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Article

Toward Global Excellence: Two Decades of Exploration at CJIP and Beyond

Xuefeng Sun[†,*] **and Feng Liu**[‡]

[†] Professor and Dean, Institute of International Relations, Tsinghua University, Beijing, China
[‡] Professor, Department of International Relations, Tsinghua University, Beijing, China
*Corresponding author. Email: sunxuefeng@tsinghua.edu.cn

Abstract

The twentieth anniversary of *The Chinese Journal of International Politics* (CJIP) offers an opportunity to reflect on its evolution and achievements, while also looking forward to its continued growth and contributions to the field of International Relations (IR). Founded in 2005 by Professor Yan Xuetong and publishing its inaugural issue in 2006, the journal was established with the vision that China's IR community could make meaningful theoretical contributions through upholding universal scholarly standards and actively engaging with the global academia. CJIP's core mission is to foster theoretical innovation, particularly through the analysis of China's external relations and the integration of ancient Chinese and East Asian thought with contemporary practices. Over the years, the journal has solidified its reputation as a key platform for intellectual exchange between China and the rest of the world. Its influential publications have spurred significant efforts to develop, test, and refine IR theories by synthesizing East Asian historical and contemporary experiences with broader perspectives. This has led to the development of some innovative theories, such as Moral Realism and Relational Theory. Looking ahead, CJIP will focus on prominent themes, including the great power competition in the digital age, the evolving transition of the international order, and the ongoing development of leader-level and middle-range theories through cross-regional comparisons. At the same time, the journal remains committed to its role as a bridge for inclusive global academic dialog.

The Chinese Journal of International Politics (CJIP) was established in 2005 with Professor Yan Xuetong serving as its founding Editor-in-Chief. The inaugural issue was formally published in August 2006, and in the blink of an eye, CJIP has now traversed two decades. With the steadfast support of colleagues both domestically and internationally, CJIP has steadily defined its academic orientation and distinctive character. Over the years, it has undertaken valuable endeavors to advance Chinese International Relations (IR) studies onto the global stage and enrich the development of IR theory worldwide. Furthermore, it has accumulated essential experience for research institutions in emerging powers on how to establish the world's leading academic journals in the field. Moving forward, CJIP will continue to uphold its defining features

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while continuously enhancing its quality to further stimulate theoretical innovation in both Chinese and global IR academia.

Why and How CJIP Launched

The founding of CJIP stemmed primarily from the challenges facing China's IR discipline at the dawn of the 21st century. Despite establishing a preliminary disciplinary framework over the two decades following China's reform and opening-up, the lack of original theoretical contributions left Chinese IR academia marginalized within the global academic community.[1] At that time, the internationalization of Chinese IR academia was also quite limited. Few scholars consciously wrote in English or contributed to international journals. Compared to their counterparts in other Asian countries, such as Japan, South Korea, and Singapore, during the same period, Chinese IR scholars remained largely "voiceless" in the international academia, as measured by works published in international journals. Their international publications also lagged significantly behind those of other Chinese social science disciplines, such as Economics and Public Administration. This situation was markedly awkward for a discipline bearing the very name "international."[2] Against this backdrop, CJIP was founded to promote the internationalization of China's IR discipline and better position Chinese scholars within the global academic community.

Professor Yan's academic aspirations directly motivated the launch of CJIP. Upon joining Tsinghua University in July 2000, Professor Yan keenly recognized that the absence of rigorous empirical research not only undermined the scientific validity of Chinese IR scholarship but also hindered its international recognition. Consequently, he initiated a "scientific revolution" within the Chinese IR community, striving to transform the academic ecosystem through teaching, textbook editing, and training programs.[3] Professor Yan also emphasized enriching modern IR theory by integrating ancient Chinese thought, contemporary Chinese practice, and scientific research methods, particularly to address major contemporary international issues.[4] He stressed that knowledge production must adhere to universal standards; if China's IR research remains confined to domestic academic circles and fails to engage with the international academia, its influence will be significantly diminished. Consequently, he consistently advocates that the discipline must pursue theoretical sophistication and internationalization, with academic innovations engaging in dialog with the global academic community while proactively accepting and responding to criticism. The founding of CJIP thus directly embodied this aspiration, aiming to establish a leading IR academic journal originating from China that could advance both the discipline of Chinese IR and the broader development of IR theory.

External circumstances and demands beyond the IR discipline provided the external impetus for the launch of CJIP. At the turn of the 21st century, Tsinghua University was accelerating its drive to become a world-class institution. Hosting high-caliber academic journals—particularly

[1] For discussions on the development of China's IR discipline during this period, see Wang Jisi, "International Relations Studies in China Today: Achievements, Trends, and Conditions," Beijing: Ford Foundation Office, 2001; Alastair Iain Johnston, "The State of International Relations Research in China: Considerations for the Ford Foundation," Beijing: Ford Foundation, 2003; David Shambaugh, "International Relations Studies in China: History, Trends, and Prospects," *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific*, Vol. 11, No. 3 (2011), pp. 339–72; Yaqing Qin, "Development of International Relations Theory in China," *International Studies*, Vol. 46, No. 1–2 (2010), pp. 185–201.

[2] We have compiled a dataset on English publications of Chinese IR scholars, specifically those who are Chinese nationals affiliated with academic institutions in Chinese mainland. This dataset shows that, between 1980 and 2000, Chinese IR scholars published only 40 journal articles indexed in the Social Science Citation Index.

[3] Yan Xuetong, "Guoji guanxi yanjiu zhong shiyong kexue fangfa de yiyi" ("The Significance of Using Scientific Methods in International Relations Research"), *Shijie jingji yu zhengzhi* (*World Economy and Politics*), No. 1 (2004), p. 17.

[4] In his extensive scholarly review of Yan Xuetong's *Ancient Chinese Thought, Modern Chinese Power*, Zhang Feng summarized Yan's intellectual approach as the "Tsinghua approach" to the study of IR. See Zhang Feng, "The Tsinghua Approach and the Inception of Chinese Theories of International Relations," *Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol. 5, No. 1 (2012), p. 75.

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those recognized among the world's leading journals—emerged as a crucial pathway to achieving this goal. Consequently, the journal's establishment and development received substantial institutional support. Concurrently, international publishers such as Oxford University Press keenly recognized the potential for collaboration with leading Chinese academic institutions. The ensuing negotiations among relevant parties regarding the publication of CJIP proceeded smoothly, leading to the journal's formal establishment as a natural and inevitable outcome.

Innovating IR Theory

As an English-language IR journal hosted by a Chinese institution and carrying "Chinese" in its title, CJIP has consistently dedicated itself to advancing the theoretical analysis of China's foreign policy and external relations, with a particular focus on driving innovation in IR theory. To this end, CJIP has published numerous influential academic papers on China's rise and the transformation of its foreign policy.

The remarkable economic growth China has experienced since the 1990s—accelerated by its accession to the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2001—has brought the question of China's global role to the forefront of international academic debate. The scale and pace of China's ascent suggest the potential for a significant power transition in world politics. This has sparked a vigorous academic discussion on the nature of this emerging great power. Scholars are questioning how best to characterize China's trajectory: is it a status quo power that broadly accepts the existing international order, or is it a revisionist power intent on reshaping it? This debate is intricately linked to the security question of whether any potential power shift between China and the USA is more likely to occur peacefully or, tragically, through violent conflict.[5] These pressing questions not only demand careful empirical investigation but also require nuanced theoretical analysis. While the traditional power-centric lens has been valuable, many scholars argue for a broader analytical framework to fully capture the multifaceted nature of China's re-emergence on the global stage. A notable contribution to this broader approach comes from Barry Buzan, a leading contemporary theorist of the English School, who attempts to update the theoretical lens by examining the interaction between a rising China and the international society. Between 2010 and 2014, CJIP featured a trilogy of articles by Buzan and his collaborators on the dynamics of China's rise. These papers analyzed the drivers and challenges of China's peaceful rise from the English School perspective, not only deepening theoretical insights into Chinese foreign policy studies but also expanding the English School's analytical boundaries.[6] In doing so, they contributed not only to a deeper understanding of China's role in the world but also to the evolution of IR theory itself.

In response to China's foreign policy transformation in the early 2010s, CJIP published Yan's paper, "From Keep Low Profile to Striving for Achievement," in the summer of 2014. The study posited that China's foreign policy had shifted from a strategy of "keeping a low profile" (*taoguangyanghui*) to one of "striving for achievement" (*fengfayouwei*). It offered a theoretical explanation for this strategic transition through the lenses of international morality and strategic credibility, thereby gradually establishing the theoretical framework of Moral Realism.[7] Following its publication, the article repeatedly featured in ESI's list of highly cited papers, with

[5] Ronald L. Tammen and Jacek Kugler, "Power Transition and China–US Conflicts," *Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (2006), pp. 35–55.

[6] Barry Buzan, "China in International Society: Is 'Peaceful Rise' Possible?" *Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (2010), pp. 5–36; Barry Buzan and Michael Cox, "China and the US: Comparable Cases of 'Peaceful Rise'?" *Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol. 6, No. 2 (2013), pp. 109–32; Barry Buzan, "The Logic and Contradictions of 'Peaceful Rise/Development' as China's Grand Strategy," *Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol. 7, No. 4 (2014), pp. 381–420.

[7] Yan Xuetong, "From Keep Low Profile to Striving for Achievement," *Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol. 7, No. 2 (2014), pp. 153–84.

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its core arguments attracting widespread attention within the IR academic community. Building on this article, Yan's 2019 monograph, *Leadership and the Rise of Great Powers*, systematically elaborated on Moral Realism theory. It contends that the rise and fall of great powers within the international system—particularly the smooth replacement of hegemons by emerging powers—primarily hinges on the type of leadership exercised by these great powers. Proactive leadership, characterized by rigorous domestic reform and enhanced strategic credibility abroad, earns greater moral authority both domestically and internationally, thereby increasing its prospects for attaining triumphant ascendancy and reshaping the international order.[8] These publications sparked extensive scholarly debates, which, in turn, further propelled innovation in the study of China's foreign policy and in IR theory.

In 2010 and 2014, Qin Yaqing contributed two CJIP papers, engaging in debates with Buzan and Yan regarding the prospects of China's peaceful rise and the characteristics of its foreign policy transformation. The core concepts and theoretical frameworks underpinning his main arguments were precisely those that later evolved into the Relational Theory established by Qin.[9] In this way, CJIP became not only a platform for academic debates on China's foreign policy but also a catalyst for theoretical breakthroughs, such as Moral Realism and Relational Theory. Today, these theories stand as hallmarks of contemporary Chinese IR scholars' original theoretical contributions to global IR, exemplifying the capacity of emerging academic communities to innovate theory-building while meeting scholarly standards commonly followed in international academia.[10] The publications and associated exchanges have significantly enhanced CJIP's reputation and influence, playing a vital role in advancing it toward the ranks of leading IR journals.

Enriching IR Theory

Even during CJIP's preparatory phase more than two decades ago, the initiative to advance IR theory through drawing on ancient Chinese and East Asian intellectual traditions was already gaining momentum within the field.[11] Seizing this opportunity, CJIP published a series of seminal papers that explored both Chinese thought and East Asian historical experiences, thereby stimulating innovative theoretical exchanges and elevating the journal's scholarly impact.

In exploring and reevaluating ancient Chinese thought, CJIP has published several articles examining the ideas of prominent thinkers, including Xunzi and Mozi.[12] These studies have played a vital role in inspiring subsequent theorization. When discussing the development of Moral Realism, Yan specifically emphasized that its innovative inspiration stemmed from Xunzi's thought. In Xunzi's view, states could be categorized into three leadership types: humane

[8] Yan Xuetong, *Leadership and The Rise of Great Powers* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019).

[9] Yaqing Qin, "International Society as a Process: Institutions, Identities, and China's Peaceful Rise," *Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol. 3, No. 2 (2010), pp. 129–53; Yaqing Qin, "Continuity through Change: Background Knowledge and China's International Strategy," *Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol. 7, No. 3 (2014), pp. 285–314. For Qin Yaqing's seminal article on the construction of relational theory, see Yaqing Qin, "Rule, Rules, and Relations: Towards a Synthetic Approach to Governance," *Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol. 4, No. 2 (2011), pp. 117–45.

[10] Amitav Acharya, "From Heaven to Earth: 'Cultural Idealism' and 'Moral Realism' as Chinese Contributions to Global International Relations," *Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol. 12, No. 4 (2019), pp. 467–94. Haoming Xiong, David A. Peterson, and Bear F. Braumoeller, "Reconceptualizing International Order: Contemporary Chinese Theories and Their Contributions to Global IR," *International Organization*, Vol. 78, No. 3 (2024), p. 541.

[11] David C. Kang, "Hierarchy, Balancing, and Empirical Puzzles in Asian International Relations," *International Security*, Vol. 28, No. 3 (2003/2004), pp. 165–80; Victoria Tin-bor Hui, "Toward a Dynamic Theory of International Politics: Insights from Comparing Ancient China and Early Modern Europe," *International Organization*, Vol. 58, No. 1 (2004), pp. 175–205.

[12] Yan Xuetong, "Xun Zi's Thoughts on International Politics and Their Implications," *Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (2008), pp. 135–65; Li Bin, "Insights into the Mozi and Their Implications for the Study of Contemporary International Relations," *Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol. 2, No. 3 (2009), pp. 421–54.

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authority (*Wang*), hegemony (*Ba*), and tyranny (*Qiang*). The humane authority state attained leadership through recognition by other states, and the hegemony state maintained leadership primarily through the support of its allies. In contrast, the tyrannical state relied chiefly on coercion to sustain its leadership position.[13] Xunzi's typology of state leadership inspired Yan to recognize that political leadership is the pivotal factor in determining the rise and fall of great powers, shifts in international configuration, and transformations of international order. Building upon this insight, he established the theory of Moral Realism. Drawing on ancient Chinese thought, this framework has also catalyzed broader research agendas, such as comparative studies of political thought across ancient civilizations like India and China, thereby offering insights into contemporary strategic behavior.[14]

As an academic journal rooted in East Asia, CJIP places strong emphasis on drawing insights from the region's historical international relations to identify new theoretical frontiers. It seeks to advance the development of IR theory through dialog and exchange among diverse regional and national experiences of East Asia. Among its most significant endeavors has been the publication of a series of papers that utilize the historical cases of the East Asian tributary system to produce innovative theoretical perspectives. In early 2011, Zhou Fangyin published "Equilibrium Analysis of the Tribute System" in CJIP. This article employs game-theoretic modeling to provide a compelling analysis of the equilibrium and stability of interactions between the leading state and its neighbors within the tributary system, empirically validated through the relations among the Sui and Tang Dynasties and Korea, as well as between the Ming Dynasty and Korea. Zhou's research broke through the established framework of tributary system studies, revealing the system's intrinsic logic more accurately by examining strategic interactions between China and its neighbors.[15]

Following its publication, we organized a cross-national dialog that brought together scholars from multiple disciplines, including International Relations, History, and Area Studies, as well as diverse paradigms such as Realism, Constructivism, and the English School. Drawing upon historical experiences of various nations, such as Korea, Japan, and Vietnam, these exchanges have significantly deepened the exploration of IR theory grounded in ancient East Asian thought and practice.[16]

Inspired by this series of articles, an increasing number of scholars have begun to explore the contemporary theoretical implications of the tributary system and the broader historical practices of East Asia. In spring 2013, Yuen Foong Khong published "The American Tributary System" in CJIP, arguing that the concepts and structural characteristics of ancient China's tributary system offer a more apt and accurate framework for understanding the alliance system and international order shaped by the USA after World War II.[17] In other words, the notion of

[13] Yan Xuetong, *Ancient Chinese Thought, Modern Chinese Power* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), pp. 70–106.

[14] Amitav Acharya, Daniel A. Bell, Rajeev Bhargava, and Yan Xuetong, eds., *Bridging Two Worlds: Comparing Classical Political Thought and Statecraft in India and China* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2023).

[15] Fangyin Zhou, "Equilibrium Analysis of the Tributary System," *Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol. 4, No. 2 (2011), pp. 147–78.

[16] Yongjin Zhang and Barry Buzan, "The Tributary System as International Society in Theory and Practice," *Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol. 5, No. 1 (2012), pp. 3–36; Brantly Womack, "Asymmetry and China's Tributary System," *Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol. 5, No. 1 (2012), pp. 37–54; David Kang, "Authority and Legitimacy in International Relations: Evidence from Korean and Japanese Relations in Pre-Modern East Asia," *Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol. 5, No. 1 (2012), pp. 35–71; Nianshen Song, "'Tributary' from a Multilateral and Multilayered Perspective," *Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol. 5, No. 2 (2012), pp. 155–82. For reflections on the concept of the tributary system and on theoretical innovation in international relations through the lens of East Asian historical experience, see Zhang Feng, "Rethinking the 'Tribute System': Broadening the Conceptual Horizon of Historical East Asian Politics," *Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol. 2, No. 4 (2009), pp. 545–74; Zheng Chen, "The Use and Misuse of East Asian History in IR Theorizing," *Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol. 17, No. 3 (2024), pp. 306–22.

[17] Yuen Foong Khong, "The American Tributary System," *Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol. 6, No. 1 (2013), pp. 1–47.

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the tributary system applies not only to the ancient East Asian order led by China but also to post-war regional orders in East Asia and Western Europe, shaped by the USA. Khong's comparative approach and unique insights compellingly demonstrate the profound potential to enrich contemporary IR theory through the lens of ancient Chinese and East Asian experience. In this special issue, Khong revisits the concept of the American tributary system (ATS) to analyze the current challenges to the underlying principles of ATS, offering timely and illuminating observations on the transition of international order in the context of China–US competition and Trump 2.0.[18]

While CJIP has long been committed to developing IR theories rooted in Chinese and East Asian intellectual traditions, its publications also actively engage in broader debates within mainstream IR theories. This engagement is exemplified by the work of Tang Shiping, who has critically examined and proposed modifications to several key areas in IR theory. Tang's contributions span a wide range of foundational topics, including the critique and refinement of offense–defense theory, the agent-structure problem, and neoclassical realism.[19] This dialog between Chinese and global IR scholarship is essential for generating fresh insights and developing more robust theories.

To promote dialog between diverse theoretical perspectives, we adhere to cultivating intellectual debates among diverse scholars (different nationalities and schools of thought), reflecting and highlighting the development of IR theory. In winter 2018, CJIP published four papers by scholars from China, the USA, the UK, and South Korea. These works critically examined some fundamental issues, including the applicability of distinguishing between Western and non-Western theories, the divergent developmental trajectories of IR theory across regions, and strategies for cultivating meaningful theoretical dialog among scholars from diverse intellectual traditions.[20] Along this line of inquiry, in 2024, CJIP published a series of papers examining the evolution and innovation of contemporary Chinese IR theory. Contributors from China, the USA, the UK, Italy, Australia, and other countries engaged in profound debate on questions such as whether a distinct Chinese school or broader non-Western schools of thought exist. They also offered critical reflections on original theories proposed by Chinese scholars, such as Moral Realism and Relational Theory.[21]

These discussions not only foster a more profound understanding among scholars from diverse intellectual backgrounds and contribute to the further development of IR theory but

[18] Yuen Foong Khong, "The American Tributary System Revisited," *Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol. 19, No. 1 (2026).

[19] Shiping Tang, "Offence-defence Theory: Towards a Definitive Understanding," *Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol. 3, No. 2 (2010), pp. 213–60; Shiping Tang, "International System, not International Structure: Against the Agent–Structure Problématique," *Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol. 7, No. 4 (2014), pp. 483–506; Shiping Tang, "Neoclassical Realism: Methodological Critiques and Remedies," *Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol. 16, No. 3 (2023), pp. 289–310.

[20] Peter J. Katzenstein, "The Second Coming? Reflections on a Global Theory of International Relations," *Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol. 11, No. 4 (2018), pp. 373–90; Barry Buzan, "How and How Not to Develop IR Theory: Lessons from Core and Periphery," *Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol. 11, No. 4 (2018), pp. 391–414; Yaqing Qin, "A Multiverse of Knowledge: Cultures and IR Theories," *Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol. 11, No. 4 (2018), pp. 415–34; Yong-Soo Eun, "Beyond 'the West/non-West Divide' in IR: How to Ensure Dialogue as Mutual Learning," *Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol. 11, No. 4 (2018), pp. 435–49.

[21] Peter J. Katzenstein, "Is There a Chinese School of IR Theory?" *Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol. 17, No. 3 (2024), pp. 222–41; Ren Xiao, "Why There is Now Non-Western International Relations Theory," *Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol. 17, No. 3 (2024), pp. 262–76; Lu Peng and others, "Forum: Debating the Chinese School(s) of IR Theory," *Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol. 17, No. 3 (2024), pp. 277–305; Toni Erskine and Liane Hartnett, "Images of a Statist Ethic in 'Western' and Chinese IR Theory: Locating (and Deciphering) the 'Moral Realism' of the Tsinghua Approach," *Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol. 17, No. 2 (2024), pp. 153–73; Yan Xuetong, "Upgrading the Paradigm of Leadership Analysis," *Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol. 17, No. 2 (2024), pp. 174–86; Stefano Guzzini, "Relationalism(s) Unpacked: Engaging Yaqing Qin's Theory of World Politics," *Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol. 17, No. 2 (2024), pp. 187–205; Yaqing Qin, "The Zhongyong Dialectic: A Bridge into the Relational World," *Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol. 17, No. 2 (2024), pp. 206–21.

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also reinforce CJIP's role and commitment as an open and inclusive platform for global academic exchange. Advancing this research agenda will require more rigorous empirical and comparative inquiry to deepen our understanding of how general theoretical concepts evolve across different temporal, spatial, and historical contexts, thereby generating distinct trajectories and outcomes. Amitav Acharya's research on regional variations in order arrangements illustrates how incorporating broader experiential contexts across different times and spaces into comparative analysis can substantially enrich the empirical foundations for constructing and testing IR theories.[22]

The Road Ahead

Despite notable progress having been made over the past two decades, CJIP remains a relatively young journal confronting multiple challenges. The rapid advancement of digital technologies and the resurgence of great power competition have generated numerous emerging research topics. Yet the tension between consolidating the journal's established strengths and venturing into these new frontiers has become increasingly evident. At the same time, the task of achieving theoretical innovation grounded in Chinese and broader East Asian intellectual traditions has grown more complex, with future directions for conceptual breakthroughs still to be charted. Confronted with these new developments and challenges, and with the continued guidance and support of the Editorial Board and the wider academic community, CJIP will remain committed to addressing emerging issues arising from the transformation of the international order, exploring new and novel pathways of theoretical advancement, and further strengthening dialog among IR scholars across the world.

The intensification of great-power competition is profoundly reshaping China's external environment and the international order. These interrelated dynamics and China–US strategic competition have already inspired several high-impact studies published in CJIP in recent years.[23] While exploring the evolving landscape of great power competition, the journal will dedicate the coming years to focusing on the nature of China–US competition and its driving forces, encompassing contestation over emerging technologies, the restructuring of supply and value chains, as well as traditional issues of geopolitics, trade, and finance.

Driven by digital technologies, today's great-power competition has extended into new domains. As these emerging spheres remain under-institutionalized and under-regulated, they have become critical arenas where dominant powers and emerging powers vie for global influence. Consequently, the contest over rules, standards, and norms—especially in areas such as technological standards and digital governance—has become particularly salient. Against this backdrop, we shall intensify our focus on institutional rivalry and normative contestation within this transformative process. In particular, we will pay close attention to debates concerning the governance of artificial intelligence, cross-border data flows, and sustainable development, where normative competition and diffusion are likely to shape the future trajectory of global order.[24]

Amidst great-power competition and technology revolution, evolving US–ally relationships are testing the resilience of the US-led global order and challenging established theories like

[22] Amitav Acharya, "Before the Nation-State: Civilizations, World Orders, and the Origins of Global International Relations," *Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol. 16, No. 3 (2023), pp. 263–88.

[23] Yan Xuetong, "Bipolar Rivalry in the Early Digital Age," *Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol. 13, No. 3 (2020), pp. 313–41; Zhang Jue and Xu Jin, "The Descending Porous Curtain and China-US Strategic Competition," *Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol. 14, No. 3 (2021), pp. 321–52; Stephanie Christine Winkler, "Strategic Competition and US-China Relations: A Conceptual Analysis," *Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol. 16, No. 3 (2023), pp. 333–56; Cathy Xuanxuan Wu, "A Bargaining Theory of US-China Economic Rivalry: Differentiating the Trade and Technology Wars," *Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol. 17, No. 4 (2024), pp. 323–45.

[24] Haotian Qi and Wanmingkhwan Kamnerdrat, "How Epistemic Community Shapes Global Governance of AI in Military Domain?" *Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol. 18, No. 1 (2025), pp. 85–122.

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alliance theory and the theory of international hierarchy. We therefore anticipate further scholarly engagement with questions surrounding the reconfiguration of the international order and the adaptation of US alliance systems in different regions. In this special issue, the papers by Qin Yaqing, David Lake, Michael Zürn, and Kai He, among others, offer exemplary explorations of these themes, providing valuable insights into how shifting power dynamics are reshaping global and regional arrangements.[25] In other words, CJIP aims to remain at the forefront of research on China's foreign policy and great power relations in the digital age, contributing to the global understanding of how technological change and strategic competition are jointly reshaping international order.

CJIP will continue to explore novel approaches to theory-building in international relations. On the one hand, we aim to actively promote the development of a theoretical paradigm centered on leadership in international relations. In recent years, IR scholars have shown an increasing interest in developing theories at the leader level, with Moral Realism standing as a particularly influential example. The re-election of Donald Trump as US President and the rise of populist leaders in various countries have both further underscored the importance of leadership-centered studies and heightened the need for theoretical explorations that account for leaders' roles in shaping international relations. CJIP, therefore, seeks to foster academic inquiry and dialog on paradigm shifts and leader-level theory-building, an endeavor exemplified by the contributions of Yan and Buzan in the 20th-anniversary issues.[26]

On the other hand, we will continue to encourage the construction of middle-range theories, particularly those derived from contemporary Chinese and East Asian experiences of international relations. For example, explaining the "long peace" in post-Cold War East Asia—where no interstate wars have occurred since 1992, in contrast to repeated conflicts in Europe, the Middle East, and Africa—represents a compelling avenue for theoretical inquiry. As East Asia increasingly becomes a focal region in global politics, theoretical innovation grounded in the region's practices and experiences can meaningfully enrich and diversify the foundations of IR theory. Scholars from China and other East Asian countries are especially well-positioned to make distinctive contributions in this regard. CJIP looks forward to deepening collaborations with scholars committed to these lines of inquiry and to fostering the mutual advancement of IR theory.

In its pursuit of theoretical innovation, CJIP will continue to serve as a bridge for global academic exchange, advancing theoretical dialog among IR scholars worldwide. First, CJIP will continue to host forums on issues of global concern, fostering exchange among scholars from developing, emerging, and developed countries alike, and promoting the integrated and pluralistic development of IR research worldwide. Building on this foundation, we will also invite more scholars from the Global South to join the Editorial Board and participate in the peer-review process, thereby enhancing the journal's diversity, inclusiveness, and reach. Second, CJIP will continue to identify and foster promising contributions from emerging economies, developing countries, and regions such as Eastern and Southern Europe.[27] We will also explore the possibility of trilateral dialogs on key issues, bringing together Chinese scholars, their counterparts from the counterpart country, and third-party scholars to engage in collaborative discussions

[25] Yaqing Qin, "Relational Order: Harmonizing Power and Effective Leadership," *Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol. 19, No. 1 (2026), pp. 63–81; David Lake, "The End of the Liberal International Order? Globalization, Deep Contestation, and the Future," *Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol. 19, No. 1 (2026), pp. 10–24; Michael Zürn, "Charting Global Futures: A Configurative Perspective on International Order," *Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol. 19, No. 1 (2026), pp. 42–62; Kai He, Anders Wivel, Markus Kornprobst, and T. V. Paul, "Understanding Change in Times of Crises: U.S.-China Competition and the Prospects for Peaceful Change," *Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol. 19, No. 2 (2026).

[26] Barry Buzan, "We Will Need to be Lucky: The Problem of Leadership in a Deep Pluralist World Order Facing a Climate Crisis," *Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol. 19, No. 1 (2026), pp. 25–41.

[27] Athanassios Platias and Vasilis Trigkas, "Unravelling the Thucydides' Trap: Inadvertent Escalation or War of Choice?" *Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol. 14, No. 2 (2021), pp. 219–55.

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on shared topics. For instance, discussions on potential China–Europe cooperation in digital technology will involve scholars from China, the European Union, and other regions for in-depth exchange and discussion. Third, CJIP will maintain its commitment to presenting the most dynamic research frontiers and intellectual debates within the IR communities of developing countries and emerging powers, including the evolving discussions in China surrounding major policy and theoretical issues.[28] Through these efforts, the journal aims to expand the scope of IR theories and enhance its global influence.

More than 20 years ago, when we served as editorial assistants for CJIP, we were still doctoral students in training. At that time, we could hardly have imagined accompanying the journal on such a remarkable 20-year journey. As we look ahead, with the continued support of our colleagues, contributors, and readers, we remain steadfast in our commitment to improving the journal's quality and to enabling CJIP to make ever greater contributions to the advancement of both Chinese and global international relations scholarship.

Conflict of interest statement

None declared.

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[28] For representative works published earlier on this topic, see Mingjiang Li, "China Debates Soft Power," *Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol. 2, No. 2 (2008), pp. 287–308; Minghao Zhao, "Is a New Cold War Inevitable? Chinese Perspectives on US-China Strategic Competition," *Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol. 12, No. 3 (2019), pp. 371–94.

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