Comparative Political Studies
1–34

DOI: 10.1177/0010414016672236
cps.sagepub.com
SAGE

Bringing in China: Insights for Building Comparative Political Theory

Lily L. Tsai[1]

Abstract

What do comparativists have to gain by reading recent work on China? In this article, I focus specifically on the ways in which scholarship on China can contribute to the task of theory building in comparative politics. I identify two areas that could reap particularly high benefits from considering scholarship on China—comparative political development and the political behavior of development—and I discuss some of the specific contributions that China scholarship can make to building comparative theory in these areas.

Keywords

China, comparative politics, theory building, political behavior, authoritarian institutions

How do autocrats elicit voluntary compliance from citizens? When are autocrats able to keep their agents in check? Under what conditions do ordinary people take political action despite high levels of risk and uncertainty? In recent years, these questions have begun to preoccupy comparative political scientists as we turn from examining transitions toward understanding

[1]Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge, MA, USA

Corresponding Author:
Lily L. Tsai, Department of Political Science, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 77 Massachusetts Avenue, Cambridge, MA 02139, USA.
Email: l_tsai@mit.edu

authoritarian institutions and the political behavior of development. Meanwhile, political scientists studying China have produced a body of theoretically innovative as well as empirically rigorous studies on these questions. The field of comparative politics, however, has paid little attention to this work.

What do comparativists have to gain by reading recent work on China? In this article, I focus on the ways in which scholarship on China can contribute specifically to the task of theory building in comparative politics. I identify two areas that could reap particularly high benefits from considering scholarship on China—comparative political development and the political behavior of development—and I discuss some of the contributions that China scholarship can make to building comparative theory in these areas.

This article focuses on how China can contribute to comparative political theory building for two reasons. The first is because China scholars have often found it challenging to generate theories from the case of China in ways that enable others to apply it to cases outside of China. The second is because comparative political scientists have often expressed doubts about the feasibility and desirability of using China to generate theories that they can use because they see China as too unique.

What is so special about China in terms of providing insight for comparative political theory? Over the past 10 years, scholars of China have used an increasingly diverse set of cutting-edge methodologies to look more closely "under the hood" at mechanisms and strategies of governance and state–society relations in authoritarian regimes. It turns out that individuals, communities, and government officials—the various units of analysis of interest to political scientists—do not always behave in ways that are totally unique to China. Take, for example, the question of why China's authoritarian regime is so durable. Authoritarian resilience in China is to some extent exceptional. Its rulers benefit from what is perhaps the oldest state apparatus in the world, and it could be said to be a benevolent dictatorship and developmental state like no other. However, the strategies and technologies that its rulers use to control its citizens—co-optation, censorship, implicit and explicit threats, discretionary use of the law, and selective prosecution of its opponents for corruption—are familiar to many places around the world (Levitsky & Way, 2010).

The key to using China to contribute to comparative theory building is to take age-old questions in comparative politics and break them down into questions about constituent parts of the overall process of interest. So while the answer to the overarching question at the system level may be specific to the case of China, theories developed to explain variation in the constituent parts from the case of China are likely to apply to the many countries that also

experience variation in the constituent parts. As with many research questions, China's immense subnational variation in contextual characteristics—formal and informal institutions, economic development, center-periphery relations—provides a valuable opportunity for using empirical research to improve our theories about when and why rulers use different strategies—and when and why individuals and communities respond in different ways to the same strategy.

China is so big and has so many subnational units that it is possible to meet several important conditions for generating theories that can apply outside of China. First, China is big enough to enable us to identify study populations with characteristics that are comparable to populations outside of China. If we can answer a question about the impact of fear of authorities on the political attitudes of citizens in China, then our answer ought to have some applicability to citizens in other dominant-party systems with relatively functional bureaucracies and police forces. Second, China has enough subnational variation and subnational units of analysis (individuals, communities, local governments, politicians, etc.) so that we can often rigorously examine the impact of particular contextual variables on our outcomes of interest while controlling for or matching on other contextual characteristics. Third, subnational variation combined with large study populations also enable us to look rigorously at heterogeneous treatment effects, or how contextual characteristics condition the impact of our main independent variable(s) on our outcomes of interest.

The specification and empirical assessment of scope conditions are essential to building *comparative* political theory—theory that not only posits a causal relationship but precisely identifies—and empirically validates—the conditions or contexts under which the theory holds. The study of China offers enormous benefits for this aspect of theory building. But because China scholars often neglect to specify the scope conditions for their findings and identify comparable study populations in other settings, we have generally failed to take advantage of this opportunity for connecting our findings to the study of comparative politics. In this article, I look at several lines of inquiry and seek to draw some of these connections to lay a foundation for greater integration of China scholarship into comparative political theory.

Before continuing, it is worth taking a moment to delineate the scope of this article and discuss what it does and does not consider. This article is addressed to anyone who has an interest in seeing how China research can contribute to theory building in comparative politics. It presumes no prior engagement with the field of Chinese politics so as to include readers who do not study China and perhaps know little about it. This article also focuses

quite narrowly on the past 5 to 10 years of scholarship published in major political science journals—top disciplinary journals and comparative politics journals. Scholarship on China published in book form can of course contribute to theory building in comparative politics—indeed, the luxury of additional space for theoretical discussion may make books more likely to contribute to comparative theory building than journal articles that often focus primarily on empirical analyses.

But in the interests of making the writing of this article tractable, I have chosen to review the China scholarship published in journals. If we want to understand why there is so little uptake of China scholarship by non-China scholars, we need to look first at the work published in disciplinary journals. It is through these journals that non-China political scientists are most likely to be exposed to work on China. And articles in these journals face greater incentives to draw explicit connections to other country contexts and engage with broader theoretical debates in comparative politics than articles from area studies journals. China scholarship published in disciplinary journals should be the type of research that comparative political scientists are most likely to integrate into their work. If there is little integration, examining these articles will provide the earliest indication.

What I do not do in this article is evaluate the overall state of the field or examine specific trends in the study of Chinese politics.[1] In fact, this article focuses only on two substantive areas of theoretical inquiry—authoritarian political development and the political behavior of development—that have recently become of particular interest to comparativists and China scholars. Thus, this article does not examine other areas in which the study of China has contributed to political science, such as the extensive body of work on Chinese political economy.[2]

Moreover, this article does not examine work that takes an existing theory in comparative politics and uses it to improve our understanding of the specific case of China. These studies sometimes refer to their arguments as a theory of X "with Chinese characteristics," playing on the Chinese regime's way of referring to their political and economic system as "socialism with Chinese characteristics." Like the regime, these studies typically underscore what is unique about China rather than illuminating something about the original theory that improves its ability to explain its population of cases more generally.

This article also does not look at a third way in which research from particular empirical contexts can contribute to comparative politics—namely, empirical research that provides rigorous evidence for hypotheses derived from existing theories in comparative politics. The primary objective of this research is to validate that existing theories are indeed generalizable to the

case of China. Shi (1997), for example, fruitfully imported insights from American politics in his study of political participation in post-Mao Beijing. More recently, Truex (2014) provides evidence from the case of China for co-optation theory, which argues that legislative institutions in authoritarian regimes help to distribute rents to co-opt potential opposition (Gandhi, 2008; Gandhi & Przeworski, 2006, 2007).

It is, however, indeed worth taking note of the astonishing empirical innovation that is rapidly becoming characteristic of research on China. Innovative methods of data collection combined with "strong" research designs (Dunning, 2012) now put empirical work on China at the cutting edge of the discipline. Field surveys, which were extremely difficult logistically and politically just a decade ago, are now common with the establishment of survey research centers at Chinese universities and the emergence of market research firms and online survey respondent pools. Web scraping and machine learning techniques have enabled the automated or semiautomated compilation of administrative and other publicly available data for investigating topics such as the promotion of politicians within the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and decisions about Internet censorship in ways that have never been possible before. And as with the broader discipline of political science, an emphasis on strong research design has become increasingly common as China scholars implement survey experiments (e.g., X. Lü, 2013; Mattingly, 2016), identify natural experiments (Mattingly, **IN PRESS**), and develop creative ways of administering lab-in-the-field experiments (Distelhorst & Hou, 2014; Hou, 2015).

The question is whether this empirically rigorous scholarship on China can also inform broader theoretical debates in comparative politics. To assess this question, the article proceeds in the following manner. The first section illustrates the distance between China research and the rest of comparative politics by examining article citation data to see how frequently political science journal articles on China are cited by non-China scholars. The second and third sections then identify two research agendas—one on the political development of authoritarian regimes and the other one on the political behavior of development—that are poised to bridge this gap. These sections discuss the ways in which comparative politics can reap substantial benefits for comparative theory building from integrating recent work on China in these areas. I argue that these research agendas are areas where the study of China is maturing from what Elizabeth Perry (1994; see also K. S. Tsai, 2013), more than 20 years ago, called a "consumer field," dependent on its analytical insights upon imports from the study of other countries, to a "producer" field, one that gives rise to original concepts and theories that we can then use to understand other places in the world.

In the fourth section, I identify nascent research questions emerging from the study of China that may constitute future windows of opportunity for comparative politics. The article concludes by discussing concrete practices that China scholars can implement to contribute more directly to comparative political theory.

Bringing China Into Comparative Politics: How Far Do We Have to Go?

We have a considerable distance to bridge between comparative politics and scholarship on Chinese politics. As one metric of this gap, this article looks at citations as reported in the Web of Science for articles published during the 10 years from 2006 to 2015 with the word "China" in the title, abstract, or keywords in (a) top disciplinary journals—*American Political Science Review*, the *American Journal of Political Science*, the *Journal of Politics*, and the *British Journal of Political Science*; (b) top comparative politics journals—*World Politics*, *Comparative Politics*, and *Comparative Political Studies*[3]; and, given the focus of this review article on questions of political behavior and development, (c) top political behavior journals, in particular, *Political Behavior*, *Public Opinion Quarterly*, and *Political Psychology*. Articles were then excluded if they were review articles or if they were not empirical, and if they were not primarily about Chinese politics.

This review produced a total of 55 articles on Chinese politics with original empirical findings. For each of these articles, Figure 1 shows the total number of citations as the height of the bar and the number of citations in papers that were not about China—or "non-China citations"—as the darkened percentage of the bar. (When the percentage of non-China citations is above 50%, the darkened part of the bar representing non-China citations is black. When the percentage of non-China citations is below 50%, the darkened part of the bar is gray. Thus, more black in the graph indicates more citation by papers not about China—or "uptake" of China papers by non-China scholarship.) Articles are ordered from left to right by lowest percentage of citations in non-China articles to highest percentage of citations in non-China articles. Six articles had no citations, but these were only published in the past 2 years. Articles with zero citations account for the blank space on the left-hand side of the figure.

These data show clearly that non-China scholars either do not read articles on China or find them useful enough for their own work to cite them with much frequency, even articles on China published in disciplinary journals. Non-China citations exceed China citations for only 12 out of the 55 articles on China published in disciplinary journals—only 22%. These 12 articles are

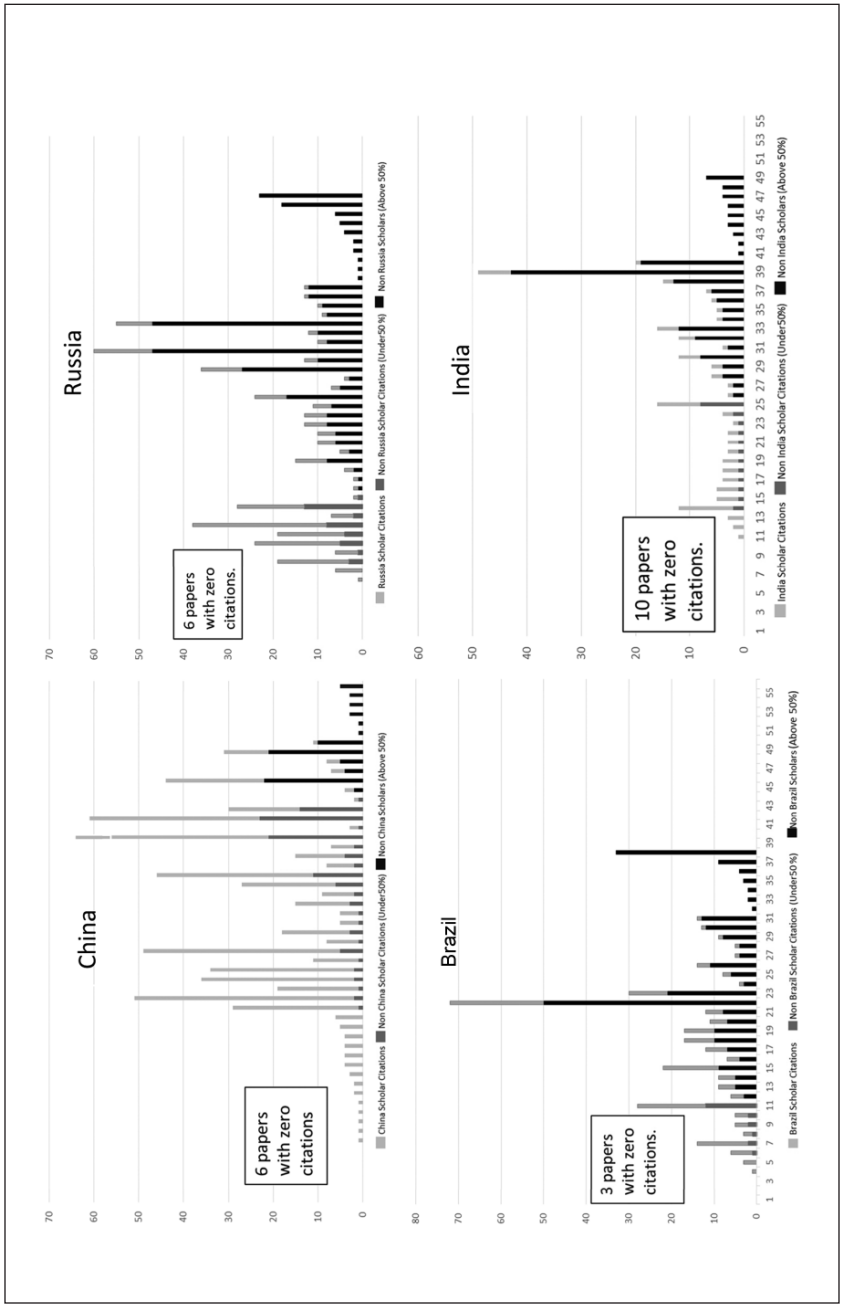

Figure 1. Citations by area and non-area scholars.

represented by the 12 bars on the right-hand side of the figure with citations by non-China articles represented in black. Moreover, most of these articles had relatively few citations as indicated by the height of the bars.

One question we might ask is whether some questions in Chinese politics are more likely to be of interest to non-China scholars than others. When, for example, we compare articles on Chinese political economy to articles on other aspects of Chinese politics, China political economy articles are somewhat less likely than other types of articles to be cited by non-China articles. Out of nine articles in the sample that might be classified as political economy articles, only one of them (or 11%) had more than half of its citations coming from non-China articles (compared with 20% for non-political economy articles).

These data thus suggest that there is not much uptake of China scholarship by non-China researchers, but how much uptake should we expect? One way of benchmarking the distance between China research and the rest of comparative politics is to look at research coming out of other comparable countries.

When we carry out the same exercise for research on India, Russia, and Brazil, we see a very different pattern. For articles about China with at least one citation, the median percentage of citations by non-China articles was 22% compared with 75% for articles on India, 71% for articles on Russia, and 67% for articles on Brazil.

In contrast to articles on China, most of the articles on India, Russia, and Brazil are cited primarily by articles not about these countries. Fifty-six percent of articles on India are cited by non-India articles, 69% of articles on Russia are cited by non-Russia articles, and 73% of articles on Brazil are cited by non-Brazil articles.

Moreover, not only are articles on India, Russia, and Brazil more likely than articles on China to be cited by articles not on that country, but articles on India, Russia, and Brazil that are primarily cited by others are also more likely than articles primarily cited by other country specialists to have a greater number of total citations. The opposite is true for articles on China.

Why do political scientists fail to make more use of the research from China? One simple answer is that research on China is often not designed—or not presented as if it had been designed—for other political scientists to make use of it. Comparative development of theory is based on tasks like identifying scope conditions, developing concepts so that they can be measured—sometimes quite differently—in different contexts, and specifying causal processes in ways that make them straightforward to trace in other cases. Yet many research articles on China overlook these tasks.

Specifying scope conditions is of course the first piece of information non-China readers need to know to decide whether or not to read our work. China scholars have become increasingly likely to identify scope conditions. But it is still rare that we identify other specific empirical cases where these scope conditions apply and provide data to show that our scope conditions do indeed apply in these cases.

Even less common is detailed discussion on issues like conceptual equivalence across empirical contexts—comparing apples with apples. Is a get-out-the-vote (GOTV) campaign in a one-party system like China conceptually equivalent to a GOTV campaign in a consolidated democracy like the United States? Or take voting in local elections. Villagers voting for village officials in China's one-party system do not serve the same function as individuals in the United States voting in a presidential election and are thus unlikely to have the same causes or consequences. It may be possible, however, to argue that there are conceptual equivalents, even in the U.S. context. Voting for local school board officers in the United States, for example, is similar to voting for village officials in China in that both have some power to make decisions about local resource allocation and policy implementation that matter to ordinary people, and that the election outcomes depend not on partisanship but on mobilization by local elites. In political economy, theories about nontariff barriers might apply in both China and non-China contexts, but what constitutes a nontariff barrier might not take the same form in different contexts. Kim (2016), for example, demonstrates that biased media reporting can constitute an important nontariff barrier that escapes the notice of the World Trade Organization. Not only is media bias against foreign firms in China stronger among government-controlled newspapers than among commercial newspapers, but such bias is stronger in localities where local governments own automotive industries. This example illustrates that comparativists may need to catch up with the Chinese government in recognizing when oranges can actually be apples (Locke & Thelen, 1995).

In this spirit, the following sections identify particular research agendas within comparative politics where findings from China are likely to share conceptual equivalents and scope conditions with contexts outside of China and discuss how China scholarship can contribute to building comparative political theory in these areas.

Authoritarian Governance and Comparative Political Development

As comparative political scientists have shifted away from focusing on democratic transitions to examining authoritarian institutions and stability, the

case of China becomes an important testing ground for building theory. Now that it has become clear that trajectories of political development and regime consolidation in developing contexts are nonlinear, we need to develop finer-grained theories of how and why institutions and strategies of control in authoritarian regimes vary over time and across localities. Recent work on China helps comparativists understand the processes at multiple levels of the political system that underpin how autocrats rule, why authoritarian regimes endure, and the ways in which authoritarian institutions function and evolve. This section discusses two particular lines of inquiry in the study of China that can inform the building of comparative theory on authoritarian institutions and stability—the role of quasi-democratic institutions in authoritarian regimes and the impact of revolution and colonialism on state building.

Quasi-Democratic Institutions in Authoritarian Regimes

Theoretical work in comparative politics has focused on how seemingly democratic institutions such as elections and legislatures actually reinforce authoritarian rule. This strand of literature argues that quasi-democratic institutions help to solve the autocratic ruler's principal–agent problem by co-opting and distributing rents to potential opposition and providing information about the performance of officials at lower levels (Brownlee, 2007; Gandhi, 2008; Gandhi & Lust-Okar, 2009; Geddes, 2006; Magaloni, 2006; Malesky & Schuler, 2008; Simpser, 2013).

Work on China provides empirical support for many of these accounts. Truex (2014) finds that despite a negligible role in policy making, members of the national legislature benefit their firms, which perform more strongly on financial indicators. Hou (2015) shows that membership in local legislatures reduces taxation on the businesses of private entrepreneurs. Manion (2014) takes a somewhat different tack, arguing that local legislatures in China are composed both of regime-reinforcing candidates nominated by the ruling party as well as citizen-nominated candidates who provide their localities with "pork," or local public goods for their locality.

Intriguingly, however, another stream of research from China suggests that comparativists ought to broaden the scope of our theorizing on quasi-democratic institutions from elections and legislatures to incorporate the role of media and the Internet. Like China, other authoritarian and hybrid regimes—for example, countries like Egypt, Russia, Ukraine, Uganda, and Tanzania, to name a few—balance state control of media with media marketization. Recent work on China reveals the nuances of how autocrats use not just media and censorship but even media freedom as techniques for control. Commercial media, for example, can serve as a sophisticated instrument of

propaganda. Stockmann and Gallagher (2011), for example, examine how marketized Chinese media is even more effective than state media at promoting the image of a pro-labor bias in the law among citizens. Lorentzen (2014) develops a formal model to theorize about the conditions under which authoritarian regimes permit investigative journalism to collect information on lower-level officials and deter them from corruption and malfeasance. In this model, the amount of leeway permitted to watchdog journalists depends on the level of underlying social instability and the prevalence of uncontrollable information channels such as the Internet. Building on insights from Kuran (1997), the model posits that autocrats balance the solving of this principal–agent problem with maintaining sufficient uncertainty among citizens about the true state of affairs to deter collective action.

The ways in which autocrats use censorship can also vary in important ways. Stern and Hassid (2012) highlight the way in which authoritarian regimes like China and Egypt foster an environment of uncertainty as a technique for controlling the press. By making the boundary of what is permissible to report unclear, while also threatening renegades with unpredictable but extreme punishments, autocrats can effectively use fear to deter public opposition by journalists. King, Pan, and Roberts (2013) provide empirical support for a long-standing tradition of scholarship on the ways in which Chinese authorities tolerate criticism and even protest as long they are able to individualize and localize such actions (see, for example, Perry, 2001; Shue, 1988; Wasserstrom & Perry, 1992). They show that the Chinese regime does not use censorship to silence citizen feedback or even frank criticism. Instead, the regime specifically censors online social media when there are many people communicating about the same subject or events and about actual collective action such as protests (King et al., 2013, p. 327).

In addition to the use of media censorship to control behavior directly, research from China also indicates that indirect media effects can be important for reinforcing authoritarian rule. Building on work from American politics, J. Lu, Aldrich, and Shi (2014) suggest that autocrats also try to change political attitudes indirectly by inculcating certain nonpolitical values and norms such as obedience to authority and collectivist values rather than individualist ones.

Legacies of Revolution and Colonialism for the Reach of the State

Another important lesson from the study of China is that variation in the reach of the state over time and space is critical to explaining the stability and effectiveness of authoritarian and dominant-party regimes. The ability of ruling

parties to stay in power is not merely a function of how they manipulate elections and quasi-democratic institutions or deploy techniques of censorship and repression, but also a matter of the state apparatus that they inherit and build. Autocrats and ruling parties with a state apparatus that can organize the population, regulate social relations, and distribute resources effectively throughout their territory to their supporters may not need to engage in the manipulation of elections or repression. If, however, the reach of the state bureaucracy is uneven, and those at the top lack reliable ways of delivering a minimal amount of resources more broadly, then control of national office may be inherently unstable.

Many countries, as Soifer (2008) notes, share with China significant subnational variation in the projection of state infrastructural power across time and space. Goodwin (2001, p. 27) observes that revolutions are unlikely in places where the territorial reach of the state's coercive capacity extends throughout its territory. Similarly, Kalyvas (2006) notes that bureaucracies that exercise direct regular control over the population with the ability to register inhabitants and control their exchanges are far more stable than political organizations that rely on local agents to achieve control indirectly.

Both recent and past scholarship on China suggest that there may be much to learn from bringing together research agendas on state building, authoritarian governance, and regime consolidation to understand the implications of subnational variation in state institutions and identities on political stability and development. Perry (2007) has described how wartime strategies of "divide and conquer" developed by the Chinese Communists during the war against Japan and continued during the Chinese Civil War subsequently evolved into a postwar regime consolidation strategy of "divide and rule." This strategy of "controlled polarization" (Y. Chen, 1986, p. 517) relies on the ability of the ruling party to use state institutions to organize society into groups that it defines, and state resources to reinforce these group identities. In China, the CCP created work units to isolate the urban industrial labor force and render them dependent on the state, people's communes that enforced the self-sufficiency of rural communities, a job allocation system to co-opt intellectuals, a system of class labels to categorize people into "good" and "bad" political groups, and household registration permits that largely prevented internal migration across localities. As the speed at which these state-sponsored institutions and identities break down during the reform period has varied across regions in China, the incidence of social instability and protest has varied accordingly (see, for example, Lee, 2007).

Mattingly (**IN PRESS**) notes that localities in northeastern China that experienced Japanese colonial rule in the 1930s and 1940s benefitted from intensive state-building efforts and the extension of local bureaucratic administration

down to the subvillage level. Localities with this prior experience of Weberian bureaucracy and rationalized provision of public health and education continue to exhibit better governance and development in the contemporary period than localities without this historical legacy.

The Political Behavior of Development

Over the past 10 years, both scholars and practitioners of development have started to move beyond a focus on development policy and development outcomes to understanding the political behaviors and processes that are particularly important to developing contexts either because they contribute to or help alleviate persistent poverty and inequality. Hundreds of millions of dollars every year are now spent on initiatives encouraging people in developing countries to engage in politics and complain to their governments about poor performance and public service delivery. Political scientists of developing contexts have become increasingly attentive to the full range of political actions that citizens take and the ways in which they demand greater accountability from government authorities.

Scholarship on China has an important role to play in shaping this new research agenda on the comparative political behavior of development. First, China scholars have long recognized the importance of nonelectoral forms of participation. Second, China scholars have theorized extensively about political behavior under fear, risk, and uncertainty—conditions common to many developing contexts and which are critical for understanding why current programs for "community-driven development" and "social accountability" fail to have an impact. Before turning to particular lines of inquiry from research on political behavior in China, it is worth discussing each of these overall insights in a bit more detail.

First, why look at nonelectoral forms of political participation? As China scholars have long known, ordinary people have many ways of influencing the decisions and behavior of government authorities other than voting. One important trend in the study of political behavior in developing contexts has been the broadening of a traditional focus on voting to nonelectoral forms of citizen participation. As the previous section notes, however, elections outside of developed democracies are often fraught with problems—election-rigging, vote-buying, and straight-out coercion. Elections may simply be for show, functioning primarily as an instrument for co-opting elites. As a result, citizens seeking to influence policy decisions, policy implementation, and government performance may be more likely to find nonelectoral forms of action more effective as well as more relevant for their everyday lives.

Having come to similar conclusions, recent studies of participatory development in places like sub-Saharan Africa, Southeast Asia, and the Middle East have started to investigate citizen efforts to hold bureaucrats and local service providers accountable for their performance rather than to demand that elected officials represent their policy preferences in the policy-making process (see reviews by Humphreys & Weinstein, 2009; McGee & Gaventa, 2011; World Bank Report, 2004). These efforts to hold authorities accountable for performance and public service provision are often taken through channels outside of elections—community meetings, petitioning, individual contacting, citizen feedback delivered through traditional and religious elites, and various forms of collective action and everyday resistance. Much of this work, however, has limited itself to empirical rather than theoretical contributions, focusing largely on testing hypotheses imported from studies of voting behavior, political participation, and democratic accountability based on the United States and consolidated democracies.

Comparativists would do well to look instead at scholarship on China for ideas on how to conceptualize and theorize about political behavior outside of consolidated democracies. Research on China has resulted in a wealth of studies on both electoral and nonelectoral forms of political behavior. Shi's (1997) book on political participation in Beijing (p. 94) laid much of the groundwork for these studies, cataloging, for example, an array of 28 citizen behaviors that he argues has a genuine impact on the decision making of government officials and political authorities. A vast body of work on village elections has been amassed, as has a large set of studies on the petitioning and individual contacting of officials (e.g., X. Chen, 2008, 2009; O'Brien & Li, 1995, 2008; O'Brien, Li, McAdam, Tarrow, & Tilly, 2006). More recently, there have been studies of newer forms of political behavior taking place through legal institutions (Gallagher, 2006; O'Brien & Li, 2004; Woo & Gallagher, 2011) and online forums (e.g., Distelhorst & Hou, 2014; King et al., 2013; Truex, **IN PRESS**).

Many of these studies also speak to the importance of theorizing about how risk and uncertainty affect political behavior, a realization that is beginning to dawn on comparativists studying other contexts. Over the past decade, much of the work on citizen participation in developing contexts has relied on principal–agent theory from economic institutionalism. This work, often empirical and experimental, has focused on the question of whether providing information about government performance motivates citizens to demand better governance.[4] The thinking has been that citizens lack sufficient information about the quality of governmental performance and that this informational asymmetry is the key barrier to citizen participation and government accountability. Evidence for the impact of information provision, however, remains highly variable.[5]

Given rampant corruption and poor public service provision, one puzzle for scholars of development has thus been why citizens fail to take more action. Research on China draws our attention to an important answer. Political risk and uncertainty about the outcomes of their actions may be much more important for shaping citizen participation than lack of information about government performance. Citizens in many developing contexts—both single-party and multi-party systems—often face higher levels of risk and uncertainty than their counterparts in developed democracies. Transparency about bureaucratic procedures and the "right" ways of taking action is low (Khanna & Johnston, 2007). Identifying and accessing the relevant decision maker can be difficult. Formal institutions, individual rights, and the rule of law are generally weak. Corruption is widespread, and local thuggery and/or police brutality are everyday realities. Political instability and violence may be a constant worry, and ordinary people may have to adjudicate between competing sources of authority and governance.[6] Data from the 2008 Afrobarometer survey, for example, show that most respondents have some fear of becoming a victim of political intimidation or violence during election campaigns and that one third of people fear it "a lot" or "somewhat." Similarly, more than one third of the respondents in the last two rounds of the Arab Barometer survey (2010-2011 and 2012-2014) say that they are not able to criticize the government without fear.

Building on insights from the work on China, this section discusses two lines of inquiry in recent China research for the comparative study of political behavior in developing contexts: the strategic use of law and other formal institutions; and the role of informal institutions and political intermediaries in shaping mass political participation and state–society relations.

Strategic Use of the Law and Formal Institutions

A variety of studies from China suggest that citizens and nongovernmental actors in these circumstances can develop a variety of creative strategies for pressuring government actors and influencing their decisions that help us better understand political behavior in developing contexts but which non-China political scientists have generally overlooked. O'Brien and Li (2005), for example, have shown how citizens strategically and successfully refer to existing laws and policies on the books when petitioning, contacting, and taking legal action to demand that the government enforce the implementation of its own policies (see also Distelhorst, **IN PRESS**; Stern & Hassid, 2012; Stern & O'Brien, 2012). Distelhorst (**IN PRESS**) builds on this line of research in his study of how Chinese activists have been able to extract concessions from government agencies by showing how government authorities

themselves fail to observe right-to-information laws, and then using these institutional failures to justify negative media coverage and lawsuits. Fu's (**IN PRESS**) work on underground labor organizations describes how civil society organizations covertly coordinate workers to take political action on an individual basis, rather than coordinating collective demonstrations. L. L. Tsai (2015) also shows that individual citizens use principled lawbreaking or selective noncompliance with state policies and decisions they see as misguided or inappropriate as a way of voicing their input and providing authorities with constructive policy feedback.

Given that citizen participation can indeed lead to government responsiveness even in nondemocratic and hybrid regimes, it is important to understand the factors that determine whether or not citizens take action. These studies from China also suggest that individuals operating in contexts with high political risk and uncertainty about potential outcomes require resources for participation above and beyond what is needed for participation in consolidated democracies where the rule of law is strong and fear of political reprisal is low. For example, in addition to time, money, and civic skills, which Verba, Schlozman, and Brady (1995) identify as the key resources for participation in the United States, individuals in developing contexts need resources that enable them to access decision makers, obtain information about the government's policies and procedures, and give them protection against the risk of political retribution. Shi (1997) has observed, for example, that party members in China have more opportunities to access higher level officials, more familiarity with the government's policies, and the ability to ally themselves with higher level officials to force more favorable outcomes in their conflicts with lower level officials. Guo (2007) shows that membership in both civil society organizations and state-sponsored organizations facilitates citizen participation by providing access to authorities and information about how to take action, or what Ang and Jia (2014) have called "know-who" and "know-how." L. L. Tsai and Xu (2015) demonstrate that individuals with political connections, or relatives who are government or local authorities, are equipped with more political knowledge and access to government decision makers, and more likely to complain to authorities about government performance. Another important resource for citizen participation under fear and uncertainty is a protected format for taking action. Read (2008) points out that in the Chinese context, civil society organizations based on property rights, such as homeowners' associations, can provide relatively unconstrained spaces for civic participation. In the U.S. context, these types of groups are criticized for "privatizing" citizen engagement and substituting for broader, public channels such as town hall meetings. In developing contexts, however, where civil liberties are not always fully protected, a safe

space, even one that is local and private, provides community leaders with opportunities to learn organizational skills and develop useful relationships with government decision makers.

Research from China can also help comparativists theorize about government responsiveness to citizen participation in developing contexts. Meng, Pan, and Yang (**IN PRESS**) show that government officials are less likely to report that they are receptive to suggestions from citizens expressed on the Internet when they believe that tensions between citizens and government are high. Manion (**IN PRESS**) shows that voters in China nominate candidates for local congresses based on candidate characteristics signaling that these candidates will represent local interests. Such "good-type" politicians ought to be more likely to respond to citizen contacting than candidates nominated by the ruling party. Distelhorst and Hou (2014) find that local officials were less likely to provide assistance to citizens with minority Muslim names than to ethnically unmarked peers, despite the lack of institutionalized racism or electoral politics.

Finally, scholarship on China warns us that we should not assume that citizen actions to hold the government accountable indicate an adversarial relationship between state and society but may instead constitute behavior that contributes to authoritarian resilience. Truex (**IN PRESS**), for example, finds that citizens, at least those who are less educated and more politically marginalized, increase their levels of satisfaction with the regime and their perceptions of government responsiveness when randomly exposed to the national legislature's new online participation portals. Such findings suggest that such outlets for citizen participation can, as Huntington (2006) has posited, provide pressure valves for political mobilization. Landry, Davis, and Wang (2010) similarly conclude that more competitive local elections, by increasing both voter turnout and perceptions that elections were fairly conducted, may both foster greater government accountability and loyalty to the regime. As He and Warren (2011) have astutely observed, quasi-democratic institutions such as local elections, public hearings, legal mechanisms for suing the state, and initiatives to make government information publicly accessible in authoritarian regimes can enable "authoritarian deliberation," a process by which autocrats accept and incorporate input from citizens into their decisions. Citizens who participate through these channels have influence over decision makers when decision makers need cooperation and legitimacy from the citizenry. In contrast to democratic participation that enables citizens to resolve conflicts by means of arguments and votes, authoritarian deliberation channels political conflict away from regime-level participation, such as multiparty elections, and into "governance-level" participation, with citizen input limited to specific policies expressed through administrative or juridical channels.

The Role of Intermediaries and Informal Institutions in Shaping Political Behavior

Work on China also contributes to a rising interest among comparativists in informal institutions and the role of local elites, brokers, intermediaries, and newly trained activists and leaders in local governance and development (e.g., Acemoglu, Reed, & Robinson, 2013; Baldwin, 2013, 2014; Baldwin & Myukiyehe, 2015; Watkins & Swidler, 2013). There is an increasing awareness that such actors play a critical role in sustaining and stabilizing political systems, providing services to citizens, and sometimes representing their interests. One prominent stream of research on the politics of the developing world has focused on clientelism and vote-buying in competitive authoritarian regimes and developing democracies, looking closely at the dynamics between patrons, brokers, and voters (Stokes, Dunning, Nazareno, & Brusco, 2013).

Local elites and community leaders, however, take many forms and engage in many different ways of interfacing between citizens and political authorities in addition to brokering votes for political parties. Krishna (2011) and Kruks-Wisner (2011), for example, describe the role of local intermediaries that assist villagers in India with obtaining access to government welfare programs. Bratton and Bingen (1994, pp. 249-250) note that farmers in Senegal use local patronage networks to engage also in policy advocacy. Singerman (1995, p. 172) describes how, in urban Egypt, individuals use informal networks with government officials both as a private resource and as a public resource that fulfills the shared needs of their community to obtain public goods and services.

Research from China contributes to theory building in this area by showing that intermediaries and informal institutions can both enable citizens and their community leaders to make sure that local authorities provide the public services that communities need, while also increasing citizen compliance and regime stability. L. L. Tsai (2007a, 2007b), for example, argues that local leaders of encompassing and embedding temple and lineage groups are able to hold village authorities accountable for spending public funds on roads, schools, and infrastructure because village authorities need the approval of these community leaders to elicit citizen compliance with tax collection and the birth control policy. Xu and Yao (2015) also note that local leaders are able to overcome collective action problems and elicit more compliance with contributions to village public goods when they are from one of the two largest surname groups in the village. These studies build on a long-standing tradition of research in China on lineage and temple institutions (see, for example, Duara, 1991; Freedman, 1966; Johnson, 1983; Ruf, 2000; Watson, 1975; A. P. Wolf, 1974). In urban settings, Read (2012) looks at how state-organized

neighborhood associations in China and Taiwan both mobilize compliance with policing and surveillance as well as provide services to residents.

Work from China also points to the importance of local elites as sources of information, or opinion leaders (Huckfeldt & Sprague, 1995; Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955), who affect important attitudes and beliefs that citizens hold about authorities. Political rumors, for example, are important everywhere (Berinsky, 2012; Weitz-Shapiro & Winters, 2015) but in developing contexts with less transparent governance and fewer channels of open information, information through the grapevine from familiar acquaintances based on direct, personal experiences and told with emotional affect can be particularly important for filling in gaps and explaining the inexplicable (Ball, 1987; Ball & Vincent, 1998). Zhu, Lu, and Shi (2012) trace the impact of "grapevine" news or informal sources of information on citizen perceptions of government corruption. Understanding this impact is particularly important because rumors tend to exaggerate the prevalence of a problem. Rumors through the grapevine may also be, or be perceived to be, a critical source of negative news that formal authorities do not want to discuss in public, and such channels cannot be effective regulated and censored by the government.

Opportunities for Future Theory Building

In addition to the lines of inquiry discussed above, this section identifies yet-to-be-tapped opportunities for using research on China to improve comparative theories of governance and political behavior in developing contexts.

Governance "on the Cheap"

One potential opportunity is using the case of China to identify and conceptualize strategies for "governance on the cheap"—ways in which political leaders extend the reach of the state over local officials and citizens without investing in the construction of formal bureaucratic institutions of information transmission and supervision. China's approach of governance on the cheap evolved from the experience of the CCP. During the Chinese Revolution, the CCP had to win over peasants and build state institutions with a very limited amount of resources and personnel. Instead of systematic and fine-tuned institutions for public finance and bureaucratic monitoring and sanctioning, they developed strategies of mass campaigns, strategic unpredictability, extreme sanctions, ambiguity of central directives, "local self-reliance," and informal public finance such as "extrabudgetary funds." Such strategies may be able, for example, to shed light on how some developing countries have achieved stable (but sometimes low-performing)

equilibria (Andrews, Pritchett, & Woolcock, 2013). Tanzania, for example, is one example of a country that maintains a stable political system, despite a growing opposition party and very poor governmental performance in the provision of education, health, and infrastructure.

One such strategy, for example, from the case of China is the outsourcing of state functions to nonstate and quasi-state actors (L. L. Tsai, 2007a, pp. 263-266, 269-270). China—as well as other countries like Tanzania and Kenya (Barr, 1998; Narayan & Cassidy, 2001; Narayan & Nyamwaya, 1996)—has historically promoted policies and norms of local self-governance, where village communities are essentially expected to self-fund public goods and welfare provision and are commended by political leaders for doing so. These strategies have important implications for both political stability and government accountability. Not only does this strategy save the state time and money, but it can also socialize citizens out of expecting the state to take responsibility for public goods provision. If citizens come to see themselves and their communities as the primary provider of public goods, they may see little reason for pressuring the state to provide these goods. Self-provision by citizens and political disengagement may lead to a stable equilibrium, but one that does not have a high level of accountability.

The case of China also illustrates the use of relatively "cheap" strategies for controlling the population without building expensive institutions for monitoring. One of these strategies is to combine deliberate ambiguity of laws and policies in combination with extreme sanctions (Oi, 1989, pp. 96-103). When punishment is very severe—for example, public humiliation, labor camps, or even execution—compliance may be rational even when the probability of being caught for noncompliance is very low. Stern and Hassid (2012), for example, observe how ambiguity combined with extreme sanctions leads journalists to censor themselves.

Deliberate ambiguity of formal laws and policies combined with norms and institutions that enable local experimentation and principled rule-breaking also provide flexibility and policy feedback about grassroots conditions within an authoritarian system (L. L. Tsai, 2015, p. 269). In democracies, formal rules about how to change the rules give the system flexibility (Böröcz, 2000). In authoritarian regimes, ambiguously worded laws and policies, combined with institutions such as "provisional" or trial laws and pilot or "demonstration sites" (Heilmann, 2008), give officials and citizens implicit—and sometimes explicit—permission to bend or even break the law when it provides policy makers with information and feedback that enables them to revise the law to make it more effective and appropriate for conditions on the ground (L. L. Tsai, 2015). Similarly, China's use of extrabudgetary funds effectively incentivizes local officials to pursue the leadership's developmental objectives

without requiring bureaucratic institutions for monitoring their behavior and decisions closely (Oi, 1999; Wong, 1997). Local officials who successfully promote economic development simply acquire more extrabudgetary funds to control, and successful reinvestment of these extrabudgetary funds spins off more revenue they need not report to the central government. At the same time, the state's promotion of local experimentation enables the central government to blame local authorities for poor policy outcomes, thereby reinforcing its legitimacy and power.

Voluntary Compliance as an Important Political Behavior in Developing Contexts

Another area of opportunity where work on China can inform comparative politics is on the recent upsurge of research on voluntary citizen compliance with the state in developing contexts. Comparativists are increasingly interested in understanding voluntary compliance with state demands for taxation, corvée labor and other contributions to the collective good such as adherence to public health regulations (vaccination campaigns, infectious disease reporting, and cremation or safe burial practices) and cooperation with public security measures (community policing and counterterrorism initiatives). Citizen cooperation with these efforts are important for states everywhere but especially so in developing countries and fragile states that need to pursue economic development and state building. Voluntary citizen compliance and cooperation with the state is also central to our understanding of regime stability and political legitimacy.

Existing theories of voluntary citizen compliance based on democratic theory and social contract focus on the procedural justice of the government (Cohen-Charash & Spector, 2001; Dahl, 1956; De Cremer & Tyler, 2005; Tilly, 1990). When citizens believe that authorities use fair procedures to make and enforce these demands, and incorporate citizen input into the policy process, they are more likely to comply (Levi, 1989; Murphy, Tyler, & Curtis, 2009).

Almost all of this theoretical literature, however, is based on the experience of early European states. Findings from recent empirical research on developing contexts, however, show little connection between procedural justice and voluntary compliance with taxation (see, for example, Broms, 2015; Castro & Scartascini, 2015; de la Cuesta, Milner, Nielson, & Knack, 2015; Paler, 2013). In developing contexts, where the rule of law is often weak and corruption is rampant, ordinary citizens may have little confidence that existing institutions for citizen participation will have any effect on government decision making.

So what might encourage voluntary compliance with state demands under these adverse conditions? Work on China offers a number of intriguing avenues for investigation. Scholarship on voluntary compliance with the one-child policy and birth planning in China, for example, suggests that states can inculcate new social and cultural norms that change citizen preferences and redefine individual choices as contributions to the public good (Greenhalgh & Winckler, 2005; Milwertz, 1997; M. Wolf, 1985; Yan, 2003). Voluntary compliance may also result from interpersonal relationships of reciprocity and obligation between citizens and local agents of the state or "street-level bureaucrats" (Read, 2012; Read & Pekkanen, 2009). An alternative to procedural justice concerns may be retributive justice concerns (K. S. Tsai, 2013; L. L. Tsai & Lu, 2016), where citizens are more likely to comply voluntarily with authorities who punish malfeasance by local officials because such punishment signals that authorities are just.

Building Institutional Theories of Political Behavior

The field of political behavior has generally focused on individual-level determinants of political action and attitudes. The case of China, however, suggests that political scientists need to look more carefully at the impact of institutional variation on these individual-level outcomes. If we are to understand how political fear and uncertainty affect individual participation, we necessarily have to examine how institutional arrangements lead to different levels of risk and uncertainty. As comparativists devote more attention to subnational variation in state capacity (Luna & Soifer, 2015; Soifer, 2008), policy implementation and institutional enforcement (Levitsky & Murillo, 2009), and local public finance that can exist in developing contexts, one of the frontiers in the study of political behavior becomes theorizing about how variation in these institutions affects citizen perceptions of governmental performance, citizen trust in government, and citizen participation.

China, with its size and subnational variation in political institutions, becomes a valuable testing ground for building and testing new theories on these questions. In China, for example, variation in institutional arrangements for funding and organizing local public projects seems to affect how local officials view compliance from citizens with government policies such as the birth planning program (L. L. Tsai, 2011). In rural areas, individuals who live in communities where top-down bureaucratic institutions are stronger seem more likely to engage in bottom-up participation in village elections and complaints about public goods provision.

The case of China also illustrates how localities can vary not only in the types of institutional arrangements that exist but also in institutional stability

and enforcement. In districts where institutions are more stable and more likely to be enforced, uncertainty and fear may be less of an obstacle to political participation than in districts that have similar institutions but ones which are not stable or not enforced consistently. This variation suggests interesting questions for comparative study; for example, it may be the case that districts in developing democracies where political violence is an issue and institutions change frequently—where, for example, there is frequent redrawing of constituencies to influence election outcomes—citizens in these districts may be more likely to disengage from politics and refrain from voting because frequent change in election institutions signals strong elite intentions and capacity for election-rigging.

Looking Ahead by Looking Back and Reaching Beyond

Most of this article has targeted political scientists who do not study China but may have much to learn from those who do. For any comparativist interested in questions of governance, accountability, and political behavior in developing contexts, recent research on Chinese politics provides a rich source of analytical insights and theoretical hypotheses to consider.

This final section, however, concerns those of us who do study China. To continue building these linkages and others between the study of Chinese politics and comparative political studies, we have a number of tasks in front of us.

The first task is to ensure that China scholars continue to acquire and develop in-depth theoretical knowledge and field-based area expertise of China. As more data become easier to acquire, technologies for data-intensive projects make it easier to assemble large data sets, and options for outsourcing research tasks expand, there is a strong temptation simply to study China from a distance. This greater availability of data enables better identification strategies and facilitates causal inference, which is an important precondition for contributing to comparative politics.

Such data, however, have rarely been used to specify clearly or rigorously the scope conditions under which the identified causal relationships are likely to hold, perhaps because we spend relatively less time reading prior theoretical literature on Chinese politics, which is what provides the analytical frameworks for understanding those scope conditions. Based on our sample of articles on China published in top disciplinary journals over the past 10 years, we are about 9% less likely to cite scholarship from before 1999 as every year passes.

Perhaps theories and political phenomena from before 1999 are just not relevant anymore. But I do not think so. Unless we have a deep and nuanced

understanding of Chinese politics informed by prior theoretical research on Chinese politics, we risk using extraordinary data to study questions that are of little consequence because they have little bearing on the key struggles over power and resources. Although cutting-edge data collection strategies can be fruitful, at the same time we also want to make sure that we do not only concentrate on the actors, institutions, and data that provide the most visible, low-hanging fruit—politicians and government offices with websites, social and traditional media, official statistics and administrative data—but that we continue training and practicing as area experts. A command of the decades of scholarship on China that have come before us arms us with the arguments for defending whether our current research questions are really about significant political conflicts. And unless they are, scholarship on China cannot really inform comparative theory building in a genuinely useful and meaningful way.

A command of prior scholarship on China, moreover, is necessary to comparative theory building because it is only through comparison with previous theoretical research on China that we can understand what scope conditions have been identified as important for particular types of outcomes, and whether and how these scope conditions have changed over time. As comparative political scientists, we need to understand how these scope conditions came about in China in the first place because if we do not understand how they came about in China, we cannot know whether they are likely to exist or come about elsewhere. Specifying the conditions under which our arguments are likely to hold in a general sense necessitates a qualitative understanding of China's history, culture, institutions, and people that we can only gain through mastering prior work on China, reading primary documents, and conducting field research.

Area expertise and field-based knowledge—in addition to a working familiarity with other empirical contexts—are also important for ensuring conceptual equivalence in our choice of variables and measurement strategies (see Locke & Thelen, 1995). One has to have in-depth familiarity with the context and with actors in the context to know whether a particular measurement strategy—whether it is a survey question, the observation of a particular behavior or phenomenon, or a particular interview quote—is indeed measuring the concept it is intended to measure, and whether this concept means the same thing in China as it does elsewhere. Moreover, we need to draw on our area expertise to make arguments that there is measurement validity and that we are comparing apples with apples when we say that findings from China are generalizable to other contexts. Without making these arguments both explicitly and convincingly, there is unlikely to be uptake of research from China by other political scientists.

Our second task as China scholars is to acquire more working knowledge with other empirical contexts so that we can actively compare China to other places and generate theories that we know will apply to more than one case. Without knowing the empirical cases to which our arguments generalize and knowing enough empirical detail about these other cases to persuade others that these cases share the same scope conditions as the China case, we cannot contribute effectively to theoretical debates in comparative politics and political science. To evaluate whether the same scope conditions hold or whether the same measures mean the same thing in the Chinese context as well as in other contexts, we need to know other contexts as well.

One solution to achieving these ambitions is to collaborate more with non-China scholars working on the same theoretical questions. Collaborations among China and non-China scholars of China have become more common, which has been an unquestionably productive development for empirical research. Collaboration between China and non-China comparativists working on political development and political behavior, however, remains uncommon even though such collaboration has proved fruitful in the past.

Migdal, Kohli, and Shue's (1994) edited volume, for example, brought scholars on Latin America, Asia, the Middle East, and Africa to show that comparativists ought to shift away from a state-centered theory of a zero-sum relationship between states and social forces. Instead, the empirical evidence reviewed by this diverse group of scholars, including two China scholars—Vivienne Shue and Elizabeth Perry—illustrated the benefits of a broadly applicable approach that disaggregated the state into different actors and constituent parts and hypothesized that states vary in their effectiveness based on their ties to society. Similar interactions between China and non-China scholars include the seminal survey research project of citizens and local officials from four counties in China organized by a combination of China scholars and Americanists interested in political behavior and political economy at the University of Michigan in 1990, and Richard Madsen's work with non-China sociologists on culture. More recently, He and Warren's (2011) article situating political participation and deliberation in authoritarian regimes like China in relationship to but outside democratic theory helped to lay theoretical groundwork for identifying the conditions under which China and other nondemocratic systems might engage in democratic transition or maintain a stable governing equilibrium as durable authoritarian regimes. Collaboration between J. Lu, Aldrich, and Shi has helped contribute to theory building on media effects in authoritarian systems as well as suggesting that the indirect media effects on political attitudes via shaping social norms might also be important to explore in other contexts.

The bottom line is that to bridge the existing gap between the study of Chinese politics and the building of comparative political theory, we as China scholars have to go beyond adopting the discipline's cutting-edge empirical methodologies. We have to become genuinely knowledgeable about the extensive body of prior theoretical scholarship on Chinese politics as well as engaged with the work of our non-China colleagues. We have to build on previous scholarship on China while working actively with non-China colleagues to identify shared questions about political phenomena that exist beyond China. Only through looking back and reaching beyond can we ensure that our hard-won findings about China fully contribute to knowledge.

Acknowledgment

My Seppo provided excellent research assistance. All errors remain our own.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Notes

1. For articles on these topics, see, for example, Perry (1994), Perry (2007), O'Brien (2011), and Reny (2011).
2. Work by China scholars on economic policy and performance, government–business relations and the emergence of interest groups in economic policy making, and the developmental state have recently been assessed elsewhere (see, for example, excellent essays by Kellee Tsai in *Perspectives on Politics*, 2013; and by Scott Kennedy in his recent edited volume, *Beyond the Middle Kingdom*, 2011)
3. We originally intended to include *Politics and Society*, but it is not included in the Web of Science. Only five articles resulted from including the political behavior journals. The empirical patterns discussed remain the same when these articles are excluded.
4. This literature is too large to cite comprehensively, but overviews include Lily Tsai (2010, p. 143), Gunter Schubert (2003), and Robert Pastor and Qingshan Tan (2000).
5. For a review, see Pande (2011); empirical examples include Chong, Ana, Karlan, and Wantchekon (2015); Banerjee, Banerji, Duflo, Glennerster, and Khemani (2010); de Figueiredo, Hidalgo, and Kasahara (2011); Humphreys and Weinstein (2012); Lieberman, Posner, and Tsai (2014).

6. Fear of reprisal is often an obstacle to political participation. Bratton (2008), for example, has found that violence is used to reduce voter turnout in Nigerian elections. In the Philippines, Cruz (2013) finds that politicians strategically use violence and intimidation to suppress voter turnout among opposition party supporters. Posner and Simon (2002) report that public dissatisfaction with the government is most often expressed through abstention rather than a vote for the opposition for fear of being punished by the ruling party. Magaloni (2006) finds that in hegemonic-party autocracies, the poor are less likely than the rich to vote for opposition parties because of higher levels of risk aversion and dependence on state patronage.

References

Acemoglu, D., Reed, T., & Robinson, J. A. (2013). *Chiefs: Elite control of civil society and economic development in Sierra Leone*. Cambridge, MA: National Bureau of Economic Research.

Andrews, M., Pritchett, L., & Woolcock, M. (2013). Escaping capability traps through problem driven iterative adaptation (PDIA). *World Development*, *51*, 234-244.

Ang, Y. Y., & Jia, N. (2014). Perverse complementarity: Political connections and the use of courts among private firms in China. *The Journal of Politics*, *76*, 318-332.

Baldwin, K. (2013). Why vote with the chief? Political connections and public goods provision in Zambia. *American Journal of Political Science*, *57*, 794-809.

Baldwin, K. (2014). *Impact evaluation of supporting traditional leaders and local structures to mitigate community-level conflict in Zimbabwe*. USAID, Arlington, VA. Retrieved from http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PA00K5R5.pdf

Baldwin, K., & Mvukiyehe, E. (2015). Elections and collective action: Evidence from changes in traditional institutions in Liberia. *World Politics*, *67*, 690-725. doi:10.1017/S0043887115000210

Ball, S. J., & Vincent, C. (1998). "I heard it on the grapevine': "Hot" knowledge and school choice. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, *19*, 377-400.

Banerjee, A. V, Banerji, R., Duflo, E., Glennerster, R., & Khemani, S. (2010). Pitfalls of Participatory Programs: Evidence from a randomized evaluation in education in India. *American Economic Journal: Economic Policy*, *2*(1), 1-30.

Barr, A. (1998). *Enterprise performance and the functional diversity of social capital*. Oxford, UK: Centre for the Study of African Economies, Institute of Economics and Statistics, University of Oxford.

Berinsky, A. J. (2012). *Rumors, truths, and reality: A study of political misinformation*. Unpublished manuscript.

Böröcz, J. (2000). Informality rules. *East European Politics and Societies*, *14*, 348-380.

Bratton, M. (2008). Vote buying and violence in Nigerian election campaigns. *Electoral Studies*, *27*, 621-632.

Bratton, M., & Bingen, R. J. (1994). Farmer organization and agricultural policy in Africa. *African Rural and Urban Studies*, *1*(1), 7-29.

Broms, R. (2015). Putting up or shutting up: On the individual-level relationship between taxpaying and political interest in a developmental context. *The Journal of Development Studies*, *51*, 93-109.

Brownlee, J. (2007). *Authoritarianism in an age of democratization*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Castro, L., & Scartascini, C. (2015). Tax compliance and enforcement in the pampas evidence from a field experiment. *Journal of Economic Behavior & Organization*, *116*, 65-82.

Chen, X. (2008). Collective petitioning and institutional conversion. *Popular Protest in China*, *54*, 55.

Chen, X. (2009). The power of "troublemaking": Protest tactics and their efficacy in China. *Comparative Politics*, *41*, 451-471.

Chen, Y. (1986). *Making revolution: The communist movement in Eastern and Central China, 1937-1945* (Vol. 1). Berkeley: University of California Press.

Chong, A., Ana, L., Karlan, D., & Wantchekon, L. (2015). Does corruption information inspire the fight or quash the hope? A field experiment in Mexico on voter turnout, choice, and party identification. *The Journal of Politics*, *77*, 55-71.

Cohen-Charash, Y., & Spector, P. E. (2001). The role of justice in organizations: A meta-analysis. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, *86*, 278-321.

Cruz, C. (2013, September). *Social networks and the targeting of illegal electoral strategies*. Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, Chicago, IL. Retrieved from http://polisci.ucsd.edu/_files/Cruz_JobTalk_Paper_1125.pdf

Dahl, R. A. (1956). *A preface to democratic theory*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

De Cremer, D., & Tyler, T. R. (2005). Managing group behavior: The interplay between procedural justice, sense of self, and cooperation. *Advances in experimental social psychology*, *37*, 151-218.

de Figueiredo, M. F. P., Hidalgo, F. D., & Kasahara, Y. (2011). *When do voters punish corrupt politicians? Experimental evidence from Brazil*. Unpublished Manuscript, University of California Berkeley.

de, la, Cuesta, B., Milner, H. V., Nielson, D., & Knack, S. (2015). *No greater representation with taxation: Experimental evidence from Ghana and Uganda on citizen action toward oil, aid, and taxes*. Princeton Conference on the Political Economy of Government Revenues, Princeton, NJ. Retrieved from https://www.princeton.edu/~hmilner/working%20papers/NoGreaterRepresentationWithTaxation.pdf

Distelhorst, G., & Hou, Y. (2014). Ingroup bias in official behavior: A national field experiment in China. *Quarterly Journal of Political Science*, *9*, 203-230.

Duara, P. (1991). *Culture, power, and the state: Rural North China, 1900-1942*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Dunning, T. (2012). *Natural experiments in the social sciences: A design-based approach*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Freedman, M. (1966). *Chinese lineage and society: Fukien and Kwangtung*. London, England: Athlone Press.

Gallagher, M. E. (2006). Mobilizing the law in China: "Informed disenchantment" and the development of legal consciousness. *Law & Society Review*, *40*, 783-816.

Gandhi, J. (2008). *Political institutions under dictatorship*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Gandhi, J., & Lust-Okar, E. (2009). Elections under authoritarianism. *Annual Review of Political Science*, *12*, 403-422.

Gandhi, J., & Przeworski, A. (2006). Cooperation, cooptation, and rebellion under dictatorships. *Economics & Politics*, *18*, 1-26.

Gandhi, J., & Przeworski, A. (2007). Authoritarian institutions and the survival of autocrats. *Comparative Political Studies*, *40*, 1279-1301.

Geddes, B. (2006). Stages of development in authoritarian regimes. In V. Tismaneanu, M. Howard Morje, & R. Sil (Eds.), *World order after Leninism* (pp. 149-170). Washington, DC: University of Washington Press.

Goodwin, J. (2001). *No other way out: States and revolutionary movements, 1945-1991*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Greenhalgh, S., & Winckler, E. A. (2005). *Governing China's population: From Leninist to neoliberal biopolitics*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Guo, G. (2007). Organizational involvement and political participation in China. *Comparative Political Studies*, *40*, 457-482.

He, B., & Warren, M. E. (2011). Authoritarian deliberation: The deliberative turn in Chinese political development. *Perspectives on Politics*, *9*, 269-289.

Heilmann, S. (2008). Policy experimentation in China's economic rise. *Studies in Comparative International Development*, *43*, 1-26.

Hou, Y. (2015). *Participatory autocracy: Private entrepreneurs, legislatures, and property protection in China*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Political Science.

Huckfeldt, R., & Sprague, J. (1995). *Citizens, politics, and social communication: Information and influence in an election campaign*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Humphreys, M., & Weinstein, J. (2012). Policing politicians: citizen empowerment and political accountability in Uganda preliminary analysis. Unpublished Manuscript, Columbia Universities.

Humphreys, M., & Weinstein, J. M. (2009). Field experiments and the political economy of development. *Annual Review of Political Science*, *12*, 367-378. doi:10.1146/annurev.polisci.12.060107.155922

Huntington, S. P. (2006). *Political order in changing societies*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Johnson, D. (1983). Chinese kinship reconsidered. *The China Quarterly*, *94*, 362-365.

Kalyvas, S. N. (2006). *The logic of violence in civil war*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Katz, E., & Lazarsfeld, P. F. (1966). *Personal influence, the part played by people in the flow of mass communications*. Glencoe, IL: Transaction Publishers.

Kennedy, S. (2011). *Beyond the middle kingdom: Comparative perspectives on China's capitalist transformation*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Khanna, J., & Johnston, M. (2007). India's middlemen: Connecting by corrupting? *Crime, Law and Social Change*, *48*(3-5), 151-168.

Kim, S. E. (2016). *Media bias against foreign firms as a veiled trade barrier: Evidence from Chinese newspapers*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press.

King, G., Pan, J., & Roberts, M. E. (2013). How censorship in China allows government criticism but silences collective expression. *American Political Science Review*, *107*, 326-343.

Krishna, A. (2011). Gaining access to public services and the democratic state in India: Institutions in the middle. *Studies in Comparative International Development*, *46*, 98-117.

Kruks-Wisner, G. K. (2011). *Making claims: Citizenship and service delivery in rural India*. Retrieved from https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1945333

Kuran, T. (1997). *Private truths, public lies: The social consequences of preference falsification*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Landry, P. F., Davis, D., & Wang, S. (2010). Elections in rural China: Competition without parties. *Comparative Political Studies*, *43*, 763-790.

Lee, C. K. (2007). *Against the law: Labor protests in China's rustbelt and sunbelt*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Levi, M. (1989). *Of rule and revenue* (Vol. 13). Berkeley: University of California Press.

Levitsky, S., & Murillo, M. V. (2009). Variation in institutional strength. *Annual Review of Political Science*, *12*, 115-133.

Levitsky, S., & Way, L. A. (2010). *Competitive authoritarianism: Hybrid regimes after the Cold War*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Li, L., & O'brien, K. J. (2008). Protest leadership in rural China. *The China Quarterly*, *193*, 1-23.

Lieberman, E. S., Posner, D. N., & Tsai, L. L. (2014). Does information lead to more active citizenship? Evidence from an education intervention in rural Kenya. *World Development*, *60*, 69-83. doi:10.1016/j.worlddev.2014.03.014

Locke, R. M., & Thelen, K. (1995). Apples and oranges revisited: Contextualized comparisons and the study of comparative labor politics. *Politics & Society*, *23*, 337-368.

Lorentzen, P. (2014). China's strategic censorship. *American Journal of Political Science*, *58*, 402-414.

Lu, J., Aldrich, J., & Shi, T. (2014). Revisiting media effects in authoritarian societies: Democratic conceptions, collectivistic norms, and media access in urban China. *Politics & Society*, *42*, 253-283. doi:10.1177/0032329213519423

Lü, X. (2013). Equality of educational opportunity and attitudes toward income inequality: Evidence from China. *Quarterly Journal of Political Science*, *8*, 271-303. doi:10.1561/100.00012043

Luna, J. P., & Soifer, H. D. (2015). *Surveying state capacity: AmericasBarometer Insights: 2015* (Latin American Public Opinion Project Insights Series). Retrieved from http://www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop/insights/IO919en.pdf

Magaloni, B. (2006). *Voting for autocracy: Hegemonic party survival and its demise in Mexico*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Malesky, E., & Schuler, P. (2008, January). *Why do single-party regimes hold elections? An analysis of candidate-level data in Vietnam's 2007 National Assembly contest*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, Boston, MA. Retrieved from https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Edmund_Malesky/publication/228869053_Why_do_Single-Party_Regimes_Hold_Elections_An_Analysis_of_Candidate_Data_in_Vietnam's_2007_National_Assembly_Contest/links/0c960528b303c2af82000000.pdf

Manion, M. (2014). "Good types" in authoritarian elections: The selectoral connection in Chinese local congresses. *Comparative Political Studies*. Advance online publication. doi:10.1177/0010414014537027

Mattingly, D. C. (2016). Elite capture. *World Politics*, *68*, 383-412. doi:10.1017/S0043887116000083

McGee, R., & Gaventa, J. (2011). *Shifting power? Assessing the impact of transparency and accountability initiatives* (IDS Working Papers No. 383). Retrieved from http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.2040-0209.2011.00383_2.x/abstract

Migdal, J. S., Kohli, A., & Shue, V. (1994). *State power and social forces: Domination and transformation in the Third World*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Milwertz, C. N. (1997). *Accepting population control: Urban Chinese women and the one-child family policy*. Richmond, VA: Curzon Press.

Murphy, K., Tyler, T. R., & Curtis, A. (2009). Nurturing regulatory compliance: Is procedural justice effective when people question the legitimacy of the law? *Regulation & Governance*, *3*(1), 1-26.

Narayan, D., & Cassidy, M. F. (2001). A dimensional approach to measuring social capital: Development and validation of a Social Capital Inventory. *Current Sociology*, *49*(2), 59-102.

Narayan, D., & Nyamwaya, D. (1996). *Learning from the poor: A participatory poverty assessment in Kenya*. Retrieved from http://agris.fao.org/agris-search/search.do?recordID=US2012420554

O'Brien, K. J. (2011). Studying Chinese politics in an age of specialization. *Journal of Contemporary China*, *20*, 535-541.

O'Brien, K. J. (2013). Rightful resistance revisited. *Journal of Peasant Studies*, *40*, 1051-1062.

O'Brien, K. J., & Li, L. (1995). The politics of lodging complaints in rural China. *The China Quarterly*, *143*, 756-783.

O'Brien, K. J., & Li, L. (2004). Suing the local state: Administrative litigation in rural China. *The China Journal*, *51*, 75-96.

O'Brien, K. J., & Li, L. (2005). Popular contention and its impact in rural China. *Comparative Political Studies*, *38*, 235-259.

O'Brien, K. J., & Li, L. (2008). Protest leadership in rural China. *The China Quarterly*, *193*, 1-23.

O'Brien, K. J., Li, L., McAdam, D., Tarrow, S. G., & Tilly, C. (2006). *Rightful resistance in rural China*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Oi, J. C. (1989). *State and peasant in contemporary China: The political economy of village government* (Vol. 30). Berkeley: University of California Press.
Oi, J. C. (1999). *Rural China takes off: Institutional foundations of economic reform*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
Paler, L. (2013). Keeping the public purse: An experiment in windfalls, taxes, and the incentives to restrain government. *American Political Science Review*, *107*, 706-725.
Pande, R. (2011). Can informed voters enforce better governance? Experiments in low-income democracies. *Annual Review of Economics*, *3*, 215-237.
Pastor, R. A., & Tan, Q. (2000). The meaning of China's village elections. *The China Quarterly*, *162*, 490-512.
Perry, E. J. (1994). Trends in the study of Chinese politics: State-society relations. *The China Quarterly*, *139*, 704-713. doi:10.1017/S0305741000043113
Perry, E. J. (2001). Challenging the mandate of heaven: Popular protest in modern China. *Critical Asian Studies*, *33*, 163-180.
Perry, E. J. (2007). Studying Chinese politics: Farewell to revolution? *The China Journal*, *57*, 1-22.
Posner, D. N., & Simon, D. J. (2002). Economic conditions and incumbent support in Africa's new democracies: Evidence from Zambia. *Comparative Political Studies*, *35*, 313-336.
Read, B. L. (2008). Assessing variation in civil society organizations: China s homeowner associations in comparative perspective. *Comparative Political Studies*, *41*, 1240-1265.
Read, B. L. (2012). *Roots of the state: Neighborhood organization and social networks in Beijing and Taipei*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
Read, B. L., & Pekkanen, R. (Eds.). (2009). *Local organizations and urban governance in East and Southeast Asia: Straddling state and society*. Seattle, WA: Routledge.
Reny, M.-E. (2011). What happened to the study of China in comparative politics? *Journal of East Asian Studies*, *11*, 105-135.
Ruf, G. A. (2000). *Cadres and Kin: Making a socialist village in West China, 1921-1991*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
Schubert, G. (2003). Democracy under one-party rule? A fresh look at direct village and township elections in the PRC. *China Perspectives*, *46*. Retrieved from https://chinaperspectives.revues.org/256
Shi, T. (1997). *Political participation in Beijing*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
Simpser, A. (2013). *Why governments and parties manipulate elections: Theory, practice, and implications*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
Singerman, D. (1995). *Avenues of participation: family, politics, and networks in urban quarters of Cairo*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
Soifer, H. (2008). State infrastructural power: Approaches to conceptualization and measurement. *Studies in Comparative International Development*, *43*, 231-251.
Stern, R. E., & Hassid, J. (2012). Amplifying silence: Uncertainty and control parables in contemporary China. *Comparative Political Studies*, *45*, 1230-1254.

Stern, R. E., & O'Brien, K. J. (2012). Politics at the Boundary Mixed Signals and the Chinese State. *Modern China*, *38*(2), 174-198.

Stockmann, D., & Gallagher, M. E. (2011). Remote control: How the media sustain authoritarian rule in China. *Comparative Political Studies*, *44*, 436-467.

Stokes, S. C., Dunning, T., Nazareno, M., & Brusco, V. (2013). *Brokers, voters, and clientelism: The puzzle of distributive politics*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Tilly, C. (1990). *Coercion, capital, and European states, AD 990-1990*. Cambridge, MA: Basil Blackwell.

Truex, R. (2014). The returns to office in a "rubber stamp" parliament. *American Political Science Review*, *108*, 235-251. doi:10.1017/S0003055414000112

Tsai, K. S. (2013). China's political economy and political science. *Perspectives on Politics*, *11*, 860-871. doi:10.1017/S1537592712003222

Tsai, L. L. (2007a). *Accountability without democracy: Solidary groups and public goods provision in rural China*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Tsai, L. L. (2007b). Solidary groups, informal accountability, and local public goods provision in rural China. *American Political Science Review*, *101*, 355-372.

Tsai, L. L. (2010). Governing one million rural communities after two decades: Are China's village elections improving? In J. C. Oi, S. Rozelle, & X. Zhou (Eds.), *Growing pains: Tensions and opportunity in China's transformation* (pp. 143-166). Stanford, CA: Asia-Pacific Research Center.

Tsai, L. L. (2011). Friends or foes? Nonstate public goods providers and local state authorities in nondemocratic and transitional systems. *Studies in Comparative International Development*, *46*, 46-69.

Tsai, L. L. (2013). *The political payoffs of governance reforms: How citizens see and judge the state in Authoritarian China* [Working paper]. Retrieved from http://sites.lsa.umich.edu/polisci-cpw/wp-content/uploads/sites/223/2015/01/tsai-michigan-1119.pdf

Tsai, L. L. (2015). Constructive noncompliance. *Comparative Politics*, *47*, 253-279.

Tsai, L. L., & Lu, X. (2016). *When do citizens want representation in exchange for taxation? An experimental study of property tax in urban China* [Working paper]. Retrieved from http://ssrn.com/abstract=2870770

Tsai, L. L., & Xu, Y. (2015). *Outspoken insiders: Political connections and citizen participation in authoritarian China*. Retrieved from http://papers.ssrn.com/abstract=2480611

Verba, S., Schlozman, K. L., & Brady, H. (1995). *Voice and equality: Civic voluntarism in American politics* (Vol. 4). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Wasserstrom, J. N., & Perry, E. J. (1992). *Popular protest and political culture in modern China: Learning from 1989*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

Watkins, S. C., & Swidler, A. (2013). Working misunderstandings: Donors, brokers, and villagers in Africa's AIDS industry. *Population and Development Review*, *38*(Suppl. 1), 197-218.

Watson, J. L. (1975). *Emigration and the Chinese lineage: The mans in Hong Kong and London*. Berkeley: University of California Press Berkeley.

Weitz-Shapiro, R., & Winters, M. S. (2015). *Can citizens discern? Information credibility, political sophistication, and the punishment of corruption in Brazil*. Retrieved from https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2645332

Wolf, A. P. (1974). *Religion and ritual in Chinese society*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Wolf, M. (1985). *Revolution postponed: Women in contemporary China*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Wong, C. P. W. (1997). *Financing local government in the People's Republic of China*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

Woo, M. Y. K., & Gallagher, M. E. (2011). *Chinese justice: Civil dispute resolution in contemporary China*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

World Bank. (2003). *World development report 2004: Making services work for poor people*. Washington, DC: Author.

Xu, Y., & Yao, Y. (2015). Informal institutions, collective action, and public investment in rural China. *American Political Science Review*, *109*, 371-391. doi:10.1017/S0003055415000155

Yan, Y. (2003). *Private life under socialism: Love, intimacy, and family change in a Chinese village, 1949-1999*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Zhu, J., Lu, J., & Shi, T. (2012). When grapevine news meets mass media: Different information sources and popular perceptions of government corruption in Mainland China. *Comparative Political Studies*, *46*, 920-946. doi:10.1177/0010414012463886

Author Biography

Lily L. Tsai is an associate professor of political science at MIT and faculty director of the MIT Governance Lab (MIT GOV/LAB). Her research focuses on issues of accountability, governance, and political participation in developing contexts, with particular emphasis on Asia and Africa.