My field of specialization is comparative politics, with an emphasis on Chinese domestic politics. I also read widely in the general area of comparative politics and, more recently, in international political economy, as mentioned below.

As for my early education, given my attraction to China, I was very fortunate to be an undergraduate at the University of Chicago some 60 years ago. At that time all social science majors were required to take a year (three academic quarters) of courses on one non-Western civilization. The choices at the time were just China, Russia and India. I was majoring in political science and I knew immediately that the choice would be China. I had felt an affinity for the country practically all my life, back to the time when my parents cajoled me to finish the food on my plate, because “people in China were starving.” That would have been in the late 1940s or the early 1950s, and I don’t think their facts were quite right, at least not for most of the Chinese people—though a decade later, in the midst of the “Great Leap Forward” (1957–1960), during which possibly 40 million people died of hunger, it was indeed close to correct.\(^1\) I also was intrigued as a child when informed that if I dug deeply enough in our backyard in Ohio I could reach China.

Later, in the eighth grade (1958–59) our teacher had us prepare a scrapbook on any place in the world. I picked China and India, and called my album “Democracy versus Communism in the Far East.” At the time the National Geographic somehow managed to capture a bevy of photographs on the two countries, even though Americans were not permitted to travel to China. My collection mostly included people being worked nearly to death in the “Great Leap Forward (1957–1960).” The China section is full of pictures of peasants laboring in the fields into the night under lanterns during the Leap, under orders to produce grain far, far beyond the fields’ or the farmers’ capacity, and striving to turn out steel in homemade backyard steel furnaces to “catch up with Great Britain.” But in compiling this collection I probably had no idea what all that was about.

In the mid-1960s, even before I had selected my college major, I recall reading in the New York Times sundry articles about China’s international behavior and wishing to understand what was driving one act or other. So by 1966 when I had to choose one of the three offered non-Western civilization sequences, I felt that only China of the three spoke to me.

\(^1\) In 1931 and 1942 there were serious famines in China, but not during my childhood.
Those who opted for the China track were privileged to be instructed by eminent scholars then at the very pinnacle of their fields: Herrlee Creel, Edward Kracke, and Ho Ping-ti. The first of these was Professor Creel, who, I thought, was quite an old man (actually, he was only 60 when he taught us). He was a distinguished scholar of Chinese philosophy and history, and knew everything that was available then about early China, from literature to archaeology; in total, he taught at the University of Chicago for 40 years. I recollect his anger at the Communists for wrecking what he believed to be the essence of Chinese culture and his nostalgia for ancient China. At that time the Xia Dynasty, which ruled for several centuries about three to four thousand years ago, was thought to be apocryphal, but it has been confirmed now that it did exist.

Professor Edward Kracke, who lectured in the winter quarter, was a specialist on Song Dynasty China (960–1279 AD), and had studied at Harvard, L'Ecole Nationale des Langues Orientales Vivantes in Paris and at Yenching University in China. He had also worked as an intelligence officer in the Office of Strategic Services during World War II, and was a pioneer in the Western study of the Chinese civil service during the Song.

Professor Ho, who was born in China, taught the spring quarter class. He was a wide-ranging scholar of Chinese history, producing lasting scholarship on the country’s historical demography, ancient archaeology, and contemporary events. He was a member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. His celebrated works, Studies on the Population of China and The Ladder of Success in Imperial China, both covered the periods from the fourteenth to the mid-twentieth centuries. His outstanding characteristic for me as a student was his ability to sit on the lecture stage, smoking his pipe—and sometimes knocking it against the floor to clean it—while he recited details from centuries of China’s past as if telling a story, and without any notes.

As a political science major, I also took the two-quarter sequence then offered on the history (from the late nineteenth century up to the then-present) and politics of the Chinese Communist Party, its early founders, and the larger context in which it arose, as well its ongoing rule, instructed by Professor Tsou Tang. Like Professor Ho, Professor Tsou was also born in China, and was a leader in the field of contemporary China Studies. His early work, American’s Failure in China, 1941–50, the first of his six books, established his reputation. His lectures were remarkably objective, given that he was teaching in the midst of China’s “Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution” (1966–1976), a time of enormous social upheaval, rampant violence against and the death of millions of officials and intellectuals and disgrace for previous leaders, and chaos nationwide. All four of these instructors and their classes—which I was so lucky to have the opportunity to learn from—cemented what was already my strong inclination to become deeply knowledgeable about China.

As for the politics part of my studies, in graduate school at Stanford University I was the advisee of Professor John Wilson Lewis, some of whose work I had already read as an undergraduate; in fact, the reason I chose to attend Stanford, where he had just joined the faculty the year I entered, was to work with him. I had been intrigued by his penetrating research on how the Party operated and how its leaders governed. He had done fieldwork in Hong Kong, and was one of the few political science professors at the time who were conversant with these matters. His instruction led me to attempt to understand Chinese political life in its own terms, rather than from a stance of bias.

I also decided to go to Stanford because of Political Science Professor Gabriel Almond, whose work at that time was influenced by that of Talcott Parsons, which I had read in a sociology class at Chicago. Almond was...
a leader in the then-relatively new field of comparative politics, which at the time mainly entailed conducting interdisciplinary approaches to the study of politics, including, in particular, insights from sociology and anthropology. Almond was the recipient of several distinguished awards, in both political science and international affairs. Although his famous *The Civic Culture*, co-authored with Sidney Verba, involved survey research and quantitative analysis, it was Almond’s qualitative intellectual, analytical, multi-disciplinary approach that affected me.6

It was also the case that Stanford back then emphasized that graduate students who worked on China should become well-rounded in the study of the country; in that vein, in addition to studying the language both at Stanford and for nine months in Taiwan, I took several courses in Chinese anthropology and history. Indeed, over the past several decades my own work has probably been more often read and used by sociologists, anthropologists, and geographers than by political scientists. For me, the most influential scholar I learned from was the world-renowned anthropologist G. William Skinner, who took quite an interdisciplinary approach in his work and teaching. He had a great impact on me; my PhD dissertation, on the administration of the Communist Party’s great regions in its early years in power after 1949, borrowed from several of Skinner’s interests.7

During the time I was in graduate school, Americans were still unable to go into China. Obviously, this put a limit on the kinds of research that scholars could do. Just as significant, the official statistics from there—the only type then available—were notoriously suspect and essentially unusable. In consequence, neither I nor any of my cohort of then-graduate students studying China at Stanford in the late 1960s and early 1970s bothered to train in the use of statistics. To this day, in fact, none of my peers—Gordon White (deceased in 1998),8 David Michael Lampton,9 Harry Harding10, Thomas Fingar11—though each of these scholars have held high positions in universities, government and/or organizations connected with the study of China, and while each has produced numerous volumes of highly regarded research—nor I have ever published other than qualitative scholarship. The same could be said for academics training at other top institutions then; it was at least a decade or even more after we all had finished our degrees (by the mid-to late-1970s or so) that quantitative scholarship on China began to appear.

What initiated a fundamental alteration in my research and my interests was the openness of China in the 1980s and 1990s, and even into the first decade of the present century (it is now again not feasible to investigate the topics that interest me in China, and is not possible to get printed documents or to interview subjects, ordinary people, or other scholars). Before that opening, all of my research had been on government institutions, and on policies and their implementation. This was the case for my first four books.12

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7 Skinner’s most famous publication (apart from three volumes he edited on the city in China) was the three-part “Marketing and Social Structure in Rural China,” *Journal of Asian Studies* 24 (1964): 3-44; 2 (1965): 195-228; and 3 (1965): 363-399.


At a conference on cities held in Beijing at the end of 1989 (First International Urban Anthropology/Ethnology Conference in China, which was sponsored by the Wenner-Gren Foundation) I heard a speech on peasant migration from the countryside into the cities, which was gathering real force by then, and I felt drawn to the topic. I immediately began to search for relevant journals and other documentary materials while still in China, and soon after got a grant from Stanford (where I was an invited professor for a year) to go back and do more digging; two years later I received two other, larger grants (one from the American Council of Learned Societies) to work on this project. I spent much of the 1990s during summers interviewing peasant migrants and urban officials. This undertaking issued in a book that was named the best book on post-1900 China that had been published in 1999 (the Joseph R. Levenson prize of the Association for Asian Studies), *Contesting Citizenship in Urban China: Peasant Migrants, the State, and the Logic of the Market*.\(^\text{13}\)

Following my completion of that project, I learned about the Chinese government’s imminent entry into the World Trade Organization (which occurred in December 2001) and its concomitant program to order tens of thousands of factories to expel their older (over age 35) and less educated workers, amounting to the sudden unemployment of tens of millions of once life-tenured, middle-aged laborers. I went on to interview scholars working on this subject as well as dozens of laid-off workers over the first decade of this century. The fruit of that venture also became a book, *Poverty and Pacification: The Chinese State Abandons the Old Working Class* (2022).\(^\text{14}\)

During the years that I was involved in interviewing people in China, I was also teaching a graduate class on the topic of “the state in comparative perspective,” which included a section on the state in the economy, featuring, among other issues, the theme of the relation of the state to globalization. This general topic was prominent in the fields of political science and sociology during the 1980s and 1990s, and my course, which contained readings on France and Mexico among other states, led me to research and write a book on the fate of workers as states joined supranational organizations (the WTO for China, the EU for France, and NAFTA for Mexico). The book I published from that project was entitled *States’ Gains, Labor’s Losses: and Mexico Choose Global Liaisons, 1980–2000* and was selected as a 2010 Choice Magazine Outstanding Academic Title. I would say that reading qualitative scholarship in the field of international political economy in the 1980s and 1990s led me to develop a research interest in this topic, which was entirely different from my previous training and research. Another new effort in recent years was to work with my graduate students to prepare statistically based articles on one of China’s welfare policies using a dataset sent to me by a scholar in China. One of these pieces has garnered well over 100 citations as of now.\(^\text{15}\)

I also edited or co-edited six other books, one on states and sovereignty in the global economy, two on Chinese poverty and urban inequality, one on narratives of individuals affected by the Chinese economic reforms of the 1980s and 1990s, and a comparison of socialism in Eastern Europe and China.\(^\text{16}\)

Under the reign of top leader President Xi Jinping in China since 2012, access to archives and personal interviewing has become steadily more prohibitive. At the same time, graduate work over the past two

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decades at some universities has shifted from preparing students to conduct fieldwork in, and to use
documentary materials from, China to teaching them to use complex statistical approaches and to “scrape”
data from the Internet from Chinese sources. This has resulted in findings that it is not possible to uncover
by employing simpler statistical methods or through purely qualitative means. Probably practically no one
(with perhaps one or two exceptions) studying China who was trained before the year 2000 has applied such
schemes in their research. Fortunately for me over the recent past, tomes and articles based on older
methodologies continue to appear, though my own time as a researcher on China has now come to an end.

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aauthored books include Poverty and Pacification (Rowman & Littlefield, 2022), Contesting Citizenship in Urban
China (University of California Press, 1999) (winner of the 2001 Joseph R. Levenson prize of the Association
for Asian Studies) and States’ Gains, Labor’s Losses (Cornell University Press, 2009), a comparative study of
China, France and Mexico that was named a Choice Magazine Outstanding Academic Title in 2010. She has
also edited or co-edited six books.