al., (2013), for example, studied the television series *The Wire* to investigate the role of objects in the exercise and constitution of state power. Emphasizing the television as an object that unleashes real forces, stimulates our imaginations and makes possible new geopolitical narratives, Meehan et al. (2013) pointed out that objects within *The Wire* matter for the understanding of the nature of power by moving beyond the representational realm and breaking the human-centred narratives of state powers. In addition, Dittmer (2014, pp. 385–386) recently introduced ‘assemblage and complexity theories’ into the geopolitical research agenda, arguing for a material return and post-human turn that tries to involve ‘animals, “nature”, and other objects into our understandings of the geopolitical’. Non-representational geopolitics is associated with new geographical ontologies and epistemologies that move far beyond textual discourse that underpins formal, practical, and popular geopolitics.

Nevertheless, it merits noting that the material world (mentioned in classical geopolitics or re-mentioned in non-representational geopolitics) as well as political discourse (mentioned in formal, practical and popular geopolitics) are not mutually exclusive. Socially produced geopolitics has been combined in complex ways with material-based geopolitics. Neither the material world nor political discourse can be viewed as a single force that impacts upon politics. For example, Kaplan (2014) discussed the effects of physical geography on the build-up of tensions in the South China Sea in the context of discourse-based international politics, re-emphasizing the importance of material geopolitics. Recently, Gregory (2016, p. 3) explored the intertwining between physical and material geographies of warfare (drawing on ‘the mud of the Western Front in the First World War, the deserts of North Africa in the Second World War, and the rainforests of Vietnam’) and political discourses (drawing on soldiers’ narratives of warfare) to propose an assemblage imaginary of warfare that brings materiality and discourse together.

In general, it can be seen that modern geopolitics is not a clearly delimited sub-field of political geography, but, on the contrary, comprises a variety of works characterized by investigation in both representational and non-representational ways of the complicated relations between political practice and geography. The evolving theories of modern geopolitics constitute of the fundamental theoretical framework for the majority of current geopolitical studies. However, the aforementioned theories of modern geopolitics have not drawn up a comprehensive blueprint for geopolitical studies. Drawing on several theoretical interventions with which the modern geopolitics might be challenged, the next section focuses on one key line of enquiry and debate concerning the location of geopolitical knowledge on which future (in particular Chinese) geopolitical research could expand.

The location of modern geopolitical explanations

Geopolitical sites and sights are important notions in modern geopolitics. These notions are closely related to the location where geopolitical issues are discussed and the state in which scholars are talking about geopolitics (Sharp, 2013a). In extant studies, ‘geopolitical sites and sights’ stand in an intimate relation to the concept of the state. More specifically, geopolitical writings have long been enclosed in a territorial tradition that highlights the core role of territorial states in world politics (Dalby, 2013; Dodds, 2000). In other words, the global political map is divided into a series of states, and an examination of how these spatial entities interact with each other in such a territorial system plays an irreplaceable role in current geopolitical discussions. Even though recent geopolitical studies have expanded the range of institutions and social groups under consideration to include non-governmental organizations, international organizations, journalists, statecraft intellectuals, indigenous groups, artists, evangelicals, women and activists (Kuus, 2013), the vast majority of existing modern

geopolitical studies examine the spatiality of the state, dealing with issues such as national identity and borderland practices (Kuus, 2010). The state is therefore playing an important role in structuring how we understand geopolitics.

The research objects of most extant studies in modern geopolitics (whether in formal and practical, popular or non-representational geopolitics) are, however, Western states, particularly the United States. As the United States played a significant role during the Cold War and the Global War on Terror, it has long been the focus of recent geopolitical research. As Agnew (2007) argued, many current geopolitical writings have involved the projection of the US context and interests. For example, in early studies of Cold War geopolitics (Dalby, 1990; Sharp, 2000; Tuathail & Agnew, 1992) and subsequent studies of post-9/11 geopolitics (Dittmer, 2005; Dodds, 2008; Pain, 2009; Tuathail, 2003), geographers examined how geopolitical discourses were produced in the United States by US elites and popular culture, and from US perspectives. A substantial amount of modern geopolitical literature has broadened the scope of geopolitical analysis to embrace some European states. For instance, Dodds (2002) focuses on geopolitics in relation to Britain; Bassin (2003) investigated the traditions of German geopolitics; and Hepple (2002) examined French radical geopolitics. However, the existing literature has paid little attention to non-Western states.

Nevertheless, the non-Western context has gradually and increasingly been noticed as in modern geopolitical research on 'subaltern geopolitics' (Sharp, 2011a, 2013b). Focusing on unequal power relations between the hegemonic and the marginal, subaltern geopolitics explores the sights/sites of geopolitical knowledge production and calls for more attention to be paid to marginalized voices (Sharp, 2011a). Even though the lack of non-Western studies has been lamented in extant works, there are still few empirical studies focusing on non-Western cases. Sharp (2011b) explored the geopolitical imagination of the US War on Terror from a non-Western perspective drawing on the Tanzanian newspaper *The African*. In so doing, Sharp offered a completely different explanation of the US War on Terror and, therefore, disrupted the hegemonic geopolitical imagination of a war that is dominated by Western perceptions. Moreover, Sharp also attempted to discuss non-Western geopolitical ideas through an examination of Julius Nyerere's (the leader who led Tanzania to independence) pan-Africanism, significantly challenging dominant geopolitical imaginations of Africa as the 'Third World' struggled over by superpowers. The idea of 'pan-Africanism' seriously challenged the dominant imagination of Africa projected by Western powers, and at the same time supported the idea that the margin does matter in global politics (Sharp, 2013b). In addition, Chil Yuan Woon focused on the geopolitics of the Global South, which he depicted as 'impoverished', 'marginalized' and 'Orientalized' (Woon, 2013). These negative imaginations of the Global South, in Woon's words, play an influential role as a new-Orientalism serving strategy, justifying the Global North's socioeconomic interests in the Global South.

By lamenting the paucity of non-Western voices in proposals for 'subaltern geopolitics' and by drawing on non-Western cases (e.g., Sharp's and Woon's studies), discussions of the location of geopolitical issues do contribute to the development of non-Western geopolitics. However, these studies are strongly located in specific socio-political contexts, including pan-Africanism and new Orientalism. Many other non-Western contexts remain under-researched. The exploration of Chinese contexts and the explanation of Chinese geopolitics are, for example, still large blank spaces. In a number of economic and political discourses, China has been described as a low-ranking and underdeveloped state in the Global South. This claim may not be true. In the past few decades, China has become a superpower playing an increasingly important role on the international stage. Chinese geopolitics should not, therefore, be simply understood from the lens of the geopolitics of marginalized peoples or new Orientalized geopolitics. As China was, moreover, never fully colonized (except for Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan), Chinese geopolitics cannot be understood from the perspective of

post-colonial geopolitics. The geopolitics of marginalized groups, new Orientalized geopolitics, post-colonial geopolitics and subaltern geopolitics do not help investigate China's particular social, economic and political context and thought, including the Confucian geopolitical traditions of the '*hua-yi* distinction' (华夷之辨), 'diversity but harmony' (和而不同) and 'constructing socialist harmonious society' (构建社会主义和谐社会), which impact upon Chinese geopolitical visions. These issues are under-researched, further highlighting the hegemony of Western sights/sites and Western locations/positionality in extant geopolitical knowledge. This paucity of non-Western case studies and the space that exists for examining China's special socio-political context are indicative of the potentialities and possibilities for future geopolitical research, and in particular for a new Chinese geopolitics.

CHINESE GEOPOLITICS

Although 'geopolitics' has long been regarded as 'poison or pseudoscience' for historical reasons (the close relation between 'geopolitics' and 'Nazism'), since the 1970s a number of Chinese scholars have focused on geopolitical issues (Liu, 2013). Moreover, because of China's active involvement in a number of military and political issues with Western and neighbouring countries in the South China Sea and in relation to the Belt and Road Initiative, China's Outward Investment (in particular in Africa), the cross-strait relations between mainland China and Taiwan, the return of Hong Kong, and China-India border disputes, non-Chinese scholars increasingly take interest in China-related geopolitics. However, both Chinese and non-Chinese scholars concerned with Chinese geopolitics seem to have been enmeshed in US-style realist thinking. Zeng, Xiao, and Breslin (2015) and Rolf and Agnew (2016) have argued, for example, that the core international debate in China is concerned with securing China's political and, in particular, economic interests. This realist geopolitical thinking is mainly embodied in a concern with topics in geo-security and geo-economy.

The vast majority of already existing work in Chinese geopolitics deals with how the physical and material geographies of China and the surrounding environments impact upon China's national security and international/interregional economic activities. This research can be read as a form of 'classical geopolitics' or its extensions. For example, Jiang and Lei (2009) mapped the complex relations between the geopolitical situation in Central Asia and Xinjiang's (a Chinese province) security environment; Liu (2009) examined the structure of current globalized sea powers and China's naval strategies. Taking Western countries' trepidation concerning China's development of aircraft carriers as the entry point, Liu examined the historical, economic and geographical conditions of developing sea powers, discussed how to handle the relations between rising and existing sea powers, and suggested that China should combine its strategy of developing sea power with its strategy of developing its overall national strength and peaceful rising policy. Some non-Chinese scholars are also concerned with Chinese geo-security issues. Overholt (2007), for instance, paid attention to the transformation of geo-security patterns in the Asia-Pacific region. Examining the roles of both the United States and China in this region, Overholt has indicated that the US's military-based foreign policies in this region have been weakening its political presence and enhancing China's influence, thereby resulting in a bi-condominium geopolitical pattern in this part of the world. Scott (2008, p. 1) investigated the geo-security issues involving China and India from 'the logic of geography'. Based on the realist assumption that underlines 'zero-sum' relations (one gains and the other loses) among states with geographical proximities, Scott suggested that China and India increasingly compete in the realms of military security, diplomacy and economics.

As China's economic influence and presence on the international stage have increased in the past several decades, an increasing number of Chinese and non-Chinese scholars have paid attention to Chinese geo-economic issues. For example, Zhang (2009) investigated the relations between petroleum and China's foreign policy. Mapping out the petroleum connections between China and other regions, Zhang discussed China's foreign policies and petroleum strategies and argued that oil-rich regions were gradually becoming geographical foci of Chinese diplomacy. Carmody and Owusu (2007) studied the geo-economic relations among China, the United States and Africa through the investigation of China's increasing capital investments in and commercial exchanges with Africa, as well as the US's increasing political and economic interventions in Africa. In so doing, they argued that increasing geo-economic competition between the United States and China has contributed to the reworking of colonial trade structures, the strengthening of authoritarian governments and the fuelling of conflicts in Africa. Maswana (2009) also examined the geo-economic links between China and Africa. Focusing on China's increasing economic activities in Africa and the challenge that China has brought to other economic powers present in the continent, Maswana insisted that the China–Africa economic link has established a South–South dialectic, thereby breaking the monopoly position of North–South geo-economic patterns.

Beyond US-style realist geopolitical thinking, some scholars have drawn on insights from critical geopolitics to explain Chinese geopolitics, linking the production of geographical knowledge (in particular, knowledge related to China) to the exercise of political power. An and Zhu's (2015) recent research on the Eastern Turkistan Islamic Movement's (ETIM) terrorist activities in China, for instance, drew on critical geopolitics, explaining how the mass media produced negative geographical imaginations of Xinjiang, thereby contributing to tense geo-relations between Xinjiang and other areas within China. Many Anglophone scholars have also been concerned with Chinese critical geopolitics. For example, Mawdsley (2008) studied how UK newspapers' representations of China's diplomatic and economic relations in Africa are driven by China's recent economic growth, and in so doing explored how such knowledge reflects the West's anxiety about the rise of China; Power and Mohan (2010, p. 486) explored Chinese political discourse relating to its outward investment in Africa, and, in so doing, indicated that China's 'meta-narratives and the emphasis on south–south co-operation' are used to a significant extent to provide moral justification for China's influence and presence in Africa.

The list of scholars employing US-style realist thinking or drawing on insights from critical geopolitics who are interested in Chinese geopolitics is much larger than those listed above. The existing literature on current Chinese geopolitics (written by Chinese and non-Chinese scholars) is largely dominated by Western scholarship: Chinese geopolitical practices are largely examined through the theoretical frameworks of classical or critical geopolitics. Neither Sinophone nor Anglophone geopolitical studies have paid much attention to the examination of the socio-political context of China. In this sense, there is a great paucity of work localizing Chinese internal geopolitical concepts and theories into Chinese geopolitical analysis. These limitations of Chinese geopolitics as well as those identified in the earlier discussion of 'the location of modern geopolitical explanations' together provide a research agenda for future Chinese geopolitics, and indeed for wider non-Western geopolitical research.

AN AGENDA FOR NON-WESTERN GEOPOLITICS

These trends in world development involve transformations taking place at multiple geographical scales, indicate that there are multiple pathways to development and require detailed investigation and research from a range of perspectives, including those of emerging economies themselves. As such, these transformations have important implications for academic scholarship (interpretation,

explanation and theory construction) and for academic publishing where they increase the importance of communication and dialogue involving scholars from all major world regions and of greater mutual awareness and understanding.

(Dunford et al., 2016, pp. 2–3)

The above quotation, from an editorial of this journal, highlights the importance of multiple and diversified academic voices, in particular from those regions where have been silenced for a long time. Since the end of the Cold War, the world (at the international level) has gradually moved from being unipolar to pluri-centric. That means that not only the United States and/or Western countries matter for global politics and economics. China is all the time developing its relationships with the outside world, and in the 21st century it has begun to have a great impact upon the global economy and politics. In the Middle East, the United States launched a series of military acts against terrorist or guerrilla groups in Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria. These interventions directly contributed to the relative decline in the US's role in the global economy and its Vietnam-like geopolitical dilemma. Moreover, an increasing number of states and other political or economic organizations have gradually intervened into African affairs, re-making this continent as a connecting point for global economics and politics. These three cases all indicate why non-Western actors also matter for global politics and economics. Unfortunately, as this review has suggested, these issues are underexplored from non-Western perspectives. Such studies as exist are to some extent under the hegemony of Western scholarship. However, it is essential that research using non-Western perspectives increases. A major aim of this paper, therefore, is to make some suggestions for a non-Western agenda for future geopolitical research.

Taking China as an example, it is clear that the notion of geopolitics has received little attention in the past few decades, but there has been recent discussion about the geopolitical and/or geo-economic relations between China and the rest of the world, in particular in relation to the social, economic and cultural backgrounds of China–Africa Cooperation and ‘One Belt, One Road’, which gives the notion of geopolitics a new life in China (Bennett, 2016; Du & Ma, 2015; Liu, 2015; Liu & Dunford, 2016; Lu & Du, 2013; Mao, 2014; Song, Lu, Liang, Wang, & Lin, 2017; Toops, 2016). However, the localized Chinese geopolitical concepts and theories like the notion and theory of modern geopolitics that this paper has reviewed are still under-researched in China. Even if some scholars are trying to explain Chinese geopolitics via traditional Chinese geopolitical notions (Agnew, 2010; Callahan, 2010; Park, 2015; Woon, 2012),¹ the localized theory of Chinese geopolitics is still under-theorized in both Sinophone and Anglophone scholarship. In this sense, the paucity of localized Chinese geopolitical knowledge and theory identified above can be viewed as an important agenda for future Chinese geopolitics.

Most specifically, considering the limitations of hegemonic Western ideas in current geopolitical practices and studies, possible potential directions for further geopolitical studies could expand from current non-Western and Chinese geopolitics, especially as China and other developing countries emerge as increasingly important actors on the international stage. In the Chinese case, possible research questions include how the Chinese elite, media and people construct their imaginings of foreign states and affairs in the framework of a revised ‘modern geopolitics’. Wider research questions could deal with the situating of Chinese geopolitical visions in a context of Occidentalism: in other words, future research could also focus on how China and Chinese geopolitical practices are observed by others. In so doing, Chinese geopolitical research can both fill the large current gaps in knowledge about Chinese geopolitics and contribute to the theoretical construction of a Chinese geopolitics in a situation in which current theory is largely Westernized.

Extant research in modern geopolitics appears to have overemphasized knowledge spillovers from Western scholarship, and seems to have overlooked emerging powers worldwide. The overreliance on the Western scholarship may limit explanations of non-Western geopolitical practices and general understanding of global politics. The emergence of the greater BRICS – comprising Brazil and wider Latin America, China, India and the rest of Asia, Russia and other parts of Eurasia, South Africa and the rest of the African continent – seems to be having increasing impacts on global politics and the economics in the post-Cold War and post-colonial eras and against the background of concepts of the Global South. As a result, it is reasonable to expect further explorations of how the development of the Global South occurs, how South–South relations and interregional links are established, and how the North–South dichotomy is dislodged in non-Western contexts. These explorations will potentially contribute to the development of new perspectives and a future non-Western geopolitical agenda. Movement in this direction requires the development of a new research agenda embracing a range of approaches and perspectives that emerge from the BRICS, the Global South and other non-Western areas and which are developed by scholars who look at the world through a variety of lenses, including ones not frequently reflected in mainstream Western journals.

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NOTE

1. Among them, Agnew (2010) and Park (2015) have tried to apply the concept of 'Sino-centrism' (华夏中心主义) to explain Chinese geopolitics; Callahan (2010) has used the notion 'identity politics' to explain Chinese geopolitics; while Woon (2012) has suggested unpacking Mandarin-documented geopolitical narratives to understand China.

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