

Statement of Research

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My research is primarily motivated by an interest in advancing the study of political-economic dynamics under authoritarian rule at both macro and micro levels. Moreover, I also investigate, more fundamentally, individuals' political-economic decision-making under different perceptions and communication contexts. My publications also feature methodological diversity for both experimental and observational data.

1 Dynamic Political Economy of Dictatorships

Using both country-specific and cross-national data, I unpack in my recent research the political-economic dynamics of authoritarian rule at both the levels of intra-elite power sharing and contentious state-society relationship amid protests and repressions. This strand of my research echoes a recent call to switch the focus in the literature of comparative authoritarianism from democratic to autocratic transitions, which account for about half of all regime changes.

1.1 Dynamics of Authoritarian Power Sharing and China's Changing Institutional Landscape

Students of dictatorships have long noticed the importance of power-sharing arrangements or patronage distribution in authoritarian politics. Just like their democratic counterparts, the leaders of authoritarian countries are not exempt from making compromises and cutting deals with their core constituents to form a ruling coalition. Moreover, the literature on authoritarian institutions takes the argument a step further and shows both theoretically and empirically that authoritarian regimes are able to live longer, reach higher economic growth rates, and induce more investments when such a *power-sharing* relationship can be institutionalized through elections, legislatures, or political parties.

I advance this literature in two important ways. First of all, my earlier 2014 article in *Emerging Market Finance and Trade*, "**Dynamic Career Incentive versus Policy Rent-Seeking in Institutionalized Authoritarian Regimes: Testing a Long-Run Model of Trade Policy Determination in China**," which was cited in an *Annual Review of Political Science* article, "Advancing the Empirical Research on Lobbying," (de Figueriredo and Richter, 2014) shows that Chinese political elites' career incentives shaped by China's power-sharing institutions had an effect on how they made trade policy. This finding rejects the conventional wisdom that mainly depends on the distribution of policy rents as the sole driver of China's political economy.

Second, while a decade of scholarship on authoritarian institutions has provided convincing evidence for their effects on the aforementioned economic and political outcomes, various topics related to their formation and change, however, still remain relatively untouched. For this part

of my research, the central question is: *How has China's post-reform economic development shaped the dynamics of its institutional landscape?* Thanks to Xi Jinping's recent political maneuvers, China watchers now have the chance to observe how the political institutionalization of collective leadership designed by Deng Xiaoping could be dismantled and witness the emergence of a new political regime with Xi's various institutional initiatives. My 2019 book, *Economic Growth and Endogenous Authoritarian Institutions in Post-Reform China* (Palgrave) develops a dynamic political game where authoritarian institutions are endogenously determined and provides both analytic and historical accounts for the political economy of China's authoritarian institutions from the second to the fourth generations of leadership. Specifically, based on the idea of institution-induced dynamic inconsistency, the book shows that the momentum for change in power-sharing institutions in authoritarian regimes can be endogenously induced for lack of dynamically consistent design in succession for the incumbent. Moreover, when such an inconsistency arises, authoritarian institutions also give the sitting dictator an informational leeway to introduce change by suppressing his/her allies' rebellious collective actions.

Through the chapters, the book makes a contribution to the "authoritarian resilience" debate by showing how economic growth, predominantly viewed as a "blessing" to an authoritarian regime, can actually be a "curse" for endogenously triggering intra-elite conflicts over resource distributions and give rise to a centrifugal force that drives a wedge between the dictator and his/her allies. In other words, from a longer-term perspective, the very institutional foundation on which the authoritarian resilience is based can actually be incentive incompatible.

More recently, in a 2022 conference paper presented at the 118th Annual Meeting of American Political Science Association, "**Noisy Signaling and the Consolidation of Dictatorial Control**" (with Victor Shih and Keng-chi Chang), I also try to test the same theory through an original data base of Xi Jinping's activities during the 2016 People's Liberation Army (PLA) reform. Empirically, this paper breaks two new grounds. First, we collected publicly available press data on Xi Jinping's engagement with the PLA and found the level of ad hoc visits was higher than Hu Jintao's visits to military units and higher than his own visits to military units in the 2017-2019 period after the reform. Second, adding to the growing literature on military promotions in authoritarian regimes, this paper also finds that Xi did not pursue a clear factional strategy of promoting followers, which would have invited collective action against him.

1.2 Media Freedom

Beyond the authoritarian institutions such as legislatures and political parties the bulk of the traditional literature focuses on and China as a case, my research further enriches the general scholarship on comparative authoritarianism by extending it to how the power-sharing dynamics among elites in an authoritarian regime affects its level of media freedom. My 2022 *Political Communication* article entitled "**Power Sharing and Media Freedom in Dictatorships**" (with Greg Sheen and Wen-chin Wu) demonstrates quantitatively that media freedom increases when authoritarian regimes have a higher level of power sharing between dictators and their allies. Whereas the existing literature views the regime as a unitary actor, this cross-national study takes advantage of the unexplored variation in power sharing within regimes and uncovers a new political logic for understanding why dictatorships might allow (partial) media freedom. Moreover, while a higher level of media freedom is more often associated with a higher likelihood of mass mobilization and democratic transitions, the finding actually suggests otherwise. A higher level of media freedom can actually help the intra-elite power-sharing arrangements more sustainable, and therefore consolidate, rather than destabilizing, the regime.

Along this line of research, another paper under review, "**Tell Me the Truth: (Un)committable**

Media Freedom in Dictatorships” (with Greg Sheen and Wen-chin Wu), studies formally the dictator’s commitment problem in media politics and derives testable conditions for self-censorship to take place under dictatorships. Its formal analysis shows that even if the dictator requires truthful reporting *ex ante*, the media may not “tell the truth.” The dictator suffers from more severe information insufficiency when the society is stable or when he is more capable of manipulating information.

1.3 Autocratization amid Protests and Repressions

In addition to the intra-elite power sharing, more recently, I’ve also expanded my research agenda to include the state-led autocratic transition. More specifically, Hong Kong’s Anti-ELAB (Extradition Law Amendment Bill) Movement and the ensuing National Security Law (NSL) provide an exceptional opportunity for studying how China’s rise changed its attitude towards a crucial gateway of foreign investment and a top-down autocratization process unfolded amid protests and repressions.

Together with Yuko Kasuya at Keio University, I guest-edited in 2021 a special issue on Hong Kong’s Anti-ELAB Movement for the *Japanese Journal of Political Science* and helped shepherd a collection of high-quality papers that address important topics such as the political psychology of how resistance was organized by pro-democracy Hong Kongers (Tang and Cheng, 2021; Yuen and Tong, 2021), the effect of the district council election on the mobilization for the Movement (Shum, 2021), and the NSL’s effects on Hong Kongers’ attitudes towards political reforms (Kobayashi et al., 2021) as well as polarization (Shen and Yu, 2021).

In my own contribution to the special issue, “**Anti-ELAB Movement, National Security Law, and Heterogeneous Institutional Trust in Hong Kong**” (with Ming-Jen Lin and Yi-fan Lin), I exploited the two surveys conducted right before and after the NSL to find evidence of significant NSL-induced attitudinal changes in institutional trust and heterogeneities in such effects. While the pro-democracy Hong Kongers’ post-NSL institutional trust took a plunge, the trust conversely went up by a substantial margin among the pro-establishment camp. The paper also sheds further light on the institutional road map for crafting a dictatorship through soft repressions. Hong Kongers’ robust trust in the monitoring institutions such as the Court could be readily leveraged by Beijing to transform Hong Kong’s political system from within.

Along this line of research, a working paper presented at the 2022 ASSA Annual Meeting of the American Economic Association, “**Preferences for Government Concessions amid Protests and Repression: Experimental Evidence from Hong Kong’s Anti-ELAB Movement and National Security Law**.” (with Daiki Kishishita and Ming-Jen Lin) empirically tests at a micro level Acemoglu and Robinson’s (2006) commitment problem thesis by conducting a pre- and a post-NSL conjoint experiments with causal interactions in Hong Kong. Apart from confirming the thesis experimentally, I also found that Beijing actually successfully carved out a space of political compromise in Hong Kong through the NSL.

Furthermore, during the pandemic (March 2020 to June 2021), I also contributed to a data collection project, “Pandemic Backsliding” (Online Data Dashboard: <https://www.v-dem.net/pandem.html>), which documents different degrees to which countries across the world violated democratic standards in their responses to COVID-19 outbreak and how much the quality of democracy was affected in them. The database provides an opportunity for scholars to assess the development of autocratization both globally and regionally amid the pandemic.

2 International Political Economy: China and the World

Another strand of my China-related research interest focuses on the international political economy of China's rise on the world stage. On this subject, my forthcoming *Review of International Organizations* article entitled "**WHO Approves? International Organization and Credibility of China's COVID-19 Vaccines..**" (with Greg Sheen, Chien-huei Wu, and Wen-chin Wu). This study leveraged the current COVID pandemic as the world had switched gear from prevention to vaccination and the special relationship between China and Taiwan to show through a survey experiment that the WHO (World Health Organization) endorsement could still on average induce acceptance of Chinese vaccines among Taiwanese people. This empirical finding suggests that, while China's international image has been faltering since the pandemic began, it still pays for China to stay in the international system for saving its credibility deficit.

Previously, I've also published in 2015 a book chapter, "**Signaling Peace: A Theory of ECFA and Peace Dividend Beyond the Taiwan Strait**" (with Yun-han Chu) in *Taiwan and The China Impact: Challenges and Opportunities*. (Routledge). The article provides a formal theoretical model and a case study on why the then administration in Taipei decided to sign a trade agreement with Beijing as a way to signal the former's resolve in keeping the cross-Strait relationship peaceful. In 2019, another paper published in *Modern China Studies* entitled "**Exit and Voice: Mainland China's Talent Policy and Taiwan's Weak Response during the Ma Administration**" (with Chelsea C. Chou) examined how Taiwan's declining developmentalism and skilled workers' non-credible exit contributed to its "brain drain" to China during the Ma administration.

3 Political Economy of Information and Communication

The third strand of my research interest centers around micro-level investigations of individuals' risk information and its implications for political communication in both authoritarian and democratic contexts. Especially, since the COVID-19 pandemic broke out in early 2020, I have taken this exceptional window of opportunities to understand people's risk behaviors and perceptions amid an unprecedented global health crisis. In particular, I focused on non-coercive political strategies that enable both authoritarian and democratic governments around the world to induce more compliance with their anti-COVID campaigns through their risk communications. Based on my various experimental studies, I've found substantial evidence for the causal effects exerted by the (perceived) independence of information source and government transparency about the COVID-19 responses.

3.1 Information Independence and Political Communication under Democracies and Dictatorships

First of all, in my 2021 *PLoS ONE* article, "**Citizen Journalism Reduces the Credibility Deficit of Authoritarian Government in Risk Communication amid COVID-19 Outbreaks**" (with Greg Sheen and Wen-chin Wu), I provide evidence based on a survey experiment in Hong Kong (February, 2020) that the information endorsed by an independent and non-official source (citizen journalism in the study) and government transparency enhanced the credibility of official government messages. Moreover, through citizen journalism, nondemocratic leaders could make themselves more trustworthy even among potential dissenters.

The effect of the information independence was not only found useful to authoritarian governments, but also proven instrumental in democracies. In my forthcoming *Public Opinion Quar-*

terly article entitled “**Policy Experts or Politicians? Citizen Responses to Vaccine Endorsements across 5 OECD Countries**” (with Greg Sheen, Joan Barcelo Soler, and Wen-chin Wu), I found experimentally that citizens were more likely to rely on endorsements from medical professionals—the experts—over politicians when choosing a COVID-19 vaccine. This effect was independent of citizens’ political alignment with the government.

3.2 Decisions under Risk and Uncertainty

Moreover, in the early stage of the pandemic, uncertainty could make it hard to evaluate not only whether one would be infected, but also probabilities such as the infection and the mortality rates. In my forthcoming *Japanese Economic Review* article entitled “**Ambiguity and Self-Protection: Evidence from Social Distancing under the COVID-19 Pandemic**” (with Daiki Kishishita and Charlotte Wang), I constructed a simple model based on the economic concept of *Knightian Uncertainty* and demonstrated how its effect was heterogeneous depending on ambiguity-attitudes. I found that higher uncertainty increased the level of social distancing among ambiguity-loving people, but such evidence was nonexistent among ambiguity-averse counterparts.

4 Work in Progress and Future Research

4.1 Dynamic Political Foundations for China’s Rise

My previous research and publications have laid down a solid foundation for my research that is both underway and planned. First of all, given the ongoing Russo-Ukrainian War and its geopolitical repercussions throughout the region and the world, it has become more imperative for us to understand the dynamics inside China’s domestic political landscape that may or may not encourage its assertiveness during Xi’s much-predicted third term. To this end, I will continue my collaboration with Victor Shih on not only our current PLA reform project, but also other project on the Chinese elite politics that will help unpack the institutional basis for Xi’s political ambitions. Furthermore, since 2019, I’ve also leveraged the expert networks in the China field to collect data on expert opinions about China’s elite politics (with Franziska Keller and Johan A. Elkind; Project Website: <http://www.chinaexpertsurvey.net>). The data collection is near completion and will provide me with additional resources for enriching the analytic framework I’ve developed over the recent years and making new contributions to the burgeoning literature on the social networks among Chinese political elites.

4.2 China and Nationalism in a Post-COVID World

I believe the impacts brought by China’s rise can be best understood in a larger global context. Especially, as China’s diplomacy regarding the origin of the coronavirus and domestic zero-COVID policy have made people worldwide reevaluate its image, two of my major publications on COVID nationalism can help us better envisage what a post-COVID world might look like and China’s role in it.

First of all, through a collective scientific endeavor (An International Collaboration on the Social & Moral Psychology of COVID-19), I published in 2022 a *Nature Communications* article, “**National Identity Predicts Public Health Support during a Global Pandemic.**” (with Jay J. Van Bavel, Charles Crabtree, Yusaku Horiuchi, et al). The paper shows through a global survey across 67 countries that respondents who reported identifying more strongly with their own nations consistently reported greater engagement in public health behaviors and support for public

health policies. Moreover, in another 2022 *Social Science & Medicine* article, "**Vaccine Nationalism Among the Public: A Cross-country Experimental Evidence of Own-country Bias towards COVID-19 Vaccination**" (with Greg Sheen, Joan Barcelo Soler, and Wen-chin Wu), which was based on an experimental study across fourteen countries, national identity was also found to drive people's choices over which kind of vaccine to take.

What should be noted here is that, national identity in both studies is conceptually different from national narcissism. As a result, the findings from them don't necessarily lead to a very confrontational picture of world politics hereafter. Nonetheless, they do suggest that people might become more inward-looking as most countries gradually open their borders to the outside world. For China, its zero-COVID policy has already made it difficult to lift its strict border measures, and, based on my findings, we should continue to investigate the dynamics of China's international image before the COVID Nationalism fades away, if it does at all.

Finally, at the moment, I am conducting another experimental project on the popular perceptions of the US-China economic decoupling in Taiwan (Pre-registration number at the AEA RCT Registry: AEARCTR-0009807) and will expand the scope to include more country samples soon. Against the backdrop of rising nationalism, this project investigates the issue through the lens of motivated reasoning to identify the psychological basis on which people's beliefs on the US-China relations are formed.

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