

A “CHINA IN THE WORLD” PARADIGM FOR SCHOLARSHIP

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Abstract

In this introduction to the special issue, we use the expression “China in the world” paradigm to define scholarship that purposefully migrates across the traditional borders of comparative politics and international relations in the study of China. We argue that such a paradigm represents a view that many issues of Chinese domestic politics are now issues of international politics; as a result, domestic politics in a globalized contemporary China often cannot be sufficiently understood without considering international consequences. More than this, the paradigm is about scholarly attentiveness to the fact that the politics in China that we study also shapes how the rest of the world views China. We describe the paradigm and its antecedents in the scholarly literature. We then illustrate, with reference to three momentous events that captured public attention around the world in 2020, the paradigm’s usefulness as a perspective to scholars reaching out to engage intellectually on contemporary affairs in an environment in which global responses to China require nuanced knowledge as all parties seek to avoid dangerous pitfalls. We conclude by summarizing the five articles included in the special issue and the broader implications of the “China in the world” paradigm.

Keywords: China in the world; Second image reversed; Territorial disputes; Hong Kong; Covid-19

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Introduction

As China has become wealthier, more powerful, and confident as a global player, it has attracted more scrutiny and attention from the rest of the world. In December 2019, 55 political scientists, across generations and a broad spectrum of substantive expertise in China politics, assembled at Duke University to forge a connection between scholars whose research focuses on domestic Chinese politics and those who take China's global role as their point of departure.⁴ A key impetus was to understand better how politics within China shape how the rest of the world views China in a politically charged atmosphere where the need for rigorous, expert, and engaged scholarship seems more critical than ever. The five articles in this special issue of *Studies in Comparative International Development* are extensions of papers discussed at that conference. They exemplify a "China in the world" paradigm for scholarship, which took shape during the dialogue across subfields that characterized the conference. In this introductory essay, we describe the paradigm and its antecedents in the scholarly literature. We also illustrate, with reference to three momentous events that captured public attention around the world in 2020, its usefulness as a perspective to scholars reaching out to engage intellectually on contemporary affairs in an environment of potentially dangerous responses to China's global profile.

The study of Chinese domestic politics has mostly observed the border delineated in political science between comparative politics and international relations. Certainly, even decades ago, after China embarked on its program of reform and opening to the rest of the world, political scientists understood that domestic interests also drove policies with

⁴ <https://sites.duke.edu/gettingchina/>.

international implications.⁵ Scale matters, however. China has fairly rapidly become an immensely more powerful country than when it emerged from the Maoist era. As the world's second largest economy and top trader, it has acquired major global economic clout. Its spectacular economic success has allowed it to expand its political influence in other countries, through the One Belt One Road projects, for example. The point of departure for a "China in the world" paradigm is a view that many issues of Chinese domestic politics are now, more than ever, also truly issues of international politics; as a result, domestic politics in a globalized contemporary China often cannot be sufficiently understood without considering international consequences. More than this, however, the paradigm is about scholarly attentiveness to the fact that the politics in China that we study also shapes how the rest of the world views China.

We emphasize perceptions, rather than behaviors, while recognizing that a focus on behaviors is more common in the international relations subfield, as described below. Our choice reflects the fact that the study of Chinese domestic politics was the point of departure for developing the paradigm. Presumably, perceptions have implications for behaviors in global affairs—and a focus on views may seem artificially limiting. Instead, we argue simply that it is relatively less demanding than what seems an explicit foray into the study of international affairs. The paradigm imposes on scholars of Chinese politics a new burden: to "step outside" the confines of a study contained to Chinese domestic affairs so as to consider in broader global perspective the knowledge they have produced. The apparent next step—to consider how global views of their knowledge leads to behaviors of other states or other international players—seems to us to require training in a different sort of expertise.

⁵ Shirk's (1994) study is an excellent example of this.

Perspective from the International Relations Subfield

Working within the subfield of international relations, scholars of China's foreign policy have normally sought to bridge the domestic and the international. One of the most basic frameworks for studying international relations is "levels of analysis," which identifies different locations where scholars can search for causes of explanations (Waltz 1959; Singer 1961). The first or individual level of analysis (i.e., "first image") refers to the role of individuals in foreign policymaking, drawing especially on cognitive or perceptual approaches. The second or domestic level of analysis (i.e., "second image") highlights how factors within a state or group of states—such as political institutions, bureaucracies, or national identity—affect behavior. The third level of analysis is the international level, which refers to how the structure and dynamics of the international system as a whole shapes state behavior. This level of analysis often treats the state as a unitary actor or black box, especially in realist (e.g., Waltz 1979) and rationalist (e.g., Fearon 1995) approaches to international relations.

Although a good deal of international relations scholarship focuses on the international level of analysis, scholarship on China's foreign policy is often at least partly rooted in the second level of analysis—domestic politics—to explain China's international behavior. At the most general level of abstraction, for example, if economic performance and nationalism are pillars of Chinese Communist Party (CCP) legitimacy within China, especially after the end of the Cold War, these goals shape China's foreign policy preferences. For example, it is almost a truism that for much of this time, China has sought a peaceful or benign external security environment (defined by the absence of war) in order to facilitate economic growth, not just to improve China's power position in the international system, as traditional international

relations theory might expect, but also to underpin the CCP's legitimacy (Swaine 1995; Goldstein 2005).

At the same time, scholars of China's foreign policies have often turned to domestic political factors to help explain China's behavior in the world in specific domains. A short and incomplete list of external behaviors that scholars have invoked domestic politics to explain at least partly includes strategic culture (Johnston 1995), grand strategy (Christensen 1996; Shirk 2007), territorial disputes (Fravel 2008), exchange rate policy (Shi and Steinberg 2012), nationalism and crisis bargaining (Weiss 2014), military strategy (Fravel 2019), and the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) (Ye 2020).

In sum, scholars of Chinese foreign policy routinely incorporate the individual or domestic level into their analyses. It is as likely that any given Chinese foreign policy might be explained as stemming from China's external environment as from within China or from some combination of factors inside and outside. The levels of analysis are porous, not rigid.

Antecedents in Comparative Politics

If scholarship on Chinese foreign policy characteristically considers the dimension of Chinese domestic politics, the study of Chinese domestic politics situates China in the world rather less frequently. In 1978, the same year that Beijing pivoted decisively toward the "reform and opening" that have since made it a major global player, a seminal article on the "second image reversed" suggested a way for scholars to analyze the effect of international affairs on domestic politics (Gourevitch 1978). Gourevitch calls for a comparative political literature that situates the state within forces (e.g., war and trade) in the international environment so as to better explain major features of the political system (e.g., regime type and coalition patterns). In the

past quarter-century, some studies of Chinese political economy have done this, leveraging international political economy to explain features of domestic structural change.⁶ By “China in the world,” we mean something different and more than this.

We mean something more in that we think practically every issue in contemporary Chinese politics has a non-trivial global dimension that, when taken into explicit account in our scholarship, contributes to a better understanding of domestic politics. Minimally, then, “China in the world” implies an attentiveness to the global dimension in the study of Chinese domestic politics. We mean something different in that we think what happens inside China and how scholars of Chinese domestic politics understand it non-trivially affects how the world views China. In this, a “China in the world” perspective on the state of the world and China in it is at least politically aware of the context of scholarship.

We choose as examples of antecedents in the study of Chinese domestic politics three book-length studies, published in 2005, 2009, and 2015. In situating China in the world, each of these scholarly works illuminates what remain enormously important questions for the world outside China, including policymakers and the public: namely, the emergence (or not) in China of political liberalization and the rule of law.

In *Contagious Capitalism: Globalization and the Politics of Labor in China*, Gallagher (2005) argues that the reliance on foreign direct investment (FDI) rather than the domestic private sector for China’s development has delayed China’s political liberalization. FDI played this role through three mechanisms. First, it placed competitive pressure on regions and firms to pay attention to labor practices and regulations. In order to attract ever greater amounts of FDI,

⁶ Good book-length examples include Pearson (1991), Shirk (1994), Zweig (2002), Huang (2003), Hsueh (2011), and Chen (2018).

regions granted enterprises increasing managerial control and autonomy over labor practices. Domestic firms, interested in attracting infusions of foreign capital, also became increasingly willing to grant foreign investors more managerial control and more flexible labor policies. State-owned enterprises (SOEs), as they struggled to compete with foreign-invested enterprises, also lobbied for a level playing field and for the extension of more flexible labor policies into the state sector. These competitive pressures, combined with learning and demonstration effects, hastened the adoption of capitalist labor practices in state firms, which mitigated the demand of workers for political changes. Second, the foreign sector served as a laboratory for difficult and politically sensitive reforms, in particular, changes in the traditional social contract between the state and urban workers. This laboratory effect was critical in allowing the competitive pressures noted above to manifest themselves gradually. Third, the existence of a foreign-invested sector led to an ideological reformulation that reduced the importance of public ownership in China, while increasing the importance of national ownership. China's leaders justified "letting go" of state ownership in order to build up national industry that is globally competitive. In sum, contrary to a conventional wisdom that globalization brings political liberalization, Gallagher's analysis demonstrates that, in China, economic openness strengthened an authoritarian regime

In *Piracy and the State: The Politics of Intellectual Property Rights in China*, Dimitrov (2009) also presents a counter-intuitive argument about the adverse impact of the foreign presence, more specifically, of foreign pressure on Chinese enforcement of intellectual property rights (IPR) laws. Across countries, Dimitrov finds, the supply of consistent, transparent, and procedurally fair enforcement—what he calls "rationalized enforcement"—is associated with the enforcers: civil courts are most likely to supply this sort of high-quality enforcement,

criminal courts somewhat less likely, and administrative agencies least likely. In China, administrative agencies dominate as enforcers of IPR laws, particularly laws on copyright and trademarks.

Dimitrov argues it is possible for rationalized enforcement by administrative agencies to emerge, but only in the absence of pressure to enforce. Enforcement without pressure allows agencies to develop the exclusive professional competence conducive to the emergence of rationalized enforcement. Pressure obstructs this. In China, foreign pressure produces campaign-style enforcement that mobilizes multiple agencies, which blurs jurisdictional specialization. Foreign pressure and the primacy of administrative enforcement contributed to the unpredictable enforcement of copyright and trademarks in China. Lack of foreign pressure and a less important role of administrative enforcement, compared to court enforcement, account for the emergence of rationalized enforcement of patents.

While FDI may have delayed China's democratization and foreign pressure delayed legal protection for copyright and trademarks, Wang (2015) shows that an inflow of foreign investors led to positive changes in China's legal institutions more broadly. In *Tying the Autocrat's Hands: The Rise of the Rule of Law in China*, Wang argues that when U.S. and European investors arrive in China, they often face competition with Chinese domestic companies, which have strong political connections with the Chinese government. Unable to build the same type of connections due to constraints imposed by anti-bribery laws at home, these investors lobby the Chinese government to provide a level playing field. Leveraging their strong bargaining power, thanks to their ability to threaten "exit," foreign investors push for legal reforms. The Chinese government, in turn, is willing to "tie its hands" by strengthening the legal institutions so as to make a credible commitment to retain foreign investment. Wang

shows that the quality of courts is significantly higher in localities heavily invested by the U.S and European investors and much lower in localities dominated by Chinese SOEs, Chinese private companies, and investors from the “China circle” (i.e., Hong Kong, Macau, and Taiwan). This does not mean that China is marching toward a full-blown rule-of-law regime. As Wang warns, while the CCP promotes judicial fairness in the commercial realm, it still uses a heavy hand to control the courts and interfere in political cases. As a whole, then, China’s rule of law is still “partial.”

Each of these studies of Chinese domestic politics complicates the analytical story by situating China in the world. Each also challenges presumptions in the dominant public discourse about an unambiguously positive role for international players in hurrying China along in progress toward more liberal politics and more reliable adherence to laws.

A “China in the World” Perspective on Contemporary Issues

In this section, we take up three very recent issues in Chinese politics to which the world has been highly attentive. The point here is to illustrate the potential value of a “China in the world” perspective where scholars may choose to weigh in with their expertise on contemporary affairs. We start with an examination of China’s assertiveness in the South China Sea and border disputes with India, traditional examples of how the domestic and international levels of analysis shape China’s foreign behavior. Then, we turn to two domestic issues that have shaped views of China in the rest of the world: namely, the clampdown in Hong Kong and the early response to the coronavirus pandemic.

The South China Sea and Border Disputes with India

In spring 2020, as the novel coronavirus began to spread around the globe, China has adopted

an assertive stance on its periphery and especially in areas where China's sovereignty is contested, such as the disputes in the South China Sea and on the border with India. Studies of escalation in territorial disputes often treat states as unitary and rational actors, prone to the effects of security dilemma (Jervis 1978; Christensen 2002), in which the efforts by one state to defend its sovereignty claims are viewed as offensive by the other state in the dispute, often producing spirals of instability. Yet a "China in the world" perspective that considers how domestic politics can shape the foreign policies China adopts and create other incentives for assertive behavior.

In Spring 2020, the CCP leadership faced perhaps unprecedented criticisms of the party's performance under Xi's rule, which questioned their competence and thus the legitimacy of their rule. The sudden occurrence and rapid spread of the novel coronavirus in Wuhan raised serious questions about the ability of the party to govern effectively. In early March, prominent businessman Ren Zhiqiang's penned a scathing critique of the party and especially Xi's handling of the pandemic (Radio Free Asia 2020). The viewpoint he expressed was so potentially threatening that Ren, a party member, was placed under investigation a few weeks later and then sentenced to eighteen years in prison in September 2020 (Buckley 2020). The pandemic also hit China's economy hard, a longstanding pillar of CCP legitimacy, as it had contracted by almost ten percent from the previous quarter. As party leader, Xi was also vulnerable to criticism for his handling China's foreign relations. China's global image became tarnished for being associated with the apparent origins of what is now a once-in-a-century pandemic. Likewise, China's ties with the United States began to decline at an even more rapid pace when Washington focused its public diplomacy for several months on efforts to frame the pandemic as the "Chinese virus" and attributed the outbreak to a laboratory in Wuhan. As one

analyst observed, taken together, the “regime feels weaker at home than it appears from the outside” (Bishop 2020).

Facing the domestic upheaval the pandemic and its consequences, as well as criticism of the party’s performance, China’s leaders cannot afford appear to look weak before domestic or international audiences and may be benefit from taking strong positions in foreign policy in order to demonstrate their competence. This is perhaps especially true regarding China’s sovereignty claims, which Xi Jinping has intertwined with the achievement of the “China dream” and thus the party’s legitimacy. Moderation on sovereignty issues might signal weakness at a time when strength is perceived to be needed for those who might question Xi or the CCP’s performance and for foreign audiences in disputes with China who may assess that China might be distracted or consumed by domestic policy challenges and thus less resolved. This kind of thinking draws on the idea of “internal chaos inviting foreign aggression” (内乱外患)—that when China has historically been weak or best by domestic upheaval, challenges from abroad increase. Thus, by asserting itself in sovereignty disputes in spring 2020, China’s leaders sought to avoid appearing weak on a fundamental issue, underscoring that it will not be unmoved by the pressure the pandemic has wrought (Fravel 2020a, 2020c). The party leadership was not responding a more nationalist public opinion demanding greater action in these disputes. Nor was assertiveness the product of a faction or group within the leadership. Instead, the party leadership adopted assertive policies to pre-empt criticism from the public and party elites, thus demonstrating their competence (Goemans and Fey 2009).

In the South China Sea in Spring 2020, China’s willingness to assert its claims, as it has done over the past decade, continued unabated, despite the pandemic. In the wake of the 2016 tribunal, China ironically has focused part of its efforts in the past few years to asserting its

“historic” rights in these waters. In April, a Vietnamese fishing vessel was sunk after a confrontation with the China Coast Guard in waters near the Paracel Islands, which China controls but Vietnam claims.⁷ In May, China dispatched coast guard vessels to harass a Malaysian effort to drill exploratory wells in Malaysia waters that China views as its part of its historic rights. Beijing then conducted its own seismic survey in these waters, to challenge Malaysia’s claims.⁸

From an international relations perspective, Beijing’s behavior could be explained as a response to what it viewed as challenges by other claimants in waters that China claims. However, the occurrence of these challenges during the pandemic suggests that Beijing may have worried about the costs of not responding even more. From China’s standpoint, the need to continue to press China’s claims was more important than pausing to focus on the pandemic or improve ties with other states. China’s leaders likely believed that any pause or change in behavior might signal weakness or a change in China’s fundamental position in the South China Sea (Fravel 2020a).

On the China-India border in early May, China asserted itself in the long-standing dispute with a rare mobilization of troops in the western sector of the dispute, which is also called Ladakh. In three locations, China moved forces up to what it views as the “line of actual control” (LAC)—but across what India views as the LAC. The scope, scale, and posture of Chinese actions on the border are perhaps unprecedented (Fravel 2020c). Unlike previous incidents on the border in 2013 at Depsang or 2014 at Chumar, China is now putting pressure

⁷ Khanh Vu, “Vietnam protests Beijing’s sinking of South China Sea boat,” *Reuters*, April 4, 2020

⁸ Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative, “Update: Chinese Survey Ship Escalates Three-Way Standoff,” May 18, 2020, <https://amti.csis.org/chinese-survey-ship-escalates-three-way-standoff/>

on the LAC in the western sector, simultaneously, in multiple areas across a large front.

These moves created conditions for a deadly clash between Indian and Chinese forces, which occurred in mid-June in the Galwan Valley. From China's standpoint, it was responding to increased concerns about India's approach to the border after the 2017 standoff in Doklam, India's creation of Ladakh as a federally administered Union Territory in October 2019, and the completion of a new strategic road astride the LAC (Fravel 2020c). From an international relations perspective that treats the state as a unitary actor, these factors may be sufficient for explaining tensions on the border and the context in which China decided to act in Spring 2020. Nevertheless, the scope and scale of China's response suggests it was also influenced by the domestic considerations associated with the pandemic. Even though the competition for presence along the LAC plays a critical role, China's unprecedented response was likely shaped by a desire to signal resolve and avoid showing weakness in light of the challenges Xi Jinping and the party faces at home and abroad.

Hong Kong

In 2019, large-scale street protests began in Hong Kong, a Special Administrative Region (SAR). At their peak on June 16, 2019, as many as two million people—more than one-quarter of Hong Kong's population—took to the streets. The police responded with force, using pepper spray, tear gas, non-lethal projectiles, batons, and riot gear shields. The clash between the protestors and the police claimed several lives and injured thousands.

Different from the hundreds of thousands of everyday forms of protest that mostly involve economic issues and target local governments in Mainland China, the Hong Kong protests directed their demands at the central government, and publicly challenged Beijing's

authority. The protests have had far-reaching ramifications for China's governance model. The Chinese legislature passed the National Security Law in June, 2020, which grants Beijing broad powers to crack down on a variety of "political crimes." The cleavages made salient in the Hong Kong protests between Hong Kong and Beijing, and between Hong Kongers and mainlanders, will haunt Hong Kong society for decades to come.

What explains the onset of the protests? What explains the government's response to them? We show that while popular theories of ethnic conflict and contentious politics can go a long way towards explaining the onset, a "China in the world" perspective will help us examine government response and develop a more complete picture of what happened.

The Hong Kong issue was the product of an international conflict. As part of a series of treaties between the Qing government and the British government after the Opium Wars, Hong Kong became a British colony in the mid-19th century. China regained sovereignty over the territory in 1997. Since then, the Chinese government has governed Hong Kong using the "one country, two systems" framework, which designates it as a Special Administrative Region that enjoys more autonomy than other Chinese provinces.

Since day one of its reversion, the departing colonial authorities and Hong Kong pro-democracy forces, on one side, and Beijing and its supporters and allies in Hong Kong, on the other side, have espoused three fundamentally different concepts of how the SAR should be governed (deLisle and Lane 1996, 1997); this divide has dominated the conflicts in Hong Kong over the last two decades.

The first issue of contention is *autonomy*. Both the 1984 Sino-British Joint Declaration and the Basic Law, which serves as the Hong Kong SAR's mini-constitution, uphold the principle that Hong Kong has autonomy over its governance and the right to maintain its pre-

1997 economic and legal systems for 50 years. The controversy that ignited the 2019–20 protests was proposed legislation, colloquially referred to as an extradition bill, that would authorize Hong Kong’s government to hand over individuals identified by Beijing as criminal suspects to the Mainland Chinese authorities. Opponents of the bill maintained that it threatened to undermine the robust rule of law and independent judiciary that Hong Kong had long enjoyed—and had been promised for the Hong Kong SAR—but in recent years had increasingly come under siege (deLisle 2019, 477–8).

The second issue of contention is *democracy*. While the pro-democracy forces in Hong Kong understand the Basic Law as promising direct elections for Hong Kong’s chief executive and legislative council,⁹ in 2014 the Standing Committee of China’s National People’s Congress issued a formal interpretation of the Basic Law that rejected more expansive versions of democracy in the SAR. Hong Kong’s 2014 Occupy Central movement (or the Umbrella Movement, as its contentious public protest phase became known) arose in reaction to Beijing’s rejection of demands for more democratic procedures to select the SAR’s chief executive (deLisle 2019, 474).

The third issue of contention is *identity*. Recent opinion polls confirm a strengthening of a Hong Kong identity. In a June 2016 survey conducted by the Public Opinion Program at the University of Hong Kong, 42% of respondents identified themselves as Hong Kongers only, with no reference to China (Kaeding 2017, 168). A popular explanation for identity conflict is that when the identity cleavage reinforces (rather than cross-cuts) other cleavages, such as

⁹ Article 45 of the Basic Law stipulates that “The ultimate aim is the selection of the chief executive by universal suffrage upon nomination by a broadly representative nominating committee in accordance with democratic procedures.” Article 68 refers to the legislative council and says the “ultimate aim is the election of all the members of the legislative council by universal suffrage.”

economic or cultural, it is difficult for two identity groups to find shared interests—and conflicts ensue (Lipset and Rokkan 1967; Varshney 2003).

Reinforcing cleavages are a driving force behind contentious politics in Hong Kong. Divisions over autonomy, democracy, and identity fall along a generational line. Young Hong Kongers constituted the majority of the protestors in the 2014 Umbrella Movement and the 2019–20 anti-Extradition Bill protest (Lee and Chan 2016, 15; deLisle 2019, 483), and are more likely to identify themselves as Hong Kongers only (Kaeding 2017, 168). Multiple recent protests have reinforced cleavages within Hong Kong society between ardent (often young) advocates of liberal norms and democratic change, on the one side, and older Hong Kongers and Mainland-origin Chinese who are opposed to disruption on the other side (deLisle 2019, 501).

However, understanding Beijing’s response requires assessing international factors. As deLisle (2019, 492) argues, the United Kingdom perceived the Sino-British Joint Declaration on Hong Kong as a conventional, contract-like international agreement in which China pledged to guarantee Hong Kong’s autonomy and continuity in return for Britain to return sovereignty. British Prime Minister Theresa May expressed concern in June 2019 about the extradition bill’s implications for the rule of law and Hong Kong’s autonomy, and declared it “vital” that any Hong Kong extradition arrangement with China be “in line with the rights and freedoms that were set down in the Sino-British Joint Declaration.”¹⁰ The foreign secretary for the new Boris Johnson government reemphasized this theme in August 2019.¹¹

¹⁰ Prime Minister Theresa May, “Oral Answers to Questions in Parliament,” June 12, 2019, <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2019-06-12/debates/A192214E-99CA-4F22-9DFC-BDD7FA62B125/PrimeMinister>.

¹¹ Foreign and Commonwealth Office, “Foreign Secretary Meets China State Councilor in Beijing,” August 2, 2019, <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/foreign-secretary-meets-china-state-councillor-in-beijing>.

U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo also criticized the proposed legislation for threatening the rule of law in Hong Kong. As the protests in Hong Kong expanded, President Donald Trump discussed the extradition bill and Chinese interference in Hong Kong with Chinese President Xi Jinping at the G20 meeting in Osaka.¹²

International involvement in Hong Kong provided the Chinese government an opportunity to frame the issue as related to sovereignty rather than autonomy and democracy. For example, a Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson expressed firm opposition to U.S. and other foreign criticism of the legislation as outside “interference in Hong Kong affairs.” China’s deputy foreign minister summoned a senior American diplomat to protest U.S. statements that were critical of the extradition bill as “impermissible interference” in Hong Kong’s and China’s affairs.¹³ UK government criticism and calls for China to observe the Joint Declaration drew similar rebukes from official Chinese sources. They warned that the days of British rule were “long gone,” that the UK had “no sovereignty, jurisdiction or right of supervision of Hong Kong” and should abandon its “colonial mindset,” and that China would brook “no foreign interference” in the affairs of the Chinese sovereign territory of Hong

¹² US Department of State, “Secretary Pompeo’s Meeting with Hong Kong Pro-Democracy Leader Martin Lee,” May 1, 2019, <https://www.state.gov/secretary-pompeos-meeting-with-hong-kong-pro-democracy-leader-martin-lee/>; *South China Morning Post*, “Donald Trump to Raise Hong Kong Extradition Protests with Xi Jinping at G20, Mike Pompeo Says,” June 17, 2019. It is important to note that remarks from Trump have repeatedly undercut the promise of U.S. support for protesters and the values they invoked. For example, Trump combined his comments to Xi with a reported pledge to soften U.S. criticism, praised Xi for acting “very responsibly” toward the extradition bill protests, and as a “great leader” and “good man” who “could quickly and humanely solve the Hong Kong problem.” See Demetri Sevastopulo and Sue-Lin Wong, “Trump Softened Stance on Hong Kong to Revive Trade Talks,” *Financial Times*, July 9, 2019.

¹³ *Xinhua News Agency*, “China Opposes Other Countries’ Interference in Hong Kong Affairs,” July 3, 2019 (quoting Geng Shuang); *RTHK*, “Beijing Warns Washington on HK ‘Interference,’” June 14, 2019, <https://news.rthk.hk/rthk/en/component/k2/1462945-20190614.htm> (quoting Geng Shuang); Ministry of Foreign Affairs, People’s Republic of China, “Foreign Ministry Summons Chargé d’Affaires of the United States (US) Embassy in China to Lodge Solemn Representations Against the US Side’s Irresponsible Words and Deeds on the Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (SAR)’s Amendment to the Ordinances,” June 14, 2019, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjbxw/t1673211.shtml.

Kong.¹⁴

Similar to its playbook for addressing unrest and resistance that Beijing used in handling the 1989 Tiananmen democracy movement and unrest in Tibet and Xinjiang, the Chinese government characterized the opponents of the legislation and protesters as influenced or controlled by foreign “black hands.”¹⁵

The Chinese government’s reframing of the issue as related to sovereignty helps Beijing gain many supporters, especially mainlanders, who condemn Hong Kong’s protests and “separatist” movement. Lee and Chan (2018, 153), in their study of the Umbrella Movement, argue that Beijing’s tactic of labeling the protest a result of foreign influence helps “delegitimize an action by defining it as something that is dubious and alien, and to render any crackdown on the action legitimate.” This is consistent with decades of public opinion research on China, which shows that many Chinese are sensitive to the notion of foreign intervention because it reminds them of the compromise of national sovereignty forced upon the country during the “Century of Humiliation” (Zhao 2004; Wang 2012; Weiss 2014; Huang and Liu 2018), and that nationalism in China is often associated with a strong anti-democratic, pro-authoritarian tendency, which impedes public demands for democratic change (Tang and Darr 2012).

Early Response to the COVID-19 Outbreak

Major public health crises quintessentially span international borders. Effective containment,

¹⁴ *Guardian*, “British Government’s Hong Kong Intervention Riles China,” August 10, 2019 (quoting People’s Republic of China (PRC) Foreign Ministry spokesperson Hua Chunying); Reuters, “China Tells ‘Colonial’ Britain: Hands Off Hong Kong,” July 3, 2019 (quoting PRC ambassador to the UK).

¹⁵ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, People’s Republic of China, “Wang Yi: Stand Firmly Against Any Foreign Attempt to Interfere in Hong Kong Affairs,” June 19, 2019, <http://www.fmcopec.gov.hk/eng//Topics/gfz/t1674263.htm>.

reduction, and prevention all require international cooperation, if not active coordination. In our third case, we present the novel coronavirus that became the COVID-19 pandemic as a chronic problem of Chinese domestic politics—namely, failure in upward reporting—which was literally and catastrophically exported to the rest of the world. In a mere few months after its appearance in Wuhan in mid-December, the virus diffused globally, sickening millions and killing hundreds of thousands. The unprecedented January lockdown of Wuhan and epic all-out state-directed effort to contain further spread of the virus is part of the Chinese domestic politics of the coronavirus story. Here, however, we focus on local response to the immediate outbreak to answer a question that ignited rancorous international political debate and fueled global suspicion about Beijing’s lack of transparency: why was vital information about the virus withheld from the world for so long?

Especially in the context of past experience, it is an obvious question. In 2003, after global pressures about response to the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) crisis, Beijing set up a state-of-the-art reporting system for contagious diseases, even connecting doctors and hospitals directly to Beijing. It seems to have functioned well: as Thornton (2020) points out, after SARS, China successfully confronted several avian flus, H1N1, MERS, Ebola, Zika, African swine fever, and other diseases. Yet, no one used the reporting system to report to Beijing the “pneumonia of unknown cause” that showed up in Wuhan until January, after the Chinese Center for Disease Control (CCDC) had already learned of it, apparently through social media, and after Beijing had already sent down its first team to investigate.¹⁶ Even then, hospital managers in Wuhan, officials in the Wuhan Municipal Health Commission, and

¹⁶ On the timeline and players involved, see Huang (2020), Li et al. (2020), and Swaine (2020). A fairly comprehensive Chinese government account of events is in a State Council Information Office White Paper (2020).

officials in the Hubei Provincial Health Commission worked purposefully to obstruct efforts of local doctors and scientists and experts sent from Beijing to understand the gravity of the situation. From his apology on 31 January 2020 and his dismissal, it seems that Wuhan's communist party secretary was also involved in some part of the coverup or obstruction.

Here, we consider the perverse incentives that blocked timely and accurate upward reporting of the virus from Wuhan to Beijing. The reporting system created after SARS is embedded in a larger bureaucratic system of communist party leadership and upward accountability. Bureaucratic reporting operates in a setting without supervision from an investigatory free press. Incentives for officials to conceal, exaggerate, and lie, as they weigh the career consequences of reporting bad news, are strong. From top to bottom, the CCP monopolizes the appointment, promotion, transfer, and removal of all public officials of even moderate importance. This includes state hospital managers, government health care officials, and municipal party secretaries, for example. From the political center in Beijing, tier by tier, party committees manage officials one level down the political hierarchy (Manion 1985; Burns 1989, 1994; Landry 2008). Career advancement is designed to be based on performance, measured against standards that Beijing determines and subordinate party committees adapt and apply to the officials they manage (Edin 2003; Whiting 2004; Zuo 2015). Competition for further promotion is very fierce. A serious mistake precludes advancement.

An extensive sophisticated empirical literature on Chinese domestic politics documents widespread deliberate “pernicious manipulation of performance measures” (Gao 2016) for career advancement. Pan and Chen (2018), analyzing leaked documents, find selective reporting is common. An analysis of which online grievances lower-tier officials report to superiors shows a systematic pattern of omission: for example, complaints of corruption that

reflect badly on the lower-tier officials or their associates are less likely to be reported upward.

Wallace (2016) finds local economic growth, a key metric in performance evaluation, follows a political cycle of data falsification: reported increases are greater just before party congresses, when candidates are being evaluated for promotion.

Quite apart from perverse incentives, the “matrix muddle” of horizontal and vertical relationships in the Chinese bureaucratic system (Lieberthal 2004) also frustrates upward reporting. The “boss” of the Wuhan Center for Disease Control and Prevention and the Wuhan Health Commission is the Wuhan Municipal Government. It is a relationship of leadership, which trumps the relationship of professional guidance with the CCDC and National Health Commission, respectively. Indeed, the Wuhan Communist Party Committee is the ultimate boss of these health agencies; it appoints and promotes their directors, just as the Hubei Communist Party Committee appoints and promotes directors of these health agencies at the provincial level. Requirements of the contagious disease reporting system do not change this; nor, it seems, are the professional vertical relationships as important as the horizontal relationships of leadership.

In sum, we find the details of China’s governance failure in the crucial early response to what became the international public health catastrophe of COVID-19 are local and unsurprising features of domestic politics. They are found in the same set of bureaucratic incentives that have delivered economic success and in the matrix of vertical and horizontal bureaucratic relationships. These features worked against upward reporting in the crucial early stages after the outbreak of the virus in December 2019. Beijing’s response reflects a

recognition of this¹⁷ and of the collateral damage to the country's international status as a high-capacity state.

Overview of the Special Issue

The three contemporary issues considered in the previous section illustrate how Chinese domestic politics can shape how the rest of the world views China. They also illustrate how a politically discerning attentiveness to the global dimension can contribute to a better understanding of the domestic politics. The five articles that make up this special issue of *Studies in Comparative International Development* illustrate the “China in the world” perspective in fully-developed conceptual and empirical studies.

China's expanding global economic footprint has given rise to a conventional wisdom that the PRC's overseas influence is growing in tandem with that footprint. Indeed, the U.S. government views expanded influence as a key motivation behind China's massive BRI. Scott Kastner and Margaret Pearson challenge this conventional wisdom by pointing out that the relationship between China's foreign economic ties and its overseas influence is in fact quite complicated. They provide a conceptualization of key assumptions and discuss research designs that allow identification of mechanisms of potential influence. They conclude that the impact of China's foreign economic ties may not be exactly what Beijing intends: while China's leaders may succeed in leveraging economic interactions to carry out influence, they may fail to obtain the influence they hope for, and reap either good or ill from effects that they do not (initially)

¹⁷ For example, National Health Commission Director Li Bin recently reported that China is looking to artificial intelligence as a possible solution to a flaw the reporting system cannot solve. See BBC News, “Coronavirus: Chinese Official Admits Health System Weaknesses,” 9 May 2020, at <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-52600618>.

intend.

Lizhi Liu further challenges the popular view that Chinese government's backing helps Chinese companies expand globally. Through several case studies of Chinese tech companies, Liu shows that the proliferation of data as a new strategic asset will pose challenges for China's engagement with the world. Data, as Liu points out, differs from traditional strategic assets (e.g., land, oil, and labor) in that it is non-rivalrous and partially excludable. This generates a commitment problem in data use and sharing. As data are only partially excludable and never perishes, there is great uncertainty regarding future use. In general, tech firms that collect personal data cannot guarantee that they will not disclose their user data to the government, which may abuse the data for surveillance or coercion. Chinese tech firms therefore suffer from a commitment problem in overseas markets, where they are routinely suspected of sharing data on foreign citizens with their government. As a result, they confront a "deep versus broad" dilemma: deep ties with the Chinese government reduce domestic political risks but raise overseas regulatory risks.

China's increasing investments globally have also created a strong notion of a China threat in both developed and developing countries. Yet, as the articles by Xiaojun Li and Kerry Ratigan show, the threat is largely based on misperceptions and not supported by survey evidence.

Using a series of public opinion surveys conducted in Canada, Li demonstrates that Canadians hold widespread misperceptions regarding Chinese investments in Canada. Canadians on average overestimate the proportion of FDI in Canada coming from China—over 10 times larger than the official statistics of 3%. Furthermore, more than 92% of Canadians are misinformed about foreign investment rules and practices, believing that foreign companies

need not observe Canadian domestic laws and that investments from foreign state-owned firms are not subject to tighter rules and approval procedures. These misperceptions make respondents much less likely to support FDI projects from China.

China's economic involvement in Latin America has also increased dramatically this century. Beijing has worked to foster China's "soft power" abroad. Using data from the Latin American Public Opinion Project coupled with data on Chinese investments in Peru, Ratigan examines Peruvian views of China and, in particular, whether Peruvians think China should be a model for their country. She finds that while Peruvians generally trust the Chinese government, only a small proportion prefers China as a model for Peru. Moreover, Peruvians who strongly value democracy are less likely to prefer China as a model for their country. Together with Li, Ratigan demonstrates the constraints of Chinese outward investments.

While the world has misunderstood China, China may have also misunderstood the world. Haifeng Huang turns to the Chinese public and demonstrates that Chinese citizens tend to have misperceptions of China's image, power, and popularity in the world, which is the social backdrop of the Chinese government's overreach in global affairs in the last few years. Using a series of online surveys, Huang shows that the Chinese public significantly overestimates China's global image and popularity, which produces a high evaluation of China. Providing inconvenient facts about how the world actually perceives China dampens this evaluation. Huang concludes that while the world should "get China right" and not misinterpret China's intentions and actions, China should also get the world right and have a more balanced understanding of its relationship with the world.

Conclusion

In this introductory essay to the special issue, we present and exemplify what we call a “China in the world” paradigm. The “China in the world” paradigm goes beyond purposefully migrating across the traditional borders of comparative politics and international relations in the study of China. We argue that, as China has become a global player, the “China in the world” paradigm is a view that many issues of Chinese domestic politics are now truly issues of international politics. Scholars of Chinese politics can no longer understand domestic politics in a globalized contemporary China without considering international consequences. More than this, however, the paradigm is also about scholarly attentiveness to the fact that the politics in China that we study also shapes how the rest of the world views China. In this, a “China is the world” perspective on the state of the world and China in it exhibits awareness of the context of scholarship. More specifically, from this perspective, as we produce expert knowledge of Chinese domestic politics, we understand it may shape global views and have consequences for global politics.

Drawing on works in international relations and comparative politics, we discuss how previous scholarship has advanced our understanding of Chinese foreign policies by considering China’s domestic factors and our studies of Chinese domestic politics by situating China in the world. The field of Chinese politics, however, needs more work that theorizes the nexus between domestic and international politics and appreciates international ramifications of domestic events. As we show using three recent events that captured public attention around the world—the South China Sea and the border dispute with Indian, Hong Kong, and early response to the COVID-19 outbreak, Chinese domestic politics can soon become global politics, and how the Chinese government reacts to these events can significantly shape how the world views China.

The five articles included in the special issues advance the “China in the world” paradigm and produce a promising research agenda in the fields of Chinese politics, comparative politics, and international relations.

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