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From Eurocentrism to Sinocentrism? Echoes of the Chinese Model of Development in the Non-Western World

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ABSTRACT

For much of the 20th century, Western societies have been the predominant models of development, and their political and socio-economic systems have influenced the paths taken by many developing countries striving to achieve stability and prosperity. As China has emerged as a global economic powerhouse in the early 21st century, it seems to present an alternative model of development to the Western paradigm. This article explores whether China can replace the West as the global model of modernity by examining key components of the Chinese model, its successes and limitations and the broader implications for the global political and economic system. The Chinese model, often referred to as the "Beijing Consensus", is characterised by several features that differentiate it from the Western liberal model. These include state-led economic planning, limited free-market (a.k.a. state capitalism), and authoritarian governance. China's annual GDP growth has averaged around 10% for much of the past four decades, transforming it into the world's second-largest economy. Hundreds of millions of people have been lifted out of poverty, significantly improving average living standards and reducing income inequality. Therefore, it is not surprising that the Chinese model holds significant appeal for many developing countries. Nevertheless, the Chinese model has notable limitations such as environmental problems, demographic challenges, and an authoritarian political system widely criticised for violating human rights. As non-Western countries navigate their developmental trajectories, the Chinese model will continue to serve as both an inspiration and a point of critical engagement. This article analyses the nature of the Chinese model and discusses several developing country cases (i.e. Vietnam, Egypt, Venezuela and Saudi Arabia) that have so far applied various aspects of the Chinese model. It will be argued that while China is undoubtedly reshaping the global order, the complexity and interconnectedness of the modern world mean that Beijing's influence will manifest differently from the hegemony of 19th-century Western powers. The future of global politics and economy will likely involve a multipolar distribution of influence, rather than simply evolving from Eurocentric hegemony to a Sinocentric one.

Introduction: The Rise of China and "the Age of Sinocentrism"

In recent years, many observers have begun to question whether China's development model can successfully challenge the Western liberal paradigm in light of the country's impressive economic growth and relative political stability since the 1980s (Zhao, 2010; Yılmaz, 2025; Park, 2015; Sune,

2024; Selden, 2016; Katzenstein, 2024; Kivimaki, 2014; Fukuyama, 2016; Dirlik, 2012). The Chinese model contests mainstream Western development theories that argue for democracy as a necessary precondition for long-term economic growth (Acemoglu and Robinson, 2013; Bell, 2015; Breslin, 2012; Buzan and Zhang, 2024; Buzan and Lawson, 2020; Ferchen, 2013). It is marked by state capitalism, authoritarian one-party control and a pragmatist approach to global free-trade which seemingly prioritises economic benefits over geopolitical concerns (Göksel, 2023). It has been argued that non-Western countries are increasingly interested in China's emergence as a model for alternate development paths, especially as liberal democracies in the West supposedly face economic stagnation, political conflict, and governance issues in a process usually studied under the thesis of "Westlessness" (Puri, 2024; Flockhart, 2022; Üngör, 2011; Cox, 2012; Beilharz, 2018; Yılmaz, 2021; Ünaldılar Kocamaz, 2019; Yağcı, 2018). There is a mountain of scholarly literature on China's historical modernisation and contemporary development, but few studies have so far looked at how non-Western governments are inspired by China's socio-economic and political systems – albeit there are a few noteworthy country case studies (e.g. Yildiz, 2023; Sune, 2024; Uchehara, 2009; MacFarquhar, 1963). Targeting this apparent gap, this study investigates how the Chinese model has spread to other parts of the world and evaluates its viability as a paradigm for global development in the modern era.

Development in China has always been based on a unique model that combines market-driven economic policies with strong state control and purposeful global participation. China's authoritarian political framework guarantees state domination over vital industries, information flow, and social stability, and it has accompanied the country's economic development since the late 20th century, propelled by regulated market reforms spearheaded by Deng Xiaoping (Lampton, 2014; Vogel, 2011; Chang, 1988). In contrast to the liberal democratic free-market model popular in the West – which places an emphasis on individual freedoms, laissez-faire economics, and political pluralism – China's model prioritises national sovereignty and systematic control. China has been able to maintain rapid economic development, pour resources into its infrastructure, and increase its worldwide influence with programs such as the Belt and Road Initiative (Bunskoek and Shih, 2021; Chu, 2022). This has led China to portray itself as an exemplar for developing nations, especially in the Global South, that may have lost faith in democracies and free market economics based on Western models such as the "Washington Consensus" (Saray, 2019; Huang, 2010; Kennedy, 2010).

In a number of important respects, the Chinese model stands out. First, governments in historically unstable regions, e.g. the Middle East, Latin America, and Sub-Saharan Africa, have been drawn to its long-term policy stability and state-led economic planning, which have helped to alleviate economic and political turbulence (Li, 2012; Zhao, 2010; Fourie, 2012). Egypt and Saudi Arabia are among the many countries that have tried to model their economic policies after China's, particularly its use of state-owned companies and massive infrastructure projects to spur economic development (Rasheed, 2022; Fulton, 2020a). Venezuela and Vietnam have closely cooperated with China economically, especially in the areas of resource extraction and technological transfer – regardless of their ideological disagreements with Beijing (Beeson et al., 2021; Rosales, 2016). These country cases illustrate a larger trend in which non-Western nations selectively employ Chinese policy instruments in order to accomplish their development objectives while retaining autocratic or semi-authoritarian political systems,

Nevertheless, there are several limits to the Chinese approach. Despite China's impressive economic resiliency, the country's model values economic success over political liberties. Because the model is a product of China's distinct historical, cultural, and institutional setting, critics contend that this system could be difficult to replicate elsewhere (Bell, 2015; Breslin, 2012; Zhao, 2010). Changes in population composition, widening income gaps, and geopolitical pressure from the West to rein in China's rising global influence are just a few of the obstacles that may have slowed the country's progress in the last decade (Buzan and Lawson, 2020). By providing a critical analysis of the ways in which certain non-Western nations' governance frameworks are incorporating aspects of the

Chinese development model, this article adds to the emergent academic discussion on Chinese soft power and non-Western applications of the Beijing Consensus. It looks at the ways in which Vietnam, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Venezuela are interacting with China's economic policies, political governance techniques, and state-led technology innovations using these four countries as case studies. The future of global governance will be shaped by the decisions made by emerging powers of the non-Western world within the background of an escalating geopolitical confrontation between the West and China. The flexibility, durability, and perceived validity of the Chinese model will determine whether it becomes a dominant alternative or stays a regionally influential but restricted framework.

Conceptual Framework: Eurocentrism and Sinocentrism

As this article repeatedly refers to the concepts of Eurocentrism and Sinocentrism, it is necessary to define them in relation to development studies. An epistemological and normative paradigm known as "Eurocentrism" holds that Western Europe (and Western civilisation more generally) is the principal standard for our understanding of "modernity", "reason" and "progress" (Amin, 2009; Dirlik, 1999). From this vantage point, non-Western countries are supposed to follow the same developmental trajectory as Western societies, based on their historical experiences. Modernisation theory and the Washington Consensus are two prominent frameworks in the field of development that have been firmly rooted in Eurocentrism for a long time (Göksel, 2018). These frameworks propose liberal democracies, free markets and institutional models based on Western historical experiences as panaceas for underdevelopment.

Sinocentrism, on the other hand, is an emergent paradigm that envisages China as the world's preeminent economic, political and intellectual power. Modern Sinocentrism, which has its origins in the hierarchical tianxia worldview, does not mean to restore Imperial China's ancient tributary system (Park, 2015; Rasheed, 2022). Rather, it represents the increasing trend of seeing China's model of development as an ideal substitute for Western paradigms. The so-called Beijing Consensus, China's growing economic and infrastructural power and the idea that liberal democratic values are unnecessary for fast growth are all manifestations of Sinocentrism in the modern world. In contrast to the universalist assertions of Eurocentrism, the global context now is more heterogeneous and disputed. Therefore, China's model can possibly be adopted and modified by various developing countries rather than embraced wholesale, according to modern Sinocentrism (Saray, 2019).

Debating China as a Global Model of Modernity

By promoting state-led economic growth, political stability through one-party control, and a Machiavellian approach to governance, the Chinese model of development offers an alternative to the Western liberal model based on liberal democracy, free markets, and little government interference. A regulated private sector is allowed to thrive under tight supervision by the Chinese government, which retains near-total control over key areas such as technology, infrastructure, and banking (Breslin, 2012: 1325-1338). China's economic reforms have been carried out in stages, with development policies being piloted in some regions before being applied countrywide (Chang, 1988). Suppressing opposition and guaranteeing continuity in government, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) continues to be the country's sole political power. The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) involvement with the Global South shows China's dedication to infrastructure and trade-oriented cooperation with developing countries – highlighting China's increasing self-confidence as a rising superpower and potential economic hegemon (Chen, 2018; Akbarzadeh and Saba, 2025, see Figure 1).

The World Bank (2020) reports that approximately 800 million people in China have been lifted out of poverty as a result of the country's extraordinary GDP growth since economic reforms began in

1978. Fast industrialisation has been made possible by the government's allocation of funds to strategic industries, such as manufacturing, high technology, and renewable energy (Saray, 2019). Regional connection and economic progress have been aided by massive expenditures in infrastructure (Huang, 2010: 35-38). As shown by their rise in the widely respected Times Higher Education (THE) World University Rankings, Chinese institutions have achieved outstanding progress in research, education, and technology since the early 2000s. In 2024, a total of 94 Chinese universities were ranked, an increase of 86 from the previous year, and over 20 Chinese universities had significant improvements in their results (Times Higher Education, 2025).

The country's universities have become more prominent on the world scene as a result of the government's efforts to improve academic quality, increase international partnerships, and promote innovation (Buzan and Lawson, 2020: 188-202; Zhao, 2010). For example, Tsinghua University and Peking University were the top two Chinese universities in the 2004 inaugural THE World University Rankings, which rated both universities in the 150–200 range. Tsinghua University is now rated twelfth in the world in 2025, with Peking University following closely behind at thirteenth (Times Higher Education, 2025). In the last 20 years, Chinese colleges have gone from being ranked outside of the top 100 to having numerous campuses in the top 50 worldwide. The enormous resources that China has put into research, higher education, and innovation are on full display in this astounding development.

The one-party system in China has been argued to permit continuity and long-term planning, in contrast to Western democracies where frequent leadership transitions lead to radical policy adjustments (e.g. between Democrats and Republicans in the US). Reforms can be implemented by Beijing without political resistance impeding long-term objectives. The centralized structure in China allows for swift action, in contrast to the often-seen congestion in democratic nations caused by party competition (Lampton, 2014). Frequently modifying policies in response to empirical facts, the Chinese government has been argued to show exceptional governmental flexibility (Bunskoek and Shih, 2021).

The Chinese model of development has produced outstanding results in terms of economic growth and political stability, but it is not without serious flaws. While it does keep policies consistent, the most common complaint is that its autocratic leadership limits creativity, credibility, and flexibility in the long run (Sune, 2024; Yılmaz, 2025). The financial risks associated with China's state-controlled economy are high, and the country's growth agenda might encounter pushback from both inside and outside its borders (Nguyen and Liu, 2024). While the one-party rule of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) guarantees stability, it tramples on human freedoms, democratic accountability, and political transparency (Kennedy, 2010; Fukuyama, 2016). Authoritarian governments may be effective at implementing regulations, but without institutional checks and balances, they inevitably lead to stagnation. Without a system of checks and balances, policies are frequently imposed from on high, with little opportunity for public input or adjustments based on democratic concerns.

Additionally, societal stability suffers in the long run as a result of China's dependence on censorship and political repression. Crackdowns on political activists, extensive monitoring, and the Great Firewall (internet censorship) are some of the ways that dissent is purposefully hidden (Kivimaki, 2014; Rasheed, 2022). Although these regulations provide temporary stability, they give rise to societal complaints that have been dormant for some time. In times of economic downturn or social unrest, authoritarian governments frequently find it difficult to handle the resulting mass discontent without escalating repression, which can lead to a vicious cycle of instability. This was seen during the COVID-19 demonstrations across the metropolitan areas (e.g. Shanghai) of China in late 2022 (Yıldız, 2023).

The succession issue is another major flaw in China's political structure. Power conflicts and instability are common features of authoritarian governments during leadership transitions, in contrast to democratic ones where elections take place. There are concerns that China is moving

away from institutional stability and toward a more authoritarian style of leadership due to Xi Jinping's 2018 decision to eliminate presidential term limits, allowing him to govern indefinitely (Rasheed, 2022). Government under such a system is heavily reliant on the whims of a single leader rather than a long-term political structure, as it inhibits internal discussion and the emergence of alternative leaders.

Innovation in technology and the economy is likewise threatened by autocracy. Despite China's meteoric rise to the top of technologies like AI (artificial intelligence) and renewable energy, the country's tight governmental restrictions stifle academic autonomy and entrepreneurial spirit (Yılmaz, 2021). It has long been argued that innovative ideas thrive in settings that promote free discussion and healthy rivalry (Acemoglu and Robinson, 2013). Critical thinking and risk-taking are essential for maintaining long-term economic success; nevertheless, they are obstructed at universities and private firms in China due to censorship and governmental monitoring. Furthermore, over-investment, increasing debt, and financial instability are all results of China's economic model, which is still heavily reliant on state involvement (Saray, 2019). The recent real estate bankruptcies of Country Garden and Evergrande have shown the fragility of China's state-led economic vision (Financial Times, 2023). Economic inefficiencies can continue unchecked and put financial crises at greater risk in the absence of political opposition or autonomous institutions that can challenge bad practices.

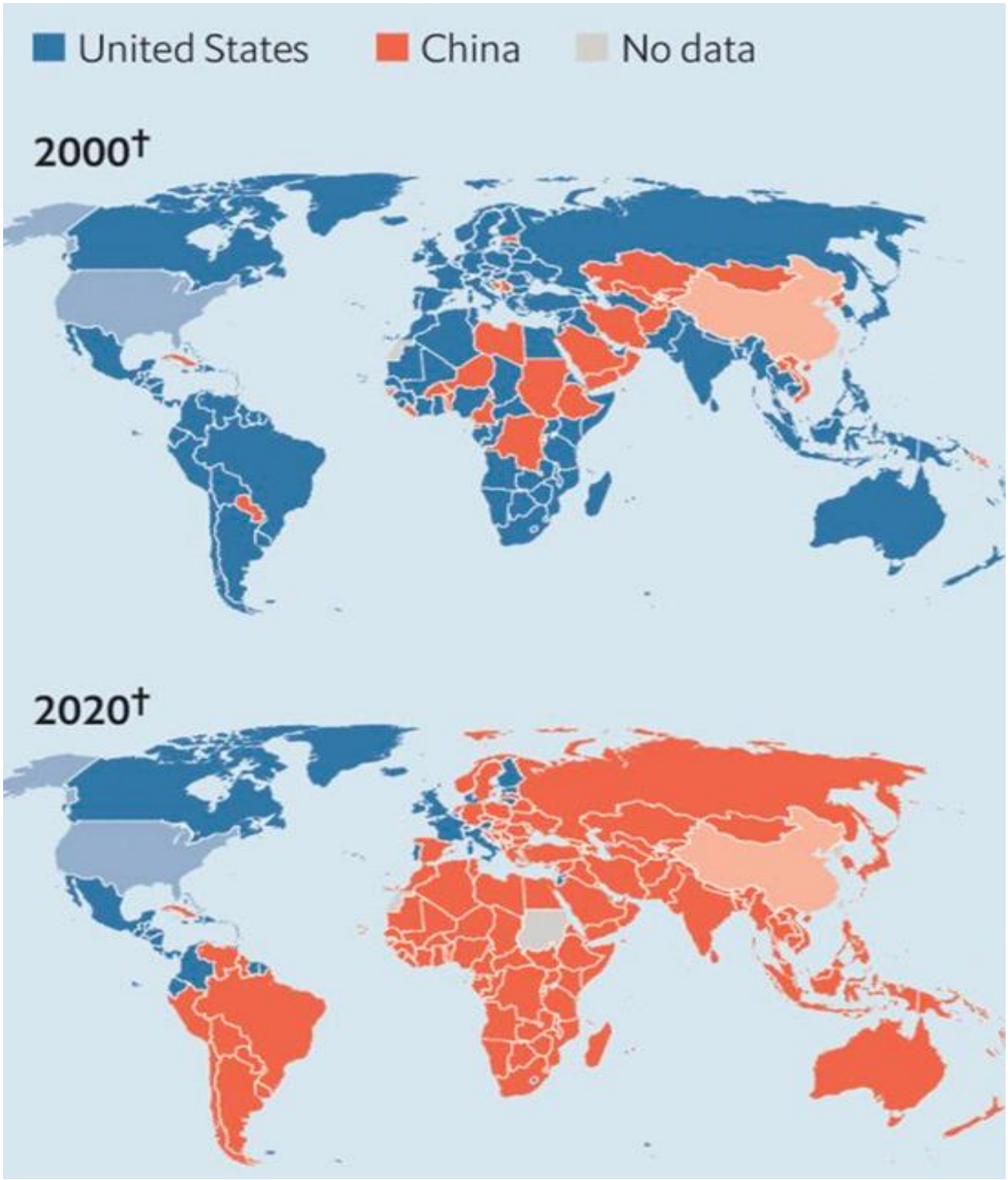
The declining population is one of China's main demographic concerns. Deaths surpassed births in China in 2022, marking the country's first population drop in sixty years (Malik, 2023). By 2100, this tendency is anticipated to have accelerated, and the population of China is predicted to drop below 1 billion (Malik, 2023: 61-66). The low fertility rate, which fell to 1.0-1.2 births per woman—far below the replacement threshold of 2.1—is the main factor responsible for this fall. The economic effects of this population drop are substantial, especially on the Chinese labour market and productivity. A manpower shortage might reduce China's global economic competitiveness as fewer young people join the workforce and an older population increases the need for social services. Although South Korea and Japan are also experiencing demographic decline, China's workforce is declining, and the country has not yet completed the entire transition to an innovation-driven, high-income economy, which poses a bigger danger to future development (Malik, 2023: 74-75).

A substantial portion of China's economic expansion has taken place in cities, prompting a huge exodus from rural areas to urban centres. While many migrants would benefit from urban healthcare, schools, and social services, rules like the *hukou* (household registration) system prevent them from doing so, leaving them economically unstable and susceptible to abuse (Malik, 2023: 70-73). Cities may also experience a scarcity of workers, especially in low-skilled occupations like construction and manufacturing, if migration slows down as a result of dwindling rural populations. Economic and social stability in China is jeopardised by demographic concerns such as population reduction, increasing ageing, gender imbalances due to long-term side effects of the one-child policy, and urban-rural inequities. Growth might be slowed, social services could be stressed, and inequality could be worsened if these tendencies are not addressed. It will be very difficult to reverse population decline, even with the government's pro-natalist measures like easing birth limits and providing incentives for couples to have more children. To tackle these difficulties and maintain China's economic trajectory in the next decades, extensive reforms in social welfare, labour regulations, and immigration will be necessary.

Perhaps without completely giving up on the Western model and institutions (e.g. the IMF), many emerging nations are looking to the Chinese model for inspiration. Countries outside of the West that want to expand economically quickly but are not ready to commit to democracy may find inspiration in China's strategy of development. Its weaknesses—e.g. demographic difficulties, over-reliance on state intervention, and autocracy—raise questions about long-term survival, despite the attractiveness of its strengths—economic success, political stability, and pragmatic governance. Priorities of developing governments determine whether the Western or Chinese model is chosen.

Future global growth will be shaped by the continuing conflict between these two approaches, which will be magnified as China's worldwide influence grows.

Figure 1: Larger Trade Partner of Countries from 2000 to 2020



Source: The Economist (2021).

Applications of the Chinese Model in the Non-Western World

Vietnam

Vietnam is perhaps the most direct adopter of China's model, particularly in its economic policies (Beeson et al., 2021: 753-780). Both nations followed for many decades a one-party communist economic growth strategy based on selective market liberalisation and have a similar political framework. Rapid industrialization, poverty reduction, and integration into global trade networks have all been achieved by Vietnam as a result of this mix of authoritarian administration and regulated economic change. Hanoi has learned a lot from China's model, but it has also adapted it to its own political, economic, and social climate (Dosch and Vuving, 2008). *Doi Moi* (Renovation) policies, which started Vietnam's economic transition in 1986, were a carbon copy of Deng Xiaoping's 1978 Reform and Opening-Up program in China. Vietnam followed China's socialist-oriented market economic model, shifting from a centrally planned to a market economy that allowed private companies and international investment to thrive while preserving state control over important industries. Similar to China, the Vietnamese government uses state-owned companies (SOEs), strategic industrial strategies, and export-led growth preference policies to actively steer economic development (Dosch and Vuving, 2008: 3-8). Vietnam has followed China's lead in joining regional trade accords like the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) and international trade organisations like the World Trade Organisation (WTO) in 2007.

Doi Moi was a watershed moment in Vietnam's economic history, ushering in rapid GDP growth, a dramatic decline in poverty, and heightened international competitiveness in vital industries including agriculture, electronics, and textiles (Dosch and Vuving, 2008). Similar to China, Vietnam is still a one-party dictatorship run by the Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV). The political system is designed to be stable and consistent so that economic policies may be put into action without being much affected by things like election cycles or political plurality. Like the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), the CPV strictly regulates all forms of political speech, including the activities of opposition groups, independent news outlets, and civil society organisations. Like China's transition toward a mixed system of state capitalism, Vietnam has adopted a growth-oriented economic policy that prioritises pragmatic principles above rigid socialism. By strengthening monitoring of online political discourse and banning sites like Facebook, Vietnam has followed China's lead in internet governance and censorship (Nguyen and Liu, 2024). Despite these shared features, Vietnam's leadership system differs from China's; unlike Xi Jinping, Vietnam does not have a single strongman figure. Rather, the authority in Vietnam is shared among the National Assembly, the President, the Prime Minister, and the General Secretary of the CPV. As a result, there are now more checks and balances inside the party and little chance of a personalist dictatorship taking power (Nguyen and Liu, 2024).

In many respects, Vietnam's economic strategy has mimicked China's development model. Foreign direct investment (FDI) from corporations looking for alternatives to China because of growing labour costs has helped Vietnam embrace export-led growth, especially in manufacturing. Vietnam has become an important participant in global supply chains after following China's lead in the early 2000s and establishing Special Economic Zones (SEZs) to entice multinational firms like Intel, Nike, Samsung, and others (Pincus, 2016). A practice frequently referred to as "China Plus One", corporations are looking to diversify their supply chains away from China, and Vietnam is a good option because of its low labour costs compared to China (London, 2020: 76-92). To promote commerce and industrial development, Vietnam has followed China's example and spent substantially on infrastructure, such as highways, high-speed rail, and ports. Following in the footsteps of China's prosperous cities like Guangzhou and Shenzhen, the Vietnamese government has actively encouraged urbanisation and the formation of industrial clusters, leading to the rise of Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City as major economic centres. Similar to China, the Vietnamese government maintains tight control over vital sectors including banking, energy, and telecoms.

When it comes to opening its economy to market forces, Vietnam has been more proactive than China in privatising and restructuring underperforming SOEs (Malesky and London, 2014).

There are several systemic obstacles to Vietnam's complete adoption of the Chinese model, notwithstanding its achievements. Public unrest and demonstrations have broken out in Vietnam due to rising income inequality, land conflicts, and corruption scandals, despite the country's strict governmental control (Nguyen and Liu, 2024). Vietnam is more susceptible to worldwide economic swings since it depends more on exports and international investment than China, which has a huge domestic market. The risk of Vietnam's economy being too reliant on foreign technology and money, rather than encouraging domestic innovation, is heightened by its substantial reliance on foreign direct investment (FDI) for growth. Vietnam is woefully unable to compete on a global scale with its national tech companies, in contrast to China's thriving IT industry (London, 2020). Climate change and industrial pollution are two of Vietnam's most pressing environmental problems; for example, the Mekong Delta is at risk from increasing sea levels (London, 2020: 98-106). Like China's demographic slowdown, the future of the workforce might be uncertain due to an older population and falling birth rate.

The economic success of Vietnam in the 21st century may be attributed in large part to its adoption of the Chinese development model, which shows how an authoritarian communist state can attain market-driven prosperity. But Vietnam is not just a little China; it has customised the model to fit its own political climate, administrative framework, and economic requirements. Its strategy differs from China's in that it is more decentralised, privatises state-owned enterprises (SOEs) faster, and is more receptive to trade deals with the West (Beeson et al., 2021). Despite the success of Vietnam's growth plan thus far, ensuring its longevity would require tackling systemic issues including political instability, corruption, environmental hazards, and reliance on foreign direct investment. Vietnam has the potential to become one of Asia's most dynamic economies if it maintains a balance between state control and economic openness, demonstrating that while China's model is not fully applicable everywhere, it may provide inspiration for modernisation.

Venezuela

Hugo Chávez (1999–2013) and his successor Nicolás Maduro have made Venezuela an example of a non-Western state that has attempted to implement elements of the Chinese model (Agustin, 2016; Dominguez, 2024). Venezuela has shown interest in China's economic model for a number of reasons. To start, the Western neoliberal model, which frequently imposes structural modifications and market liberalisation policies that have had mixed effects in Latin America, stands in stark contrast to China's centralised state of political stability and economic progress. Second, compared to Western financial institutions like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), China's state-driven investment and infrastructure-led growth provide a compelling alternative. Lastly, the socialist government of Venezuela shares the Chinese model's stance on national sovereignty and non-interference in domestic issues, especially when it comes to fighting against Western sanctions and involvement.

Economic development spearheaded by a centralised authoritarian government is a hallmark of China's model, which Venezuela has sought to imitate. The nationalisation of oil and other vital sectors has been a core goal of Chávez's and Maduro's policies in Venezuela. With the help of Petróleos de Venezuela (PDVSA), the Venezuelan government assumed direct control of the country's oil industry, much like China's SOEs. However, rampant corruption and under-investment in infrastructure have led to inefficiency, mismanagement, and falling oil output in Venezuela, in contrast to China's nationalisation initiatives, which have preserved a balance between state control and market-driven efficiency (Ferchen, 2020: 4-19). Like China's poverty reduction initiatives, Venezuela's social welfare programs sought to strengthen public services while simultaneously reducing inequality. Oil money went for housing projects, food stamps, and healthcare for the poor (Ferchen, 2020). Economic mismanagement and the fall of global oil prices in the mid-2010s

rendered these programs unsustainable, even if they originally decreased poverty and raised literacy rates. Chinese economic growth has been more durable because it has focused on diversified industrialisation, increased manufacturing, and foreign direct investment (Rosales, 2016: 563-672).

Political stability and economic growth are prioritised by China's model, which is frequently characterised by highly centralised control under the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). During Chávez's and Maduro's administrations, Venezuela followed a similar pattern of centralised rule, consolidating authority, suppressing political opposition, and controlling the media and courts. Like China's one-party system, but with a distinct ideological foundation, Chávez's Bolivarian Revolution aimed to establish a "21st-century socialism" that placed a premium on state control over economic and political matters. Institutional collapse and economic incompetence have befallen Venezuela, in contrast to China's well-developed bureaucratic framework that permits long-term strategic planning (Dominguez, 2024). Hyperinflation, mass emigration, and widespread shortages of necessities have been severe consequences of the Venezuelan government's ineffective state capacity-building initiatives (Dominguez, 2024). As a result, the country is no longer able to support a development model like China's.

As part of its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), China has spent a lot of money on infrastructure in Venezuela (Ferchen, 2020). In return for oil exports, Beijing has loaned and provided technology worth billions of dollars to Venezuela's energy, telecom, and transportation industries. Venezuela has received financial assistance from the China Development Bank and the Export-Import Bank of China, thus strengthening the economic relationship between the two nations. Venezuela has still not been able to make good use of China's investments, even with this cooperation. Projects in Venezuela have frequently been plagued by inefficiency, delays, and corruption, in contrast to China's methodical approach to building infrastructure (Yin-Hang and Acuña, 2018). Also, the relationship has been strained due to Venezuela's increasing debt and falling oil production, which may have caused China to rethink its investment approach in Venezuela (Ferchen, 2020: 5-16).

Although Venezuela has made some efforts to mimic the Chinese model, it has failed due to serious systemic flaws. Venezuela is susceptible to market swings since its economy is highly reliant on oil exports, in contrast to China's varied and export-oriented economy. In addition, Venezuela's strict socialist policies have impeded economic dynamism, in contrast to China's model, which is based on pragmatic economic policies that promote a level of market liberalisation (Yin-Hang and Acuña, 2018). Technocrats have a key role in economic planning under China's authoritarian political structure, which yet retains some meritocracy (Christensen, 2016: 73-103). Contrarily, nepotism and political favouritism have afflicted Venezuela's leadership, undermined governmental institutions and worsened economic collapse. Furthermore, China has successfully integrated into the global economy without directly confronting Western powers, but Venezuela has been economically isolated, and its financial problems have been worsened by its aggressive posture toward the US and its allies. Venezuela is becoming more reliant on Russia and China for economic help as Western sanctions have further restricted its access to global markets (Dominguez, 2024: 601-605).

There has been ambition and failure in Venezuela's endeavour to implement the Chinese model. Institutional flaws, economic mismanagement, and political instability have made it difficult for the government to properly execute important features including infrastructure-driven growth, centralised governance, and state-led economic policy. The grave economic and humanitarian difficulties in Venezuela are a direct outcome of the government's inflexible socialist policies and excessive dependence on oil, in contrast to China's Machiavellian foreign policy and economic strategies. In the end, the situation in Venezuela shows how difficult it is to apply the Chinese model in any political and social setting.

Egypt

In pursuit of economic modernisation within the context of political autocracy, Egypt under

President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi has also shown an interest in the Chinese model. One distinguishing feature of the Chinese model is state-led capitalism, in which private firms operate inside a framework established by the state, but the government maintains tight control over important economic sectors. The Egyptian government has made industrial growth, economic diversification and infrastructure investment their top priorities since the announcement of the Egypt Vision 2030 development strategy. The growth of Special Economic Zones (SEZs), modelled after the prosperous SEZs in China like Shenzhen, has been an integral part of this approach (Chen, 2018: 221-227). With the involvement of Chinese enterprises in the Suez Canal Economic Zone (SCZone), especially in logistics and manufacturing, Egypt's development strategy has become more aligned with the Beijing Consensus (Elbadri, 2020).

Contrary to the neoliberal recommendations put out by the Washington Consensus, a large portion of Egypt's energy, transportation, and communications infrastructure is still owned and operated by the government. Major infrastructure projects in Egypt are still overseen by the military, which has a long history of economic influence, further supporting the state-led economic strategy. Massive state-led investment in infrastructure has been a defining feature of China's development model, propelling economic expansion and urbanisation. Similar massive infrastructure projects have been launched in Egypt with the intention of revolutionising the country's economy. The New Administrative Capital (NAC) in Egypt is a prime example; it is a massive undertaking that aims to reduce traffic in Cairo and establish a new centre for politics and the economy for the nation. Chinese money and technological know-how went into building the NAC, making it a prime example of China's approach to economic growth through infrastructure (el-Shafei and Metawe, 2022: 137-152). The NAC's Central Business District, with its array of skyscrapers, financial institutions, and government buildings inspired by China's urban growth tactics, was mostly constructed by the China State Construction Engineering Corporation (el-Shafei and Metawe, 2022: 144-148).

El-Sisi has suppressed dissent, limited media freedoms, and stifled political diversity since assuming office in 2014. This strategy is in line with China's form of government, which uses economic development as an excuse for authoritarian rule. While advocating for national unity and economic prosperity as foundational principles of legitimacy, the Egyptian government has passed legislation limiting political participation and dissident voices. The employment of digital control measures and monitoring is another important part of the Sisi regime that has been influenced by China (Rasheed, 2022). A number of Egyptian government agencies have received surveillance equipment from Chinese firms as part of their efforts to keep the peace and quell public discontent (Elmaghraby, 2023: 273-291).

China and Egypt are involved in more than just economic ties; they also work together militarily and share technologies. As part of its effort to broaden its defence relationships outside its long-standing reliance on Western suppliers, Egypt has acquired Chinese military hardware, such as missile systems and drones (Elmaghraby, 2023: 278-286). The growing cultural and educational ties between the two countries have further solidified China's role in Egypt's economic and political growth. However, there are still obstacles to overcome before Egypt can achieve development success like China. Egyptian economic reforms continue to be impeded by bureaucratic inefficiency and administrative bottlenecks, in contrast to China's highly centralised and more efficient bureaucratic structure (Elbadri, 2022; el-Shafei and Metawe, 2022). Nevertheless, though Egypt may not be able to fully imitate China's success, it has certainly applied important aspects of the Chinese model.

Saudi Arabia

A number of features of China's authoritarian style of economic development—including state-led economic growth, strategic industrial planning, and political centralisation—have also found their way into Saudi Arabia throughout the last decade (Fulton, 2020a). With the 2016 unveiling of its grandiose Vision 2030 goal, Saudi Arabia has adopted the Chinese model – namely a program to modernise the country without political liberalisation. Vision 2030, like China's Five-Year Plans, lays

out specific goals for diversifying the country's economy and industry away from over-reliance on oil, with an emphasis on areas like renewable energy, technology, and tourism. Like China's sovereign wealth management institutions, the Public Investment Fund (PIF) is crucial in channelling state funds into important industries (Fulton, 2020b).

The establishment of state-backed megaprojects like NEOM, a smart city development, mimics China's urbanisation and tech-driven growth plans and is estimated to cost $500 billion (Akbarzadeh and Saba, 2025: 5-14). Just like Beijing, the Saudi government is trying to build a knowledge-based economy and strengthen local technical capabilities to rely less on foreign expertise. To speed up industrial growth and facilitate knowledge transfer, the kingdom has also sought out alliances with Chinese companies like Sinopec, Alibaba, and Huawei (Fulton, 2020a: 366-379). China's massive expenditures in domestic and foreign infrastructure have been a contributor to the country's economic ascent. Saudi Arabia has increasingly adopted this approach, which places a premium on infrastructure-led growth via mega-projects such as the Red Sea tourism program, the Riyadh Metro, and the King Salman Energy Park (SPARK) (Fulton, 2020a: 362-383).

Digital sectors, artificial intelligence (AI), and surveillance technologies have all received substantial funding from the Chinese government, which has contributed to the country's rapid technological development. Saudi Arabia has put a lot of money into digital transformation and government-powered by AI to copy this approach (Akbarzadeh and Saba, 2025). In 2020, the government took the lead in encouraging domestic technology innovation with the announcement of the National Strategy for Data and AI (NSDAI), which mirrored China's approach to policy (Fulton, 2020b: 518-525). Smart city infrastructure, biometric monitoring, and AI-driven decision-making are digital governance technologies that Saudi Arabia has adopted thanks to its engagement with Chinese tech companies (Akbarzadeh and Saba, 2025; Fulton, 2020a). Like the Chinese model, the Saudi state may improve administrative efficiency through the incorporation of digital technology into governance institutions, all while keeping political control.

Media censorship, stringent internet rules, and technological monitoring are all tools used by Saudi Arabia and China to quell opposition. Like China's Great Firewall policy, which involves strict governmental control of information flow to suppress political dissent, Saudi Arabia's regulatory laws on social media and digital activism mirror this approach. Furthermore, Saudi Arabia's position on foreign direct investment (FDI) has been impacted by China's method of reconciling economic openness with political autocracy. The Kingdom is wary of political liberalisation and keeps a tight rein on civil society and political speech, even as it opens its markets to more outside investment.

Even in its foreign policy, Saudi Arabia is taking cues from the Chinese style of government. As part of a larger strategy to broaden its foreign alliances, the kingdom has deepened diplomatic and economic connections with China. With oil exports as the foundation of their bilateral relationship, China has become Saudi Arabia's top commercial partner (Akbarzadeh and Saba, 2025: 2-5). Furthermore, pragmatic economic diplomacy and non-interference have become more prominent features of Saudi Arabia's foreign policy strategy, which is reminiscent of China's. Like China's ascent to global prominence, the Kingdom plans to use economic statecraft and regional influence to play a pivotal role in the new multipolar world order. The strategic parallels with China's modernisation strategy imply a calculated attempt to emulate Beijing's achievements, even as the Kingdom maintains its own socio-political features. But there are still obstacles to overcome, especially when it comes to integrating the Kingdom's traditional political system with its efforts to diversify its economy. The capacity to maintain long-term economic development while negotiating regional and global geopolitical challenges will determine whether Saudi Arabia can completely imitate China's achievements. But by following China's lead, Saudi Arabia has changed its course of growth and may rise to become a major actor in the changing international system.

Conclusion: Eurocentrism, Sinocentrism and Beyond

Various developing countries within the non-Western world that are struggling with issues such as economic stagnation, ineffective political institutions, increasing expectations for modernisation, and external pressures from Western governments have found the Chinese model of development to be especially appealing. The fact that China has accomplished remarkable economic success without embracing democracy is a major factor that draws the attention of authoritarian developing countries. According to conventional Western liberal thought, free-market competition, political accountability and democratic institutions all contribute to sustained economic success (Acemoglu and Robinson, 2013). This premise is challenged by China's model, which demonstrates that fast development can also be achieved under an authoritarian, centrally controlled political-economic system.

The free-market economic policies advocated by Western organisations like the World Bank and the IMF have disappointed many developing nations (Flockhart, 2022; Huang, 2010). Many countries in the Global South have seen unstable economies, widening income gaps, and sluggish industrialisation because of the Washington Consensus's policies of privatisation, deregulation and less government involvement. Developing nations now have a new patron in China, thanks to the ongoing shift in global influence away from the US and EU. Many nations have benefited from Chinese loans and investments in energy, roadways, and railways because of China's prominence in global infrastructure development (Fourie, 2012; Park, 2015). China is a popular partner for many authoritarian regimes because Beijing provides technical and economic support free of political demands (e.g. human rights guarantees or democratic reforms). To wean themselves off Western reliance, many non-Western countries, including Russia, Egypt, and Venezuela, have strengthened their economic and military links with China. But there are long-term dangers to associating with China as well. There is a high probability of financial instability for many countries that take out loans from China to fund infrastructure projects. As nations rely heavily on Chinese trade and investment, their national autonomy is diminished when reliance on China for economic and technical collaborations becomes excessive.

Although China's development model is highly sought after by many developing nations, there are also substantial challenges to implementing it in other parts of the world. The Communist Party's centralised leadership, long-term planning, and bureaucratic discipline are the foundations of China's capacity to blend political autocracy with economic dynamism. A lot of autocratic governments look up to China, but they do not have the same degree of institutional control. Instead of effective state-led growth, concentrated control frequently results in corruption among the elite and economic incompetence in countries like Venezuela and Egypt. The ageing population and falling birth rates in China also present a serious threat to the country's economic viability in the long run. As a result of slowing growth and increasing labour costs, China may be unable to present its development model as a viable alternative to the West soon. An economic slowdown in China would also cause several countries to re-evaluate their dependence on the Chinese model. It is important to note that a growing number of Belt and Road Initiative partner states are speaking out against what they see as China's overreach in their economy. A number of countries, including Sri Lanka, Kenya, and Malaysia, have recently renegotiated or scrapped contracts with China amid worries about debt loads, threats to their sovereignty, and political meddling (Dezenski, 2020). More observers are becoming suspicious of and resistant to China because of its rising geopolitical aspirations, such as its aggressive behaviour in the South China Sea and its increasing economic and diplomatic influence in Latin America and Africa. As such, while the Chinese model offers valuable lessons and inspiration, it is not a one-size-fits-all solution. Developing countries must adapt and modify elements of the model to fit their own historical, cultural, and political contexts, rather than seeking to replicate it wholesale, while also keeping in mind that heavy economic and/or technological dependence on Beijing may be just as problematic as dependence on the West.

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