



Guanghua School of Management
Peking University

Evolution of International Business Research and Education in China

The Past, Present and Future

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1. Does China Matter?

Does China Matter?

Gerald Segal

MIDDLE KINGDOM, MIDDLE POWER

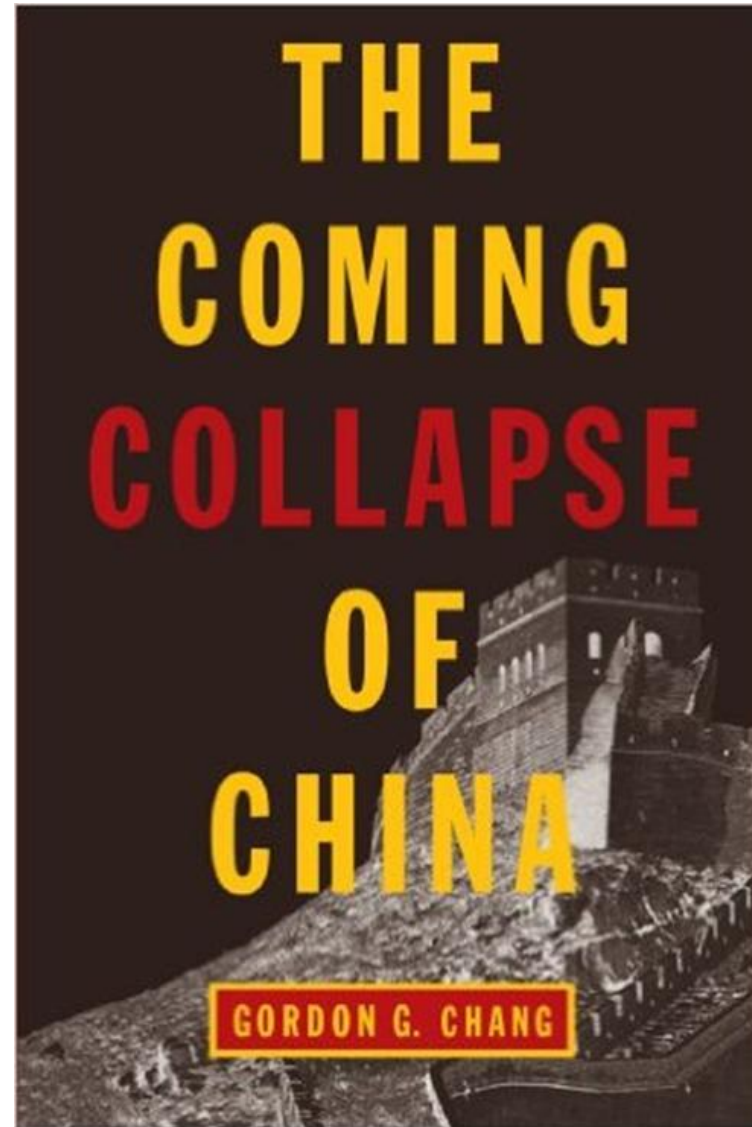
DOES CHINA matter? No, it is not a silly question—merely one that is not asked often enough. Odd as it may seem, the country that is home to a fifth of humankind is overrated as a market, a power, and a source of ideas. At best, China is a second-rank middle power that has mastered the art of diplomatic theater: it has us willingly suspending our disbelief in its strength. In fact, China is better understood as a theoretical power—a country that has promised to deliver for much of the last 150 years but has consistently disappointed. After 50 years of Mao's revolution and 20 years of reform, it is time to leave the theater and see China for what it is. Only when we finally understand how little China matters will we be able to craft a sensible policy toward it.

DOES CHINA MATTER ECONOMICALLY?

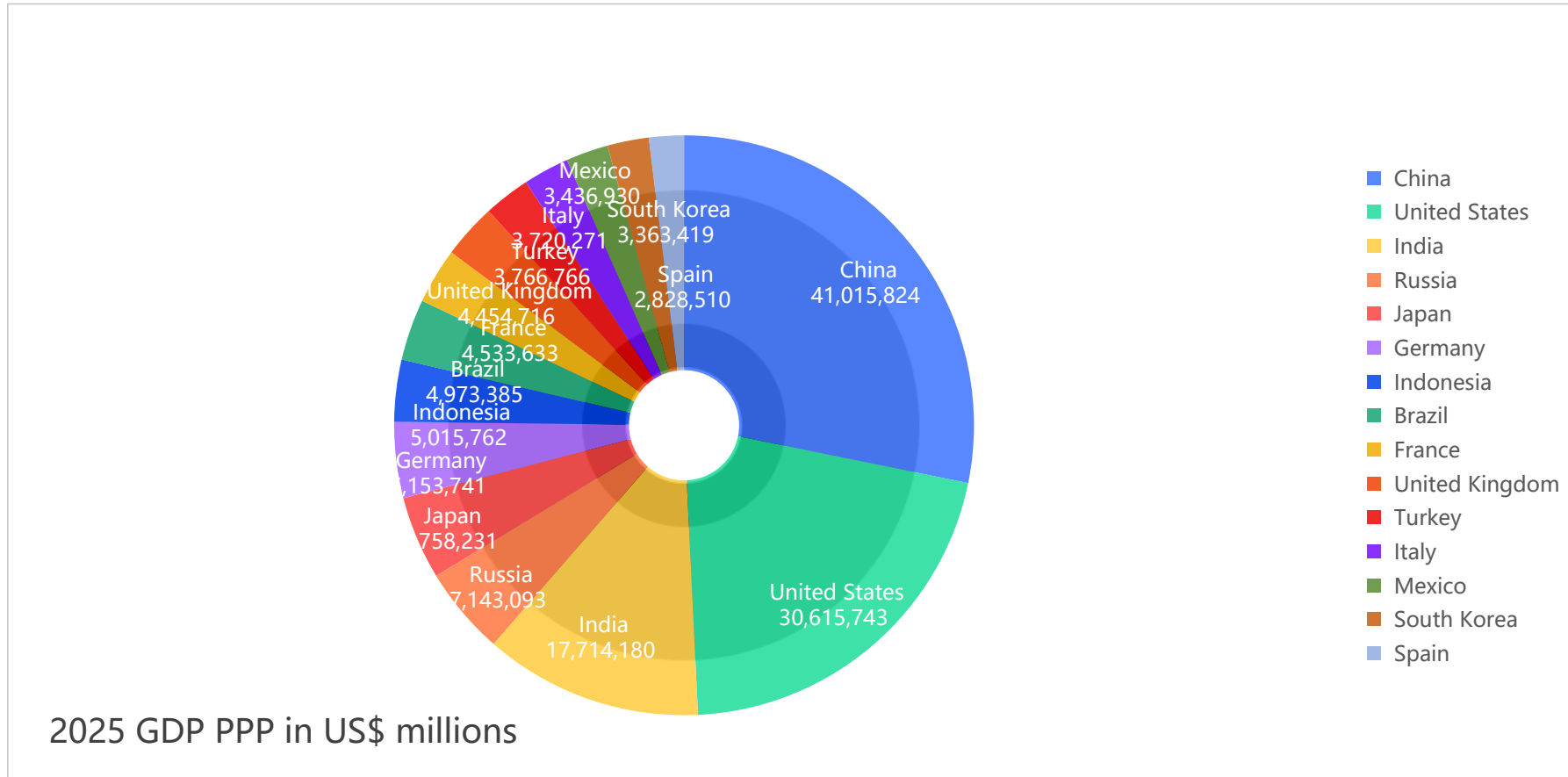
CHINA, UNLIKE Russia or the Soviet Union before it, is supposed to matter because it is already an economic powerhouse. Or is it that China is on the verge of becoming an economic powerhouse, and you must be in the engine room helping the Chinese to enjoy the benefits to come? Whatever the spin, you know the argument: China is a huge market, and you cannot afford to miss it (although few say the same about India). The recently voiced "Kodak version" of this argument is that if only each Chinese will buy one full roll of film instead of the average half-roll that each currently buys, the West will be rich. Of

GERALD SEGAL is Director of Studies at the International Institute for Strategic Studies in London and co-author, with Barry Buzan, of *Anticipating the Future*.

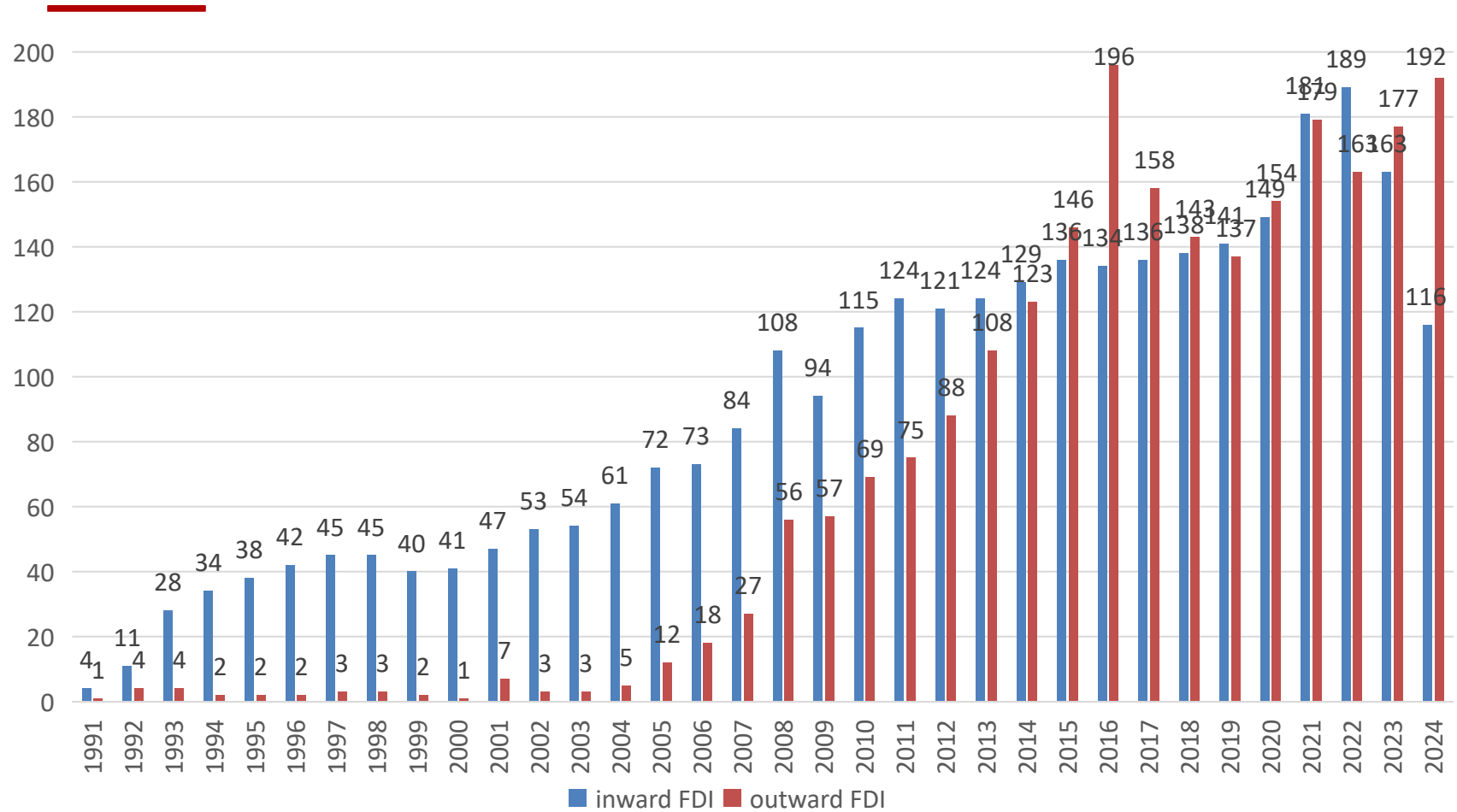
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Global GDP at Purchasing Power Parity



China's FDI inflows and outflows



Source: UNCTAD

Billions of dollar

Why China matters for IB research?

China has become an important arena for the development of international business, serving both as a major site of global business activity and as a key context for talent development.

US\$192.2bn

2024 OFDI flow

US\$3.14tn

OFDI stock at end-2024

52,000

Overseas enterprises

- Scale: China is deeply embedded in global trade, investment, production, and digital commerce.
- Variety: Chinese firms include SOEs, private firms, platform firms, labor-intensive firms and technology-intensive challengers.
- Institutional distinctiveness: government role, home-country institutions, and policy shifts are central to IB behavior.

Key features of IB research and education in China

Stages

Introduction and foundation -> expansion and internationalization -> complexity and paradigm adjustment

Drivers

Reform and opening-up; firm internationalization; higher education internationalization; geopolitics; technology development

Mechanism

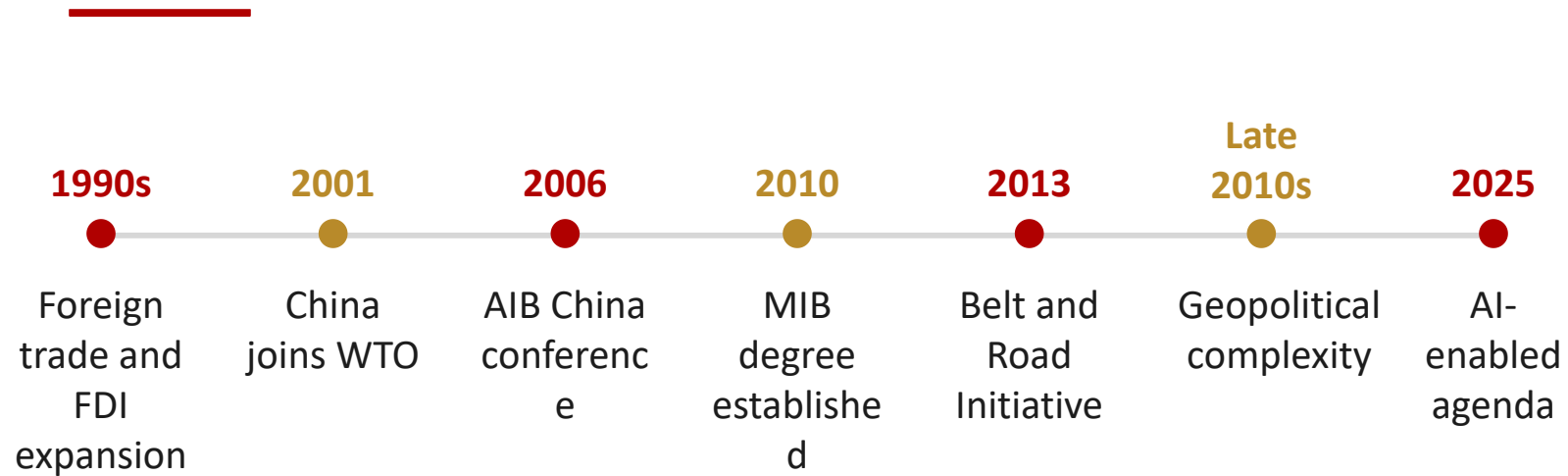
Practice creates research questions; Knowledge reshapes teaching; education builds scholarship and cases; Guide to to business practice

Outcome

IB study on China is increasingly connected to global theory while retaining local institutional insight



Timeline: China's Opening-Up and IB Development



- Research themes follow the changing position of Chinese firms in globalization.
- Education reform follows the changing capabilities demanded by firms, policy, and global uncertainty.

2. How Does IB research in China Evolve?

IB research on China

Table 1 Article categorization and main research domains

Research domains/themes	Number of papers (<i>n</i> = 331)
China's Institutional Development	32
MNE Strategic Domains:	
1. Market entry	57
2. Strategic alliances	43
3. Innovation & knowledge sharing	56
4. Global value chain strategies	27
5. Relationship management	38
6. Non-market strategies	69
Miscellaneous	9

Tse, C. H., Meyer, K. E., Pan, Y., & Chi, T. (2024). Evolution of MNE strategies amid China's changing institutions: a thematic review. *Journal of International Business Studies*, 55(6), 657-675.

IB research stage 1: introduction and adaptation

Primary lens: MNCs in China

- Research focused on foreign entry, foreign-invested enterprises, market opening.
- Existing IB theories provided the main vocabulary
- The field was still building data capacity, international publication experience, and a domestic research community.

MNCs
in China

IB research stage 2: expansion and internationalization

Developing lens: Chinese MNEs abroad

outward FDI

entry mode

latecomer

institutional distance

- China's WTO accession (2001) and the "going global" policy (2000) shifted the research agenda toward outward FDI and firm internationalization.
- Topics expanded to latecomer advantages, government roles, political ties, institutional distance, and home-country effects.
- Chinese scholars became more visible in mainstream IB journals and conference networks.

AIB 2006 Annual Conference in Beijing



IB research stage 3: indigenous theorizing and new frontiers

Primary lens: China as a source of theoretical insight

AI and digital globalization

global value chains

ESG and sustainability

innovation and IPR

geopolitical tensions

home-country institutions

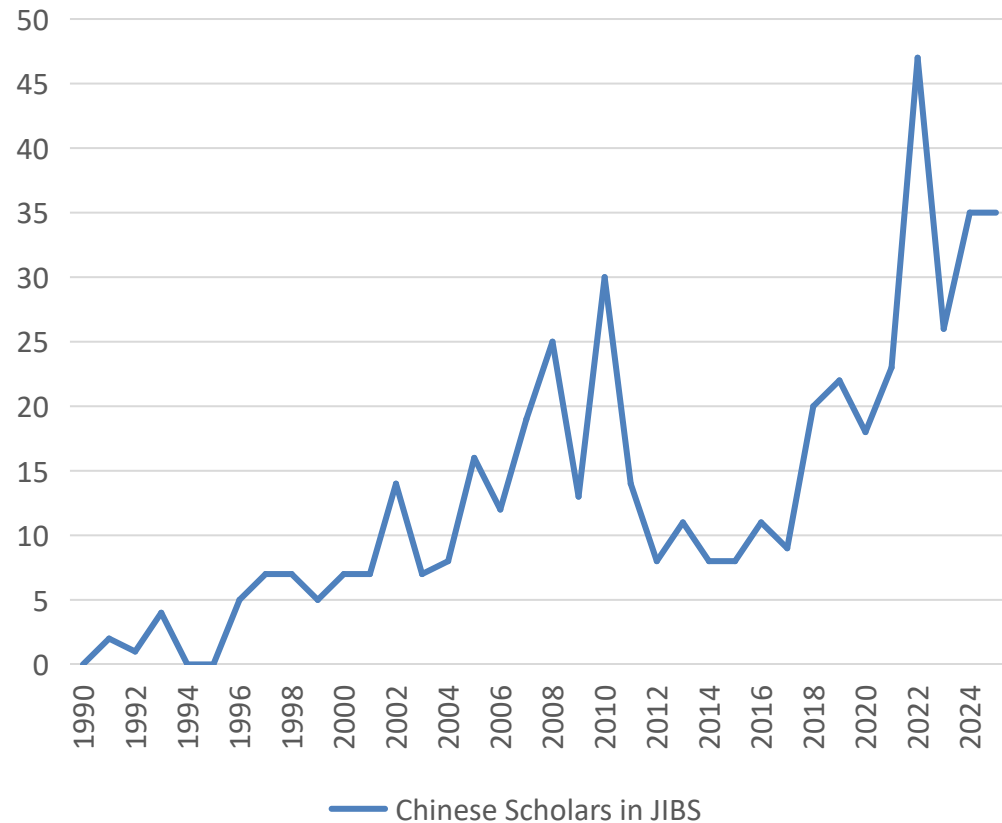
societal sentiment

State ownership

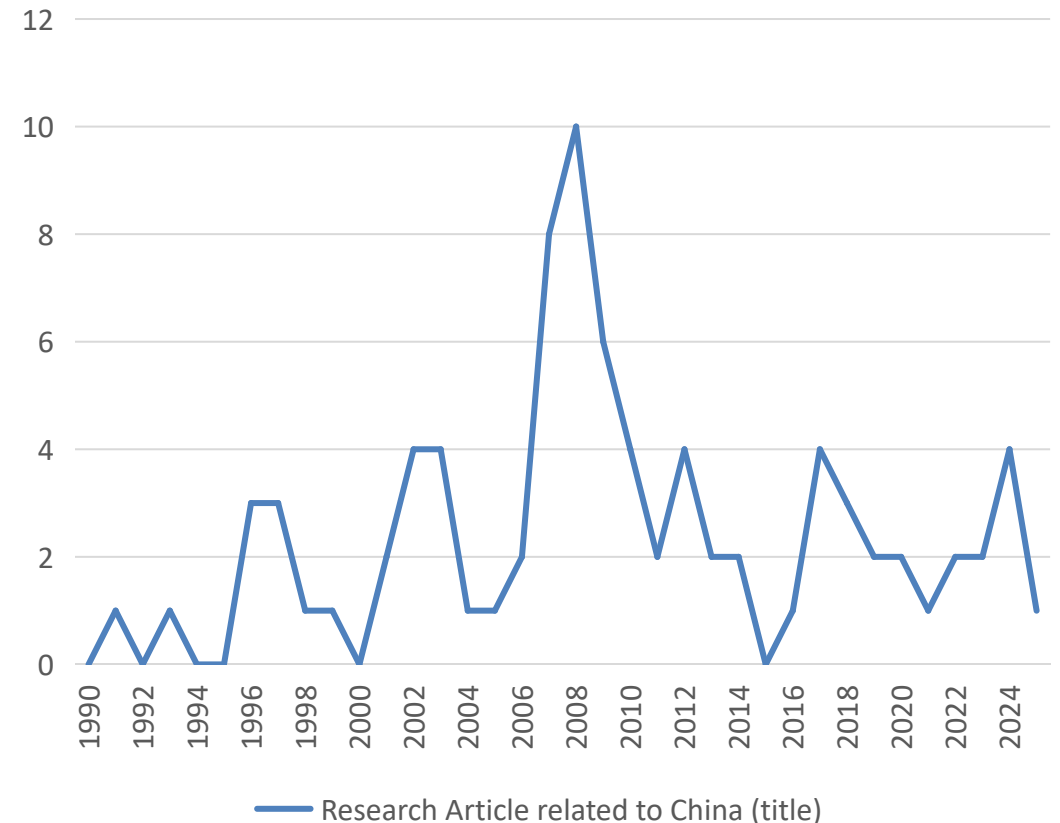
The field is moving from applying existing theories to China context toward using China context to extend or challenge IB theory.

IB research about China

Chinese Scholars in JIBS



Research Article related to China (title)



Methodological evolution

Early stage	Case descriptions, conceptual adaptation
Expansion stage	Archival data, surveys, comparative designs
Recent stage	Archival data, experiments, text analysis, machine learning ect.
Future need	AI-based methods for data collection

Core Tensions in China's IB Research

Theory import

How to further move from importing Western theories to developing China-originated theoretical insight?

Policy relevance

How to remain relevant to Chinese practice while making international theory contributions?

Generalizability

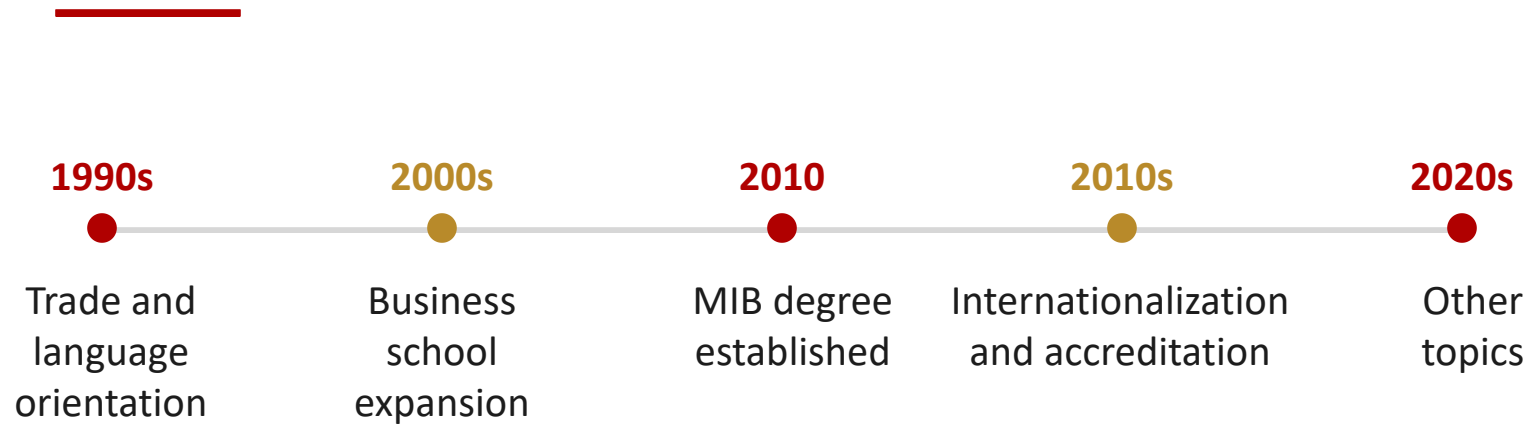
How can China-context research speak to broader IB questions rather than only China-specific puzzles?

State role

Should the state be treated as background context or as a central theoretical variable?

3. How IB Education Developed in China?

IB education in China: from trade to global complexity



- The early system trained foreign-trade professionals.
- Professional degrees and business schools expanded IB into management education.
- Recent reforms emphasize complexity: geopolitics, supply chains, ESG, digital platforms, and AI.

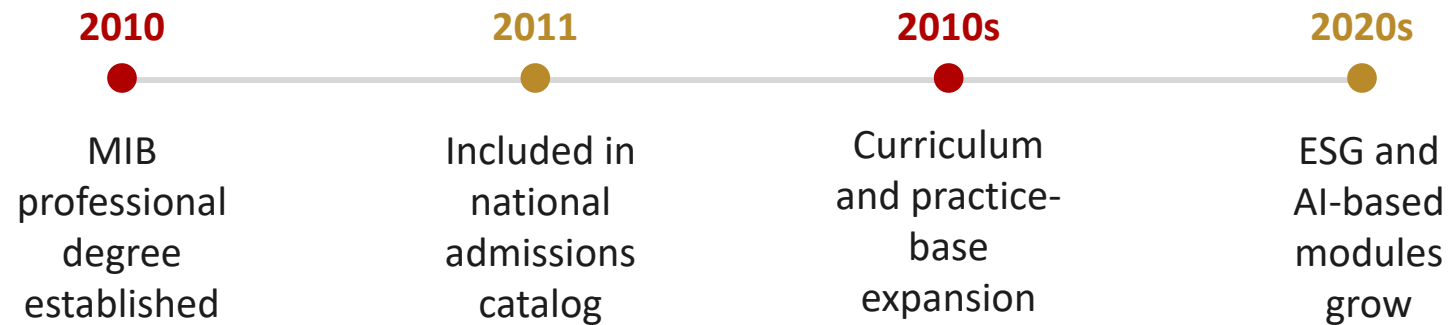
IB education stage 1: trade-oriented formation



- IB education was initially tied to international trade, foreign economic relations, and business English.
- Training emphasized practical operations: export/import processes, documentation, negotiation, and basic international rules.

IB education stage 2: MIB institutionalization and expansion

The Master of International Business degree created a formal platform for applied IB talent development.



- Professionalization moved IB beyond trade practice into international strategy, global marketing, multinational management, and entrepreneurship.
- Dual-advisor systems and practice modules connected universities with firms and policy institutions.

Internationalization of IB education

- Joint programs, exchange programs, double degrees, and overseas modules increased students' exposure to global business environments.
- Faculty internationalization and accreditation processes helped standardize curricula and teaching quality.
- Chinese business schools increasingly participate in case development and knowledge production, not only knowledge reception.
- The next frontier is combining global exposure with local relevance and China-specific institutional insight.

IB education stage 3: capability building for a complex world



The goal is no longer only to 'understand foreign trade', but to manage cross-border business under strategic uncertainty.

4. Co-Evolvement of IB Education and Research

The Co-Evolution Model



Research and education are not parallel tracks; they circulate through enterprise practice, policy change, school development, and scholar training.

How Research Shapes Education

OFDI	Chinese MNE cases and outward investment strategy enter the classroom
Institutions	Institutional distance, legitimacy, and state-business relations become teaching modules
Global Value Chains	Supply chain resilience and value-chain upgrading become central topics
Geopolitics	Sanctions, export controls, and risk management become part of IB training
AI / digital	Digital IB analytics and platform globalization enter curriculum design

How Education Shapes Research in IB

Programs

MIB and business-school programs create stable demand for IB knowledge and teaching materials

Scholars

Doctoral training, visiting programs, and international conferences cultivate an IB research community

Cases

Teaching needs push case writing, textbook development, and practice-oriented inquiry

Networks

School internationalization expands collaboration with global IB scholars and institutions

Why China is a Distinctive Co-Evolution Setting

Synchrony

Opening-up, firm internationalization, national strategy, and higher education expansion occurred in overlapping periods

State role

The state is not only a background condition; it shapes firm behavior, education priorities, and research puzzles

Scale

The size and diversity of Chinese firms create broad empirical variation for IB research

Transition

Institutional change generates questions that are valuable for both theory and teaching

5. Looking forward to the Future

Looking for the Next China

China in 1976

- With 940 million people, China constituted 22.5% of world population, then.
- China' s share in the global GDP was merely 2%
- The national economy was at edge of collapse.

Africa in 2026

- With total population of 1.55 billion, Africa constitutes roughly 20% of world population, now.
- Africa' s share in the global GDP is 3.5%
- The continent that was forgotten.



Path to 2075

World's largest economies (measured in USD)

Ranking	1980	2000	2022	2050	2075
1	United States	United States	United States	China	China
2	Japan	Japan	China	United States	India
3	Germany	Germany	Japan	India	United States
4	France	United Kingdom	Germany	Indonesia	Indonesia
5	United Kingdom	France	India	Germany	Nigeria
6	Italy	China	United Kingdom	Japan	Pakistan
7	China	Italy	France	United Kingdom	Egypt
8	Canada	Canada	Canada	Brazil	Brazil
9	Argentina	Mexico	Russia	France	Germany
10	Spain	Brazil	Italy	Russia	United Kingdom
11	Mexico	Spain	Brazil	Mexico	Mexico
12	Netherlands	Korea	Korea	Egypt	Japan
13	India	India	Australia	Saudi Arabia	Russia
14	Saudi Arabia	Netherlands	Mexico	Canada	Philippines
15	Australia	Australia	Spain	Nigeria	France

Source: Goldman Sachs Global Investment Research

IB Study in the Next 50 Years

Geopolitics and Sovereignty

Deglobalization, sanctions, and political risk become strategic variables

AI / Digital

AI changes organization, data governance, and global operations

ESG

Sustainability and non-market strategy enter core research and education

Global Innovation and IPR

Technology decoupling reshapes innovation internationalization

Supply Chains

Resilience and security increasingly complement efficiency

Global South and New World

Using Chinese experience to extend, qualify, or challenge mainstream IB theory

Conclusions: from Empirical Setting to Theory Source

China is not only an empirical setting for IB, but also an emerging source of IB theorizing and education innovation.

- IB research evolved from introduction, to expansion, to indigenous theorizing.
- IB education evolved from trade operations training to global complexity management.
- The field's future lies in translating China business experience into globally meaningful theories and educational curriculum design.

Thank You for Your Attention !

