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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Chinese Political Studies: Overview of the State of the Field

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Abstract The range of questions of interest to scholars of Chinese politics has changed slowly over recent decades, but the depth of empirical probes to answer them has quickly improved. One reason is the rise of China-born and Chinese-American researchers. Another is greater access to local information in China after the start of reforms there. Future developments in this field are likely to enrich current American political science, which will require fresh methods for adequate study of the planet's most populous polity.

Keywords China · Chinese Political Studies · State of Field · 2000s · Reforms

Introduction

The main change in English-language studies of China during the past couple of decades has come from greater participation by Chinese-Americans and especially China-born scholars. By no means do these researchers all agree with one another. Their collective influence, together with China's hesitant opening to a greater variety of international researchers, has led to better empirical probes of perennial questions in Chinese politics. Such questions relate to each other, and most are not new. Several of them, insofar as they have affected analyses published in Western languages to which this article is limited, are as follows:

How has China's halcyon economic growth affected politics? Has the decline of Marxist ideology and official planning weakened the state? Do these changes bode not just a stronger China eventually (after the 2009 recession), but also a stronger Beijing? Is the Party ending, and what might follow it? How is the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) maintaining itself? Under what conditions, if any, might China's elite adopt a liberal regime type?

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Has the increased education and professionalization of cadres in recent years merely reconstructed a quasi-Confucian mandarinate, with technocrats commanding the army as well as ordinary citizens? Or instead, is China seeing a slow transition to rule by quasi-capitalists who can buy off the state? Or will it move to some other kind of leadership?

How have new technologies, especially cell phones and the internet, affected what people know about politics in the short and long terms? Are Chinese political culture and habits basically altering, or instead are they just reproducing themselves adaptively in new contexts—or perhaps changing in some further definable manner?

China, as the world's most populous country, may well someday turn into the world's strongest. If so, would the domestic mechanisms of such change alter China's politics—and in what ways? Has China, as its economy grows and patriotic pride affects Beijing leaders, become more or less forward in foreign relations? Will there be a Sino-American war over Taiwan, which Chinese take to be their province, or can this be avoided? How are China's external politics generated by its internal politics?

All such questions are causal. Political scientists have recently faced each of them in far more books and articles than this short essay can possibly cite. For many issues, the answers may be different among distinct functions or regions. Some of these questions can also be answered differently for various sub-periods that have followed the 1969 height of formal centralization, which was based on attempts at ideological unity. These periods include the early 1970s (which deserve far more research than has thus far been undertaken), the 1976–78 transition, the 1978–1985 era when most economic planning ended, the late 1980s period of inflation and political upheaval, the Party's efforts to restore itself in the 1990s, and the period of international recognition of China's rise after 2000.

Factors that recent authors have used to answer causal questions about China's reforms range over the full panoply of types that previous scholars used to explain the strong state's founding in 1949, as well as the campaigns of the 1950s and the Cultural Revolution of the 1960s. Some writers stress organizational leadership, especially ideas and policies from the top of the political system, while others examine the cumulative importance of grassroots social changes. Some accounts use mainly rural information, variously about the rise of rural industry, or village solidarity, or elections, or farmers' movements. Others mainly use urban research and stress the entrepreneurial and technological roles of city people. Some explanations rely on central or local intentions; others explain political development in terms of the changing unintended contexts facing all actors. Some accounts aim at systematic completeness, while others admit a role for uncertain contingency or do not claim a wide scope for their conclusions. These dimensions apply to practically all explanations in social science—but they are particularly evident in the diversity of efforts to explain the quick changes of contemporary China.

The closure of PRC universities during the Cultural Revolution had truly excellent effects on the quality of later Western scholarship about Chinese politics. A whole decade's cohort of top-notch Chinese students entered tertiary education in 1977–78. Many graduated in China at the start of the 1980s, and they often attended different American universities for their M.A. and then Ph.D. degrees. Their intellectual wattage was exceptional, as was their will to understand China's politics.

They have been prolific publishers. Many took U.S. university jobs, in which they now have tenure. A minority, such as Wang Jisi or Jia Qingguo at Peking University, Cui Zhiyuan or Yan Xuetong at Qinghua, and Wang Shaoguang at the Chinese University of Hong Kong, and others have returned to major professorships in China. Zheng Yongnian is in Singapore; Wu Guoguang, in Canada. There is certainly no space here to list all those who now teach in the U.S. They are now senior scholars. No matter in which country they work, this diverse cohort of 1977–78 exam takers who later earned American doctorates continues to vitalize our field.

Asia-born and America-born scholars have often published as co-authors: Li Lianjiang and Kevin O'Brien, Lü Xiaobo and Thomas Bernstein, Anita Chan and Jonathan Unger, You Laiyi and Mark Selden, Tang Wenfang and William Parish, Li Hongbin and Scott Rozelle, Cai Hongbin and Daniel Treisman, Yang Dongning and Phillip Stalley, Li Cheng and myself, as well as other pairs. Public intellectuals and advisors to senior American politicians have emerged from among scholars who were originally from China, such as Pei Minxin of the Carnegie Endowment or Li Cheng of Brookings. Others, such as Deng Yong who teaches at the U.S. Naval Academy, or Zhao Quansheng of American University, or Wan Ming of George Mason University, acquired such roles partly because they live close to the American national capital. China programs at academic institutions are now often headed by PRC-born Chinese academics. Liu Yawei directs one at the Carter Center, as does Zhao Suisheng at the University of Denver (which thus houses the *Journal of Contemporary China* that Zhao founded and edits). Guo Sujian heads the Center for US-China Policy Studies at San Francisco State University—and with Guo Baogang and Jean-Marc F. Blanchard, he edits the *Journal of Chinese Political Science* that is in your hands. Only a lack of space here prevents a fuller listing of the many administrative and editorial contributions by U.S. academics who were born in China.

This brief essay cannot cover all the good work that has appeared about Chinese politics in recent years; it mainly mentions selected examples of approaches that seem important for the future. Moreover, there is no space here to include all the new scholarship that has developed in Japanese, French, German, Russian, Korean, or other languages—especially Chinese. This review is not, however, totally restricted to very recent work. A few classics and old debates in the field deserve mention, because they provide framing background on current concerns. These considerations, along with thoughts about the historical development of the field's supporting infrastructure, will be delayed to the end of this article, where their relevance to recent scholarship may be clearer. The main purpose of a "state of the field" article is to summarize the kinds of discoveries that have been fairly recent. But it should also relate these to professional trends in political science more broadly. The surrounding academy affects our field in diverse ways, although data from China should affect it more.

Political Legitimacy

Political scientists of democratic countries have paid less attention to legitimation than did classical students of politics. The reason may be that democracies hold

elections. Votes, which are conveniently tractable to statistical counts, are often conceived in the West as the only serious means by which a government can become legitimate. But China's post-communist changes, together with the continuing frequent presumption among Chinese that "thought" leads to action, has distinguished studies of this old polity. Vivienne Shue has written about the bases of Chinese legitimacy in national glory, socioeconomic benevolence, and claims to cosmic truth.[1] Some, such as Peter Hayes Gries, have explored occasions on which political actors in China have used nationalist appeals either for or against the government.[2] As Elizabeth Perry argues, economic prosperity is a crucial legitimation for Chinese rulers [3].

Discontent in China's polity somewhat changed after 1989. By the middle of the current decade, as compared to the 1990s, there were objectively more protesters and protests. Minister of Public Security Zhou Yongkang suggested that "participants in mass group incidents" rose between 1994 and 2004 from 730,000 to 3,760,000. The number of such incidents rose in that time from about 10,000 to 74,000.[3] He probably underestimated the later amounts. Protest tends now to be legitimist, reactive, and interest-driven, rather than revolutionary, proactive, and idealistic. Grievance is now often based on perceived or real thefts by lowly officials of ordinary citizens' conventional rights to jobs, wages, land, or normal family life. They are seldom based on assertions of new claims. They are usually aimed at local cadres, not any CCP top leaders such as Li Peng in 1989.

Wang Zhengxu, Kevin O'Brien and Li Lianjiang, and others have shown that Chinese citizens tend to trust their local leaders far less than they trust national statesmen.[4] Chinese petition high leaders, expecting beneficence; but they find reasons to deem their immediate bosses corrupt and parasitic. Scholars such as Shi Tianjian and Tang Wenfang have done modern-style political surveys, especially in Beijing, to seek the causes of public opinion [9, 10].

The current Chinese government under Hu Jintao takes stability (*wending*) as the supreme political good. Other Chinese traditions stress factors that are in sometime tension with stability, such as critical righteousness or justice. Values such as economic improvement may buttress stability even though they are not identical with it. Different legitimations come from alternative discourses—and in the long run, Chinese are likely to want everything that they guess to be good. Their local and central regimes will be pressed to provide much.

Recent research deals mainly with legitimacy that comes from political effectiveness, rather than from political equality. A prominent example is Lily Tsai's *Accountability without Democracy* [11, 12]. Seeing that Chinese village governments vary in their provision of roads, schools, and running water, Tsai asks why. Can some local leaders supply public goods because their places are rich—or

[1] Vivienne Shue [1], and especially "Legitimacy Crisis in China" [2]

[2] *China's New Nationalism: Pride, Politics, and Diplomacy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004).

[3] See http://www.china.com.cn/policy/txt/2007-04/17/content_8127682.htm (seen Jan. 16, 2009; in Chinese); I owe Cui Weiyuan, a student in the Woodrow Wilson School, great thanks for mentioning this site and for help with research. Comparable post-2004 data have not yet been found.

[4] For example, Wang Zhengxu [4]. Also see the flow of contributions from Kevin J. O'Brien and Li Lianjiang [5–7]; and Li Lianjiang [8]

perhaps because they have better connections with higher bureaucrats in the Party? These factors turn out to be documentably and statistically less important than the solidarity of local groups, often based in lineage temples. Such bonding imposes informal accountability on officials. Tsai is American, but her finding is very Chinese

Some local PRC leaders violate norms of large-scale collectivities, often claiming to organize smaller groups tightly. Theft of state or collective companies by officials is the main mode of PRC corruption. Lü Xiaobo calls this pattern "booty socialism" (paraphrasing Philippinist Paul Hutchcroft's term 'booty capitalism'). He and Ding Xueliang list the strategies that officials used to enrich themselves by stealing public property [13, 14]. Anybody who thinks that PRC-born scholars are unable to muckrake in China should realize that such researchers are well-equipped to gather the most critical kinds of materials.

Private coercive networks have been increasingly important in China. Many scholars such as Sun Yan, Gong Ting, Andrew Wedeman, Lü Xiaobo, and Julia Kwong have studied corruption in China [15–21]. Several, including Lo Shiu-hing and Melanie Manion, have also been studying Hong Kong and Macau, including links between underground activities on the Chinese mainland and in neighboring areas [22, 23]. Some networks engage part-time in criminal activities, such as trading illegal drugs, illegal gambling, and prostitution.

High taxation or fee collections by local officials from poor people has threatened local leaders' legitimacy. It has been a focus of scholarly study since fiscal help to localities dropped, as central government revenues plummeted in the 1980s. The taxes of inland local governments also sank in the 1990s. Tom Bernstein and Lü Xiaobo, as well as John James Kennedy and others, have studied the political effects of this dearth of public funds [24, 25]. Yang Dali has published a whale of a book showing how the Chinese government reformed after 1989 in fiscal and many other respects. Choi Eun-Kyong is preparing another book about the mid-1990s tax reform, showing the extent to which local leaders, official and unofficial alike, used national mandates—even mandates for centralization—to maximize their own resources.[5] Her work brings contemporary China into comparative research concerning the factors that bolster or undermine the effectiveness of tax collection systems. Rural governments became so short of money by the 2000s, agricultural taxes were abolished. Central decrees tried to stamp out excessive fees that local officials imposed on farmers. These have been seen as unfair in an era when so many poor people have stagnant incomes but know that a few coastal urban folk are becoming millionaires.

Legitimacy is in the eye of the beholder. All authors write about themselves to a greater extent than they usually admit. They are naturally interested in their own nations and situations. At the height of the Cold War, most English-language researches on China were influenced by writers' reactions to antagonism between Beijing and Western capitals. Patriotism infused scholarship, with analytic results that varied. Especially by the mid-1960s, Western researchers saw that Asians could also be patriots. Seeing some light from the East, many at that time accepted both the

[5] Choi Eun-Kyong [26]. Also, Yang Dali [27–29]

Cultural Revolution and the Vietnamese patriotic cause—but not just for reasons that lay in East Asia.[6]

More recently, although American political science has not become extremely narrow (as, for example German history was in the nineteenth century), many scholars tend to seek truth in surveys. These are the political scientist's closest feasible proxies for elections. Efforts to understand politics by counting noses can be very useful, but they can also be understood as the political scientist's closest proxy for elections when exploring an authoritarian country. Surveys have improved the empirical reach and international comparability of findings about Chinese politics. It is important to use them alongside other means of gathering insights, partly because survey results are sometimes dependent on short-term news.

China's field-to-factory shift of population, which is the largest migration in human history, may have stirred new kinds of citizenship aspirations among the varied migrants—but also new opportunities for labor exploitation, and new resentments among families that had previous household registrations in the places where the migrants arrived. Dorothy J. Solinger's book *Contesting Citizenship in Urban China: Peasant Migrants, the State, and the Logic of the Market*[7] has provoked much further work from scholars such as Zhang Li and Erik Mobrand.[8] Wang Fei-Ling and Michael Dutton have studied street-level policing and residential controls that the state attempts to continue in urban China, despite economic changes which erode such controls.[9]

Stanley Rosen shows that China's mechanisms of local elite reproduction, especially through the school system, have commercialized morals [34]. Durkheim would have defended this modern materialism; Confucius would have detested it. Current uses of solidary trust can be related to a humane "new Confucianism [35]."

Equality and technique were once both seen as modern. Although it is decreasingly clear that the egalitarian "Mr. Democracy" and the technocratic "Mr. Science" are compatible friends, as Chinese intellectuals early in the past century hoped they were, neither educated elitists nor popular politicians monopolize legitimacy in China today. Public fear of inept governors still trumps public fear of governors who lack majority consent. The CCP tries to meet both criteria, but they are not identical. Elitists tend to win, because they also claim to be patriots. "Scientism," trying to link modern knowledge to national glory, is an ideology that appeals to technocrats. It legitimates policies ranging from medicine to rocket science and (as Susan Greenhalgh shows) the one-child rule [36].

No single description of political culture will become exclusively useful as a tool for understanding Chinese decisions. The reasons are two: Culture, if defined carefully, is always incoherent rather than unified. Deductions from one strand of a culture will not necessarily lead to the same conclusion as those from another. So culture cannot be used in determinist causal arguments, but it limits the alternative

[6] This theme is expanded in Harry Harding [30]

[7] Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999.

[8] Zhang Li [31], and a forthcoming book by Erik Mobrand comparing the politics of urban immigrant communities in Seoul and Chengdu.

[9] See Wang Fei-Ling [32]; and a document anthology by Michael Dutton [33]

ways in which people conceive their options or preferences.[10] Any culture is a set of symbols and habits that has served its adherents for so long, during so many different needs, it limits the ranges of choice without surely setting a course of action. Hua Shiping has led a group of scholars who take the concept of political culture seriously.[11] Not all political scientists do so, even though they should.

Contemporary Chinese political thought provides the basis for two new publication series in English. Li Cheng at the Brookings Institution is managing a "Chinese Thinkers Series," and the first of these books has already appeared.[12] Daniel A. Bell is inviting prominent Chinese writers to give "Qinghua Lectures" that will be published from Princeton University Press. Earlier, Theodore Huters introduced a series of essays on late-1980s and 1990s politics by Wang Hui, the editor of *Dushu*, a general journal for PRC intellectuals [40]. Of course, not all of China's contemporary political sages agree with each other. But China has been prominent, compared with other countries, as a nation with a notion that ideas should be important for politics. Students of Chinese politics are less likely than students of other countries to omit thinking about philosophies and cultural preferences as factors in politics.

Political Economy

The main Chinese change in recent years has been much less philosophical. Economic take-off, along with inflation and regulatory effort, corruption and prosperity, has been the main recent syndrome that calls for an explanation linked to politics. This syndrome is dubbed "reform," although that word may prejudge whether the central government initiated it. The start of the phenomenon has been traced at least to the early 1970s, when rural leaders gained more autonomy to found or re-start factories. Legacies of the Great Leap and memories of the post-Leap famine were important in inspiring rural independence [41]. So was the closing, during the Cultural Revolution, of urban offices that had previously monitored rural leaders. An important corollary was the increase of triple cropping in traditionally rich parts of the countryside, combined with new seeds that required fertilizers and pumps, justifying rural industrialization that by the mid-1980s raised prices and destroyed most socialist planning.[13] Scholars such as Li Hongbin and Scott Rozelle credit innovative privatization for spurring growth. By contrast, others such as Cai Hongbin and Daniel Treisman doubt that government-led decentralization caused China's reform prosperity [43–45]. Margaret Pearson shows that the Chinese state, at

[10] Clifford Geertz [37], offers the violent, kin-related, materialist cockfight as "like Bali" — but then notes that an equally valid symbol of Bali's culture is the Brahmana ordination ceremony that has exactly opposite traits: quietistic, monastic, and spiritual.

[11] See Chinese Political Culture [38]

[12] Yu Keping [39]. The next two volumes are by Hu Angang on the Chinese economy, energy, and environment, and by He Weifang on law.

[13] Lynn White [42]. A comparative sequel is White, *Political Booms: Local Money and Power in Taiwan, East China, Thailand, and the Philippines* (Singapore: World Scientific, 2009). See also my introduction to *Beyond a Purge and a Holocaust: The Cultural Revolution Reconsidered*, Kam-yee Law, ed. (London: Macmillan, 2002), 1-24.

least since 1989, has begun to build modern regulatory socialism—even after the government was forced to bid farewell to overall planning [46].

Marc Blecher and Vivienne Shue produced a landmark study of government in Shulu County, Hebei, showing the responses of officials at this crucial middle level of Chinese administration to the onslaught of industrial and commercial growth [47]. Environmental problems have also created new kinds of politics in China, because of the severe water, air, and land pollution that accompanies higher incomes for most Chinese. These challenges are inseparable from China's energy challenges. Many political scientists, such as Elizabeth Economy and Erica Downs, have therefore become ecologists or energy specialists, and the books and articles which they and others have produced represent just the start of a deluge of studies that is likely to appear in future years.[14]

Inefficiency and non-monetized costs of growth have political effects. Scholars such as Edward Steinfeld have explored "old, big, difficult" rustbelt industries in China, as well as similar problems in banking [50, 51]. The varieties of management in different Chinese cities has been a theme of at least two major books, by Eric Thun and Adam Segal, who deal respectively with automobile and high-technology industries [52, 53]. The results of such studies are startling, partly because of the varying virtues they find for development in different Chinese cities. Shanghai does better than Beijing at making cars, but Beijing does better than Shanghai in high-tech entrepreneurship. Political scientists of China have spread into technical fields, to do such studies. More important, they have shown how different paradigms of local political administration bring relative success or failure in production. This institutional-structural approach to the understanding of political-economic results is also useful, as Zhang Yue shows, for the understanding of variations in urban preservation.[15]

Growth has produced *nouveaux riches*, and they are conscious of each other. Few China scholars would yet call them a middle class, however. Moderate-income or newly rich Chinese are diverse, as Kellee Tsai writes, but they seldom have an interest in challenging (rather than buying) officials [54]. Nonetheless, they often have a desire for freedom. Newly free flows of information and of migrants, as Kate Xiao Zhou argues, affect power relations no matter what officials wish [55].

Whence do the private or quasi-private entrepreneurs get their capital? The central state, which has a political need to keep urban workers employed in its own old industries and banks, supplies small businesses with scant credit. (The KMT's previous Leninist regime on Taiwan acted likewise—yet small businesses boomed there too.) These guerrilla capitalists finance each other, even when many of them have come from the ranks of state cadres.[16] Some are local tyrants who establish fiercely independent local polities within the PRC.[17]

[14] For example, see Elizabeth C. Economy [48], which is mostly domestic within China. The energy topic that also has international aspects, see a forthcoming book and a past one by Erica Strecker Downs [49]

[15] Zhang Yue, an assistant professor at the University of Illinois at Chicago, is currently revising her thesis that explains urban preservation or bulldozing in Beijing and two other cities (Chicago and Paris) in terms of functional, geographical, or multi-layer structures of political organization.

[16] See Kellee S. Tsai [56]; also, K. Tsai [57]; and K. Tsai [58]. For more, see also Jonathan Unger and Anita Chan [59]

[17] A striking example is described at length in Bruce Gilley [60]

Anita Chan, Lee Ching-Kwan, Ngai Pun, and others have used documents, interviews, and participant observations to assess the changing conditions of workers in China's export industries. Most scholars in this field have been women originally from Hong Kong, and they have been able to do fine-grained research on the changing conditions faced by female workers in the Pearl River Delta, especially in factories at Dongguan.[18] The 2009 global slowdown sharply affects the laborers they have studies, and updates are sure to be forthcoming soon.

The recent conditions of workers in large state-owned enterprises, especially in North China or in factories whose production is not mostly for export, have been less well surveyed recently. Comparative political scientists, such as Dietrich Rueschmeyer and his co-authors, have claimed that workers' participation is a crucial component of the creation of liberal democracy in most countries where that form of government has emerged. Because of great interest among Westerners who try to divine whether China will become democratic, actual proletarian politics will remain a crucial area of study, especially as the global recession of 2008-09 causes more Chinese workers to lose their jobs. Mary Gallagher shows that global trade and investment will make democratization by labor in China a very bumpy road. At least in the short and medium terms, globalization delays democratization [66, 67]. Elizabeth Perry's publications, concerning several eras of workers' politics in China, create strong future foundations for continuing research about this crucial topic.[19]

Political Leadership

Mao's personal dominance of Chinese high politics for a quarter century naturally encouraged comparisons to Stalin, Hitler, and other totalitarians. Although many scholars have shown how sharply the Chinese leadership has changed since then, research on Mao's time has continued in recent years, especially from the pens of Roderick MacFarquhar and Michael Schoenhals. They show how Mao Zedong, faithfully followed by Zhou Enlai, shaped brutally coercive policies aimed solely at Mao's personal victory over perceived rivals. Their research, whose publication in the PRC must be banned, sharply revises most intellectuals' previous images of Zhou. It also shows that Mao was totally egoistic, uninterested in any coherent social policy or community of comrades.[20] The exact intentions of leaders at that time are difficult to know, and even careful scholars like MacFarquhar or Teiwes and Sun have disagreed about politicians' motives.[21] The complete lack of beneficence

[18] Anita Chan, *China's Workers Under Assault: Exploitation and Abuse in a Globalizing Economy* (Armonk: Sharpe, 201) and more recent articles about global pressures for labor improvement, e.g., Chan [61]. Also, Lee Ching Kwan [62, 63]; Ngai Pun [64], and Ngai Pun [65]

[19] See Elizabeth J. Perry [68] or [69]; also the earlier Perry with Li Xun [70]. Comparativists of Western development tend, however, to argue that allowance of worker politics accelerates democratic possibilities; see Dietrich Rueschmeyer, Evelyne Huber Stephens, and John D. Stephens [71]. Debate about the extent of a "China difference" in this respect should beget much future research.

[20] Roderick MacFarquhar and Michael Schoenhals [72], is in effect the fourth volume of MacFarquhar's earlier series [73]. See also Schoenhals [74]

[21] Contrast the sharply different analyses of Lin Biao's motives in two works by major scholars of Chinese leadership: Roderick MacFarquhar [75], and Frederick Teiwes and Warren Sun [76]

among top leaders in the totalist period will nonetheless be a revelation to most Chinese, when they later will learn the relevant facts.

After Hua Guofeng's brief failure to maintain charismatic authority in Mao's style, Deng Xiaoping presided more lightly over a regime that various authors called "decayed authoritarianism" or "fragmented authoritarianism."[22] They showed that in economic and technical fields, mid-level bureaucrats could increasingly make decisions that benefitted themselves, and sometimes their constituencies, when at any administrative level they could agree with each other and exclude dissidents.

This bureaucratic politics model bears at least some relation to the previous "cellular" image of Chinese political structure that had long been important in economic debates and in anthropological explorations of nested markets.[23] Susan Shirk has more recently contributed a rational-actionist decision rule for describing how distinct local policies can co-exist in China: "If the agents agree, let it be [82]." When legitimated leaders at any decision table can reach a consensus (for example, by excluding potential objectors), they do not even need to report what they do to higher administrative levels.

Lack of policy consistency among places is a corollary of personalistic politics. Chinese often speak about the influence of close relationships (*guanxi*) within small groups, such as families or quasi-familial networks. Tight coteries based on trust are more important in any country than most officials or economists or philosophers admit.[24] Current authors such as Wang Hongying show that such networks can be functional equivalents to legal-rational rules [83]. "Rule of law," much idealized by statist scholars such as Pan Wei, depends partly on what the laws specifically say.[25] Yet as Randall Peerenboom shows, China's general trajectory of legal development has been similar in speed and type to that in other countries [85, 86].

The Chinese Communist Party's political management technology has modern pretensions.[26] Leninist principles of Party secrecy and appointment are supposed to affect state stability—but do they just hide or actually reduce instability?[27] Research on this question in the 1990s has been extensive. In various ways, scholars such as Yang Dali, Pierre Landry, and Guo Sujian suggest that Leninism still strengthens the state.[28] Landry's important new book shows that Party control of appointments is still the main glue that holds the world's largest authoritarian polity together. Pell-mell growth has forced geographical and functional "decentralization," which some

[22] Kenneth Lieberthal and Michel Oksenberg [77] was more fully documented than other descriptions of this structural shift. It naturally affects the most commonly used textbook on Chinese politics, which is by Lieberthal [78].

[23] Efforts to explain the Great Leap Forward spurred this discourse about kinds of decentralization, which affects more recent research also. Very important antecedents include G. William Skinner [79], Audrey Donnithorne [80], and Franz Schurmann [81]. These old works continued for decades to frame much good thinking about the structure of Chinese rural life, economy, and political organization.

[24] Exceptions include Confucius, who stressed the naturalness of dependence within any family. Some Westerners such as Edmund Burke also emphasize the importance of sympathy within "little platoons"; see *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (Garden City: Anchor, 1973 [1793]), p. 68.

[25] See Pan Wei [84]

[26] This is suggested by the prefix "neo-" in the title of an influential book by Andrew Walder [87]; but the Communist Party's efficiencies during reform came mainly from its adaptations to change that started outside the state. The CCP initiated few of those changes.

[27] See *Is China Unstable?*[88]

[28] Yang Dali [89]; Sujian Guo [90]; Pierre Landry [91].

of us prefer to call 'localization' because it did not start from the central state. Control of appointments is meaningless, as Landry shows, unless the appointing agents can effectively monitor and sanction their appointees. For a short time, 1980–83, the Party attempted a two-levels-down system, in which administrative layers separated appointers from appointees—and it did not work well. So since 1984, a one-level-down norm has prevailed. This natural experiment tested the efficiency of localization/decentralization, which in effect was scalar rather than national.

New means of electronic communication may threaten future PRC leaderships. Scholars and the Beijing cadres alike realize that if the Tiananmen Incident of 1989 had happened a decade or fifteen years later, the common availability of cell telephones and internet information could have changed the local political dynamic. In what ways do the web and other new means of dispersing information affect politics? Zheng Yongnian, Wu Guoguang, Françoise Mengin, and others show that both individuals and collectives (including the state) can use new means of communication for their own purposes.[29] Many Chinese citizens have a high tolerance for government censorship of new media. Web content can range from information to advertisement, pornography, or political dissent. Electronic presenters may be less transparent in public than classical free speakers. Some new media, if compared to constitutionally guaranteed free speech, are less subject to effective nonstate public monitoring. Top Party officials use fears of public "chaos," *luan*, to seek legitimacy for repressing web dissent. High PRC cadres (not because they honor the late Samuel Huntington's ideas on the difficulties of maintaining order in fast-changing societies) are uneasy when they cannot control twenty-first-century communications.

Central-local relations within China's huge political space have often been described in static terms. Words such as 'level,' 'higher,' even 'law' or 'center' may imply distributions of information and power that are often empirically inaccurate. The dichotomy between coercion or consent has pervaded most Western literature about this topic, but Linda Li and Zheng Yongnian both show evidence of interactive local and central bargaining institutions, or "*de facto* federalism." Coercion can be local. "Little traditions" of leadership can trump stately ones.[30]

The People's Liberation Army, whose political role in contemporary China is difficult to document, will nonetheless surely hold the country together. The PLA's domestic role, as Thomas Christensen argues, is more important to the Party than its external security function [97]. Some scholars such as James Mulvenon, Andrew Yang, Michael Swaine, and David Shambaugh have looked into this topic.[31] But PLA generals and admirals are faithful to the ancient strategist Sun Zi's advice for opacity. They like to maintain radio silence about all their activities, including their politics.

Some books still treat the top Beijing leadership as just a few individuals, such as Jiang Zemin. That approach is valid because of the tradition that the center of

[29] Zheng Yongnian [92]; Zheng Yongnian and Wu Guoguang [93]; and *Cyber China: Reshaping National Identities in the Age of Information* [94]

[30] Zheng Yongnian [95]; Linda Chelan Li [96]. The term "little tradition" comes from Chicago anthropologist Robert Redfield, who incidentally was Fei Xiaotong's teacher.

[31] The title of one book, which refers to others, shows the research problem: *A Poverty of Riches: New Challenges and Opportunities in PLA Research* [98]

government in the Central Country (a literal translation of China's name in Chinese) might notionally be a single person. Scholars have studied Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao in this fashion.[32] Joseph Fewsmith, as well as Chen Weixing and Yang Zhong (for an edited book written in English entirely by nine China-born scholars), along with Lin Gang and Hu Xiaobo have studied links between central politics and socioeconomic reforms.[33]

Factional organization has been an abiding mode of Chinese politics, even under totalist emperors such as Mao. Nonetheless, factionalism can modernize—as Dittmer and Wu, Pye, Nathan and K. Tsai, and Huang Jing have variously argued.[34] The acme of Chinese politics is changing. Groups of a few leaders at least, or tens of them or hundreds, are more powerful than they were in the days when there was more clearly a single top helmsman like Mao or Deng. *China's Leaders*, by Li Cheng, shows the great fruitfulness of doing detailed, extensive political sociology at the top of the PRC polity. Li shows that the high Chinese leadership is now a larger set than it was before, and it is technocratic. Its succession procedures have become more predictably normalized.[35]

This reviewer has not been especially charged to cover works about Chinese foreign policy, but that topic is incomprehensible without treating its domestic PRC generators. Hao Zhidong, a political sociologist writing from Macau, explores the ideas of thinkers on both sides of the Taiwan Strait about potential links between the island and the mainland [109]. Iain Johnston studies the foreign concerns of China's new middle-income urban groups, and especially the mechanisms by which Chinese diplomats become acculturated to international institutions [110, 111]. Jeffrey Legro, though not a China hand, advises American policymakers not just to contain or engage or hedge China, but instead to encourage Chinese ideas and institutions that will serve U.S. security and prosperity [112]. China's 'rise' will be safe for the rest of the world only if its internal politics makes it so. Susan Shirk similarly suggests that future PRC peacefulness or aggressiveness depends overwhelmingly on domestic politics [113].

Varied scholars from China, such as Wang Jisi or Yan Xuetong, have affected Westerners' thinking about Chinese foreign policy in more theoretical ways after 2000 than in previous decades. Guo Sujian, a political scientist from San Francisco State University, has led a group of scholars who have recently published a number of books on China's rising, new foreign policy, and the new concept of harmonious world [114–116]. Here or in any other sub-field of Chinese politics, there is no way in this summary to cite all of the important books and articles that have emerged on the domestic politics of external affairs. A book on *New Directions in the Study of China's Foreign Policy*, edited by Alastair Iain Johnston and Robert Ross, covers

[32] See, for example, Bruce Gilley [99], or other biographies of leaders — although Hu Jintao may not yet have inspired such a book.
[33] Joseph Fewsmith [100]; *Leadership in a Changing China* [101]; *China After Jiang* [102]
[34] See Lowell Dittmer and Wu Yu-Shan [103]; and two articles in by Lucien Pye [104], and by Andrew Nathan and Kellee Tsai [105]. Also Huang Jing [106]
[35] Li Cheng [107]. See also Li Cheng and Lynn White [108], and parallel articles by the same authors in that journal on earlier central committees.

both perennial and fresh topics:[36] How to prevent a war over Taiwan? How have China's relations with its neighbors Japan, Korea, and India changed? How do public opinion and identity affect relations with America in particular? How does global trade affect PRC foreign policy? The 2009 recession will surely call for more research on that last question. It will advance a trend that was evident by the middle of the current decade, linking Chinese foreign policy more closely to domestic Chinese groups.

Rising Chinese power has been described variously in military, economic, and cultural terms.[37] Steve Chan offers both empirical and theoretical reasons arguing that a transition of power from America to China is unlikely to result in war.[38] Others suggest a possible replay of the war Thucydides described, in which the Athenian democracy and Spartan autocracy fought each other, is at least possible. Wise theories should underlie policies to prevent such a sad result.[39]

Notables in many fields—government officials, court judges, newspaper editors, university professors, prosecutors, police, Buddhist abbots, Christian bishops, candidates for any legislative election—all have to be approved by one and the same Party department to lead any specific collectivity in China. This Leninist form of organization, which was once thought strong, does much to encourage corruption. It lowers the circumspect efficiency of leaders by reducing the types of information they must process before reaching decisions. This lapse of rationality is excused by overblown fears that China might become unstable. Any weakening of asymmetric hierarchy is deemed dangerous. That type of thinking has often affected Chinese policy toward smaller neighboring countries such as Vietnam, but it has also hindered negotiations with Tibetans whom Beijing leaders want to describe as Chinese dissidents; Brantly Womack has studied both of these situations.[40]

The sometime cult of national paranoia in Beijing seems odd, because of China's size. PRC elites have seen what 'super' power has brought for the United States in places like Somalia and Iraq. But they still tend to think in abstract hierarchal terms about global politics. If they want world hegemony, rather than security and prosperity, they may fare no better than America has fared. Perhaps they will not find more fruitful possibilities until they may decide to separate their own domestic powers. They could authorize different kinds of agencies to choose functional leaders who would perform the diverse tasks that a modern polity requires.

Political Equality

Many political scientists of Western countries confuse democracy with elections. They want to forget the 1933 votes for Hitler—or in Asia, the Marcos electoral

[36] This book (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006) is dedicated to Allen S. Whiting, dean of the China IR field in America.
[37] See David M. Lampton [117]
[38] *China, the U.S., and the Power-Transition Theory: A Critique* (London and New York: Routledge, 2008).
[39] Categories of such theories are described variously in Aaron L. Friedberg [118], and Thomas J. Christensen [119]
[40] For example, see Brantly Womack [120]

victories of 1965 or 1969, or the Thaksin landslides of 2001 or 2005. Populist dictators have often used electoral legitimation to end liberalism. Most Americanists, whose hope to find power in numbers has tended to dominate political science, are loath to stress this downside of democracy.

Village elections thus receive ambiguous evaluations. Few China political scientists (as distinct from literary scholars) are sure that PRC national elections would be safe for freedom. But they know that many co-professionals who study other regions tend to look at Chinese village elections mainly as practice runs for national voting. The Western profession's modal approach oddly neglects warnings about democracy that can be found from thinkers as diverse as Aristotle, Tocqueville when praising aristocrats, Madison the pragmatist, or Schattschneider in his populist but anti-theorist mood. Or Confucius. The field of Chinese politics is uniquely well-situated not just to expand future understandings of modern governance, by adapting them better to diverse traditions in Asia. It is also well-situated to remind Western political scientists of parts of their own heritage that they have neglected in their passion to count noses.

Wang Xu, Mayling Birney, or Cai Yongshun and others show the uses of managed elections for finding local leaders who can serve the overall interests of the Beijing autocracy.[41] Others such as Zhong Yang and Chen Jie show that most Chinese farmers do not care much for voting. Hu Zongze suggests that a majority in China really does not expect to control the national government [124, 125].

Li Cheng, as well as Bruce Gilley and Larry Diamond, have edited recent anthologies of debates among academics in the West who seek to divine the likeliest course of future change in China's regime type [126, 127]. Zhao Suisheng, as well as Suzanne Ogden, Gilley, and many others have written books seeking the conditions of China's democratization—while other scholars such as Edward Friedman or Barrett McCormick argue that democrats overestimate the chance of such a change.[42]

This does not mean, however, either that PRC state control is as strong as ever or that it is very lax. Lu Yiyi shows that Chinese government-organized "NGOs" are more autonomous than scholars have previously recognized. Also, NGOs that are founded by local groups tend to be more officially constrained than has earlier been reported [132].

Top Party leaders, who fear any potential links between urban working and thinking classes such as the intellectuals aborted in 1989, use the police to repress the organization of unified protest by different occupational groups together. So "cellular activism," as Lee Ching Kwan calls it, is the only available kind [133]. This situation may not last forever. It nonetheless affects scholars' understandings of the types of political expression that are current in China.

Grievances and interests that the Communist Party prevents from cohering in open politics may nonetheless press the Leninist institutions along parallel vectors. They thus acquire some collective force, as Zhou Xuegang argues [134]. A trio of

[41] Wang Xu [121]; Mayling Birney [122]; Cai Yongshun [123]

[42] See *China and Democracy: Reconsidering the Prospects for a Democratic China* [128]; Suzanne Ogden [129]; Bruce Gilley [130]; *What if China Doesn't Democratize? Implications for War and Peace* [131],

authors has similarly shown that religious groups, which are often illegal or unregistered but not actively repressed, have similar effects over time [135]. The government's dilemma is to husband its limited resources. Beijing tries to distinguish tangentially disaffected groups from criminal gangs, with which its officials are not supposed to collude.

These official efforts are not always successful. By no means have all China-born political scientists been apologists for PRC policies. Pei Minxin argues that China's economic take-off will be difficult to sustain because of PRC political autocracy. He sees a move to democracy as unlikely any time soon. China's political gradualism (which is often contrasted with shocks that ended the late great USSR) allows corruption to erode both efficiency and equality [136]. However, Guo Sujian, with some scholars, has published a couple of books on domestic problems and challenges facing Chinese government and Chinese recent pursuit of "harmonious society" as a move in a positive direction [137, 138].

Lucian Pye, in his presidential address to the American Political Science Association, foresaw a "crisis of authoritarianism" that "will not necessarily produce democracies, but rather a variety of part-free, part-authoritarian systems which do not conform to our classical typologies [139]." Most governments, including those that hold elections to major posts, actually take this mixed form. Scholars of China should thus in the future be able to make greater contributions to comparative politics.

Political Science

Half a century ago, in 1959, the American Council of Learned Societies and the Social Science Research Council, together with the Ford Foundation, organized a Joint Committee on Contemporary China. This initiative made English-language research about Chinese politics far more sophisticated than it had been in the 1950s. Scholarship has undergone several stages since then.[43] Many kinds of support institution became useful for maintaining a higher quality of academic research. The first was universities that provide most scholar-teachers with their day jobs. A second pillar of the field is journals. The *China Quarterly*, founded in 1960, has long been crucial and was later joined by the *Australian Journal of Chinese Affairs* (now the *China Journal*), and others. The *Journal of Contemporary China*, *Modern China*, and this *Journal of Chinese Political Science*, all founded by scholars born in China, have provided new venues for publishing research.

Another sort of infrastructure, especially among researchers who are not Chinese, is for learning language. Locations for that in China, such as the program that Johns Hopkins established with Nanjing University, have followed the pattern set long ago when Stanford (later joined by other universities) founded a language school for graduate students on the campus of Taiwan National University: Several American institutions now bond with those in China to house language curricula that are not just restricted to their own students.

[43] See Harry Harding [140]

Universities Service Centre, now at the Chinese University of Hong Kong, retains its importance as a library for research. Its recent conferences, featuring papers by graduate students especially, have been approximately half in English and half in Chinese. Conferences organized by the Association for Chinese Political Studies, held at both American and Chinese universities, have been similar and have also involved many senior scholars. China's opening, and the increase of political scientists with extensive experience in many parts of the country, has immensely widened the scope of research sites for seeking interviews, surveys, and documents. These possibilities for inductive work that have been created by joint arrangements have somewhat countervailed the deductive norms of the American political science profession.

Authors write about themselves and their nations' problems to a greater extent than they usually admit. At the height of the Cold War, most English-language researches on China were influenced by writers' varied reactions to antagonisms between Beijing and Western capitals, especially Washington. Patriotism or anti-chauvinism infused scholarship, with analytic results that varied. Especially by the mid-1960s, Western researchers saw that Asians could also be patriots. Thinking they saw light from the East, many at that time accepted both the Cultural Revolution and the Vietnamese patriotic cause—but not just for reasons that lay in East Asia.[44]

More recently, although American political science has not become as extremely narrow as was nationalistic German historiography in the nineteenth century, many U.S. students of politics tend to seek truth in surveys. Efforts to understand politics by counting people can indeed be useful, but they can also be understood as the political scientist's closest proxy for elections when exploring an authoritarian country. Surveys have improved the empirical reach and international comparability of findings about Chinese politics. It is important to use them alongside other means of gathering insights, however, partly because survey results are often dependent on short-term news.

PRC political history helped to create Western academic generations. Long ago, the big question about the People's Republic of China, as conceived in the West, concerned the causes of the centralist revolution that reached a peak in 1949. Did this movement win on social or national grounds, with a contingent or predictable degree of certainty, mainly because of educated leaders or rural peasants, mainly because of the flickering flame of revolutionary ideas or instead the unintended problems faced by many kinds of Chinese (e.g., during the Japanese occupation)? Then, as scholars tried to understand the campaigns of the 1950s, notably the Great Leap Forward, they asked how anybody could have imagined that communitarian norms and coercion could have been sufficient to strengthen a country.[45] Then by the late 1960s, the main puzzle was to figure out why so many Chinese became "un-Chinese," violent and impolite to each other, in the Cultural Revolution. Then why did reforms begin in the 1970s, and how did they spread to end effective socialist

[44] This theme is expanded in Harry Harding [141]

[45] Research on the Great Leap and the post-Leap famine continues. Jean-Luc Domenach's book on *The Origins of the Great Leap Forward: The Case of One Chinese Province* [Henan] finally appeared in English (Boulder: Westview, 1995), and Frank Dikötter is currently writing a book that will include very new material about the famine.

planning by the mid-1980s? After the subsequent inflation and the Tiananmen tragedy, the main question shifted again: How did the party restore itself in the 1990s? Scholars of Chinese politics have naturally focused on salient questions about China, not on efforts to find general laws of politics.

Researchers require sustenance, however; so they take professorships. American political science has now privileged statistical over non-statistical research in all fields, regardless of the results in knowledge about politics. So China hands increasingly generate, find, and crunch numbers, hoping the data may be meaningful. Especially before receiving tenure, they have sharp incentives to avoid any important political topics for which they cannot do this. In periods of Sino-American security danger or economic trade, public interest in China swells anyway, and mandates to use the limited kinds of stable-system statistics, which are the professional fad, then impinge less fully on China research. But at other times, many political scientists have tended to treat foreign "area studies" as mere "real estate studies."[46]

Universities' norms in the U.S. also tend to discourage professors from trying to produce integrating overviews of Chinese politics. Unlike countries on the Eurasian continent, such as France with its *Que sais-je?* series, academic writing in English has been mostly monographic—despite the desire of press editors for textbooks. A few overviews of PRC politics have appeared. Several authors, such as Kenneth Lieberthal, Marc Blecher, and James Wang, have written general interpretations of Chinese politics that can be used in courses.[47] More are mentioned at a website on my homepage, which can list only books in Western languages.[48] Zheng Yongnian, Lu Yiyi, and I are currently editing for Routledge a four-volume anthology of articles in English about recent Chinese politics.[49] The bibliography of this field expands so quickly, nobody fully keeps up with it.

Practical Conclusion

Fields change. There would be no need for “state of the field” articles, if they did not. This issue is not just analytic, however; it calls for work and action to improve yet further the quality of international thinking about Chinese politics and the infrastructure that supports the thinkers. Future vitality in this scholarship is likely to depend on two factors.

The first is the extent to which Chinese and Asian comparative research can help reverse the methodological narrowness that obscures much actual politics in the world from being studied circumspectly. In particular, political scientists should take

[46] This phrase was heard from an Americanist who will remain anonymous.

[47] Kenneth Lieberthal [142]; Marc J. Blecher [143]; James C.F. Wang [144]. Suzanne Ogden may be updating *China's Unresolved Issues: Politics, Development, and Culture* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1995). Robert E. Gamer has organized a group of writers to produce different editions of *Understanding Contemporary China* (Boulder: Rienner, third edition in 2008).

[48] See www.princeton.edu/~lynn/chinabib.pdf — a categorized list of Western language books on contemporary China. It is uncopyrighted 'freeware.' Some teachers have included links to it in electronic syllabi. It is 100 pages of book titles, one to a line, but still does not include articles or Chinese language sources.

[49] *The Politics of Modern China* (London: Routledge, 2009).

on board the insight of Confucius (or Aristotle) that humans are naturally social and learn preferences in collectivities. Methodological collectivism is as necessary for social understanding as is the field's much-vaunted approach, which is called methodological individualism. Any explanation that cannot account for the origins of substantive preferences, rather than just assuming them in minimalist form, is inadequate. Individuals are always the actors, but only after they have been socialized so that their actions have meaning for them. Methodological individualism is a child of U.S. libertarianism, although it cannot offer anything like a complete political picture of any country. Better methods from future Chinese studies can improve understandings of actual American politics.

A second factor is the extent to which ethnic Chinese scholars will remain important contributors to our field. Richard Baum has noted that the number of PRC citizens entering U.S. universities to study politics at the doctoral level has declined in the 2000s [145]. Europe, Japan, and Australia increasingly admit applicants from China who had planned to go for Ph.D. training to America instead. This decline is caused in part by the intellectual cramping of the political science profession. Admission committees, if they include apolitical game theorists and statisticians, or Americanists who are too parochial to notice they also are in an area study, downplay the linguistic and cultural advantages that Chinese applicants naturally bring to research on this planet's largest polity. The recession of 2009, particularly as it affects state universities, may worsen this problem.

There is a way to countervail it, however: Scholars of Chinese politics at major universities can become proactive in responding to e-mails from China politics applicants (of any ethnicity) and can lobby their admission committee colleagues in other fields to admit students who have strong abilities. Some of the application essays may hint at the intellectual bravery that the less exclusively American political science of the future will require.

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Notes

White is a professor in the Woodrow Wilson School, Politics Department, and East Asian Studies Program at Princeton. He must apologize to many fine researchers whose writings have been neglected in this article for lack of space. Some items are included because they appear in recent university syllabi of Chinese politics courses. A theme of this summary emerges from this author's appreciation of tremendous contributions that PRC-born political scientists have recently made to English-language scholarship.

The sole thing he does not like about these authors is that many - not all - of them tend to write their own names in the wrong order. Western readers *can* learn that Chinese (and Japanese and Korean and Vietnamese) names begin with the family surname, but Chinese writers in the West have not tried hard enough to teach that fact to English readers. Such readers need not be patronized for inability to learn. So East Asian names are written here in proper Chinese order (Mao Zedong, not Zedong Mao). Monosyllabic romanized personal names present a particular problem that is otherwise insoluble. This is the only way to make clear to English readers that ZHANG Li, LI Cheng, ZHANG Yue, ZHONG Yang, SUN Yan, PAN Wei, and LI Xun have the surnames that they do. These and other scholars happen to own personal names that, in romanized form, could also be perfectly valid Chinese family names. (The last two on this list prefer to write their English names in the correct Chinese order anyway. All seven appear in the footnotes of this overview solely on academic grounds.) Out of respect to ancestors, all East Asians deserve to have their names written properly no less than does Hu Jintao—whom none of them ever calls Jintao Hu.

Lynn T. White III is a specialist in Asian development with an emphasis on China. His particular interests include post revolutionary reforms, politics in non-state institutions, urban politics (esp. in Hong Kong and Shanghai), the modernization of economic institutions, Chinese media, ecological approaches to politics, concepts of corruption, political anthropology, the effects of economic booms on local politics in East and South East Asia, the Taiwan Strait issue, and the use of Chinese materials to refine theories of comparative politics. He is the author of *Careers in Shanghai: The Social Guidance of Personal Energies in a Developing Chinese City, 1949–1966*; *Shanghai Shanghaied? Uneven Taxes in Reform China*; *Policies of Chaos: The Organizational Causes of Violence in China's Cultural Revolution*; *Unstately Power* (two vols.); and co-editor of *Political System and Change* and *Social Policy Reform in Shanghai and Hong Kong*. Lynn is also the author of many articles and essays on Chinese politics. For more information, please see http://www.wws.princeton.edu/~lynn/