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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Political Science Research on China: Making the Most of Diversity

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Abstract This article aims at stimulating debate on the future development of political science research in and on China by bringing into clearer view the diversity of social science research in the West. It argues that far from monolithic, political science is itself engaged in a broad controversy on common goals and shared standards. Secondly, addressing international students of Chinese politics the article observes that we are currently witnessing a transformation of the field as we experience a slight shift toward more quantitative work. However, those China scholars working in a qualitative tradition should not see this as a hostile takeover of the field. Rather they should take this as a stimulating opportunity to employ more refined methodologies from within their own tradition as well as engage in multi-method research. The challenge is to make the most of diversity and to engage in fruitful cross-cultural dialogue based on respect for each other's viewpoints. Three major divides need to be bridged: between qualitative and quantitative approaches, between political science and area studies as well as between Chinese and Western scholars.

Keywords Chinese Political Studies · Political Science · Quantitative and Qualitative Research · Interdisciplinarity

Chinese social sciences have seen enormous development over the past three decades of reform and opening-up. However, some authors also voice a critical view. For instance, in a recent article Deng Zhenglai rekindled debate on past develop-

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ments in China's social sciences and prospects for the future. In particular he raised the issue of "indigenization" (*bentuhua*) of social science and urged his fellow Chinese scholars to "shed the Western-centric worldview brought about by 'Westernization' so as to recover or rediscover 'China' and to create our own ideal picture of social order."[1] Several other Chinese authors similarly discussed indigenization of Western political science theories, concepts and methods as a necessity to raise the profile and quality of the discipline in China.[2] While this is a Chinese debate it needs to be informed about development trends in international social sciences. Therefore, I use this symposium as an opportunity to present an outsider's observations to this debate. However, as a Western, more specifically a German, scholar in contemporary Chinese studies I limit my observations in several respects. For one, I will only talk about political science, the discipline I know best, not social sciences in general. Secondly, I deliberately choose to focus on methodological issues rather than theoretical or substantive ones more commonly associated with this debate.[3] My goal is not to lecture Chinese colleagues participating in the discussion on the proper conduct of scientific research on Chinese politics. Rather, I will offer some reflections on *Western* political science research in general and studies on China's politics in particular. In doing so, I hope to shed some new light on the issues under discussion by adding a fresh perspective.

The argument presented here is two-fold. Firstly, I argue that far from monolithic, political science is itself engaged in a broad controversy on common goals and shared standards. To illustrate this point this essay takes a look at an ongoing methodological debate within political science between quantitatively and qualitatively oriented researchers. This diversity of scientific approaches has to be fully recognized before easy dichotomies like "Western" versus "Chinese social science" lead the field into wrong directions. Such dichotomization would obstruct the mutually beneficial exchange that Chinese and international social science scholars have been engaged in over the past three decades.

Secondly, the essay discusses Western studies of Chinese politics and observes that we are currently witnessing a transformation of the field as a new generation of methodologically more sophisticated researchers takes center stage. With this development and improved possibilities for conducting empirical research in China we experience a slight shift toward more quantitative work. This shift is also connected with changes in the institutional structures and therefore incentives and constraints for researchers which tend to favor what Deng succinctly called "mono-disciplinarization." However, as I will argue below, those China scholars working in a qualitative tradition should not see this shift as a hostile takeover of their field. Rather they should take this as an opportunity stimulating them to employ more refined methodologies from within their own tradition as well as engage in multi-method research. Again, the point is to make the most of diversity and to engage in fruitful cross-cultural dialogue based on respect for each other's viewpoints.

[1] Deng Zhenglai, "The Development of China's Social Sciences: Retrospect and Prospect (1978–2008)," unpublished conference paper.
[2] For instance see Wen [1]; Wang [2].
[3] The debate on the applicability of Western concepts in non-Western context has a long tradition starting with Sartori's seminal contribution, see Sartori [3].

Is There a Western Political Science?

Modern social sciences, including political science, certainly started its development in Europe, with the United States later taking over a leading role. But is it justified to speak of a "Western political science" as opposed to an "Asian" or "Chinese" one? Such a claim seems dubious, first of all, because it does not recognize the significant level of diversity within social sciences in the West. Secondly, it would be incumbent upon the proponents of such a view to argue their case as to how and where a "Chinese social science" would diverge from its Western counterpart. Contemporary social science generally expects to develop mostly "mid-range" theories with definite limits to their applicability—instead of positing universally applicable social laws. Therefore, I believe that whenever concepts or theories developed in a Western context do not appear applicable to Chinese realities this can easily be conceived as a problem of determining their appropriate "scope conditions" without leaving the general paradigm.[4] We will get back to this point after discussing the first one.

Two "Cultures" of Research

This section aims at bringing into clearer view the diversity within "Western political science" by concentrating on a broad methodological debate between *quantitatively* and *qualitatively* oriented researchers. Theoretical and substantive issues which show at least equally strong divergent tendencies are purposely left out of the following discussion.

Reviewing the current debate between the two camps within political science methodology Mahoney and Goertz used the metaphor of two "alternative cultures," each with

> "its own values, beliefs, and norms. Each is sometimes privately suspicious or skeptical of the other though usually more publicly polite. Communication across traditions tends to be difficult and marked by misunderstanding [4]."

According to these authors there are deep-seated differences between these two research traditions in a number of areas.[5] Nevertheless, even though this "cross-cultural" dialogue is fraught with problems of misunderstanding, it is now a common observation that discourse between the two paradigms has significantly increased over the past one and a half decades. One reason is a recent renaissance of qualitative methodology within political science. After a lull from the late 1970s until the mid-1990s, during which time quantitative methodology made quantum leaps and consequently became more dominant, we have since witnessed an outpouring of new and more advanced works on qualitative methodology within the

[4] Alternatively, Sartori, op. cit., would argue that such "concept stretching" resulted from errors in "climbing and descending the ladder of abstraction." This is a general danger of the comparative method, but one, I agree with Sartori, that can in principle be mitigated.

[5] The authors discuss differences in ten areas: approaches to explanation, conceptions of causation, multivariate explanations, equifinality, scope and causal generalization, case selection, weighting observations, substantively important cases. See ibid. More recently, even a tripartite taxonomy has been advanced distinguishing between quantitative, qualitative and interpretive approaches; Yanow [5].

discipline. Compared to earlier generations of qualitative methodologists this new wave has several distinguishing characteristics: it produced more books (instead of merely articles), was engaged more in cross-method dialogue, and qualitative methodologists have become more professionalized as well as institutionalized [6].

Another reason is that quantitatively oriented researchers have opened up to the dialogue too. In fact, a highly influential textbook by King, Keohane and Verba can be seen as the opening move to the current and on-going debate [7]. Each of the three authors is a distinguished researcher in one of the three major subfields of political science in the U.S., namely American politics, international relations and comparative politics. This is probably one of the reasons why their book has become so prominent. Another reason, more important in our context, is their proposition that a common logic of scientific inference underlies all social science research, quantitative as well as qualitative. The authors thus attempt to break down the barriers separating both traditions and make a valuable contribution to "cross-cultural" dialogue.

Although this goal has been welcomed by leading qualitative methodologists the common logic proposed by King/Keohane/Verba has come in for severe criticism. A major critique launched against the textbook is that it attempts to squeeze all research into a "quantitative template" without sufficient regard for the particularities and strong points of qualitative approaches. For instance, one key advice given by King/Keohane/Verba to qualitative researchers is to increase the numbers of their observations.[6] This is a valid suggestion from the point of view of quantitative researchers because more observations will boost the leverage over a given research question.

However, qualitative methodologists have refuted that this idea is a panacea: "this recommendation appears to suggest that qualitative, small-N researchers should solve their basic research problems by ceasing to be small-N researchers [8]." More specifically, they argue that increasing observations may not be feasible because this may result in "concept stretching" (applying a concept to cases where it does not hold explanatory power) or raise a problem called "causal heterogeneity" (assuming the same causal explanation for cases in which, in fact, different mechanisms are at work).[7] Moreover, some argue that increasing observations in qualitative research is not always necessary or even desirable. In their view, qualitative research designs offer alternative ways of conducting scientific inference by drawing on intensive knowledge of only a few cases, for instance by identifying a causal mechanism.[8] Arguably, qualitative studies are better equipped to do that than quantitative ones based on a simple additive model of causation derived from standard methods of regression analysis [9].

Underlying these differences, among other things, are fundamentally divergent approaches to explanation. According to Mahoney/Goertz what qualitative analysts are interested in are the "causes-of-effects," i.e. they start with cases and their

[6] An observation is defined as "one measure of one dependent variable on one unit (and for as many explanatory variable measures as are available on that same unit)." See ibid., 217–228.
[7] Munck [28], op. cit., 105–121 (here: 112–113) and more generally on "concept stretching" Sartori, op.
[8] McKweon [29], op. cit., 139–167.

outcomes and then move backward to trace their causes. In contrast, quantitative studies typically adopt a quasi-experimental research design to establish the "effects-of-causes." What these studies are interested in is the "average effect of one or more causes across a population of cases. The explanation of *specific outcomes of particular cases* is not a central concern."[9] There is one crucial consequence of these different approaches to explanations: findings from qualitative research tend to remain valid as one moves from a larger set of cases to a particular subset, but are vulnerable if generalized from subset to superset. The exact opposite is true for quantitative research findings: they are good at explaining the average effect for a large set of cases, but may fail to explain a subset, let alone individual cases.[10] When engaging in dialogue across the cultural divide between quantitative and qualitative traditions it is necessary to realize and *respect* these differences: instead of making them the basis for criticism they should be treated as useful complements to one another.

Diverse Cultures, Shared Standards?

Without further going into detail on the differences between the two traditions suffice it to note that in spite of increasing "cross-cultural" discourse the deep-seated disagreement has not been eliminated. As Goertz reminds us, "[d]ialogue of course does not mean agreement."[11] The point I want to stress is that this diversity should be regarded as a strength of political science and we should make the most out of it by applying whichever method or combination of methods serves best to answer the question at hand.[12] In fact, using only appropriate methods (instead of uniformly imposing a single method, e.g. regression analysis) is a central ideal of qualitative research.[13] Other tenets of the qualitative tradition, avoiding concept stretching and defining appropriate scope conditions, work in similar ways, emphasizing the importance of individual cases and their circumstances [11].

I believe that much of the discomfort that some Chinese social scientists feel when looking at "Westernized" research on China could be dispelled by following these ideals more closely. Of course, *if* uncritically and uniformly applied to China, Western-derived theories, concepts and methods will lead us astray and will alienate domestic researchers (Yang [12]). However, the crucial problem in such cases is not that these studies are conducted according to a Western template, but that they fail to adhere to scientific standards by paying sufficient attention to the problems of scope conditions and the pitfalls of concept stretching [13]. Therefore, if they are applied with enough sensitivity to the local context, I believe that there is no necessity for developing a "Chinese social science," whatever that may entail.

Before concluding this section one caveat is in order. It may be tempting to replace the myth of a uniform Western political science with a distinction between an

[9] Mahoney/Goertz, op. cit., 230 (italics in original).
[10] Ibid., 238.
[11] Goertz, op. cit., 223.
[12] Pickel et al. [30] op. cit, 9–26.
[13] Mayring [10]. Mayring acknowledges that this ideal is often not adhered to by qualitative researchers themselves, particularly as they too tend to specialize in one method.

American/quantitative and a European/qualitative tradition. Certainly, quantitative methods are more developed and entrenched in the U.S. than in most European countries. However, this would again be a wrong dichotomy. For one thing, most of the proponents of qualitative methods quoted in this section stem from the United States. Secondly, such a dichotomy would not do justice to the diversity between the subfields of political science: whereas quantitative methods clearly dominate the subfield of American politics, their dominance is much less pronounced in comparative politics (the heading under which most studies of Chinese politics fall) and both are about equally strong in the international relations literature.[14] And thirdly, it would fail to notice the significant diversity existing even within European qualitative social research which makes it hard to speak of one European tradition.[15]

To sum up then, even though modern political science has been developed mostly in the West it is impossible to speak of a uniform western social science tradition. Even when reviewing methodological differences alone without recourse to theoretical or substantive issues, we find at least two equally strong cultures of research, namely qualitative and quantitative, each again home to various schools and approaches. Introducing a simple dichotomy of "Western" versus "Chinese social sciences" occidentializes this variegated field and does not pay sufficient attention to its diversity. Such a misconception would serve the development of Chinese social sciences ill as the main fault-lines of the debate do not run between "Western" and "Chinese" approaches but rather between the two broad "cultures" of qualitative and quantitative research.

Trends in Western Studies of Chinese Politics

While the methodological discourse described above continues within the larger discipline of political science, there are important changes underway in the subfield of international studies of Chinese politics which again underline that a simple "Chinese" versus "Western political science" perspective is unsustainable. Reviewing recent "state of the field" articles we can discern two general trends worth highlighting: more common application of advanced (especially quantitative) methods and greater specialization. I will argue that both trends are at least partially linked.

Increased Use of Quantitative Methods

The first trend becomes obvious when looking at a number of recent publications such as a special section on "new frontiers in survey research" in the flagship area studies journal *The China Quarterly* or a "state of the field" issue on village elections in *The Journal of Contemporary China*. In both cases Melanie Manion strongly argues for the adoption of large-scale, ideally nationally representative surveys as research design best suited to answer relevant political science questions, e.g. on migration, political participation or grassroots politics. Given the advanced

[14] Bennett/Elman, op. cit., 115.
[15] Knoblauch et al. [14]. Cf. Flick et al. [15].

methodological training now available to many graduate students as well as increased openness on the Chinese side for conducting surveys the prospects for such a research strategy are beginning to look bright. In contrast, Manion strongly argues against the use of "anecdotal evidence" plucked from Chinese media as contributing next to nothing to accumulating knowledge or testing pertinent hypotheses. Even locally representative surveys are viewed critically because the degree to which their results stray from the national mean is impossible to gauge [16, 17].

A similar assessment is to be found in Hurst's overview of studies on Chinese urban politics [18]. While not necessarily proposing more quantitative survey research, Hurst nevertheless urges his colleagues to engage much more in comparative research of various kinds instead of pursuing single-case studies as has so often been done before. His view of single-case studies is, however, more benign compared to Manion's since in the subfield of Chinese urban politics at least the most important cases (like Beijing, Shanghai, Tianjin or Guangzhou) have been selected with some justification. And yet, Hurst makes a strong case for extending the field of inquiry to those mid-sized cities which are home to the large majority of urbanites in China. Hurst's views are seconded by Chen and Sun's overview of recent literature on Chinese urban sociology. These authors already observe a greater shift towards large-scale survey research within their field [19].

From these examples it is easy to see how the methodological debate referred to above reverberates in the field of Chinese political studies: it is from the vantage point of a rigorous comparative logic—characteristic of quantitative research—that single-case studies have increasingly come in for criticism.[16] In fact, more traditional China watchers—commonly more qualitatively oriented—have taken issue with the increasing importance of quantitative methods in the field. Here, it is worth quoting Richard Baum, a seasoned China scholar, at some length:

> "Much has been written in recent years about the decline in area studies in American universities. Due in large measure to the dramatically increasing influence of (deductive) rational-choice and (quantitative) econometric models, imported wholesale into political science from economics graduate students studying comparative politics at the top U.S. research universities today appear to be investing less time and energy in gaining deep cultural and linguistic knowledge of their country or region of interest, and proportionally more time studying formal modeling and statistical techniques. Most leading political science departments, for example, now require a rigorous sequence of quantitative and formal theory courses for their first-year graduate students. Many departments now also offer students the alternative of taking an advanced sequence of mathematics/statistics courses as a substitute for a foreign language requirement. Indeed, students in many graduate departments (including my own) may now choose 'methodology' as a subfield of political science to replace one of the traditional, substantive fields. Increasingly, if almost imperceptibly, methodology has shifted from being a *set of tools*, i.e.

[16] Zhong [20], Fudan University National Institute of Advanced Studies in Social Sciences; Lauth and Winkler [31], op. cit., 37–69.

means used to study politics, to being an *object of study*, namely an end in itself.

If I may be permitted a personal observation, in the field of Chinese politics I have noticed a significant shift in the research interests of my graduate students in recent years, away from consideration of *qualitative* research problems (driven by an interest in major theoretical/conceptual issues and guided by intensive exposure to the country, its institutions, culture and its language) toward *quantitative* research agendas, often driven by the availability of 'large N data sets' incorporating several standardized socio-economic variables which can be more-or-less mechanically regressed against one another to derive 'statistically significant' tests of hypotheses (which were, in many cases, suggested by the availability of the data sets themselves). Such research is reminiscent of the old anecdote about the drunk who looked for his lost car keys under a street lamp. When asked why he was concentrating his search under the lamp, he answered 'Because that's where the light is!'

The problem lies not with the techniques and methods of statistical and formal modeling themselves, but rather with their tendency, when used in isolation from other, more traditional research methods, to facilitate the displacement of *analytical thinking* by mere *technical procedure* [21]."

Judging from this example it is probably a fair observation to make that the tone of the debate is harsher between differently inclined practitioners in the subfield of Chinese political studies than it is among methodologists of different stripes.[17] This is but one indication of a growing gap between empirical studies on the one hand and literature on methodology on the other—a gap that may be particularly large in area studies [22]. That aside, I would argue that instead of reacting defensively qualitatively oriented China scholars would do better to take up the challenge presented by the more methodologically sophisticated and quantitatively oriented scholars entering the field and try to make use of the rich new developments in qualitative methodology of recent years.

Naturally, narrowing the gap between cutting-edge methodological advances and their empirical application is a tall order, especially when we expect scholars to simultaneously bridge the quantitative-qualitative divide and engage in more multi-method research (Scharping [23]). Nevertheless, we can already see a new generation of China scholars well-versed in both quantitative and qualitative methods entering the field.[18] They are faced by enormous expectations regarding the quality of their work. We will come back to this point after addressing the second trend in Chinese political studies, namely specialization.

Higher Levels of Specialization

As Baum's remarks indicate the shift towards increasing use of formal models and quantitative methods in Chinese political studies is intimately linked with structural

[17] It could be added that this discomfort among practitioners is anything but new, see Sartori, op. cit., 1036–1040.

[18] A prime example for a study living up to these high expectations is Tsai [24].

changes in U.S. academe.[19] The same can be said about the increasing level of specialization among China scholars. Only where two or more positions for political scientists with a China focus are employed in one institution can there be specialization, for example on *either* China's domestic politics *or* foreign relations. This is a luxury that few European universities can afford. There are exceptions, particularly in the United Kingdom. But for instance in Germany the few universities with a professor for Chinese politics would consider it highly extravagant to hire a second one so that each could focus on just one of these two broad fields. This situation led Cabestan to conclude:

> "While over-specialization is often considered to be a distinguishing feature of American scholarship on contemporary China, conversely, the lack of specialization appears as an important characteristic of European studies of Chinese politics."[20]

Whether American China studies are indeed over-specialized may be disputed by others. As a matter of fact, U.S.-(based) China scholars have recently been calling for *greater* specialization. Take again the surveys cited above of political science and sociological literature on urban China: both Hurst and Chen/Sun argue for increasing specialization as enabling the integration of China studies with the specialist discourses within the respective discipline. From their point of view area studies (including Chinese political studies) need to get involved in general political science/sociology debates in order to gain greater relevance.[21] My contention would be that as students of Chinese politics do so, they have to employ what mainstream political science journals deem to be methodological rigor, and that still largely means standard quantitative methods. Therefore, I see a strong linkage between the increase in quantitative methods employed in the study of Chinese politics on the one hand and higher levels of specialization on the other.

Over-specialization, to use Cabestan's expression, can indeed be seen in some areas of political research on China. As Shambaugh demonstrates, in the U.S. the spheres of China's foreign policy studies and research on its security policy and military affairs are curiously de-linked. There are two separate communities studying each field with very limited exchanges between them.[22] Furthermore, Breslin has argued that our understanding of Chinese international behavior had been hampered by a de-linking of studies on its domestic politics and foreign policy (Breslin [26]). What these critiques make evident is that in spite of the required higher levels of specialization and integration into mainstream political science discourse we still need to put the different pieces back together to arrive at a (more or less) coherent image of Chinese politics. Hurst and Chen/Sun would certainly agree to that. In fact, Hurst argues for establishing "a coherent field that can be called 'Chinese urban politics'" bringing together various kinds of research on urban China *and* urban politics elsewhere.[23] Similarly, Chen/Sun call for greater inter-disciplinary

[19] It has also been propelled by a generation of Chinese-born, U.S.-educated scholars generally more interested in disciplinary studies than area studies. See Walder [25].
[20] Cabestan [32], op. cit., 99–131 (here: 99).
[21] Hurst, op. cit.; Chen/Sun, op. cit.
[22] Shambaugh [33], op. cit., 213–240.
[23] Hurst, op. cit., 467.

exchanges in the field of studies on China's urban society *as well as* better theorizing taking into account internationally comparative research (they explicitly reject country-specific theorizing as a useful approach).[24]

However, in my opinion all four articles quoted in the previous paragraph do not sufficiently appreciate the difficulty of fulfilling this dual task of integrating with the respective sub-disciplines *and* enhancing inter-disciplinary exchange. First, there is the simple fact that an individual researcher can only read and write that much. Given these time constraints each of us will likely focus on the audience most pertinent to his or her career. Upon self-critical inspection, it has to be acknowledged that the choice of research topics is in no small part influenced by considerations of funding and publishing opportunities as well as career prospects.[25] For those China scholars working in political science departments this means they have to concentrate on topics which will raise their chances of being published in mainstream disciplinary, not area studies journals. These are the topics most interesting from the vantage point of the larger discipline, but not necessarily those most pertinent to understanding contemporary China. Conversely, for contemporary China scholars working in East Asian departments—still very common in Europe—a different set of incentives applies. Here, what Walder writes about the situation in the U.S. during the 1950s still largely holds true:

> "[…] 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."[26]

These different outlooks are not easily reconciled which leads to my second point: what looks like "integration" from a disciplinary perspective can be seen as "fragmentation" from the vantage point of Chinese area studies. Not only will the "cross-cultural" communication problems between qualitatively and quantitatively oriented researchers become even more pronounced within Chinese political studies (as already evident in Baum's quote above), but there will also be more theoretical divides between different subject areas as each attempts to integrate into the mainstream discourses of the respective sub-discipline of political science. The more integrated into each sub-discipline Chinese political studies become the less intelligible these studies will be to China scholars with a different specialization. This phenomenon is akin to what Deng Zhenglai has labeled "mono-disciplinarization" within Chinese social sciences, only that it is happening within what is already a subfield, namely Chinese political studies.

The point here is not to argue that specialization is bad and generalist knowledge is good. Rather, I simply want to highlight that there are certain trade-offs in the development of our discipline and that specialization will, in my opinion, not automatically lead to greater inter-disciplinary exchanges but rather the opposite. The same is true for increasing methodological sophistication which will also help

[24] Chen/Sun, op. cit., 539–541.

[25] Of course, these are not the only consideration. Yanow, op. cit., 430, emphasizes that a host of subjective factors influence researchers "choice" of subject and methodology. These can be summarized as the researcher's (academic) socialization which means that "choice" is probably more limited than the use of this expression suggests. Nevertheless, I would maintain that within a given frame of preferences scholars still have room to select different topics and methods of research.

[26] Walder, op. cit.

integration into mainstream political science discourse while at the same time possibly obstructing fruitful "cross-cultural" dialogue within Chinese studies. Therefore, it is all the more important to discuss how to make the most of the increasing diversity of the field.

Conclusion: Making the Most of Diversity

I have argued above that there is a high level of diversity within Western political science—too high indeed to claim the existence of a uniform "Western political science" against which to develop a Chinese version. To bolster this claim the first section of this essay reviewed the broad debate in political science between quantitative and qualitative methodologists. While it is probably premature to speak of an emerging consensus, the general trend within that debate appears to be that instead of proclaiming the general superiority of one of these two traditions or "cultures" of research, a more fruitful approach would be mutual learning and use of multi-method research designs.[27]

The second section discussed trends in Western studies of Chinese politics and highlighted the increasing use of quantitative methods and higher levels of specialization. The methodological debate within political science in general was shown to reverberate within Chinese political studies. The more prevalent use of advanced (quantitative) methods is driven by the same structural changes (most pronounced in the U.S.) that influence development of the whole discipline. At the same time there is a (growing) gap between methodological advances and their application in empirical research within the area studies. A new generation of scholars is moving to narrow this gap, sometimes to the dismay of established China scholars. However, taking our clues from the general methodological debate, it would be most rewarding to respect different approaches to research, engage in mutual learning and adopt multi-method research designs well-suited to the actual questions under scrutiny to make the most of the existing diversity.

Of course, such advice is more easily given than put into practice. Moreover, the same holds true for recommendations advanced in recent articles on the "state of the field" in Chinese political studies. While some authors already see an over-specialization and lack of communication between the different branches of Chinese political studies, others argue for even more specialization. The latter see this as necessary integration into the mainstream of political science, i.e. the specialist discourses within respective sub-disciplines. However, the same authors also propose more inter-disciplinary exchanges without much apparent recognition of the fact that these trends may be mutually exclusive or at least obstructing one another.

The way I see it, specialization is the general trend in political science as well as in Chinese political studies. In fact, it has been argued that this kind of integration into larger disciplinary trends has come relatively late to Chinese political studies when compared to

[27] The actual benefits of multi-method research are themselves being contested, however. See Rohlfing and Kuehn [27]. More positive assessments are Pickel [34], op. cit. 517–542; Kelle and Erzberger [35], op. cit., 299–309.

China-related research in the disciplines of sociology or economics.[28] This tendency will continue quite naturally as each researcher follows his or her own interests. We all have to stake out our area of expertise to advance our own careers. And structural incentives are set in the direction of advancing specialization (however, with important differences between the U.S. and most European countries). By contrast, bringing this divergent field together to create more coherent analyses of Chinese politics and society will require our conscious and sustained efforts. The more a scholar integrates into the specialist discourse of, for instance, urban political studies he or she will lose the ability to freely communicate with other China scholars with a different specialization. However, we need to retain this ability in order to avoid fragmentation of Chinese political studies and actually accumulate substantive and theoretical knowledge.

More generally speaking, specialization is certainly desirable, but it can only proceed with increasing division of labor. This division of labor, in turn, means that as different researchers employ various methods and topical foci others have to respect these choices. Otherwise, mutual learning and "cross-cultural" dialogue will be hampered by unnecessary misunderstandings. To avoid these one has to learn about the other. It is in this sense that I hope this essay will make a contribution to the debate on the state of the field of Chinese political studies by presenting some pertinent trends in the general discipline of political science as well as Western studies of Chinese politics in particular. The challenge will be to bridge three major divides discussed above: between quantitative and qualitative approaches, between political science and area studies as well as between Chinese and Western scholars.

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