

Reviews

Allen Carlson, Mary E. Gallagher, Kenneth Lieberthal, and Melanie Manion (eds.), *Contemporary Chinese Politics: New Sources, Methods, and Field Strategies*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010 (315 pages)
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In China studies, more often than not, the country is regarded as an exception and should be assessed on its own. For many, China is so different from the rest of the world that it would be less meaningful to integrate China studies into mainstream social sciences as practiced in the West. It is not surprising to see that historians and history-oriented studies had dominated the field for so many decades as China was closed to the outside world and any social science research was impossible in the pre-reform era.

Since the reform and open door policy in the late 1970s, the situation has drastically changed. Scholars in the field now face a totally different challenge: not with too little information, but with too much information. While China is open to social sciences research, scholars have been debating on the relevance of China studies to social sciences for years. Among others, two main issues have stood out, namely data sources and methodology, which are common issues faced by other subjects of social sciences.

The book under review has made a great contribution to the field by presenting the reader with the latest research findings in terms of methods of data collection, processing, and analyzing. As the editors have indicated, the main focus of the chapters is on methodological concerns and the discovery of new data sources.

The book capitalizes on the emerging cross-pollination between China studies and the broader discipline to address three issues. First, how to effectively use new sources and data collection methods; second, how to integrate the study of Chinese politics into the discipline of political science; and, third, how to deal with logistical and ethical problems associated with doing research in a challenging environment. More specifically, the book covers the following key aspects: how to make field strategies to improve the quality and reliability of survey data; how to employ new methods to collect data; how to deal with insufficient and flawed data; and how to interpret and assess the reliability and accuracy of government reports and statistics regarding contentious actions by Chinese citizens.

The book consists of three parts. Six chapters in Part One address the issues of data sources. The contributors use specific cases to demonstrate how they have dealt with the issue. Xi Chen examines the promises and pitfalls of utilizing *xinfang* (petitioning) archives, while Neil Diamant's

chapter focuses specifically on archives. Victor Shih, Wei Shan, and Mingxing Liu deal with elite politics and Peter Hay Gries turns to experimental methods and psychological measures to study Chinese foreign policy. In the same vein, Allen Carlson and Hong Duan examine the surge in cyber activities related to Chinese foreign policy. Daniela Stockmann explores the vast number of Chinese news media sources that are now available online and indicated how scholars can conduct content analysis across media sources, across regions, and over time.

Three chapters in Part Two focus on qualitative methods. Calvin Chen demonstrates how ethnography is a useful tool to understand contemporary Chinese politics. Exploring this further, Benjamin Read illustrates how an ethnographic approach can be integrated into political science to develop new hypotheses, expose causal mechanisms, and even falsify existing hypotheses in the literature. William Hurst goes for subnational variation across China to develop research questions and effective research designs.

Six chapters in Part Three focus on survey methods. Melanie Manion provides a comprehensive review of these surveys and their products and evaluates their achievements. By focusing on the role of private entrepreneurs in the process of democratization, Bruce Dickson shows the reader how his surveys of private entrepreneurs and local officials make use of variations across the span of time, geographic region, and key individual-level characteristics. Pierre Landry demonstrates the advantages of spatial sampling using GPS technology to analyze the diffusion of formal legal institutions through networks of small communities across the country. At the micro level, Mingming Shen and Ming Yang examine the first decade of the Beijing Area Study, an ongoing annual representative survey of Beijing residents, conducted since 1995. Lily Tsai draws conclusions from her qualitative fieldwork and survey research in the Chinese countryside to discuss the implications of political sensitivity for the process and products of her research on Chinese politics.

In addition, Allen Carlson, Mary Gallagher, and Melanie Manion present an excellent introduction, discussing the origins of this book project and summarizing main contents of the chapters. In the concluding chapter, Kenneth Lieberthal reflects on the evolution of China studies in political science. These two chapters are an enhancement to the edited volume as it traces the development of China studies and the direction it is moving toward. The guidance is particularly useful for younger scholars who are not unfamiliar with the state of the field.

While China studies is not new, it is a relatively new intellectual enterprise for scholars to integrate the field into social sciences. Data sources and methodology are salient to the achievement of this goal. This edited volume has shown to the reader how the application of social science methodologies can uncover new knowledge on China and how new knowledge on China can contribute to the field. However, the reader must also acknowledge the limits of methodology-oriented studies which are more of an interpretation and less of an understanding of China. To understand China, the social science tradition, namely macro- and middle-range conceptualization and theorization, which appeared in the writings of classical writers such as Marx, Weber and others, is still needed. Solely focusing on methodological issues will lead to a situation whereby the more research one does, the less one knows.

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