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The Transformation of Contemporary China Studies, 1977–2002

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The central focus of this chapter is a distinct subfield within the broader field of "China Studies": the study of the polity, society, and economy of the People's Republic of China. For the most part--although this is changing rapidly—I take this to mean scholarship by "China specialists" in the disciplines of political science, sociology, and economics. I select this narrow definition of the field for several reasons: it is the one in which I have worked for some 25 years, and that I know intimately; it has experienced remarkable growth, transformation, and intellectual reorientation over the past two decades; and this transformation embodies all of the dilemmas and controversies about the meaning of area studies within social science fields that have been cause for so much recent concern. It also shows remarkable progress in the integration of area and disciplinary concerns.

For two reasons, I exclude from this definition the fields of history and anthropology, both integral parts of "the China field". The first is temporal and geographic focus: historians have not written about post-1949 China until very recently, and anthropological research on China long focused upon Taiwan and Hong Kong. Second, and more importantly, the tension between "area studies" and the disciplines, if it existed at all, was markedly less in these disciplines than in sociology, economics, and political science. In both history and anthropology it is expected that someone have a strong research competence, necessarily focused on an area. To be sure, the intellectual evolution of anthropology and history in the past 30 years has raised important issues for China specialists, but these tensions are properly viewed as internal to the disciplines themselves, rather than a tension between "area studies" and disciplines.

To a considerable extent, my portrayal of this field's transformation, and its implications for the meaning of area studies within social science disciplines, is based on personal reflection, and draws on my own intellectual biography--my experience in graduate school, as a scholar in search of an intellectual identity, and as a teacher of graduate students. When I first entered graduate school in sociology in 1976, already committed to the study of China, my teachers at the University of Michigan made very clear that I would be judged primarily by the extent to which my work met disciplinary standards of rigor and theoretical relevance; on the job market, the same hurdles loomed large; for every submission to a professional journal, the rejections came back with the same incantation; and at tenure time, the same skeptical scrutiny of my record by people with no devotion to the study of China. This personal experience conditioned my immediate reaction to the rationale of the recent questioning of the usefulness of "area studies", and the related anxiety evident among some of its practitioners: "*So what else is new*?"

This essay will make clear that I do not perceive any crisis in China area studies. To the contrary, I believe that the perennial tension between area specialization and disciplinary scholarship is much reduced from 25 years ago, and has virtually disappeared in some topic areas. Indeed, some scholarship on contemporary China has not only moved to the mainstream

of these disciplines, but has served in some ways to define subfields within them. Area studies is succeeding within disciplines in ways unimaginable to me when I entered the field in the mid-1970s. At the same time, traditional area scholarship of the kind published in the pages of such journals as The China Quarterly, The China Journal, and Modern China continues to thrive.

So I state my biases at the outset. I come to this subject encouraged by recent gains in political science, sociology, and economics, and skeptical about claims that area studies are now beseiged by attacks from social scientists hostile to area knowledge. *So what's all the anxiety about?* In the remainder of this essay, I will review the past 20 plus years in my subfield, explain why I am encouraged by recent developments, and then provide my brief and optimistic interpretation of recent debates within the comparative politics section of the American Political Science Association, which appear to be the cause of much recent anxiety among some area specialists.

What's an Area Specialist, Anyway?

The proper definition of an area specialist is a minimalist one: someone who *at least* is able to speak and read the language of the country sufficiently well to do extensive research in and about the country, using primary sources. For a language like Chinese, where after 4 full years of instruction one is able to read a newspaper with the aid of a dictionary, and usually one is able to write Chinese prose at the 6th grade level, actual linguistic competence varies enormously. The ideal of practical fluency in spoken Chinese is less common than we care to admit, and fluency in reading and writing rarer still. Many area specialists in the social science fields are able to hold only rudimentary conversations in Chinese, and are semi-literate outside of the kinds of documents they read for their research. Higher levels of linguistic competence are more commonly attained in the humanistic fields and in anthropology (although in anthropology this is usually in spoken Chinese and its regional dialects, rather than the written language). Of course, the second part of this minimalist definition is that the person actually *does* work primarily, if not exclusively, on the geographically defined area, using primary sources.

When people discuss area specialists, however, they inevitably mean much more than this minimalist definition. The vision articulated in this country in the 1950s, when the "social science" approach sought to free itself of the scholarly demands of traditional European sinology,[i] implied much more. The ideal area specialist was someone who, in addition to language courses, would take a battery of courses in history and perhaps anthropology that would permit them to understand the "culture" of the region. In the 1950s, 1960s, and even early 1970s, given the extreme provincialism of American higher education, this process usually began in graduate school. And it should be emphasized that this ideal was not realistically attainable: mastering a punishingly difficult language, familiarizing oneself with a history and culture of extraordinary subtlety, variability, and historical depth, *while at the same time* learning the canon of theory and research in one's discipline and the skills necessary to pose significant questions and design research. More often than we care to admit, those of us educated as area specialists during that period emerged from the process with only rudimentary language skills, a stereotyped set of cultural traits of "the Chinese" or of China's "modern historical dilemmas", and little sense of, or interest in, the core intellectual problems of social science disciplines.[ii] I emphasize these uncomfortable realities because too often discussions about "area studies" are about the *ideals*

rather than the less inspiring realities of actual area competence of area specialists in the social sciences.

What we *did* have, however, was a ferocious interest in specific areas of competence about China that we chose as our own, a finely developed sense of the limits of our knowledge about China (based in large part on the country's inaccessibility), and a relentless approach to gathering available evidence through emigre interviews or limited documentary sources. This was a major world revolution, and for intellectual as well as geopolitical reasons it was essential to understand the kind of polity, society, and economy that was emerging from this process.[iii] The field of contemporary China studies initially was relatively small, tightly knit, centered on the superb journal The China Quarterly, in which disciplinary boundaries were unimportant. In this setting, political scientists, economists, and sociologists could speak to one another and learn a great deal from one another. If a political scientist could unravel the workings of the People's Communes during the Great Leap Forward of 1958-60, scholars in all fields would benefit. If a sociologist could describe accurately the system of grass roots social organization in urban China, the economist could learn something important about scarcity and rationing, while the political scientist could draw important inferences about the sources of political order in the new regime.

From the outside, however, we were viewed as an insular and narrow lot, and we have to admit that this was not entirely unjustified. We usually did not read much about countries other than China, and often were completely uninterested in any other region (except sometimes, for obvious reasons the Soviet Union and eastern Europe, although this too was resisted strongly by many). We rarely read our disciplinary journals, often could not understand the articles in them, and never published in them. If we were aware of the core concerns of theory and research in our disciplines, and were interested in them, we usually had no idea how to relate our research to these concerns, and almost never had the kind of data that would permit us to do so. From the perspectives of our respective disciplines, we were not at all engaged in *interdisciplinary* research, as we liked to tell ourselves, we were in fact engaged in *nondisciplinary* research. Commonly heard from some of us was the refrain that "theories developed in western contexts do not apply in nonwestern settings"--a statement that entirely misses the point about theory: *most "western" social science theories do not apply to the "West" either!* All theories are contested, no matter who contrives them and where they attempt to apply them. The only intellectually defensible response is to offer an alternative theory and to show how it is better supported by the evidence.[iv] Our scholarship was almost never involved in theoretical projects in any case, because we surely were not testing "western" theories, nor were we devising new ones of our own. I strongly believe that the scholarship of this earlier era was often superb and worthy of respect on its own terms. There was something extremely important going on in China that was well worth studying, and it was virtually impossible at that time to study it while simultaneously meeting the scholarly standards of the disciplines. But what they said about us in the disciplines was often justified.

The issue is more complicated than this, however, for the 1950s ideal of the "area specialist" in the social sciences, while hardly attainable, contained intellectual traps to which area specialists were often blind. *The insistence on the cultural and historical situatedness of*

what we observed and analyzed led too easily to fallacious arguments. The problem here was twofold. First, area specialists who took their knowledge of history and culture from textbooks rarely had the depth of knowledge necessary to appreciate this situatedness beyond stereotypical statements (historians and anthropologists, however, often did, and often viewed our forays in these directions with justified skepticism). Yet the traditional model of the China specialist obligated us to point out the Chineseness of what we observed by referring to alleged Chinese cultural universals or to parallels in earlier Chinese times or other Chinese settings. And this led to a second kind of problem: our area-focused training left us with insufficient knowledge about parallel institutions or behaviors in other societies. The default position was an unwitting "occidentalism", an orientation that led us *implicitly* to compare what we observed in China with a stereotyped textbook image of "the West"--our bureaucracies are models of Weberian impersonalism, our political systems actually operate according to the principles of our written constitutions, people advance primarily according to merit, objectively judged, and we are a society of rugged, self-reliant, socially isolated individualists. When we detect organizations that operate according to personal loyalties, political behavior at variance with written regulations, nepotism and corruption, and reliance on friends and family to accomplish things, the temptation was to move to quickly to our list of Chinese cultural traits to explain these "divergences" from western institutions and behavior. Unfortunately, we were not equipped with enough knowledge about other countries to be able to identify the generic and universal from the distinctive and the Chinese. This was one of the complaints lodged against us as area specialists by scholars in our disciplines, and it was not unjustified.

So What do the "Disciplines" Expect from Us?

What do the disciplines of political science, sociology, and economics demand from us as scholars? On the surface, not much, really. All they ask is that we analyze China as a social scientist in our discipline would analyze any country, including our own--as someone who works on a generic intellectual *problem*. The ideal of the social science disciplines is simply stated: that we are social scientists *who happen to be doing research on China*. This sounds disarmingly simple, but it is an ideal that was almost impossible to attain so long as scholars and students were "area specialists" by education and orientation, and so long as information about China was so scarce.

The contradictions between area and discipline were not uniform across social science fields. Economics as a discipline is notoriously hostile not only to area studies but seemingly to the historically situated analysis of *any* real world economy. Theory in that discipline has been heavily oriented toward working out in mathematical form intriguing anomalies in the general equilibrium model. Empirical work in econometrics demands large sets of data and advanced modelling techniques. Economists who worked on China were trying to describe the economic institutions formed after the Chinese revolution, and to glean data on their performance. The general equililbrium model had little to do with any of this, and econometricians were not impressed by painstakingly assembled descriptive series of data on, for example, grain harvests in China. It was therefore almost impossible for China area specialists to survive in professional economics departments, and very few did. If it were not for the Ford Foundation's endowment of a handful of specialized chairs in the 1960s at such universities as Michigan and Harvard,

departments of applied (eg. agricultural) economics, and schools of international studies that hired area specialists in economics, and such agencies as the World Bank and Asian Development Bank, the species *sinologus economicus* might well have become extinct.

The environment in sociology was not so hostile, yet it was still harsh. The mainstream of the discipline clearly shared the scientific aspirations of economics, yet the discipline had no single dominant theoretical model, and in fact was divided into several competing camps. More importantly, the idea of quantitative analysis as the ideal was a contested one, with strong and outspoken proponents of field work and historical approaches providing ample shelter for the unorthodox. Nonetheless, China studies of the variety published in the China Quarterly had no legitimate intellectual standing within the discipline. A scholar who painstakingly assembled evidence about patterns of social inequality in China might be celebrated by the readers of the Quarterly, and receive praise from China specialists across the disciplines. Yet colleagues in sociology departments would ask: *So what? What does your study of China tell us about generic processes of social stratification in all societies; what are the implications of your research for theories about processes of inequality?* It was a challenging and intimidating question of a kind few China specialists were able to address. And it meant that in the competition for jobs in a discipline that only rarely set aside jobs for "comparativists" in world regions,[v] and in the daunting process of tenure review, few China area specialists survived.

Political science contrasted markedly with sociology and economics, and for this reason the discipline contained the vast majority of China area specialists across these three fields. The field of "comparative politics" grew rapidly in the 1950s and 1960s, and set aside numerous jobs for specialists on various world regions. While the China specialists often were viewed critically by their more discipline-oriented colleagues, especially those with strong theoretical or quantitative orientations, they were tolerated within the discipline and prospered within their protected niches. The political science departments at leading universities with major centers for China studies--Harvard, Berkeley, Stanford, Michigan, Columbia, for example--have long set aside two or even three positions for China specialists. To a considerable extent, theChina Quarterly was their organ; it was the journal that defined their field and it was the primarily journal outlet for their published work. The field of Chinese politics attained critical mass and was fairly self-contained; while it made occasional nods in the direction of Soviet politics, and borrowed ideas periodically from other political science subfields, it operated largely in isolation from the discipline as a whole.

I suspect that this sketch of the position of area studies in economics, sociology, and political science would hold true across regional areas, and am confident that this is so for Soviet and East European studies (a similarly self-contained and thriving field with such excellent journals as Soviet Studies and Problems of Communism). Unlike economics and sociology, where China scholars were constantly exposed to critical scrutiny and were never able to establish a disciplinary niche or a self-sustaining intellectual community, political scientists *were* (the primary audience for the few active sociologists and economists was in fact the political scientists who subscribed to the Quarterly). It is not surprising that as the boundaries between area studies and the disciplines have broken down over the past decade, this has caused much more anxiety among political scientists than in the other two disciplines. For sociologists and economists have no vested interests, or related intellectual identities, to defend. They have been

exposed to the harsh critical scrutiny of their disciplinary colleagues from the beginning, while the political scientists who study world regions like China are feeling the heat for the first time. This is why the recent debates within the comparative politics subfield have little resonance in sociology and economics, fields that have in many ways already transcended the perennial divide between area studies and social science.

The "China Field" in 1977

I have already referred to the transformation of China studies in the social sciences; now it is time to sketch its outlines. The China field in 1977 was a thriving international enterprise that was nonetheless intellectually isolated and marginal within the disciplines, the study of China was not seen as a promising research site for the analysis of generic social science issues. This has changed fundamentally in the past 25 years, and the reasons for this transformation are the equally fundamental transformations of China itself, and of its place in the world.

In 1977 China was still an internationally isolated and remarkably obscure country. Mao had died only the year before and the country's new leadership had arrested the top officials who had supported and benefited from the Cultural Revolution, but the reforms of Deng Xiaoping would not begin until 1979. Few Chinese citizens could travel abroad, U.S. citizens could not freely travel to China. Research by foreigners was impossible; collaborative research was out of the question; scholarly exchanges had yet to begin. The country's publishing industry had yet to recover from the effects of the Cultural Revolution; only a handful of leading national party newspapers could be obtained abroad; even regional and local party newspapers were off limits to foreigners and were scarce. Government documents that found their way outside China through obscure means were pored over by scholars; the open press was painstakingly read and analyzed; english-language transcriptions of radio broadcasts published by the BBC World Service and the U.S. Foreign Broadcast Information Service were important sources. Interviews of emigres in Hong Kong was a major component of one's "field" research.

The above implies, of course, something that seems remarkable in retrospect, but which we took very much for granted at the time: *almost none of us had ever been to the People's Republic of China*. Some of our teachers had, in carefully orchestrated tours that had followed on the heels of Nixon's visit to China in the early 1970s, and some students with left-wing orientations had participated in similar "friendship society" tours that began in the mid-1970s. I still recall the excitement at the University of Michigan when the Political Science department admitted a Canadian graduate student in 1976 *who had actually studied at Beijing University for two whole years!* The student was accorded near-celebrity status, gave a major colloqium presentation about what he had seen and observed, and soon published in the China Quarterly a long analysis of a political campaign he observed as a student. Our sense of isolation from the object of our study was much more than our colleagues who studied the USSR. China was not quite as isolated as North Korea today, but the feeling was similar.

Some of the students who entered graduate departments with an interest in China already had some exposure to the history and language of China. Some liberal arts colleges like Oberlin and Yale maintained programs for their undergraduates in Taiwan and Hong Kong, respectively, and were an important source of students with prior language training. But for the most part students did not begin serious language and area training until they enrolled in such Master's

Degree programs as Harvard's venerable M.A. in Regional Studies-East Asia and similar programs at Columbia, Michigan, Berkeley, Stanford, Washington, and elsewhere. For the most part graduate students, whether European-American or Asian American, were still working on their language courses as they began their social science Ph.D. programs.

Students who entered Ph.D. programs in political science, economics, and sociology found that China just did not fit with the focus of the mainstream of their disciplines, nor did their teachers and colleagues have much interest in China of a scholarly nature. The country seemed so obscure and arcane that it did not appear to be relevant to the mainstream concerns of any of the disciplines, with the partial exception only of political science. The late 1960s were an era of widespread questioning of the earlier (and much caricatured) "totalitarian model" in the field of Soviet and East European politics, and research on China quickly joined in the spirited search for valid models of interest group politics, tendencies of articulation, bureaucratic politics, incipient pluralism, and later corporatism and clientelism as institutional descriptions and as images of the pursuit of interest or the policy-making process. At least in political science it was possible to partake in a scholarly dialogue that spanned across areas, and to speak to general conceptual and theoretical questions. Yet the field of "comparative communism" was often neglected by students of China and was itself marginal to mainstream political science.

Students of the Chinese economy were the most marginal of all: there was no place in the discipline for descriptions of economic institutions or analysis of China's economic policy. To the extent that economists took Chinese economic data seriously, their efforts were likely to be dismissed as arcane accounting exercises employing data of highly questionable accuracy. The prospect of relating the operations of the Chinese economy to theoretical issues that derived from marginal analysis and the general equilibrium model seemed hopeless. Under Mao the Chinese were so hostile to market *and* bureaucratic allocation that they denounced even the Soviet Union as revisionist. Under such circumstances, and given the almost complete paucity of reliable economic data, the study of the Chinese economy was often a special branch of the study of China's institutions, political campaigns, policy making, and policy implementation.

The position of the sociologist was somewhat better. Potentially, the Maoist anti-bureaucratic efforts, the attempt to further level income and other social differences, and the red guard and other protest movements of the period were all potentially topics of great sociological interest. But to the vast majority of sociologists China was still a great enigma, and to the extent thatthese subjects were known, they were viewed as arcane curiosities whose relevance to the core intellectual concerns of scholars in the fields of social stratification, complex organizations, or social movements was far from clear. And even if budding China scholars were able to frame questions about China that paralleled the kind of questions asked in the mainstream of the discipline, the extreme paucity of reliable evidence prevented them from providing plausible (i.e., publishable) answers.

Despite these barriers to full participation in the intellectual conversations of their disciplines, students gravitated to the thriving if self-contained and somewhat isolated field of contemporary China studies, centered on the China Quarterly. Unable to state the implications of inequality under Mao for general theories about the causes of social inequality? No matter; China scholars will warmly welcome your description of the different life chances of students from different family backgrounds, or the importance of party membership in building a career.

Unclear about what, if anything, your analysis of the production failures of the People's Communes has to teach the discipline of economics? Don't worry, the readers of the China Quarterly will eagerly welcome your description and analysis, especially the political scientists. The contemporary China field was active and growing, already with a clearly developed sense of scholarly subfields (especially in political science), and with a growing literature and emerging debates of real intellectual substance. One such debate in economics was about the extent to which China's economic system redistributed resources across provinces, versus the extent to which each province was left to rely on its own resources. Another such debate, in the field of domestic Chinese central-level politics, was about the extent to which policy-making was dominated by Mao, or the extent to which various functional bureaucracies limited the room for maneuver for Mao or any other central-level politician. While students of Chinese foreign policy or the Chinese military might share little of interest with students of Chinese secondary education or of the rural family, there was nonethless a sense that China scholarship was equally accessible to all scholars, regardless of disciplinary training. The divisions among China specialists were primarily due to differences in substantive interest, not disciplinary orientations or methods.

Remaking Contemporary China Studies: The Forces for Change

This all seems so long ago. The forces for change were initiated in 1979, with the rise of Deng Xiaoping as China's paramount leader, the beginnings of what would become a remarkable policy of economic reform, political liberalization, and opening up to the outside world, and the restoration of formal diplomatic ties between the US and China. There is no need to rehearse here the subsequent economic and political history of the region, and later the geopolitical map of the world, since that date. We need only point to the rise of industrial east Asia and the emergence of China as a major market and trading nation, and the collapse of the Soviet Union and the rapid demise of its military might, all of which have moved a resurgent and increasingly comprehensible China more to the center of attention. The end of communism in eastern Europe and the USSR, the attendant trend toward political democratization and the attempted transformations of these countries into market economies have captured the attention of all three social science disciplines and have raised fundamental questions about how polities, societies, and economies are organized and how they change. No longer is China viewed as a marginal and arcane subject. It has moved to center stage.

As part of this transformation of China and the world since 1979, a number of specific trends have had a direct and major impact on the field of Chinese studies, transforming the field I have just described almost beyond recognition.

Access to Information and Research Opportunities

The opening of China, coupled with extensive internal political liberalization, completely transformed the research environment. Students of contemporary China, used to gleaning evidence from a small number of cryptic sources, eventually found themselves buried in an avalanche of new newspapers and periodicals, books, and published regulations, and the trickle of more valuable "internal" documents and books also grew to a steady stream, as regulations on the control of publications broke down by the late 1980s. (Students of the Soviet Union might

appreciate the magnitude of this change if we point out that it telescoped within a 10 year period all of the liberalizations that took place in the USSR from the death of Stalin to Gorbachev's early years.) Now the problem was how to select the most useful and digest it. The life of East Asia librarians was transformed utterly, as large backlogs of new publications laid uncatalogued for years.

Research opportunities in China grew more slowly, but steadily. The first official exchanges were "from above", through a central board not unlike the International Research Exchanges Board, which placed U.S. students and scholars in the Soviet Union and eastern Europe. The Committee on Scholarly Communication with the People's Republic of China, sponsored jointly by the National Academy of Sciences, SSRC, and ACLS, began exchanges in fall of 1979, initally sending only language students. Shortly thereafter the Committee sought to place researchers with universities and academies of social science; within two years scholars were sent to China for field research, and there followed a long struggle to gain research access to archives and villages. Early on, one anthropology graduate student was expelled from the country and charged with spying, leading to a ban on field research for several years. Despite these setbacks and frequent frustrations, the program grew steadily and indeed prospered, hitting its stride by the late 1980s, by which time the bulk of new research published on China was based at least in part on research done in the country.

By 1984 research in Hong Kong, the traditional base for scholarship on contemporary China, was languishing. The Universities Service Centre, for most of the period since its founding in 1963 with funding from the Ford Foundation, and later administered by the ACLS until its demise in the 1980s, had served two generations of China specialists. Located in a moldering villa on the approach to Kai Tak airport in northern Kowloon, the Centre maintained a small but outstanding research library of Chinese language newspapers and periodicals and translation series from various government agencies. (Much of the translation work, except for the radio broadcast series, was done at the U.S. Consulate in Hong Kong.) More importantly, the Centre had been the place where recent emigres from China were contacted and interviewed, often passed from scholar to scholar and sometimes became long-term research assistants and occasionally researchers in their own right. Each year since the mid-1960s, the Centre hosted a new cohort of Ph.D. students and faculty members for a year of research; from the late 1960s to the late 1970s the Centre was bursting at the seams, unable to find sufficient office space. By 1982, however, there was a rapid decline in demand, and offices went unoccupied as scholars flocked to Beijing and elsewhere to take advantage of the new opportunities. The era of emigre interviewing was over, and the Centre shifted its emphasis to enlarging its Chinese-language library collection. In 1988 the old Centre was closed and it moved to the Chinese University of Hong Kong, where it has grown into one of the finest libraries on contemporary China in the world. But for the past 15 years the rite of scholarly passage has occurred in Beijing, not Hong Kong.

As contact between scholars in China and the U.S. grew, other routes to archives and field research opened up that bypassed the centrally-administered programs of the Committee on Scholarly Communication. Universities established relationships and exchange programs, and many Chinese language programs opened their doors and welcomed students from abroad. Many of these programs were organized or run jointly beween U.S. and Chinese universities. By

the mid-1980s, despite the initially low quality of language instruction available in China, students were ignoring the long established and outstanding language programs in Taiwan, like the Inter-University Consortium ("Stanford") Program in Taipei. Universities themselves began to arrange research visits for their students and faculty through both official and unofficial ties, and eventually the most effective routes to archives and the field proved to be paved by personal relationships between faculty who shared research interests. For social scientists in the old China field, the well worn path from language study in Taipei to dissertation research in Hong Kong was no longer travelled. After the early 1980s, students and faculty went directly to Beijing and points beyond.

During the first decade of such access to China, the model employed was primarily that of the lone U.S. China scholar "placed" in some Chinese university or research institute in the social science academy network. The researcher was funded by the Committee on Scholarly Communication, and the institution that served as host was obligated to arrange access to the relevant archives, to field sites, or to arrange interviews in relevant organizations (for example, among factory mangers or government economic planners). This was an extraordinarily burdensome obligation for the host institution, which almost never received anything directly in return, and it could lead to considerable frustration for both the visiting scholar (who often complained about the denial of full access, not realizing that they were often getting better treatment than their Chinese colleagues), and the host institution (for whom the guest could be a constant and complaining burden). But gradually, somehow, the "exchange" began to yield fruit for the foreign researchers.

The Revival of China's Social Sciences and the Rise of Collaborative Research

The opening up of China to U.S. researchers was simultaneously a period of revival for the social sciences in China, which had been virtually abolished in the 1950s and 1960s. Initially, the revived economics departments were filled with surviving political economists of the Marxist school, whose orthodox Soviet training had been considered revisionist since the late 1960s. Some of them had been highly influenced by reformist thinking in the 1950s of the kind encouraged by the writings of the early Soviet reformer Liberman, and by echoes in Hungary, Poland, and Yugoslavia. But they were not equipped for full engagement with modern neoclassical economics. Senior sociologists were typically trained in Marxist philosophy, the best of them in "dialectical materialism" that came out of 1930s Soviet textbooks. Only a few very senior figures survived from the once-proud tradition of Chinese sociology from the 1930s and 1940s; the field was abolished as bourgeois after the anti-rightist campaign of 1957. Political science has yet to be revived fully; it is still a marginal discipline in China.

Despite the courtesy and genuine curiosity displayed by many of these senior figures, it would take a while before real scholarly collaboration was possible. During the 1980s most of these senior figures gradually retired or were promoted into university administration or government service, helping their successors build the foundations for further contact and cooperation. There was no successor cohort just below them in age, because the social science departments had been closed since the 1950s (sociology and political science) or since 1966 (all universities closed from 1966 to 1972, and reopened only with skeleton crews and smaller student bodies from 1972 to 1977). As a result, generational succession was very rapid.

Younger faculty and graduate students avidly immersed themselves in western, primarily American, social science, translating enormous numbers of monographs, recent articles, and textbooks. After the early 1980s, traditional Marxist economics and dialectical materialism had no credibility among those below age 40. Some attended summer institutes and guest lectures given by visiting U.S. scholars, others made visits to U.S. campuses or enrolled for degree programs. By the early 1990s, beginning to receive reinforcement from scholars returned from abroad, the younger generation moved into departmental and institute headships and paved the way for a new development: collaborative research.

Since 1988, with a 2-year interruption due to the military suppression of the 1989 protests and the diplomatic reaction to this, collaborative research has perhaps been the modal form of research in these social science fields. Typically, these now involve jointly planned and administered sample surveys or field research projects, in which Chinese and foreign researchers jointly analyze and publish the resulting data. Important sample surveys have been completed in the past ten years on political participation and political attitudes, rural household incomes, health and nutrition, mate choice and marriage patterns, social stratification and mobility, and other subjects. The collaborative projects are only a tiny fraction of the hundreds of projects carried out each year on every conceivable subject connected with China's economic growth and rapid social transformation. Because these projects are conceived and planned jointly by academics, they do not need prior approval and clearances by higher level government bodies as part of bilateral national level exchange agreements. As a result, a far greater range of research subjects and forms of collaboration are possible, even those subjects and forms of research that are formally proscribed by various national agencies. And the incentives and rewards for Chinese scholars, and the intellectual benefits for both sides, are much greater than is usually the case for the lone scholar placed in an institution by a government to government exchange program. The output of these research projects is fueling the rise of disciplinary scholarship about China increasingly published in social science journals, a subject to which I will return below.

The Transformation of Student Demographics

Above I have touched upon two subjects that have had a major impact on the study of China in the social science disciplines. I mention them again to emphasize their importance. In many ways the transformation of the characteristics of students entering Ph.D. programs with an interest in the study of China has been the key change in transforming the intellectual contours of the field. And its impact is still working its way through the system.

The first change is the direct result of the opening of China and the increased prominence of China in America's perception of the world. Most students who embark upon a Ph.D. in these fields today are already fluent in Chinese and have spent one or more years studying or working in China. It is not uncommon for entering students to have spent one or two years in a language program and then work for up to five years for a Chinese or foreign organization in China. What this means is that the typical student, unlike 20 years ago, is already able to do research in the Chinese language and needs no introduction to the country and its people. Students of this type are far better prepared to spend time mastering their disciplinary core subjects than their peers two decades ago. Increasingly over the past decade, large numbers of highly motivated students

come from Chinese family backgrounds. The rise of Asian-American students to plurality status on many major U.S. campuses has provided a larger reservoir of highly motivated potential recruits for social science Ph.D. programs, even though the language training is often just as large a barrier for them as for their peers who do not have a Chinese heritage.

A second change has had an even greater impact, and has more than anything else challenged our traditional notions of area scholarship: the rise of the graduate student/scholar from the People's Republic of China. From the first few graduate students to arrive in the early 1980s, the PRC graduate student has become an important fixture in social science departments across these three fields. This is an immense and seemingly inexhaustible national pool of talent; its impact on such fields as physics and chemistry is already legendary in this country. The effect has not been so dramatic in the social sciences, but the impact is highly magnified in the study of contemporary China. My rough impression is that more than half of the graduate students in these disciplines who specialize in research on China received their B.A. level degrees from Chinese institutions. I have personally directed the dissertations of nine sociology students since 1982 on subjects related to contemporary China: seven of them are from China (four of them from Beijing University).

Our 1950s ideal of the "area specialist" obviously was not devised with this kind of student in mind. And generally speaking, students from the PRC want nothing to do with this conception of "China scholarship". They did not surmount enormous odds to gain fellowships in leading North American universities in order to learn nondisciplinary scholarship that amounted to looking at China from a foreign perspective. They come to our universities in order to learn the theory and methods of the contemporary social sciences. These students, whether they were interested in dissertation research on China or not (they sometimes were not), often bypassed the area specialists to work with theorists and methodologists. A good many of them ignored the area specialists altogether, putting them on their dissertation committees as an afterthought.

The great strength of student-scholars from the PRC has been their single-minded focus on the discipline. I have to admit that this was not the strength that I and many of my area specialist colleagues would have predicted when graduate students first began arriving in the early 1980s. From our area studies perspective, we would have expected such students to excel at intensive documentary research of the kind we commonly practiced ourselves, enjoying a massive linguistic advantage. Instead, students from China gravitated quickly to models that predominated in the core of the disciplines: theoretically engaged empirical research, often highly mathematical and statistical in orientation. I recall my first encounter with a Chinese scholar who earned his Ph.D. in economics from the University of Chicago: he seemed to have a purer faith in the general equilibrium model than Milton Friedman himself, and he felt that the scholarly output of "China specialists" who worked on the economy was trivial nonsense. This was an extreme version of a sobering experience that would recur over the years.

This single-minded dedication to disciplinary canons has served these students well in the competition for elite faculty positions during the past 15 years. Near the end of the 1980s it was becoming apparent that students from China were out-competing students trained in the traditional "area studies" approach in the job market. In the 1990s, the most highly coveted jobs in Political Science have been filled by Ph.D.'s who came originally from China: Yale, Princeton, Chicago, Duke, and Michigan. In sociology, students from the PRC have been

offered similar entry-level jobs at Harvard, Chicago, Cornell, Duke, Minnesota, Michigan, and California-Irvine (these are partial lists, based on my personal familiarity with these scholars and their work; I exclude an equally large group of scholars of PRC origin who do not specialize in research on their own country).

The Rise of Disciplinary China Scholarship

The forces for change that I have described above have rapidly brought into being a new kind of scholarship on China that did not exist in 1977: research motivated by the core concerns of their respective disciplines, whose questions are framed as part of a disciplinary dialogue, whose theoretical orientation and methods of analysis are a recognized part of the mainstream of these disciplines. In part, this new China scholarship addressed longstanding questions within the disciplines with data that became available for the first time. In part, the new scholarship addressed issues raised by China's recent transformation against the backdrop of the collapse of communist regimes elsewhere. Some of this new work has been pushed forward by longstanding area specialists taking advantage of new research opportunities. Some has been pushed forward by established social scientists without prior research interest in China, and who have been attracted to the study of China for the first time.[vi] Much of this work has been the product of collaboration between China specialists and nonspecialists, and this new work has enormously enriched the quality of research on China - while helping China area specialists address the mainstream of their disciplines.

Economics: The Analysis of "Economies in Transition"

The debate over economic policy in the "economies in transition" has put China at center stage. Neoliberal advice to the new post-communist governments of Russia, the former Soviet Republics, and east-central Europe, urged a policy of monetary stabilization and rapid privatization that would have involved massive social dislocation. This advice was controversial within the economics profession, and has been heatedly refuted by area specialists of the region. China has been drawn into the policy debates because by the early 1990s people began to notice that its economy was making enormous progress without deflating its currency and making it convertible, without cutting subsidies to unprofitable firms, and without systematically privatizing its massive public sector. This led first to a debate about the extent to which China's economic reforms really had been successful, second to a debate over whether China's experience was at all relevant to eastern Europe's problems anyway, and third, over how one explains the positive economic performance of many sectors of the Chinese economy.[vii] Relevant publications have been carried in a series of World Bank and Asian Development Bank publications, in the annual "proceedings" issue of the American Economic Review (published each May with short papers from the annual convention), in shorter articles in the AEA's Journal of Economic Perspectives, in theOxford Review of Economic Policy , Cambridge Journal of Economics, and in a long review essay in the Journal of Economic Literature.

A more scholarly literature has engaged the theoretical and empirical issues raised by China's economic transformation. One area of inquiry and debate is about the causes of the massive productivity increases in Chinese agriculture that followed the disbanding of collective agriculture. One school argues that almost all resultant productivity gains were due to incentive

and monitoring advantages of family farms. Another school claims that sustained increases in state grain prices and freeing of peasants from ill-advised bureaucratic cropping decisions explain large parts of the productivity increases. Just beneath the surface is the issue of the presumed superiority of private property as a form of economic organization: the main contributions to the debate have appeared in the Journal of Political Economy, the American Economic Review, and Economic Development and Cultural Change. Other areas of inquiry are about the extent to which productivity improvements have been observed in Chinese state sector firms and therefore whether privatization is necessary for improved economic incentives; about the nature of ownership and agency relationships in China's rural industrial sector, with related new explorations of the theory of the firm, agency theory, and the economics of property rights. One of the main outlets for these articles, in addition to the journals mentioned above, has been published in the Quarterly Journal of Economics and especially in the Journal of Comparative Economics, which in recent years has become the leading outlet for academic work on the Chinese economy (see Table 1).

Sociology: Stratification and Economic Organization in Former Command Economies

In sociology, a much smaller field, the new disciplinary scholarship has been concentrated to a surprising degree the two leading journals of the discipline, the American Sociological Review and the American Journal of Sociology. It has also begun to trickle back into the venerable China Quarterly, as articles from sociologists more commonly bring the questions and methods of their discipline back to their area audiences. These articles have been concentrated into two broad areas: social stratification and economic sociology. The former area has focused heavily on the impact of the post-1980 reforms on social inequality and opportunity, especially the relative advantages of the politically connected and the impact on the rural household economy on the status of women, although some studies have sought to identify the distinctive attributes of inequality and social mobility in the earlier planned economy. The latter area, economic sociology, has sought to identify the features of Chinese firms and their environments that have permitted many to prosper and grow while still under public ownership (this literature also extends to publications by sociologists in the Administrative Science Quarterly and Economic Development and Cultural Change). As Table 1 suggests, scholarship on contemporary China did not appear in either of the major sociology journals before 1988, but after 1992 it has become relatively common.

Political Science: Regime Transformations and Market Reform

Disciplinary scholarship in political science has not been so focused topically as work in sociology, but two identifiable areas of concentration are the political impact of economic reform, and the role of the state in fostering market-oriented growth. These are, however, nascent foci, and the published papers tend to look like more disciplinary versions of traditional area studies papers, rather than focused attacks on general theoretical questions posed by the collapse of communism and the evolution of China. These papers as a group do not have the coherence and focus of work in economics and sociology. Instead, they cover areas of topical interest, but with a disciplinary twist: for example, on the political implications on increased migration to cities; on the causes and consequences of corruption, on the implications of local

elections in rural areas; the role of government in economic reform, or on political attitudes and political participation. While some of these publications have begun to appear in the American Political Science Review, the bulk of them have been published in the two leading journals in comparative politics: World Politics and Comparative Politics (see Table 1). Compared to economics and sociology, the rise of disciplinary scholarship in political science has been slow, with arguably only small changes from 10-15 years ago.

Conclusion: Opportunities and Fears

What I find most striking about the transformation of contemporary China studies over the past twenty five years is that it has not occurred as part of any clearly articulated plan. The initial establishment of the "China field" in the 1950s and 1960s was a deliberate creation, and resulted from the coordinated efforts of various "Joint Committees" of Chinese Studies of the Social Science Research Council and the American Council of Learned Societies, in which major senior figures at the large centers for Chinese Studies--Harvard, Yale, Michigan, Columbia, Berkeley, Stanford, Washington, Chicago--plotted the development of a new field. With the help of major infusions of funding from the Ford Foundation and the federal government (primarily through Fulbright and "National Defense" fellowships), a new and thriving field of study was created very much by design. That field was highly specialized, insular, and nondisciplinary in nature. Scholars from all disciplines shared a common set of interests, found little barrier to communication, and indeed felt themselves part of a broader community that also included non-academics from the world of journalism to intelligence agencies.

That field still exists, and in many ways it is thriving as never before. But it is being rivaled and in some respects (especially in economics) supplanted by the rise of disciplinary scholarship on China. Some of the best work on the Chinese economy is now published in Journal of Comparative Economics and the Quarterly Journal of Economics; some of the best work on Chinese society in American Sociological Review; on Chinese politics in World Politics. Scholars who are widely respected in their social science fields, but who are not China specialists, are beginning to make significant contributions to the study of China, often in collaboration with China specialists in their own disciplines. Especially in economics and sociology, this disciplinary scholarship employs a theoretical language or a methodology that is opaque to most area specialists educated before the 1980s. The 1970s community of China specialists has become fragmented, with scholars more insulated in their respective disciplines, their work increasingly inaccessible to those without specialized training.

No committee or agency willed this result; no one planned for it. It has occurred without senior China specialists encouraging it (indeed, many are not enthusiastic about it). True, the Social Science Research Council established a fellowship program more than a decade ago to reinforce the combination of area and social science competence among graduate students. This program certainly helped push matters in this direction, but it is tiny compared to earlier efforts in the 1950s and 1960s, and its impact on China studies has not been large. The train was already in motion, the SSRC has simply joined in to help push. This transformation is rather the result of grass-roots efforts in graduate social science departments throughout the country. The longstanding demand of the disciplines for a certain kind of scholarship has gradually had an effect. Geopolitical changes in the past twenty five years have brought China more to the center

of the concerns of various disciplines, and have made it easier for students to conceive of the relevance of their China research to core problems in their disciplines. These same changes have helped attract a student body, both from China and North America, much better prepared, linguistically and otherwise, to combine area knowledge with disciplinary competence. Ph.D. requirements and the dictates of publication and the job market have finished the job.

These changes do indeed require us to rethink area studies, for in the China field they have occurred so rapidly, without planning and sustained reflection, that our intellectual environment has become transformed with very little by way of commentary. But the first step in rethinking area studies is the realization that, to a considerable degree, "area studies" have *already* been re-thought by scores of scholars, working quietly on their own. These people feel that their disciplines are their primary intellectual homes; they are social scientists who are contributing to their disciplines through their research on China. The interesting thing about the debate in the pages of the newsletter of the Comparative Politics Section of the American Political Science Association is that it is *not* an attack on area studies from a disciplinary perspective; it is about how to incorporate research on areas into the mainstream of theory and research in comparative politics. That process has already advanced considerably, and I interpret that debate as an *internal* one *within* political science, a symptom of the changes of recent years. Some may find this dialogue threatening; indeed the area specialists within political science may find it so because they have been insulated from such critical scrutiny for so long. Perhaps there are unsuspected dangers for area studies that are lurking in these trends, but I see these debates as evidence of falling barriers between the area and the disciplines, something that promises to further enrich both in the years ahead.

Table 1. Publication of Articles on China in Disciplinary Journals, 1978-2002

Discipline/Journal	1978-82	1983-87	1988-92	1992-97	1998-2002
American Sociological Review	0	0	3	7	4
American Journal of Sociology	0	0	2	8	7
Total, Sociology	0	0	5	15	11
World Politics	6	8	3	7	2
Comparative Politics	0	3	5	7	8
Total, Political Science	6	11	8	14	10
Journal of Comparative Economics	4	24	16	32	67

Note: Numbers for 2002 include issues through June only.

Endnotes

i. The sinological tradition is a formidable one that would preclude serious social science work of any kind. The sinologist must immerse him or herself in Chinese (high) culture, thought, and history, mastering (primarily written) modern as well as classical Chinese, developing a deep understanding of history and literature. This would equip the sinologist with the tools to study *any* subject having to do with China, on whatever period or subject; it is an approach that idealizes total mastery of all available written sources on a subject and detailed and lengthy explication of the texts. To the traditional sinologist, what passes for China scholarship in our modern "area studies" is not serious, and can only with charity be termed scholarship.

ii. This is the kind of U.S. social science area specialist searingly portrayed in Graham Greene's The Quiet American. The protagonist, a C.I.A. operative and recent product of Harvard's M.A. program in East Asian Studies, has a smattering of Vietnamese language, a head filled with untested social science theories, and a textbook understanding of culture and history that made him oblivious to the people and events around him.

iii. Lest one be tempted by the tired old caricature of a government-funded cold war machine that sought to train intelligence specialists for purposes of empire, we should remember that many, if not most students attracted to China studies in the decade after 1966 were initially motivated by opposition to the Vietnam war and ideological fascination with China under Mao.

iv. Too often these debates about "theory" are about the adjectives one applies to them ("euro-centric", "orientalist", "functionalist", "bourgeois", the accusations change with the years) or the presumed motives of the people who offer them (which usually amounts to the same thing). In the three social science disciplines about which I write, the only valid criterion for judging the validity of a theory is whether it fits with existing evidence better than the alternatives. Therefore the burden is to offer a clear alternative and re-examine existing evidence in the light of it. Mainstream social scientists suspect that scholars who limit themselves to deconstructing the "assumptions" of theories to which they object are either not prepared to offer a clear alternative, are trying to shield themselves from critical intellectual scrutiny, or both.

v. For example, Berkeley, Harvard, and Michigan, where chairs were created as a legacy of the Ford Foundation.

vi. This is an important development that deserves more space than I am able to devote to it here, and it would have been unthinkable in 1977. Within my own discipline of sociology, one example of this trend is the career pattern of Nan Lin, a graduate of a Taiwan university who received his Ph.D. in sociology in the US, and who became a widely respected quantitative analyst of social networks and social stratification before moving almost exclusively into China research in the early 1980s. Other examples are such leading sociologists as Peter Blau, Phyllis Moen, Nancy Tuma, Anthony Oberschal, John Logan, Donald Treiman, and Barbara Entwistle, who became involved in collaborative research projects in China with senior China specialists or PRC students. Yet another example is Craig Calhoun, theorist, historical sociologist, analyst of social movements, and now President of the Social Science Research Council, who has written an outstanding book on the 1989 Beijing student movement, having observed it from beginning to end as a visiting lecturer in Beijing.

vii. See, e.g., Andrew G. Walder, "China's Transitional Economy: Interpreting its Significance," in Andrew G. Walder, ed., China's Transitional Economy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 1-17.