

Introduction: The State of the China Studies Field

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Whence do we come? What are we? Whither are we going?

—Paul Gauguin¹

Describing the state of the field of any academic pursuit is a daunting undertaking. It involves the exploration of a series of interrelated questions regarding a field's origins, present state, and likely or preferred future path of development. Such inquiries raise challenging empirical, conceptual, methodological, normative, and even philosophical issues. The contemporary China studies field, moreover, has had a development trajectory more complex than many other fields of intellectual inquiry. This enter-

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¹Title of his 1987 oil on canvas, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

prise of "China-watching," I would argue, has been buffeted by three major changes since the field was established in the 1960s.

First, the policies of reform and opening (改革與開放, *gaige yu kai-fang*) have led to radical and pervasive changes within China, changes that have resulted in a major jump in both data output within China and access to this data by scholars from outside the PRC. The field has thus since moved from the "coal-mining approach" of "digging a deep seam on a narrow front" that was necessary during the 1960s and 1970s,² along what Ross Terrill characterizes in this volume as the "new paths to data" available to us, to what Lowell Dittmer and William Hurst term "data adequacy": a situation where much available data go unanalyzed.

Secondly, China's startling growth in economic, military, and thus geopolitical power has attracted the attention of both a variety of scholars outside the traditional China studies community and a plethora of individuals outside the realm of academia, resulting in a dramatic increase in the number and types of individuals analyzing China. Richard Louis Edmonds and many of the other editors of China journals note, for instance, that they have specifically tried to make their journals accessible to the wide array of journalists, governments, policy analysts, businessmen, and even members of the general public who are now interested in China.

The third and final change is the dramatic diversification, specialization, and sophistication of methods of social scientific inquiry that have occurred over the past few decades—a development which has added yet another substantial layer of complexity to the field.

How then to describe a field that is marked by a ballooning membership of individuals from an increasing variety of backgrounds, who are utilizing a growing array of specialized methodologies to analyze a substantially expanded pool of data? Given that a decade has passed since any major integrated attempt was made to answer these types of questions,³

²David Wilson's characterization, as noted in Andrew Marble's Research Note in this issue.

³To the best of my knowledge the only edited volume providing a comprehensive overview of the development of the study of contemporary China is David Shambaugh, ed., *American Studies of Contemporary China* (Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press/Armonk,

Issues & Studies decided to produce this special double issue to mark the 50th anniversary—on April 1, 2003—of our host institution, the Institute of International Relations (IIR, 國際關係研究中心) at National Chengchi University (NCCU, 國立政治大學), a premier center for China studies in Taiwan.

To that end we invited twenty-four experts from different countries, professions, age cohorts, research foci, and methodological approaches to discuss various aspects of the state of the China studies field, with emphasis on developments since the early 1990s. Their views are expressed herein via a variety of formats—including review articles, methodological notes, research guides/notes, commentary, book reviews, and appendix. This diversity is aimed at providing the reader with a multidimensional view of the state of the China studies field today.

Four of the articles are traditional reviews of major disciplinary sub-fields of China studies, offering comprehensive overviews of their respective literatures and noting the central topics, core contentions, and research progress therein.

Lowell Dittmer and **William Hurst**—as professor and graduate student—mark the passage of time in the study of Chinese politics, focusing on the 1980s and especially the 1990s. One important feature they identify is the shift away from the analysis of the central Party-state (especially its elites and factions) to a focus on both local and regional politics as well as on the increasing institutionalization of center-provincial relations. They note that the studies of ideology and political culture have become marginalized, while explorations of the state's relationships to social groups have blossomed (particularly useful in this regard is the essay's 2×2 chart that groups these societal actors according to changes in both their economic status and relationship to the state). Dittmer and Hurst point out,

N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 1993), although Hong Kong's Universities Service Centre put out a smaller-scale review entitled *The Development of Contemporary China Studies* in 1994. There have, however, been many geographical- or issue-centered reviews of the field or its various disciplinary sub-fields, the majority of which have been published as individual articles. The "Bibliography of Essays on The State of the China Studies Field" Appendix to this special issue is an initial effort at cataloguing all such state of the field essays.

however, that an important gap in this sub-field is the lack of research on the interaction *between* these different social groups.

Shelley Rigger's essay reviews the books and articles that were important for "propelling forward" the English-language study of Taiwan's politics over the past twenty years. She finds that due to Taiwan's political situation, only anthropological explorations of Taiwan were able to flourish in the early years. Rigger traces the explosion of research on Taiwan's domestic politics that has occurred since 1986—when Thomas B. Gold's classic, *State and Society in the Taiwan Miracle*, offered the first detailed account of Taiwan's political and economic development. She reviews the main issue areas of political economy, social change, critical Taiwan studies, ethnicity and national identity, democratization and democratic consolidation, constitutional issues, institutional development, election studies, political parties and coalitions, and policymaking. She finds that, although being on the margins of the China studies field, studies of Taiwan politics and political economy integrate well with the disciplines given that Taiwan is a good case study of both democratization and economic development. She also finds that Western scholars tend to undertake qualitative studies of Taiwan politics while Taiwan scholars often opt for quantitative approaches, and calls for increased effort to integrate the two.

Yanjie Bian provides a review of the sociological study of China. He begins by tracing the rebirth in the early 1980s of Chinese sociology in the PRC, noting the important contributions made by local scholars (such as Fei Xiaotong), Western scholars (e.g., Andrew Walder and Deborah Davis), and Chinese sociologists from outside the mainland (such as Nan Lin and C. K. Yang). Bian then reviews the research trends in both the Chinese- and English-language realms from the mid-1980s forward. He finds that the development of sociology in China has been under the influence of the Party/state, while at the same time also being shaped by a desire to both be rooted in Chinese society and recognized and accepted by the world community; he also shows how Western studies of Chinese sociology have moved into the mainstream of the discipline. Bian closes by calling for increased colleague-to-colleague communication between Western and Chinese sociologists.

Jack Williams presents a comprehensive review of the scope and evolution of the discipline of China geography. He introduces this sub-field, notes many of the centers for geographic research on China, and highlights the contributions that a select number of geographers have made to this sub-field over the past 70-80 years. He identifies the current research foci as being on urban geography as well as on various aspects of economic geography, environmental studies, and cultural geography. One trend noted by Williams (and by many other contributors to this volume as well) is the increasing role that ethnic Chinese (especially those living and working in the PRC, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and other non-Western societies) have been playing in the field's accumulation of knowledge. To raise the visibility of geography in the China studies field, Williams encourages China geographers to publish articles of broader interest and value to scholars in others disciplines.

Perhaps the two biggest issues in the study of contemporary China are economic reform as well as the chances for political change in the PRC. Two essays in this volume explore these important sub-field themes.

The article by **Yu-Shan Wu** seeks to answer one single question: What explains the different pathways and results of economic reform in the Chinese and Russian cases? This article provides a conceptual review of four bodies of literature: the general literature on the reform of communist economies, as well as the literatures on the individual cases of China, Russia, and Eastern Europe. Testing both four institutional and four non-institutional variables, he makes the case for the primacy of the institutional variables of property rights restructuring and role of the state. Planned for this special issue, moreover, was a dialogue between Yu-Shan Wu and Wing Thye Woo over the ideas and arguments put forth in Wu's essay; unfortunately, this "Wu-Woo" debate was not complete at the time this special issue went to press, and therefore will instead be included in our vol. 39, no. 2 (June 2003) issue.

Barrett McCormick's piece analyzes the main controversies in the literature on Chinese media commercialization: debates over the implications of commercialization and the extent of diversification, debates about the implications of new media, and debates about the impact of globaliza-

tion. He reaches "ambiguous" conclusions, including that the commercialization of the media in the PRC (1) has not necessarily led to a fundamental weakening of the Party/state's ability to manage either the news media or the flow of information to the Chinese public, but (2) has resulted in the general population having made gains as consumers, which could—but will not necessarily—lead to strengthening their status as citizens concerned with the broader public welfare. From a civil society standpoint, these findings are not ringing endorsements of the likelihood for a bottom-up momentum towards democratization appearing in the PRC.

This issue also contains a Methodological Note and a Research Note, both of which deal with the important issue of data management. **Nicholas Lardy** notes that the study of economic development in the PRC has been plagued, in part, by problems of missing data, incorrect reporting, sampling error, and inconsistency of "mirror" statistics. His essay is an exposition on how to overcome problems with measuring the PRC's gross domestic product (GDP) by utilizing alternative and indirect methods of data measurement to uncover the true level of China's economic development. **Wenfang Tang's** introduction to conducting survey research in China traces the rise of survey methods in China: Western scholars introduced the methods in the early 1980s and the Chinese state instituted surveys in the late 1980s in order to carry out urban reform policymaking. Tang overviews the problems related to survey research in China, and also provides the China studies field with creative solutions to maximizing the quality and quantity of data that can be gained from this form of data gathering.

A special focus of this issue is on the role that China journals play in the China studies field. **Andrew Marble's** Research Note on the mechanics of journal editing recognizes the key role that *The China Quarterly* has played in establishing, nurturing, and helping shape the contemporary China studies field. He explains how *The China Quarterly* has used both journal format and substance to help build a communal identity among its readers. He concludes, however, that the China studies field has outgrown any one journal, being now composed of various, sometimes overlapping, research communities—each of which is centered around a particular methodological approach to studying the PRC.

Marble's essay is complemented by a section of **Commentary From the Editors**. This collection of essays from editors of six journals in the China field helps show the general changes that have occurred over the past four decades in the field's membership composition, research interests, and geographical centers of research. These short essays also provide both discussion of the role that journals play in the field's accumulation of knowledge as well as thoughts on what constitutes quality (i.e., publishable) research in the China studies field.

The **Book Review Roundtable**—on David Lampton's edited volume, *The Making of Chinese Foreign and Security Policy in the Era of Reform*—is a heuristic device used to stimulate discussion over the relationship of the China studies field to the social science disciplines. The roundtable presents a lively debate between a mix of scholars—generalists, comparativists, traditional Sinologists, and policy analysts—who comprise a mix of generations, research interests, methodologies, and normative and substantive concerns. The twelve chapters of China research that appear in Lampton's edited volume provide the panelists with interesting topics for debate—including such issues as the general goals and appropriate methodology of scholarly research, the degree and necessity of integration between the China studies field and the general social sciences, and the value of China studies for answering policy-relevant questions.

Finally, this special issue closes with a **Bibliography** of Essays on the State of the China Studies Field. *Issues & Studies* hopes that this bibliography can play a role in strengthening the communal history of the field by providing what is perhaps the most comprehensive listing to date of general surveys of the field. Note should be made that the sub-field surveys are more difficult to identify and thus the disciplinary-based subsections should be considered as preliminary.

What emerges from these pages is confirmation that the field is indeed marked by a dizzying array of participants who pursue a wide variety of substantive concerns and employ a diverse range of methodologies across differing levels of analyses. In contrast, previous reviews of the field were able to identify generational approaches to China studies—i.e., the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s—according to characteristic research motiva-

tions, foci, and methodology.⁴

Note that the first generation of China scholarship was comprised of a relatively small number of scholars who earned their reputation by undertaking broad research on ambitious topics, resulting in scholarship that was mostly descriptive in nature. This work was criticized for its formalism, overgeneralization of domestic politics, underconceptualization, and insistence on viewing China as a unique case.

The second generation of scholars, taking advantage of the vast increase in information unleashed by the Cultural Revolution, moved from general to specific topics, became much more focused on informal rather than formal institutions and mechanisms, and began to treat China increasingly as a testing ground for more general theories, thereby marking the first step towards the rise of social science methodology.

The third generation of scholarship has been a much larger and more diverse group than the first two, and is much more firmly grounded in social science methodology. This generation has sought to actively use the tools of social science to understand the unprecedented political and economic changes that have occurred in post-Mao China at all three levels of theorizing: general, mid-level, and specific.

This last characterization is helpful in that it provides an understanding of how more recent research compares to that conducted in earlier periods, but is perhaps not sufficiently descriptive or conceptual enough to help us take stock of the current state of China research—a necessary exercise if we are to move the field forward in a more constructive manner. Dittmer and Hurst take note of the fact that the study of Chinese politics has "slipped into a limbo among substantive concerns, among levels of analysis, and among methodological approaches." Their warnings in regard to the sub-field of politics are also extendable to the China studies field in general: "The proliferation of data and multiplication of analytical

⁴Harry Harding, "The Evolution of American Scholarship on Contemporary China," as found in Shambaugh, *American Studies of Contemporary China*, 14-40, building on his earlier work: Harry Harding, "The Study of Chinese Politics: Toward a Third Generation of Scholarship," *World Politics* 36, no. 2 (January 1984): 284-306.

approaches, moreover, has raised the issue of how to coordinate different approaches to the same problem."

Thus, what the field could most benefit from now, perhaps, would be an attempt to bring a much higher degree of conceptual order to this multi-dimensional variety that marks the China studies field today. Indeed, the contributors to this volume have done an excellent job in providing grist for such a mill. Unfortunately, the time constraint of having to print this volume before IIR's 50th Anniversary celebrations on April 1st of this year precluded a more in-depth review and conceptualization of what the scholarly research in this volume helps tell us about the overall state of the China studies field today. Hopefully there will be an opportunity to present such analysis in the near future.

The editorial staff of *Issues & Studies* would like to express sincere thanks to all participants in this special issue for their diligence as well as commitment to—and patience with—the involved processes of writing, revising, and publishing. Second, we note our warm appreciation of all reviewers who critiqued essays considered for this special issue; although they must unfortunately remain anonymous, the quality of the scholarship in this volume owes much to the thoughtful and constructive comments of these unknown soldiers. We also offer many thanks to David Michael Lampton for subjecting his edited volume, in the interest of stimulating larger discussion on the development of the field, to intellectual cross-examination by our Book Review Roundtable—few books could stand up so well to scrutiny from such a diverse panel. And to those who volunteered time to help improve the Bibliography of State of the China Studies Field essays, our thanks are noted in the Appendix.

To this I, as guest-editor of this special issue, would like to voice my heartfelt appreciation of: Philip Hsu as well as Chien-wen Kou, Shu Keng, Tse-kang Leng, Yi-feng Tao, Chih-jou Chen, Ming-chi Chen, and Chien-Yi Lu for insights on and support of many aspects of this volume; Chen-yuan Tung for his help with the Book Review Roundtable; and Steve Chan for discussion on what a proper review article should cover.

Finally, this special issue would not have been possible without the support of two key in-house individuals. Szu-yin Ho, Publisher and Editor

of *Issues & Studies* and Director of IIR, has provided the environment of intellectual freedom that allowed the idea of this book both to develop and to be turned into action. And without the many years of experience with the nuts and bolts of the editing process accumulated by our journal's Managing Editor, Shen-chun Chang, the blueprint for this special issue would never have been turned into intellectual architecture; this volume is as much a result of his dedication, enthusiasm, and attention to detail.