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# Cosmopolitan risk community and China's climate governance

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## **Abstract**

Ulrich Beck asserts that global risks, such as climate change, generate a form of 'compulsory cosmopolitanism', which 'glues' various actors into collective action. Through an analysis of emerging 'cosmopolitan risk communities' in Chinese climate governance, this article points out a 'blind spot' in the theorization of cosmopolitan belonging and an associated inadequacy in explaining shifting power relations. The article addresses this problem by engaging with the intersectionality of the cosmopolitan space. It is argued that cosmopolitan belonging is a form of performative identity. Its key characteristic lies in a 'liberating prerogative', which enables individuals to participate in the solution of common problems creatively. It is this liberating prerogative that forces the state from a position of political monopoly and marks the cosmopolitan moment.

## **Keywords**

Beck, belonging, cosmopolitanization, governance, intersectionality

## **Climate risks and cosmopolitan theorization**

Climate change has been highlighted by social theorists as a potential transformative force which not only challenges the conventional nation-state organization of collective action, but also promotes changes in individuals by advancing a transnational mindset (e.g. Held, 2010; Hulme, 2010; Urry, 2011). Ulrich Beck, a leading cosmopolitan theorist in the study of climate change, has succinctly summarized the social transformations

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brought on by global climate risk as a condition of ‘compulsory cosmopolitanism’, which ‘glues’ various actors into collective action (Beck, 1996, 2009).

From a Beckian perspective, the global response to climate change is the epitome of the world risk society’s cosmopolitan moment (Beck, 2008). It provides a valuable opportunity to develop cosmopolitan theorization from at least two perspectives. First, it provides a rare opportunity to trace the formation of ‘cosmopolitan risk communities’ as they develop. As transnational climate initiatives emerge, traditional social boundaries are contested, which may induce social actors to adapt to new forms of belonging. Understanding social actors’ internal re-orientation of the relation between Self, Other and World is important (Delanty, 2009). This is captured by Beck’s paraphrase of Adrian Favell’s postnational idea, ‘to belong or not to belong – *that* is the cosmopolitan question’ (Beck, 2003: 454, original emphasis; Favell, 1999). The becoming of cosmopolitan communities, also known as the cosmopolitanization process, is essentially a socio-political project of belonging (Skey, 2013). It is assumed that these new forms of social attachments will, in turn, necessitate and produce a ‘novel global order’ of governance (Beck et al., 2013).

Second, and just as importantly, social response to climate risk offers a timely occasion to extend empirical cosmopolitan investigations beyond Europe. Contemporary cosmopolitan discourse has long been limited by its Euro-centric approach (Shields, 2006). In recent years, a number of empirical studies have been carried out in Asia with the aim of deepening cosmopolitan theorization (Chang, 2010; Tyfield and Urry, 2009; Zhang, 2010a). Collectively, these efforts help to add a ‘cosmopolitan vision’ to a realist cosmopolitan discourse. Needless to say, this empirical attentiveness is crucial to the theoretical rigour of conceptualizing an increasingly connected and differentiated world. Craig Calhoun (2003: 532) rightly affirmed that a cosmopolitan imagination is not ‘a view from nowhere or everywhere’, but is built on ‘thick attachments’ to specific social spaces. Thus, to echo Nira Yuval-Davis’ emphasis on empirical research, studies of particular experiences of a particular assemblage of people at a particular time and place can draw our attention to issues relating to the theorization of cosmopolitanization in a way that abstract, generic reflections alone can never do (Yuval-Davis, 2010: 265).

This article should be seen in the same vein as those studies which extend the cosmopolitanization thesis by examining non-European experiences. More specifically, it draws on the author’s recent study of the roles of ‘cosmopolitan risk communities’ in China’s climate governance (Zhang and Barr, 2013).

The central aim of this article is to address the ‘blind spot’ in the theorization of cosmopolitan belonging and the subsequent inadequate understanding of their implications for governance. While it is widely recognized that a ‘sense of belonging to the world’ has gained increasing importance in the actualization of social actors’ entitlements and responsibilities (Favell, 1999; Ong, 2005; Schueth and O’Loughlin, 2008), the prevalence of a cosmopolitan outlook among social actors is often effectively taken for granted. This problem may be especially acute for a Beckian perspective, as the ‘world risk society’ thesis seems to offer a blanket explanation as to how social actors relate themselves to formerly distant others (Beck, 2008). In addition, seeing cosmopolitanization as a ‘banal’ and ‘coercive’ social condition that ‘unfolds beneath the surface of persisting national spaces’ (Beck and Levy, 2013: 6), the theorization approach, to a large

extent, precludes the necessity to explicate how social actors make sense of their ‘new’ cross-boundary attachments (or, indeed, whether those attachments are ‘new’). Consequently, while existing cosmopolitanization theory is excellent at framing diverse social phenomena (such as the decline of the nation-state and various social boundary transcendence) in the same narrative, it is weak in expounding how a cosmopolitan outlook is internalized by social actors and then translated into new power relations (Antonsich, 2010; Shields, 2006).

Related to this theoretical weakness is a methodological difficulty associated with a ‘flat’ understanding of cosmopolitan belonging that, despite a well-acknowledged emphasis on encapsulating the heterogeneity of social activities, we are often trapped in a ‘laminated’ world of the ‘multi-layered’. That is to say, cosmopolitan theorization highlights the plurality as well as the fragmentation of social associations. But instead of asking directly how social actors instrumentalize these multiple belongings, theorists are often more interested in the final aggregated effect layered by a myriad of social milieus. The trouble with this ‘laminated’ world model is that belongings are not just ‘multi-layered’, but also multi-faceted, multi-territorial and of multiple scales. They embody influences that perform at the *intersection* of different social domains at different levels and at different times, which it may not be possible to ‘layer’ onto each other (Antonsich, 2010). Thus, a laminated approach often compresses world order into a ‘both/and’, in which *both* global *and* local, *both* traditional *and* emerging collectives matter. Such a conclusion has a lot of truth to it. But it also invokes conceptual ambiguity about what distinguishes a cosmopolitan assemblage from that of others. In addition, it sheds little light on future governance (Jarvis, 2007; Martell, 2009). Few would dispute that the increasing demand for cosmopolitan governance is due to the inadequacy of the nation-state in addressing cross-border risks. Yet a simple ‘laminated’ world-view blinds us from seeing where the ‘gap’ is, and how cosmopolitan communities fill this void.

This article addresses this theoretical weakness by employing an intersectional analytical lens (Yuval-Davis, 2010, 2011) to examine how social actors situate their (cosmopolitan) belonging and how this affects the actualization of socio-political projects which attempt to mitigate global risks. The article is structured as follows: The first section summarizes findings from a recent study in China. It discusses why, in the absence of a systematic understanding of what constitutes cosmopolitan belonging, the cosmopolitanization hypothesis fails to provide a coherent account of how cross-boundary solidarities are formed and of how these solidarities, however contingent they are, still assume a powerful influence within an authoritarian state (Wang, 2012). For example, why have Chinese society’s political and social participation in global climate initiatives not simply promoted a ‘both/and’ logic, but invoked a seemingly paradoxical ‘neither/nor’ reflection? Why did a seemingly ‘patriotic’ clean air movement, ‘I Monitor the Air for My Country’, successfully establish a ‘cosmopolitan community of respiration’? Following the analytical questions raised in the first section, the second section uses an intersectional lens to address theoretical weaknesses exposed in the analysis of Chinese climate governance. Instead of looking through laminated layers of different social spheres, and speculating upon the overlap or overlay of social boundaries, this section ‘zooms in’ and directly studies the sites where social collisions take place. It examines resulting social ‘voids’ that cosmopolitan communities aim to fill. This intersectional

approach provides insights on the actual performativity of cosmopolitan belonging and what it means to coordinate a collective response to climate risks.

On the basis of this new theorization and evidence collected from China, I argue that the essence of cosmopolitan identities lies in its *liberating prerogative*. But cosmopolitan belonging is not simply ‘freedom from social belongings’, nor should it be conceptualized as a fixed form of belonging (Calhoun, 2003). Rather, the liberating effect comes from social actors’ freedom to explore and exploit different forms of social belonging simultaneously, without necessarily being pressured to commit to or to prioritize any one of them. To be sure, from an individual actor’s point of view, the embodiment and entanglement of multiple social attachments may ultimately produce a new hybrid identity. But this new hybrid is a result of biographical synthesis, and thus cannot be generalized as ‘cosmopolitan’ in nature. It is in this sense that the membership of cosmopolitan communities remains differentiated and fragmented. Yet, the recognition of one’s capacity to experience and instrumentalize different belongings may become universal. It is this liberating prerogative rather than the specific substance that underpins a social characteristic of cosmopolitan belongings.

It is beyond this article’s remit to provide an exhaustive analysis of different aspects of cosmopolitan belonging. I also do not intend to claim that the Chinese experience is ‘representative’. However, I highlight that the removal of analytical limits of cosmopolitan social theories requires an enriched understanding of cosmopolitan belonging, and I demonstrate one possible way how this can be achieved.

## **Cosmopolitan imagination and political reality in the making**

In this section, I contextualize how a ‘cosmopolitan imagination’ emerged from China’s response to climate change and associated environmental risks. I then demonstrate the analytical bottleneck of a ‘laminated’ model of cosmopolitan belongings. This is to say that a ‘laminated’ model leaves the question of how collective actions are mobilized and organized inside a ‘black box’. This has the potential to lead to analytical inconsistencies. Finally, by returning to the realpolitik of Chinese green politics, I expound on how emerging cosmopolitan belonging by Chinese actors signifies an empirical ‘liberating prerogative’ which cannot be equated with a ‘both/and’ characterization.

China views combating climate change as a chance to become an integral part of global leadership. The Chinese government’s ambition of becoming a dominant player in climate governance can be traced back to 2007 (Tschang, 2007). Certainly, China’s role in global climate mitigation remains controversial in media, policy and academic discussions. On the one hand, despite China’s incorporation of air pollution data as part of its climate governance, it remains the ‘world’s worst polluter’ and biggest carbon dioxide emitter (*The Economist*, 2013; Swartz and Oster, 2010). On the other hand, many commentators remind us that China ‘gets it’ in a way that many Western nations still do not. That is, China is aggressively tying its dominance in future global politics to ambitious climate initiatives, and tactically allying its climate actions with international partners from different sectors. For example, China is currently the world’s leading recipient of the United Nation’s Clean Development Mechanism programme and accounts for more than half of the world’s Certified Emission Reductions (World Bank, 2009:

262). Already a world leader in wind turbine and solar panel production, China is seen by the business sector as leading ‘by action, as opposed to seeking binding commitments at international conferences’ (Bradsher, 2010; China Green Initiative, 2011: 12).<sup>1</sup>

As the Chinese government seeks to become a visible force in the global response to climate change and natural degradation, citizen-organized climate groups also aim to make their influence felt. Arguably, the development of a green civil society in China in the past two decades has exhibited a sense of global openness. The numbers of international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) in China increased at the end of the 1990s and they have had an important influence on the rise of civil society. In many cases, homegrown Chinese environmental NGOs (ENGOS) are led by individuals who either have studied in the West or had ‘simply worked in an INGO before setting up their own organisations’ (Chen, 2010: 508). These homegrown ENGOS are at the forefront of promoting worldwide low-carbon initiatives in China, such as hosting Earth Hour events and advocating global supply-chain citizenship<sup>2</sup> (Zhang and Barr, 2013).

As I have argued elsewhere (Zhang, 2010b, 2012a), there are at least three key elements that constitute a cosmopolitan outlook. It is not difficult to identify China’s organization of climate initiatives with a process of ‘cosmopolitanization’ (Beck, 2002). To begin with, there seems to be a clear sense of a global connectedness underlying China’s attempts to join the global climate community. More importantly, this sense of global interrelatedness has, at least in part, been instrumentalized and translated into the organization of collective actions. Second, the engagement with cross-border climate initiatives is not limited to small elitist circles, but involves deliberation by both ‘institutional agents’ (e.g. the government and government-supported enterprises) and ‘the citizens who inhabit networks of communication and interaction’ (Bohman, 2007: 189). Third, though Chinese green governance is often seen, along with other countries like Singapore, as ‘environmental authoritarianism’, the exposure to global climate discourses have also ‘transformed the quality of the social and the political *inside* nation-state societies’ (Beck, 2002: 17, 23, original emphasis). This idea of ‘globalization *from within*’ is a valuable contribution to cosmopolitan discussions, as it highlights the necessity of examining ‘the co-presence, and co-existence of rival lifestyles, contradictory certainties in the experiential space of individuals and societies’ (Beck, 2006: 89). However, as the following paragraphs demonstrate, the nebulous theorization of cosmopolitan belonging negates a Beckian analysis to explain the changing social (and political) dynamics that distinguishes a cosmopolitanization process.

To demonstrate China’s process of ‘globalization *from within*’, one only needs to compare public attitudes in China towards two Sino-American diplomatic disputes over air quality in 2008 and 2011. It should be noted that while, technically, fighting air pollution is different from combating climate risks, given China’s heavy reliance on coal, these two issues are conflated in practice. Tackling smog is an important part of China’s efforts to curb climate change. But public involvement and attitudes towards air pollution have changed dramatically in the past few years. The 2008 footage of US Olympic athletes arriving in Beijing wearing masks generated a mixture of bewildered indignation and humiliation among the Chinese people (Macur, 2008). At the time, many Chinese saw it as an arrogant display of Western discrimination against China and, in the context of Chinese political culture, the government was perceived as the only agent that had any

real capacity to act on collective affairs, such as air quality control. However, as the US Embassy in Beijing started to publicize its independent monitoring of air quality, the professional jargon 'PM2.5' and associated debates over rights and responsibilities gradually entered China's public domain (Bradsher, 2012; Wu, 2011). In 2011, when the Chinese government claimed that the US Embassy's online publication of China's PM2.5 levels was illegal and showed a lack of respect for national sovereignty, the Chinese public sided with the international critics (Tong, 2012). In responding to Beijing's criticisms, US Department of State spokesperson Mark Toner pointed out that the US Embassy's air monitors were 'a service provided for American citizens, the Americans who work in the Embassy community and live in China' (Toner, 2012). A further cosmopolitan turn of this event took place when Chinese ENGOs, inspired by the US Embassy, launched a clean air campaign in Beijing, asking citizens to use handheld PM2.5 devices to monitor and publish air data themselves. This idea received support from China's main portal website, Sina. Sina helped to set up a month-long event in which air quality data collected by volunteers were published online. This was the beginning of what became a nation-wide 'I Monitor the Air for My Country' movement, with local initiatives adopting names such as 'I Monitor the Air for (My) Tianjin', 'I Monitor the Air for (My) Shanghai', and so on (Feng and Lv, 2011). This initiative later 'coerced' Chinese authorities to bring forward its timetable of stringent air control (Wang, 2012).

I have detailed the development of this movement elsewhere (Zhang and Barr, 2013). Relating to the discussion of this article, there are two findings that need to be highlighted. The first finding is how transnational solidarity was recognized and instrumentalized by Chinese green activists. At the time of my investigation in China, Beijing was considering a possible ban on civil monitoring. I asked Chinese ENGO staff how they perceived the US Embassy's role in their nation-wide (though not 'national') campaign for clean air. One responded: 'We think it's good that the Americans are doing independent monitoring. In case one day, we [as homegrown ENGOs] are banned from monitoring, at least we know they [the American Embassy staff] can continue the publication of air quality data.' This is but one example of how Chinese actors strategize their actions beyond a nation-state framework.

A second finding is how the Chinese ENGOs perceived the role of the government. While the bottom-up air campaign was highly critical of Beijing's incompetence, it also took advantage of an existing nationalist rhetoric in justifying and legitimizing their actions both to the authorities and to the public. To note that these projects were presented as '*for my country*' (rather than '*against*') is important. This was not only a simple strategy to win public sympathy and appease local authorities, but also reflected a more pragmatic political value that many Chinese environmental activists want to promote. That is, almost all the green activists I interviewed said that what they were campaigning for was not a negation of government efforts but rather it was a protest against the 'sloppiness' of institutional work. The aim was to make the government do its job better, but not to replace it. Interestingly, in the eyes of grassroots ENGOs, this non-subversiveness was not a weakness, but was an acquired maturity on how to integrate different social resources (Zhang and Barr, 2013: 72).

When I presented these collective efforts on improving air quality in a workshop I co-organized with the late Ulrich Beck, we found that cosmopolitanization theory provided



an excellent framework to incorporate this diverse network of actors and emerging power relations (Zhang, 2012b). This collective struggle for clean air in China resembles an ‘imagined cosmopolitan community’. Drawing on the work of Benedict Anderson (1983), we can note a sense of solidarity founded on the conscious awareness that one is living through and affected by similar experiences and events with distant others. In this case, it is an ‘imagined community of respiration’, as the grassroots Chinese, a foreign embassy, foreigners living in China and the Chinese government were all connected by the concern of breathing healthy air. In addition, as the Chinese green activists exploited their options both nationally and internationally, this case also seems to echo Beck’s description of a cosmopolitan belonging, which ‘replace[s] the either/or logic with the both/and logic of inclusive differentiation’ (Beck, 2006: 4–5).

Yet if we push this line of inquiry further, we find ourselves short of conceptual tools to illuminate how new forms of global association function. A both/and characterization dodges rather than confronts the question of how actors manoeuvre heterogeneous (and sometimes conflicting) social facts into synergies. This ‘laminated’ approach also gives rise to analytical loopholes. For example, many Chinese activists we interviewed took pride in the ‘maturity’ demonstrated by the national air quality campaign. They interpreted such maturity as embracing a cooperative mindset while acknowledging clear organizational boundaries and limits. That is to say, an increasing number of Chinese green activists have come to abandon a blanket faith in either national or transnational alliances. Instead of a ‘both/and’ logic, one could equally argue that what sustains this cosmopolitan community of respiration is the opposite – that is, a more critical attitude of ‘neither/nor’.

Another example of this ‘neither/nor’ logic is China’s unique form of ‘climate sceptics’.<sup>3</sup> These sceptics do not challenge the validity of climate science per se, nor do they dismiss the necessity for collective undertaking. Rather, this discourse is highly suspicious of the social cost of climate agendas set by Western as well as Chinese state-sponsored hegemonies. The most high profile case is China’s much heralded production of solar panels, which have been exported widely to Europe and the USA but have left behind a legacy of toxic pollution in Chinese villages, due to poor manufacturing infrastructure and illegal dumping (Gou, 2010: 3–4). The idea of allying one’s faith *neither* with the nation-state, *nor* with a (Western-dominated) global commons struck a chord in some segments of Chinese society (Zhang and Barr, 2013).

To be sure, one could argue that such ‘neither/nor’ scepticism is directed at the power relations at national and global levels. It is different from the both/and theorization of cosmopolitan identity. However, the choice of social belongings conceived and perceived by social actors is closely related to the rights and responsibilities they underpin. Few would disagree that the actual operation of a cosmopolitan community involves more intricate deliberations than simply ‘adding up’ national and international resources. Yet global inclusiveness itself cannot fully explain how cross-border initiatives are steered through and shaped by increasingly multi-layered and entangled webs of power relations. For example, the cosmopolitanization of civil society has brought an evident transformation to power relations in China’s authoritarian state (Zhang and Barr, 2013). But unless we resort to the old hierarchical view of the social (that the level of authority and importance descend in order of the global, the national and the local) or

leave it to a theoretical mystification, it is hard to justify this ‘automatic’ shift in power dynamics in an authoritarian state. Thus, questions such as how social actors situate themselves in existing power relations and how new forms of belonging reconfigure the contour of political domination, should not be taken for granted, but should be at the centre of cosmopolitan investigations.

In fact, the very success of the above-mentioned ‘imagined community of respiration’ in mobilizing the masses, which pressured the Chinese authoritarian state, lies in the campaign’s excellent command of a cosmopolitan framing and its instrumentalization of social belonging. While this clean air campaign operates on territorial boundaries that *coincide* with the nation-state, this nation-wide campaign is not a ‘national’ one. The leading slogan ‘I monitor the air for *my* country’ entails a strong (re)claim of a ‘regime of living’ (Lakoff and Collier, 2004: 420) that can be personal, fragmented, and different from any official view. The ‘I’ is inviting as well as liberating for it bears little prescribed social categorization. It highlights an imperative and obligation of every individual’s contribution to the ‘congeries of moral reasoning and practice’ that can respond to the situation in which ‘the question of how to live a life is at stake’ (Lakoff and Collier, 2004: 420). By putting individuals at the centre of a concrete social problem with an open directive, it provokes questions and incentivizes contributions from social actors from all walks of life. To push the analysis further, what is empowering is the enlightenment of a prerogative that one can and should actively explore and exploit one’s social attachments in the pursuance of a good life. This, as is explained in the next section, may be an essential character of cosmopolitan belonging. Correspondingly, the challenge to the nation-state is not so much pressures from an external cosmopolitan *imaginary* that is imposed on top of national loyalty. The challenge lies in the reality that an increasing number of citizens have embraced the prerogative that they can ‘switch sides’, ‘turn away’ and engage with alternative agendas resourcefully, which can effectively ‘coerce’ the establishment out of their respective political monopoly.

This is a short demonstration of how attentiveness to the concept of belonging can further our understanding of the nature of cosmopolitan communities and of the sources of shifts in power. This empirical focus on belongings in the making of a cosmopolitan community necessitates a corresponding theoretical framework. The Chinese experience echoes what Aihwa Ong (2005) described: in a globalized world, the actualization of one’s rights and obligations is not so much through *a* membership of *a* certain community. Rather, it is configured through the *intersection* of milieus of globalized contingency. Thus, to understand what a cosmopolitan future holds, one needs to open up the theoretical ‘black box’ of how social actors situate themselves in these intersections, and see why a cosmopolitan outlook allows social actors to achieve what otherwise they would not be able to do.

## **An intersectional gaze at cosmopolitan belonging**

Through an analysis of the Chinese experience, I have outlined cosmopolitanization theory and specified why an under-theorization of ‘belonging’ constrains its analytical depth. In this section, I address this theoretical weakness by applying an intersectional gaze at cosmopolitan belonging. It should be remembered that the main challenge that

climate risk poses is not limited to the sheer scope of natural catastrophe. Climate change also unsettles people across the world by making visible the entangled web of interests and belongings that they are implicated in by ‘connect[ing] the use of an electric toothbrush in Germany with large-scale flooding in Australia’ and associating Chinese iPhone factories with storm patterns in the Pacific Rim (Beck et al., 2013: 3; Griffiths, 2014). In short, it exposes us to the ‘intersectionality’ of the social.

By intersectionality, I mean the manifested properties of the social resulting from interactions between different social spheres of varying configurations and with different modalities of power (Crenshaw, 1989; Kaijser and Kronsell, 2014; McCall, 2005). The concept of intersectionality is rooted in feminist thinking. It was originally proposed by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989: 139) as a way to engage with the ‘multidimensionality’ of research subjects’ lived experiences. In addition, recent studies on belonging have shown the intersectional approach to be valuable in understanding the relations between self-identity, social positioning, and the grid of power relations between different groups (Yuval-Davis, 2010). It is not surprising that the intersectional lens has started to attract attention from climate studies (Kaijser and Kronsell, 2014). Below, I extend the intersectional lens to the investigation of a cosmopolitan climate community.

The intersectional approach, as described by Nira Yuval-Davis (2011: 6), is a metaphorical application of the term. It is ‘aimed at evoking images of a road intersection’. These intersecting roads represent the social divisions that are involved in a particular analysis. In conducting an intersectional analysis, I describe an alternative to the ‘laminated’ view of the social space.

It is true that we live amid a confluence of global flows and in a ‘space of assemblage’ (Ong 2005: 697; Ong and Collier 2005). It is also true that in addressing climate disasters and the anticipation of future natural catastrophes, these entangled social spheres collide, creating ‘cracks’ in the social space where the reach of existing socio-political systems ‘falls short’. In fact, many climate initiatives fall into these ‘social voids’ which are at the convergence of different communities. To call these cracks ‘social voids’ is appropriate not only because they represent a vacuum of laws and norms, but also because they are social and ethical domains that human societies have not yet ventured into. Social actors at the intersection of these cracks may belong to just one sphere or to multiple social spheres. It should not be taken for granted that all of the social actors that happen to be in or at the proximity of these cracks would necessarily initiate a new (cosmopolitan) community, just as we cannot assume that every global problem will automatically attract attention. But it is the coming together of concerned social actors from different social divisions to this in-between space with the intention to fill the social void that formulates a new cosmopolitan collective.

This intersectional modelling of climate risk may not incorporate every aspect of a ‘cosmopolitan imagination’. But, for a sociological investigation of cosmopolitan belongings, this approach helps to make sense of a few key empirical characteristics of emerging cosmopolitan communities.

First, an intersectional approach provides us with a clearer view on how social actors ‘situate’ their sense of cosmopolitan belonging (Yuval-Davis, 2010). As with other forms of identity, cosmopolitan belonging is not just a semiotic representation of one’s emotional attachment to, or moral recognition of, global others. It is also associated with

rights, obligations and access to social resources (both material and immaterial) (Skey, 2013). Thus, when studying the problems which arise at the juncture of different domains, we should recognize that actors who are at the social opening of new situations do not come from ‘nowhere’, but have historical social ties and commitments. The intersectional model helps to mark and trace social actors’ myriad social positionings and their access to different modalities of influence and resources. The establishment of membership within a new cosmopolitan community is also situated. This acute awareness of the ‘situatedness’ is indeed reflected in the coming together of a ‘cosmopolitan community of respiration’ in China. It is useful to be reminded that the clean air movement is not aimed at negating existing roles and commitments but at prompting complementary contributions from diverse actors. Furthermore, as this new space originally consists of a ‘social void’, as further explained below in the second point, the development of this belonging draws on the performance of other identities. In short, a cosmopolitan belonging is not independent of traditional belongings, but draws on them. Similarly, the becoming of a cosmopolitan community involves the configuration of new power relations through the contributions channelled by different actors from different social spaces. Certainly, through self-performance and interaction with other actors, the individual is constructing new profiles of attachment that are entangled with others in this new space. Collectively, these interwoven bonds will gradually fill the void and establish new patterns of relations with their own ‘moralisation of geography’ (Delanty, 1995). However, the idea that a cosmopolitan space is not ‘given’ but is built on a ‘social void’ is important. It highlights that the political influence of a cosmopolitan community is not intrinsic but is developed (Kogler, 2005). This leads to the second point.

An intersectional lens helps us to attend to the contingent nature of social contexts in which cosmopolitan communities emerge. In turn, it enriches the understanding of the fluidity and performativity of a cosmopolitan belonging. An intersectional approach does not presuppose categories of significance or units of research, but allows an open examination of new communities as they happen. Let us take the Chinese clean air movement again, for example. It is difficult to map out the temporal and spatial boundaries of an ‘imagined community of respiration’. Different parts of this community ‘appear’ at different localities at different times with different actors involved. The existence of a cosmopolitan community is not a ‘status’ which, once achieved, will not disappear. Nor is cosmopolitan membership a ‘badge’ that can be authenticated and carried around. Rather, cosmopolitan belonging arises from milieus of global contingencies, and are acquired and sustained through a process similar to what Martin Albrow termed ‘performative citizenship’ (Albrow, 1996: 175). Although Albrow did not use the term ‘cosmopolitan’, in his seminal book, *The Global Age*, he theorized the contour of global governance by a ‘world citizenship focused on the future of the globe’ (Albrow 1996: 175–80). He pointed out that this new cosmopolitan belonging neither resembles an Aristotelian idea of full administrative participation, nor has the contracted relationship in the manner of modern nation-state. A cosmopolitan outlook is not a ‘thing’; we know its existence only through its performative effects. To paraphrase Albrow, social actors are actually ‘performing the cosmopolitan collective’. To push the argument further, these performances are aimed at ‘stitching up’ social chaos. The building of a new trans-boundary order occurs in and through social actors’ practices which they have

learned as ‘the colonised and skilful members of various communities’ (Albrow, 1996: 177). The recognition that cosmopolitan collectives may consist of members from ‘colonised communities’ is important in understanding the role of boundaries in the organization of cross-border initiatives.

The third advantage of an intersectional approach is that it gives a vantage point to examine how ‘boundary’ functions in the conceptualization of Self and Other, and in the mobilization of both ‘Us’ and ‘Them’. ‘Boundary work’ has been a central theme in sociological cosmopolitan studies (Beck, 2006; Grande, 2006; Shields, 2006).<sup>4</sup> The rhetoric of borders being ‘drawn and redrawn’ often implies a mutual tension between social division and a cosmopolitan outlook. While it is true that collisions between different social domains is not devoid of contention, existing boundaries may not necessarily lose their authority or be downgraded in importance. In fact, one of the most surprising findings from the author’s investigation of China’s climate governance is that a number of INGO officers were only ‘too happy’ to have local government or other social institutions take over their projects along with all the political credit. Although these INGOs were founded to serve a planetary society, they are not keen on ‘knocking down’ existing administrative boundaries or forming a borderless operation. On the contrary, they believe that keeping up the ‘boundaries’ helps to enforce commitment to responsibilities and incentivizes existing institutions to do their job. Only in this way can these global civil actors free up their resources and ‘move on’ to other situations (Zhang and Barr, 2013). Similarly, in the clean air movement, Chinese green activists considered it valuable to work with existing institutions rather than to simply replace them. Thus, in the process of cosmopolitanization, social boundaries are not just ‘edges’, but are interfaces in which resources are channelled and collective responsibilities are distributed (Favell, 1999; Shields, 2006: 227, 233). The coming together of ‘us’ and ‘them’ does not necessarily entail an erosion of boundaries. As Yuval-Davis (2010) wisely pointed out, not all others are the Other. In the eyes of global civil actors, boundaries, with the otherness they enclose, still present situated advantages in attending to collective problems. A cosmopolitan future may not be a borderless society, and it may not be free of ‘otherness’ either. On the contrary, it may be a society in which borders will proliferate and ‘otherness’ is celebrated. Although borders and otherness may not be social ‘capital’ in the sense of trading for competitive advantage, they will certainly remain a form of social ‘asset’, as they are instrumental in ‘getting things done’.

Finally, an intersectional gaze at the ‘social voids’ made visible by global risk is essential to delineate the actualization of socio-political projects, and what constitutes the empowerment of a cosmopolitan belonging. As discussed in the first and second points above, the capacity to steer the realpolitik of global risks may not be intrinsic to a cosmopolitan imagination but can be acquired through the actions and interactions of different social agents. Furthermore, as clarified in the third point, the ability to enforce collective agendas also lies in the extent to which one can collaborate with others, or gain membership in (and thus access to) different social groups. This is also supported by empirical evidence. As with many other societies, the success of translating global climate initiatives into local action in China relies on an intricate effort of ‘mix[ing] several “master frames” in their discourse’ (Yang, 2009: 128). For lack of a better metaphor, if the collision of traditional domains ‘cracks open’ a space of a ‘social

void', it also illuminates an intellectual realm of 'global openness'. What is empowering is neither diversity nor a naïve inclusiveness, but the recognition of one's capacity to take advantage of different memberships in different phases and in different social settings to push ahead the agenda at stake. It is this liberating prerogative for individuals to participate in the solution of common problems creatively, rather than following institutional prescriptions, that marks the cosmopolitan moment.

In summary, an intersectional approach sets the study of cosmopolitan belonging 'on site'. That is, it embeds theorization in the entangled network of interests and power relations where cosmopolitanization takes place. As demonstrated above, intersectional investigation sheds light on how new forms of collective outlook emerge and evolve (point one and two) and on how it impacts existing power relations, giving rise to new ones (point three and four). The above analysis enriches the 'world risk society' thesis by further specifying the social conditions in which the collective experience and/or the anticipation of risk leads to a cosmopolitan outlook. It should be pointed out that not all *global* risks are necessarily translated into *global* solidarities. As this section clarifies, new cross-border commitments emerge when social actors recognize and act on the need to address the 'social voids' that traditional nation-state frameworks fail to fill. The capacity for political manoeuvre in a cosmopolitan space does not come from nowhere, but draws on the skills, influences and resources that the social actors have established in various social divisions. This enhances cosmopolitan theory's analytical rigour on real-world power dynamics. It extends a 'both/and' argument by identifying where the instrumentalization and challenge to old power regimes lie.

## Conclusion

Beck's cosmopolitan theory is at the forefront of examining social transformations brought on by climate change. The cosmopolitanization thesis has provided valuable guidance in interpreting diverse social experiences in Europe and Asia. To be sure, Beck was also the most visible social theorist who championed new methodological tools to equip sociology for the new global order. However, as demonstrated by empirical research in China, current cosmopolitan theorizations are still limited in their analytical depth and carry conceptual ambiguities. While they offer an excellent framework to identify and capture the morphology of an emerging social order (e.g. what a cosmopolitan community looks like), they possess little explanatory capacity regarding what is new in these emerging social relations, and how they reconfigure social orders. For example, why do social actors within the 'cosmopolitan community of respiration' consider it instrumental to maintain 'old' social boundaries? While Chinese green activists remain at the grassroots level, how did they acquire a coercive capacity that was powerful enough for an authoritarian government to adjust its policy agenda?

I argue that one reason for this analytical weakness is an uncritical top-down methodology that denies the necessity of examining the heterogeneity of cosmopolitan belonging itself and resorts to an orderly abstraction of the 'laminated' world. For a cosmopolitan theory to become fully-fledged, an in-depth understanding of the sociality and politics of cosmopolitan belonging itself is needed. One way to fill this gap of

knowledge is to engage with the intersectionality of the social spaces that give rise to cosmopolitan communities.

An intersectional gaze enables the recognition of the situatedness of cosmopolitan belonging as well as the social void that it responds to. It also offers insights on how 'boundary' functions as an interface and brings out new power relations. What is 'cosmopolitan' in cosmopolitan belongings is not the commitment to a specific (boundary-crossing) membership. Cosmopolitan belonging is not a 'thing', nor is it a set of definable qualities that, once acquired, can be preserved and used as benchmarks to differentiate the 'haves' and 'have-nots' or the 'insiders' and the 'outsiders'. In fact, the statuses of cosmopolitan belonging are precarious as they represent a kind of performative identity, a key characteristic of which lies in its liberating prerogative. That is, it empowers individual actors to construe their identities through reaching out to and taking advantage of different assemblages of associations. In the process, this prompts joint efforts to tackle collective problems in creative ways.

## Notes

1. As mentioned, praise and blame seem to coexist regarding China's potential in global climate mitigation. On China's strategic leadership on green development, some suspect that China is not committed to 'green tech' per se, but that its so-called climate initiatives are primarily economically driven. Development will always trump environmental protection, the sceptics argue (Shin, 2010).
2. One prominent initiative to promote global supply-chain citizenship in China is the Green Choice Alliance, formed by 41 environmental groups. Their most high profile action has been an international attempt to curb the pollution generated by making Apple electronic products in China. This case and its implications for cosmopolitanization are discussed in Beck et al. (2013).
3. In 2010 alone, three books bearing provocative titles were published in China: *Low Carbon Plot: China's Vital War with the US and Europe* (Gou, 2010), *In the Name of CO<sub>2</sub>: Global Rivalry behind the Low Carbon Deceptions* (Liu, 2010), *The Carbon Empire: Carbon Capitalism and Our Bible* (Bai, 2010). This sceptical attitude is not limited to mass market media but also appears in semi-academic publications.
4. Some of the more focused discussions have made further useful conceptual distinctions between boundary and border. However, for the purposes of this article, these two terms are used interchangeably.

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