

# China Transnationalized?

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### Introduction

This paper, which is part of a larger research project, takes up the issue of contemporary China's relationship with the rest of the world, and between its government and people. In so doing it challenges much of the conventional wisdom about China, both in terms of how to study the country, how it got to this juncture, and where it is headed. It contends that China's recent emergence on the world stage is much more complex, and mercurial, than observers have so far recognized. It is also one that China's leaders have found to be increasingly vexing as they have raced to make sense of their new found international position and to maintain control over developments both at home and abroad that are part and parcel of the country's emergence as a major power.

The paper's central argument is that China should be viewed as a transnational polity. This state not only involves a deep level of integration between its economy and the international one (a topic that has already been discussed at length by political economists), but also how those within China think of themselves and their country's relationship with the rest of the world. This is not to say that China have become particularly cosmopolitan, but rather that it is deeply entwined with the international system in ways that extend well beyond how we normally think of the country. Such a development has stimulated deep and far reaching debates within the China over fundamental issues of collective identity and China's place within the existing international order, while posing a series of troublesome difficulties for a Chinese leadership looking to coral such discussions in a direction that will enhance rather than erode its authority and control over one of the world's largest, and most powerful, states.

To be clear from the start this is not to contend that such a change is pervasive, or irreversible,

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but rather that it is meaningful, and constitutes one of the most important recent (even though it is embedded in a longer history of openness) developments within China, and its relationship with the outside world. It is also a shift that has largely gone under-reported by those who study the country. The project from which this paper is drawn looks to rectify such a shortcoming via a focus upon the prominent role within the country of elites who have deep intellectual bonds outside of China, but whom have attained a level of prominence within the country. More specifically, I contend that this group has attained a high level of significance and influence within China, especially following the removal of many of the physical barriers to movement into and out of the country over the last several decades, and with the more recent rise of Internet-based social media that has eclipsed more traditional, territorially grounded, forms of communication. Such actors stand in a nebulous, but crucial, space between China and the world, but also between the country's top leaders and its vast population.

Over the last 25 years these transnational public intellectuals have moved relatively unfettered across China's territorial boundaries, gained access to the highest levels of power within the country, and influenced the tone and tenor of popular debates and discussions, while also serving as its main interlocutors on the international stage. It is my impression that many within China are aware of this trend, however, I also feel as was the case with Montesquieu, and the light he shed on American politics over two hundred years ago, outside insight into this Chinese dynamic is needed if we are to fully describe and explain its development and significance.

This paper then places transnational public intellectuals at the center of studying contemporary Chinese politics and foreign relations. The larger project from which it draws upon then considers two primary cases (international relations scholars and contemporary artists) and four secondary ones (economists, legal scholars, leaders of religious movements, and the musicians in the underground music scene). The main empirical chapters of the manuscript that will follow examine how those within these groups have spoken to each other, influenced the state, and shaped public discussions both within their specific areas of expertise, but also more broadly, through contributing to and shaping public debates about what it is to be Chinese, and where the country now fits into the existing international order. Such broader questions have been grounded with a particular attention to the extent to which over the last three decades those within these groups have tended toward either insular or cosmopolitan interpretations of China and its place in the world.

Such a survey, though, extends beyond the scope of this paper. Instead, on the following pages I set out the foundations for the project by considering how the transnational has played a role within contemporary Chinese politics, outlining the extent to which such influences have been under-reported in the existing secondary literature on the country and its foreign relations, and mapping out the conceptual framework for overcoming such limitations.



## Part 1: Questioning the Naturalness of Insularity and Autarky within Modern China

China's present is very often studied with reference to the country's propensity and attachment to isolation and insularity, to wall building, to xenophobia. The prevalence of such an interpretation of what was normal for China is evident in both casual studies of the country and in more sophisticated academic treatises. It is a perspective that makes it difficult to see the extent to which the transnational has played a pivotal role in shaping China's modern development and current trajectory. Thus, for any study seeking to put the transnational at its center it is a necessary first step to challenge the natural, taken for granted nature, of such a narrative.

In brief, the stepping off point for viewing modern China as insular can be found in virtually every conventional study of the turn of the previous century when the Qing dynastic system teetered, and then finally fell in 1911, to be replaced, eventually, by a modern nation-state structure. Not surprisingly this period of rapid transition has long attracted historians and political scientists seeking to describe and explain its tumultuous politics. One might expect that work of this period would give broad consideration to the possibility that the new China that emerged from the wreckage of the Qing was more open to the external world than had previous been the case. Indeed, at first glance, this emphasis is visible in the way the period is normally presented. However, upon closer examination it becomes apparent that most surveys of the time fall back upon known truths about Chinese preferences for insularity.

This being the said, it is also the case that the conventional story in this literature is told with reference to surging levels of economic and political interaction with the outside world, which reveals that China at the end of the 1800s was an entity that was no longer closed off to the outside world. However, fascinatingly, most such narratives also tend to place a heavy emphasis upon the extent to which those within China attempted to channel such a development in the direction of preserving Chinese distinctiveness, and limiting the degree to which change breached both the territorial and intellectual boundaries of the new country.

The anchor for such a constrained view of the period is located in the famous *zhongti waiyong* (中学为体 西学为用) concept that appears to encapsulate how those in China at the time viewed the rest of the world. Chinese scholars first formulated this idea during the end stages of the Qing as an intellectual framework for making sense of the changing world they were confronting. As such *zhongti waiyong* was central to subsequent May 4<sup>th</sup> era intellectual debates. The term is usually translated as “preserving a (Chinese) essence, making use of the foreign” and is generally seen as referring to the preference within the country to somehow save its culture and tradition even as it had to utilize external, western approaches to economics, politics, and culture, in order to survive in a world dominated by others. Most scholars peg this approach to the outside world to the work of Zhang Zhidong (1837-1909), especially as his influential essay, “Exhortation to Learning,” which contained a vigorous defense of the old, insular Chinese order, coupled with a limited acknowledgement of the need to change and modernize China through a limited importation of western learning. As Zhang was the first to articulate this position he is deserving of



a prominent spot in reflections on this period. However, the enshrinement of his rather static interpretation of the concept is more an artifact of our own preference for continuing to imagine the country's past as insular than it is reflective of the political and cultural debates of his time.

The comparative political philosopher Leigh Jenco has recently made this point in a clear fashion. Her work re-considers the intellectual terrain of this period of Chinese history, and pays particular attention to excavating key points of uncertainty and debate that surrounded the *zhongti, waiyong* concept that we tend to accept as being both clear and authoritative (then and now). Rather than uniformity of mind Jenco finds that Chinese thinkers from the period disagreed, often vehemently, not only over the relative balance that should exist between Chineseness and foreignness in their country's development, but even over the basic meaning, and locateness, of such concepts.

Jenco argues that as such debates progressed Chinese thinker became increasingly more inventive, and less constrained, in thinking both spatially and temporally about how to envision the point of intersection between where and when they lived and the rest of the world. Indeed, she concludes that at this juncture more than a few Chinese thinkers became akin to intrepid explorers, and their intellectual universe extended well beyond an East/West dichotomy. Or, as she wrote:

“The point of their ‘Eastern’ and ‘Western’ tropes, then, may not be to sort out civilizational characteristics into categories of the inevitably universal and the irredeemably particular (read: ‘cultural’), but to facilitate the travel of cultural products and practices across the spatial as well as temporal boundaries originally seen to contain them. By denying the inevitable adherence of cultural characteristics in particular persons or groups, the May Fourth debate reveals ‘East’ and ‘West’ to be spatial categories deeply contingent on human actions to situate communities within a variety of alternate trajectories. These thinkers thus made it possible to see the future, and not only the past, as a site of cultural identification and possibility.”<sup>1</sup>

It is of interest, and a point that is central to this paper, that during the late Qing those at the center of such discussions were increasingly individuals who occupied in-between spaces (literally and figuratively) within Chinese politics and culture. They were almost all born in China, but the vast majority of those who came to shape public debates in the emerging country were educated abroad, or had at least spent extended periods of time outside of dynastic China's boundaries. Their imaginative de-couplings of time and space can then be seen as exercises which were performed in order to carve out new terrain, not in a manner that necessarily insulated China from the outside, but rather sought out new points of intersection and convergence between it and other places and times.

To be clear such innovative approaches are not entirely forgotten in the usual histories of this period. However, it is of no small significance that transformative ideas are almost always placed

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<sup>1</sup> Leigh Jenco, *Making the Political: Founding and Action in the Political Theory of Zhang Shizhao* (Cambridge University Press, 2013): 30.



within the confines of the *zhongti waiyong* formula. As such their fluidity, even when acknowledged, is generally treated in a limited manner, one that pays greater attention to what was being done to preserve boundaries and protect the past than it does to how such divides were being muddied and transgressed by a new class of political actors, intellectuals with transnational ties. Such a disciplining is further underscored by the fact that for most students of the period while intellectual debates are considered to be of interest, they are also treated as being of secondary importance to the eventual hurly burly of the Chinese civil war, a conflict whose eventual victor is well known to all.

It is in the telling of the declaration of victory that another stone is placed into the mental construct that envisions China as closed. Mao Zedong's famous October 1, 1949 celebration that the Chinese people (中华人民共和国 *zhonghua renmin*) had stood up (站起来 *zhang qilai*) to foreign oppression with the establishment of the People's Republic of China marked the Chinese Communist Party's formal ascendancy to power and the official creation of the state that still governs China. Not surprisingly, it tends to be the key stepping off point for discussions of contemporary Chinese politics and foreign relations. As a pronouncement that was so clearly intended as a defense of the Chinese nation, and a celebration of its independence and separateness, it also seems to constitute a compelling example of a modern continuation of the historical tradition of insularity and animosity toward the foreign.

However, there is a problem with this story that everyone in China, and all students of the country as well, know: the existing tape of Mao's October first speech is inconclusive regarding whether or not the chairman actually made the specific reference to "standing up" at that particular time. This is not to say that he never made such a powerful statement, but rather that he most likely did so in another context. It is then possible to contend that it is a trifling matter to argue that this utterance was made in a slightly different time and place than is commonly understood. What is, though, of inarguable significance is that throughout this period, neither Mao, his Party, nor the citizens of his newly formed state, had a coherent idea of their collective national identity, or what to make of the "*zhonghua renmin*" that performed the "standing up" function the speech so lauded. In other words, while the act of standing up can be symbolically equated with the formal establishment of the PRC and the creation of a new China, it was far from clear who had agency in such a process, and who belonged within the territorial boundaries of this new state.

Such confusion was dramatically evident in the volatility within the terms Mao, and his government, used after the creation of the PRC to refer to the population they governed. While the eventual orthodox formula that the country belonged to 56 distinct nationalities, led by the vast Han majority and complemented with 55 minority groups, is now universally accepted, in 1949 such a categorization had not attained such a status, or even taken root. On the contrary, Beijing's new rulers spent a great deal of time and energy in the early years after the establishment of the PRC debating the meaning of Chinese-ness within the confines of the contemporary nation-state and Marxist ideology.



In the China's leaders opted for enforcing upon the Chinese people a particular interpretation of this identity that consisted of little more than an extended application of largely imported Marxist concepts about race and ethnicity to discipline the remarkable ethnic heterogeneity with which they were confronted. However, when such definitions were first brought down to parts of the Chinese countryside they were so outside the context of everyday life there as to be unknowable. Thus, when residents of such regions were asked to self-identify their ethnicity in a trial survey in the early 1950s they produced a laundry list of such markers that was so extensive as to be virtually unintelligible and unusable for China's new census takers.<sup>2</sup>

The implication of such confusion is that if it was the case that China's leaders, and its people, could not articulate who they were, even in the context of Mao's famous, if somewhat apocryphal, statement, then it is impossible to see them as being particularly inward looking and insular. Standing against something, at least in any meaningful way, requires common knowledge of who one is. Absent such a framework there is no way that one can exclude the outside world.

Such a claim can be taken even further when attention is turned directly toward Mao himself. It is well known that he subsequently moved to rectify what he saw as deviant tendencies amongst his people, especially intellectuals, and questioned their loyalty and patriotism through calling attention to their contacts with the outside world, and alleged slavish devotion to all things foreign. However, such a drive was, rife with contradictions.

First, at a fundamental level Mao was a central conduit for the introduction of a foreign ideology into China: Marxism. Moreover, while Mao, himself, was not educated outside of China, the vast majority of his generation of fellow Chinese communist leaders were (at least in part), with a core group having spent time in the capitals of Europe, most notably Paris.

Second, in yet another sign of robust pragmatism, even as Mao increasingly came to rail against all things external to China, he continued to seek out foreign aid, capital and technology in fostering the development of the country's economic and national security apparatus, largely via an embrace of a large-scale Soviet presence within the country.

This being said, it is also the case that beginning in the late-1950s Mao drove China down the path of the Anti-Rightist Campaign, the Great Leap Forward, and, finally, during the mid-1960s the Cultural Revolution. As a result the space he allowed for points of contact with the outside world was dramatically, and violently, diminished. However, written against the longer historical patterns unearthed in the preceding pages, and their return immediately following his death, such an imposition can be seen as an aberration from the norm in Chinese history.

Not surprisingly, the segment of the Chinese population which bore a disproportionate amount of the pain and suffering caused by such an abortive move were Chinese intellectuals, especially those with international ties, as they were portrayed by Mao throughout this period as enemies of the Chinese nation. The painful irony of such a charge is that while as a rule this group was deeply wedded to the external, they had also already played a pivotal role in formulating a coherent vision for, and engaged in extended debates over, just how China was to join the world

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<sup>2</sup> For more on this topic see Thomas Mullaney, *Coming to Terms with the Nation: Ethnic Classification in Modern China* (University of California Press, 2011).





without losing its past. Indeed, such activity, and the individuals who generated it, has become the focal point of an expanding body of work by students of Chinese politics. The forerunners of this field are Merle Goldman and Perry Link, but it now includes scholars such as Timothy Cheek, Timothy Weston, and David Kelly, among others. This work has done a great deal to illuminate not only the intellectual history of China, and how China's leaders have so often sought to bring such a group under their control, while many within it have fought back against such constraints.<sup>3</sup>

Such literature, though, has also generally been fettered on two fronts. First, it has not paid enough attention to the transnational linkages that so many Chinese intellectuals have, a consideration of how their status and reputation may be elevated by ties to the outside world. Second, it has almost without fail tended to view the relationship between intellectuals and the Chinese state as combative and conflictual, or, on the contrary, with the former lacking agency in regard to the later, and then serving as handmaidens to an authoritarian regime. While this may have once been the case, as the most recent wave of work on intellectuals suggests, the situation is now much more complex. Regardless of how they have been studied, it is clear that these intellectuals were progressively constrained under Mao. However, even at the height of his power could not entirely close China off to outside influences, and almost as soon as he perished so too did the temporary restraining walls he had created around the country.

Deng Xiaoping is widely praised for returning China to a more pragmatic path, and cautiously, experimentally, opening it up to the same foreign influences that had played such a prominent role at each stage of its earlier development. In other words, from this juncture forward it becomes virtually impossible to ignore the yawning holes in the supposed dike that separates China off from the rest of us. China's recent rise on the world stage has only occurred as the country has become much more deeply enmeshed in the broader international political and economic order. It was, and still is, an age of Chinese integration with the rest of the world.

However, once more the manner in which such a trend is normally framed tends to prioritize the insular, and treat openness as limited and contingent. As a result, the degree to which those in China have been willing to consider (if not always adopt) the ways of others remains under-explored, even invisible. At this juncture, it is the political scientists, rather than the historians who have played a central role in the perpetuation of the theme of Chinese propensity for keeping the outside world out.

The initial point of departure for such a concentration can be found in the literature from the late 1980s and 1990s that focused on the process of international norms diffusion into China. Such work described and explained the extent to which China's nascent involvement in international organizations brought about a change in the country's relationship with the rest of the world. More specifically, contributors to it tended to begin their studies by taking note of the degree to which China was an outsider through the mid-1970s to the growing United Nations

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<sup>3</sup> See for example Merle Goldman, *China's Intellectuals: Advise and Dissent* (Harvard University Press, 1988); Perry Link, *Evening Chats in Beijing: Probing China's Predicament* (Norton, 1992); Timothy Cheek, *The Intellectual in Modern Chinese History* (Cambridge University Press, 2015); Timothy Weston, *The Power of Position: Beijing University, Intellectuals, and Chinese Political Culture, 1898-1929* (University of California Press, 2004);



based system of international regimes but became a more active participant in these multilateral forums in the 1980s and after.

The socialization literature would then appear to be cut from a different cloth than the stories of isolation that have so far been recounted in this paper. After all the core of this work is a consideration of the manner in which increased interaction with the international system influenced both Chinese domestic politics and foreign relations. In other words, it looks to trace how foreign ideas worked their way into the Chinese political system since Deng partially opened it up to such influences. Thus, it does at least consider openness and as such has value. Indeed, most of my previous work on China was written entirely within this field's parameters. However, such an approach is deeply flawed in terms of how it conceptualizes the point of contact between the country and the rest of the world, and by extension acts as yet another mechanism for the perpetuation of the myth of Chinese insularity.

To begin with it is built upon an implicit assumption of China as inert, as a recipient, in the diffusion process and that change across boundaries is being produced through the country being acted upon. In other words, once more closed-ness is normal for China, something that is then breached, or overcome, only over Chinese reticence and resistance to such a trend.

Such a concentration is not so misguided that it should be jettisoned out of hand. On the contrary, it captures an important facet of the changing point of intersection between China and the world that was set in motion in the late 1970s. However, it is also not so valuable that it should end up monopolizing all discussions of such a dynamic. My main reservation in this regard is that throughout the period in question a wide variety of more informal points of contact were rapidly growing (both in number, depth and reach, an empirical trend that will be documented in the following chapters) between China and the rest of the world. To limit thinking about boundary-crossing largely to the incubators created by the UN-system is to miss much of these broader processes and thus arrive at a limited vision on what was actually beginning to unfold.

In short, the socialization literature allowed political scientists to develop testable hypotheses about the extent to which change within China was being triggered by international influences. However, it also rested upon overly narrow assumptions about what matters within the outside-in dynamic within the country.

A partial corrective to this limitation has recently been forwarded within a new set of work that looks to describe and explain why so many Chinese are now returning to China, and measuring the impact that such a development is having on various aspects of culture, economics, and politics within the country. Such analysis has been richly empirical and shed much light on the complex motives that seem to underlie individual's decisions to "go back home," while also doing a great deal to document the challenges they confront once in China after having spent significant periods of time away from the country.

Such work is had tended to be more empirically grounded than the socialization literature, but, it has also generally not been framed in a manner that explores larger issues of Chinese identity and worldview construction. In other words, the possible broader imprint of returnees on China has received rather short shift. Moreover, the majority of those writing in this field have



framed their observations with reference to either the diaspora literature, or studies of Chinese domestic politics, rather than on the country's foreign relations and the nature of its rise on the world stage.

In addition, this literature has brought to the forefront individuals who have relatively high levels of education (those who studied for advanced degrees abroad), and wealth (those who oversee inflows of capital and investment into China, and technical knowledge (in terms of expertise over particular sectors of the economy, or mastery of new technological innovations), it has not generally extended to a consideration of those within such areas who have attained a level of public notoriety within China. Put differently, those who have managed to create platforms for the dissemination of their views within China more broadly are largely invisible within this scholarship.

More fundamentally, neither the socialization, nor returnees literature has, in the end, made a particularly indelible imprint on how we normally think about China and its rise. The work has been read by specialists, but, in the end, the boundary transgressing tendencies that figure prominently in all three strands of work tend to be eclipsed by the apparent rise of Chinese nationalism, work which is built upon yet another image of the country that conveys ongoing insularity and xenophobia.

Events within China since the late 1990s have made it quite easy to fixate upon the apparent rise of nationalism within the country as its has been repeatedly, if somewhat sporadically, rocked by popular anti-foreign demonstrations. The emblem of such protests is the *fenqing*, or angry youth, face painted with the flag of the PRC, mouth stretched upon in rage, carrying a sign denouncing Japan, the US, or some other nation.

The impact of such imagery is obvious as it makes the country again appear intent on defending its borders and ramping up its opposition to external influences. However, lost in such imagery is the series of contractions and cross-cutting trends that underlie *fenqing* activism. The very youth who generate such images are most often quite tied into international networks via the use of social media, and are consumers of a wide array of international brands and products. Yet, *fenqing* imagery resonates deeply with what we think we know about China. This is not to say that the literature on Chinese nationalism has intentionally essentialized *fenqing* in this way and ignored the incongruities within their apparent anti-foreign leanings, but rather that by giving pride of place to these individuals, and their particular brand of slogans, and highlighting the most abrasive of their actions and behaviors, the work tends to create the impression that closedness within China once more reigns supreme.

The work then brings into consideration only one side of the coin, and by ignoring the face which could contain more cosmopolitan views of the world within China, it is unable to develop a more thorough, comprehensive view of the type of discussions which are unfolding within the country. Such a tendency is over-determined, as, we have seen that Chinese insularity dominates our thinking about the country.

My previous work attempted to sidestep such a limitation by placing a heavy emphasis on elites as source of insight into the emergence of new trends within Chinese thinking about international relations, especially with reference to the concept of sovereignty and intervention.



Moreover, since the early 1990s a number of other scholars have honed in on the same group. Much of this work has tended to treat elites in the same manner that I did in 2005. They see them as those “affiliated with a short list of prominent government sponsored research institutes, think tanks, and universities within China that are involved with analyzing China’s foreign relations and broader issues of international politics. Such organizations include, but are not limited to, the Chinese Academy of Social Science’s Institute of World Economics and Politics (*Shijie Jingji yu Zhengzhi Yanjiusuo*) and American Studies Institute (*Meiguo Yanjiusuo*), the Foreign Ministry’s Institute of International Studies (*Guoji Wenti Yanjiusuo*), the State Council’s Institute of Contemporary International Relations (*Xiandai Guoji Guanxi Yanjiusuo*), the Shanghai Institute of International Relations (*Shanghai Guoji Wenti Yanjiusuo*), Peking University’s Institute of International Relations, Fudan University’s Institute of American Studies, and the Foreign Affairs College.”<sup>4</sup>

However, this approach to coming to terms with who is among the country’s elite considers who matters (within a single issue arena), and what gives one this status (with a fixation on positions in formal institutions), much too narrowly, while also understating the group’s bridging role within and without China. In short, the book that is growing out of this paper will demonstrate that Chinese elites now move back and forth between China’s leaders and its population, acting as go-betweens, neither holding the reigns of power, nor part of the masses, but occupying a crucial bridging space between the two. In this regard the country’s new intellectual elite convey information in both directions, shaping views and opinions of those occupying the highest seats of power, but also influencing the tone and tenor of discussions in the street. This is not to say that they are unfettered by those in power, or stand unbowed in front of the masses, but rather that they play a crucial, yet to date understudied and poorly understood, role within contemporary Chinese politics and foreign relations.

## Part II: Thinking about a Transnationalized China

The previous section of this paper reviewed recent Chinese history, and how we study the country, and forwarded two arguments. First, modern China has never been, and certainly is not now, hermetically sealed off from the rest of the world. Second, there is a rather pervasive tendency to think about the so-called Middle Kingdom as a far-off and insular place. In other words, there is a marked disjuncture between how China has interacted with the rest of the international system, and the manner in which we tend to describe and explain such a dynamic.

This paper, and larger book project, is intended to rectify this sorry state of affairs through developing a new research framework for re-orienting how we come to terms with the country and its place in the world. Fortunately, the rudimentary elements of such a turn have already been

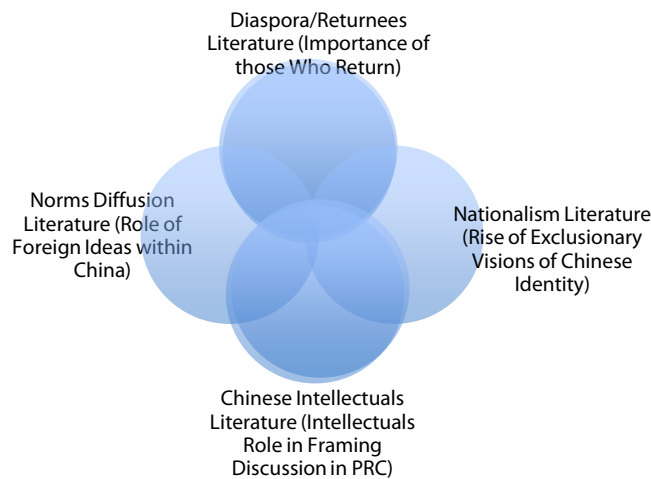
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<sup>4</sup> Allen Carlson, “More than Just Saying No: China’s Approach to Sovereignty and Intervention since Tiananmen,” in *New Directions in Chinese Foreign Policy*, eds. Alistair Iain Johnston and Robert Ross (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006): 217-241. Also note that scholars as diverse as Jonathan Garver, Iain Johnston, David Shambaugh, Taylor Fravel, among others, have also tended to focus on this community in their work.



suggested in the extant academic literature on Chinese politics and international relations. In short, a Venn diagram of all four approaches discussed in part one (socialization, returnees, nationalism, and Chinese intellectuals) reveals an unexplored place of overlap between them.

### Diagram of Literatures on Contemporary Chinese Politics and Foreign Relations



Each of these approaches contained useful insights. The literature on norms diffusion into China suggested just how much foreign and external ideas have come to matter there. Scholars studying new developments within patterns of returnees to the country highlight what appears to be an increasing level of movement across its borders by a highly educated and influential subset of the general population. The new cottage industry on Chinese nationalism demonstrated that the foreign within China is far from reigning supreme and insular concepts of collective self seem to be on the rise. Finally, work on Chinese intellectuals points to the importance of this class within shaping modern Chinese politics.

When such strands of analysis are de-coupled from the constraints of seeing China as naturally closed, and from the research traditions in which they were originally incubated, it becomes obvious that they collectively point to the potential importance in China of those who were born there, but have received at least part of their education, or, more broadly, have spent significant periods of time, outside the PRC, yet have gained recognition as influential/significant voices within the country on issues of political and social significance. Those within this category then form a bridge between the China and the rest of the international system, and can be best understood as being transnational public intellectuals.

This transnational public intellectual concept is the foundation of this book. It contains three discrete components, each of which needed to be defined in a manner that was amenable to empirical research.



First, what can be considered transnational (跨国 *kuaguo*)? To lend the requirement a degree of specificity this project required that for anyone in the PRC to be considered as such he or she must have spent, at a somewhat early juncture in his or her life (before turning 30), at least two consecutive years outside of China. While this residency requirement is somewhat arbitrary it allowed for the creation of a basic litmus test for the transnational, and set the bar high enough so that simple trips abroad were not sufficient to meet it. In other words, this requirement is a general ticket for admission to the research study. However, it is also one that could be, in particular circumstances, purchased via other means.

Second, whereas so much of the extant literature on China's public intellectuals has revolved around rather esoteric, and heavily theoretically laden, discussions of what "public" (公众 *gongzhong*) means in the Chinese context, or on how those within the country have debated the concept, this book took a more pragmatic approach to the term. The method I deployed here hinged upon a pair of simple tests related to degree of visibility within China.

First, to be considered "public" one must have attained some recognition from the Chinese state. Such appreciation is not of a singular nature, and can take many forms, including, but not limited to: official commendations, honorary positions, advisory posts, formal roles within the state hierarchy, and positive portrayals within official media outlets. In other words, to be public one need have a foot in the world of the Chinese state. However, primary professional position cannot be within the state in terms of being a high-ranking government official. Conversely, in general, being public means have not strayed so far from the state, becoming so critical of its structure, or so frustrated with its perceived shortcomings, that it leads to full-time dissent.

The second facet of being public may be more fleeting than the first as it relates to the degree to which one is known within China. Visibility here is not synonymous with fame, nor did it need to be universal, but means that one must be known in China outside one's own circle of expertise. Qualification then entails general name recognition, sales of cultural products, trending on Internet search engines, being the subject of discussions on websites, blogs, BBs forums, and more recently followings in various popular social media sites. The point here is not that one needed be a household name to be considered public, just somehow "known" outside of the halls of power and beyond their own field of expertise.

Finally, the term "intellectual" (知谁分子 *zhishifenzi*) has deep cultural roots within China's dynastic past, its exam system, and contemporary Chinese politics. This insures that it is overladen with multiple meanings within China. In an effort to sidestep such issues I use it to simply mean that one has specialized training/expertise in a specific field of knowledge production.

All three components of the transnational public intellectual concept were treated as functionally discrete and measurable categories of activity. The intent of the transnational public intellectual concept was then not to forward philosophical or normative arguments about Chinese intellectuals, but rather to lay out an empirical research framework that allowed for distinguishing who can and cannot be considered a transnational public intellectual within China at any given point in time.



This being the case, it was apparent from the beginning of the project that within China there are a number of clusters of intellectual debate/production within the larger universe of all those that could be considered as transnational public intellectuals. More specifically, there are several intellectual communities where the major constellations of activity have a degree of coherence/cohesiveness, prominence within China at both the popular and official level, and, which have, even at first glance, some transnational component to them. More specifically, on the basis of my over 20 years of studying China, and the feel for all the possible areas of activity that might merit more extensive focus via the TPI framework that grows out of such experience, I arrived at a list of possible cases of TPI: international relations scholars, religious leaders, innovators in the technology industry, economists, analysts in consulting firms, artists, musicians, legal scholars, human rights activists, bankers, designers and architects, and a wide variety of scientists (chemists, physicists, etc.).

A single research project cannot tackle all of these groups. To narrow the scope of the study down I then utilized the crucial case concept. In short, I placed a priority on finding cases that appeared to be of central importance to the main animating questions within my research framework. More specifically, I choose my cases studies with an eye toward detecting levels of trans-nationality within China, and the extent to which such activity appears to be affiliated with either cosmopolitan/inclusive views on China and its position in the world versus exclusive/insular perspectives on the same issues. In other words, are those in various TPI communities trending toward either particularly open or closed perspectives on Chinese identity and the country's place within the existing international order?

These criteria led me to two cases of transnational public intellectuals: international relations and contemporary art. Each of these passed the initial educated guess test regarding their transnational dimension. In addition, both have a quite visible role within various public debates regarding China and its position in the world (albeit channeled through field specific conversations). Moreover, based on initial impressions of the character of each of these centers of public intellectual activity it seemed warranted to expect that those in international relations might hold views that skew a bit more toward insular and protective positions on China and Chinese-ness, while those in art could initially be thought of as tending to hold more cosmopolitan, less defensive, views of the country and its people. In other words, the two selected cases covered each of the main the operational aspects of the transnational public intellectual experience that are the focus of this book.

All this being said, one might argue that through such a set of choices about what to study I end up constructing a project about the two cases, not one about general trends within transnational public intellectual activity in China. Such a critique has some merit (this is a weakness of crucial case study approaches in general). However, even if this is the case the book has value as these groups have generally been understudied, they clearly matter within China, and they also offer traction on important questions regarding who is popular, who influences the state, and what kind of views are in play within the universe of Chinese transnational public intellectual activity. In other words, they yield a rich and significant set of empirical findings about how



Chinese politics and foreign relations are changing. In addition, in order to test out the uniqueness vs. generalizable nature of the two cases in the concluding part of the book I briefly turn to other groups of transnational public intellectuals via the development of a handful of mini-cases.

Having settled on this case study approach developing the project further hinged on determining what its unit of analysis would be. As my main interest within the project was to determine the relationship between transnational exposure, visibility in a field (up to officials/amongst peers/down to grassroots), and views/approaches to questions of Chinese-ness/China's position in the world (insular vs. cosmopolitan), I decided to focus on individual TPis in China.

There is precedence in international relations for looking at the individual. On the one hand, classical realists, such as Hans Morgenthau, focused their work on the role that leaders and diplomats played in trying to navigate their states through the rough and tumble world of international politics. More recently, neo-classical realists have reprised this argument. Most notably, in his book on sovereignty Stephen Krasner explicitly argued that to know international politics one must examine the decisions made by individual statesmen. On the other hand, a host of scholars have recently attempted to ground the rather abstract theoretical pronouncements of systemic constructivism with empirical research that places individuals (whether in states, or between them) at the center of their analysis.

This project then finds itself in rather good company in making individual elites its main focus. I am even more confident of the validity of this turn when it is viewed against the backdrop of recent trends within the study of Chinese foreign policy and national security as the majority of this work has begun to fold in extensive consideration of the views of the country's foreign policy elite. The problem, though, with this China-specific literature is twofold. First, it has tended not to pursue the task of surveying elite views in a particularly rigorous manner. In other words, there is little consideration within this turn of basic methodological questions related to measurement and sampling. More broadly, the voices that are considered to matter, to merit study, have been rather narrowly defined, limited only to foreign policy elites and excluding others who occupy international spaces, and whom comment on, contribute to broader discussions of China and its place in the world. This oversight has continued despite the fact that most such studies also take note of the expanding number of contributors within the country to discussions on both fronts that through the mid-1990s had been monopolized by the state, and a small circle of establishment intellectuals. In other words, the time is ripe to look beyond such usual suspects within the study of China.

With such foundational issues settled I then turned to thinking of what metrics to use to study these individuals, and their relationship to the cluster of TPI activity that they both populate, animate, and are framed by, while doing so in a manner that could account for change over time. In the broadest sense I approached this task through isolating specific periods within post-post-Tiananmen Chinese history (1992-1999; 1999-2008; 2008-2013). However, such a turn only provided a rudimentary starting point for the research project, one that set the stage for the





more fine-grained analysis of who and what TPIs are in China.

Once again drawing on my over two decades of experience studying Chinese politics, and informed by a thorough reading of the extant secondary literature on issues related to each of the main two cases of intellectual activity that are a focus of this book, I determined that since the early 1990s there have been in the neighborhood of between ten to twenty prominent individuals within each of the case studies. However, such a figure was intended to simply set the general parameters for the project. To move beyond such an estimate I made a series of methodological moves that allowed for a much more specific location of each of the key facets of the research program on TPIs: who were TPIs, who mattered within such groups (with reference to each other and their broader field), who influenced the state, who had the public's ear, and how were they positioning themselves on issue of Chines-ness and China's place in the world.

The case studies discussed in the book that is growing out of this paper each center on issues of intellectual activity that are distinct, the specific types of sources gathered for this research project were quite varied. However, in a general sense I made use of the same set of rubrics in examining both cases.

First, in determining who was “transnational” in both fields I made use of the fact that a great deal of biographical information about high profile intellectuals is now available online, both in terms of individuals resumes and CVs, but also within the secondary academic literature and media reports (in both English and Chinese). In many cases I am supplementing such written information with field interviews that seek to confirm the accuracy of such reports. Making use of these mechanisms I will be able to establish whether or not individuals working within each of the fields of study qualified as transnational.

Second, I utilize basic statistical techniques from the field of bibliometrics to trace the networks within online data archives to determine which individuals were most prominent within each case study during the identified period in post-Tiananmen Chinese politics. More specifically, I look at trends within citations, references, and co-citations in such archives as being indicative of the relative reputation that individuals have within their own fields of expertise. I then triangulate such quantitative findings with probes of the secondary literature and open-ended interviews with elites (within the subject field, and experts on such fields studying outside of China) as a way of confirming their validity.

Third, the project gauges the influence of transnational public intellectuals outside their own domains on the two levels mentioned above. Regarding their visibility within the state no single, comprehensive data source exists, rather I again make use of individual's CVs and resumes as a way of tracking their “official posts,” but here too reference the secondary literature and media reports, and drew upon information gathered through interviews. While it is possible that such a process overlooks some official roles (especially consultative ones within a Chinese political establishment that is not entirely transparent to say the least), it represents the most comprehensive effort to date to locate such ties across such an array of cases studies. Similar methods are employed to gauge “popularity” within China, here, though, particular attention is paid to an evolving set of outlets, with a special focus on successive rounds of Internet based



communication (early websites, chatrooms, BBs, followed by blogs and social media), with additional information garnered from media reports that discussed questions of popularity and name-recognition, complimented by a limited use of interview data.

However, as already emphasized, this project is not intended to simply keep track of who is “popular” within China. Its is designed to identify transnational public intellectuals’ views on Chinese identity and power and how these shape broader discussions within China on similar issues. In this regard it places a particular emphasis on specifying the extent to which individuals are constructing in their work perspectives that are either more cosmopolitan and inclusive or exclusive and nativist. The raw materials for such a search consist of representative samples of each individual’s most well-known work paired with in-depth interviews with many of the transnational public intellectuals identified.

The crucial concept being examined in both cases is the degree to which individuals forwarded either inclusive or exclusive concepts of Chinese-ness and the Chinese state’s place in the world. The first score is generally linked to nationalism and national identity, the second to worldview, and in particular the degree to which individuals see international politics, and China’s place within this stage, in zero-sum terms. This being the case, it was in the development of this facet of the research framework that I also became acutely aware of the vast differences within intellectual activity between the two case studies. In short, divides over what elites within each field produced, and what they discussed, become glaringly apparent when one moves beyond simply cataloguing individual’s transnational exposure and public profile. Such gaps then required a breaking down of the broad animating questions that motivated the book into categories that were more directly relevant to the main debates and discussions within each of the case studies.

Between them it was not surprising to find that transnational public intellectuals in the field of international relations were the most directly engaged in debates about Chinese national identity and assessments of the existing international order (and the degree to which it is harmful or beneficial to China). Such discussions stand at the core of international relations scholarship in a way that presses those engaged in this enterprise within China to reveal the degree to which their views are more aligned with xenophobia and nationalism versus inclusive perspectives on identity, and the extent to which they see the world in realist zero-sum terms or with reference to win-win, non-conflictual, mutual beneficial outcomes. However, beyond such considerations, those working in this field also repeatedly returned to a set of discussions that was more specific to China and hinged upon the degree to which elites viewed international relations theory as a universal vs. western concept. In conjunction with such opinions they also staked out different positions over the degree to which it was incumbent upon those within the country to develop their own approach to studying international politics in a way that drew upon Chinese tradition, culture, and historical experience.

With regards to contemporary Chinese art an attempt was first made to locate trends and patterns within the products of those within this community (mainly limited to artists and art critics, but extending to those heading particularly well-known galleries as well) related to either



orthodox or heterodox views on Chinese identity, especially Chinese nationalism, and anti-foreign sentiment. This was followed by attention to the extent to which members of this community defended indigenous traditions or global themes within their choice of medium, patterns of showings, and type of representation chosen. Moving from art products to commentary a particular emphasis was placed on identifying the degree to which individual's high profile statements were either defensiveness regarding the need to preserve something which is distinctly Chinese within contemporary art versus the extent to which they contained a celebration/embrace of the global themes.

In both cases I operated with the assumption that these views could be considered as ranging up a ladder from foundational perspectives on identity and power to more policy-oriented pronouncements related to field development and professional responsibilities. In the case of international relations scholarship, views on nationalism and national identity were considered fundamental, followed by perspectives on the nature of the contemporary international system, and, finally, theoretical and methodological perspectives on international relations theory. The examination of contemporary Chinese artists began with a search for the same bedrock issues related to nationalism and national identity, followed by a consideration of how much individuals chose to emphasize the indigenous and domestic within their work over more cosmopolitan traits.

## Conclusion

The rest of the book beyond this paper goes in detail into what was discovered via this research framework regarding whether exclusive or inclusive views are predominating among China's new transnational public intellectuals. However, before turning to such findings it should be pointed out that there are two starkly contrasting, and quite established, clusters of theoretical arguments regarding each possibility. On the one hand, students of transnational social movements have generally contended that individuals who have been involved with such groups have tended to become more global in their outlooks through processes of norms diffusion. On the other hand, strands of the literature on identity formation have argued that extended out-group contacts by individuals have a tendency to reinforce feelings of distinctiveness and strengthen attachments to one's pre-existing reference for collective identity. In the case of China the former of these arguments has found expression in academic and policy work that highlights the possible impact of engagement and integration with the global community on the country. The later argument has been given voice in recent discussions about rising levels of patriotism and nationalism among Chinese elites. However, neither proposition has been rigorously explored with reference to the issues raised in on these pages, and in regards to the empirical domains that form the core of the remainder of this book. ■



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Allen Carlson is an Associate Professor in Cornell University's Government Department. His work mainly focuses on issues related to Chinese politics and foreign policy and Asian security. In 2005 his *Unifying China, Integrating with the World: Securing Chinese Sovereignty in the Reform Era* was published by Stanford University Press. He has also written in the *Journal of Contemporary China*, *Pacific Affairs*, *Asia Policy*, *Nations and Nationalism* and *The China Quarterly* (forthcoming). His most recent books are the co-edited *Contemporary Chinese Politics: New Sources, Methods and Field Strategies* (Cambridge University Press, 2010) and *New Frontiers in China's Foreign Relations* (Lexington, 2011). In 2014 Carlson was the Class of 1955 Visiting Professor of International Studies at Williams College, and he was named a recipient of an East Asia Institute Fellowship. Professor Carlson is currently developing a research project that examines the emerging role of transnational public intellectuals in shaping debates within China about the country's rise and its implications for the international system.

His publications include:

*New Frontiers in China's Foreign Relations*, co-editor (with Ren Xiao), Lexington Books, forthcoming.  
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