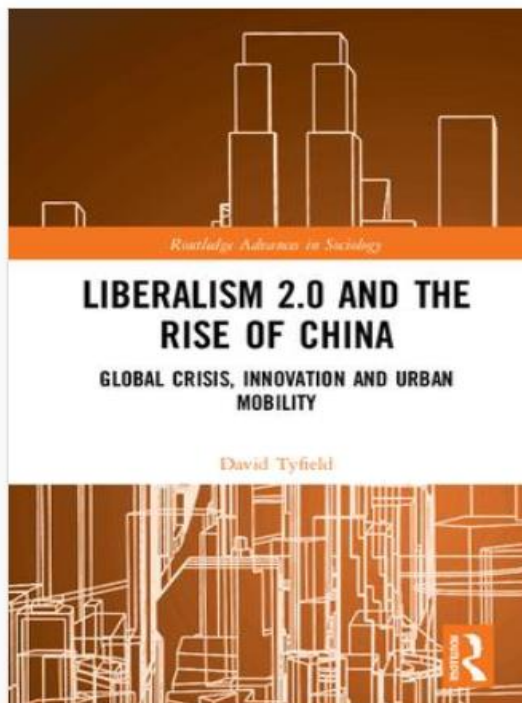


# Will Chinese (E-mobility) Innovation Lead to Global Low-Carbon Transition?

*David Tyfield*

There is one thing on which everyone appears to agree regarding climate change: that innovation is needed – and lots of it, fast – if we are to meet the ambitious targets of decarbonization by 2050 needed to stay within 2°C (let alone 1.5°C) global targets. But what is “innovation”? And whence will it come? Usually, it is understood as new technologies that will ‘solve’ specific ‘problems’ – and, it is hoped, return life to a ‘business as usual’ of limitless growth in individual freedom and wealth. Moreover, the exemplar of this ‘innovation’ today is taken to be the high-tech, digital innovation with which California’s Silicon Valley in particular is identified.



In the last couple of years, however, an alternative future has emerged into global consciousness, regarding a new and unlikely hero for global environmental challenges in the 21<sup>st</sup> century: China. China’s severe environmental challenges, including those of GHG emissions and air pollution, have long had negative international public attention. But more recently, spectacular developments in a number of domains of low-carbon technology have begun to seed a new celebratory narrative. This sees Chinese low-carbon innovation as an exceptional force that will both continue an apparently exponential rate of improvement while simultaneously spreading rapidly around the world with unrivalled government support. In short, China’s national project of ‘Ecological Civilization’, it is argued, may yet ‘save the planet’.

Drawing on over 10 years of research on low-carbon innovation in China and a major new book (*Liberalism 2.0 and the Rise of China: Global Crisis, Innovation, Urban Mobility*, Routledge, 2018), this talk will explore evidence from the key arena of urban mobility innovation – arguably the ‘hardest case’ for low-carbon transition and one in which the new narrative is particularly significant. We will explore the confusing dynamics of low-carbon innovation in China and how they illuminate profound social and (geo-)political changes that are taking place in parallel with the rise of Chinese environmental technologies... and which must be taken into account when forecasting their possible future impact, both environmentally and socially.

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