Building Bridges in the Studies of Contemporary China: The Case of *Journal of Contemporary China* (JCC)

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The Study of Contemporary China in the United States

- The JCC has been as US based journal of China studies.
- The United States is home to the largest China watch establishment in the world outside of China, including many best academic centers for China studies located within the leading American universities.
- The United States publishes numerous books and monographs on contemporary China.
- The US serves as one of major funding sources for China studies inside and outside the United States.
- But the US did not have a comprehensive and interdisciplinary journal of China studies before the 1990s.
The Birth of the JCC

• The JCC was born 1992 in the US as an interdisciplinary journal to fill the voids in the studies of contemporary China.
• The JCC started three issues per year, became a quarterly in 2001 and published five issues per year in 2008 and six issues a year in 2012.
• The JCC is the only bimonthly China studies journal in the English world today.
A Top Area Studies Journal

- Listing in almost all major indexes, including the Social Sciences Citation Index (SSCI), JCC’s impact factor has been increased steadily since Thomson Reuters first included the JCC in the Journal Citation Report (JCR) in 2008.
- The JCC has ranked #2 in the Google Scholars/s Top Publications list of the Asian Studies &History category in 2018.
Impact Factor

- Constantly ranking among the top area studies journals, the JCC was the 5th out of 68 journals in the Area Studies category in 2016 and the 8th in 2017.

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- The JCC has remained firmly among the top 3 China studies journals.
Following New Trends of China Studies

- The *JCC* has followed four trends in contemporary China studies that were identified by Michel Oksenberg in the early 1990s.
- One is geographical to broaden China studies beyond mainland China.
- The second is temporal to link contemporary China and historical China.
- The third trend is that the focus of contemporary China studies has shifted from high politics in Beijing (Beijingology) to local levels of the populace and the interaction of state and society.
- The fourth trend is that China has been increasingly understood in a comparative context rather than as a unique phenomenon.
JCC Missions: Building three bridges

- The JCC has strived to build the following three bridges to meet the challenges of contemporary China studies in the 21st century.
- One is a bridge between traditional sinology and modern social science studies of China.
- The second bridge is between scholarly studies of China and policy research of China.
- The third bridge is between the Western studies of China and the increasingly sophisticated and rich studies of China by non-Western scholars, particularly Chinese scholars.
Three periods of the American scholarship of contemporary China

• The first period was influenced by sinology tradition before the 1960s.
• The second period started in the late 1960s when new sources of information provided during the Cultural Revolution became available.
• The third period is influenced heavily by information revolution and social science methodology after the 1980s as opportunities for field studies became increasingly available.
Sinology Tradition

• For about a half century, most scholars of China studies in the US, were confined to area studies and influenced heavily by the sinology tradition started in Europe during the 19th century.

• Sinology takes China as an isolated case and emphasizes its unique historical and culture. The old hands of sinologists focused on historical and linguistic studies of China and avoided comprehensive analysis of contemporary China’s political, economic, social, and foreign affairs and were not interested in applying in social science methodology to the study of China.

• Although some of China scholars paid attention to the contemporary China affairs, they were the China-watchers not scholars because were mostly to chronicle current events through historical analysis and screening of officially published information.

• the first generation of China scholars, such as John K. Fairbank, Dock Barnet, Lycian Pye, developed the *Chineseness Paradigm*, which assumes that contemporary China can be understood only by study of imperial China.
Social Sciences Study of China

- China studies began to integrate into social science disciplines largely because of two developments after the 1980s.
- One is the opening of China, which has brought about the new opportunity of field research and the availability of systematic data, including archival research and variety of official publications. Researchers can go nearly everywhere and study nearly everything.
- The second is that more and more scholars of China studies have been trained in vigorous social sciences departments. As a result, they have been able to apply contemporary social sciences theories and methodologies toward the study of contemporary China.
Topical Specialization and Disciplinary Specialization

• Kevin O’Brien found two new developments.
• One is topical specialization as some division of labor is inevitable and desirable.
• The second is Disciplinary Specialization. China has been increasingly understood in a comparative context rather than as a unique phenomenon.
• New generations of scholars have tried to apply and develop new approaches and concepts or paradigms.
• Quantities and big data research has become popular in China studies.
Scholarly studies and policy Research of China

• For many years, the China studies communities were largely closed. While very few China scholars were engaged in policy debates, very few government policy analysts or non-China specialists published their researches in China-focused journals.
• China's reform and development and subsequently China's rise have increased the demands for the policy studies of China.
• More and more China scholars have taken part in the increasingly heated China policy debate while many non-area studies scholars have come to publish articles and books about China and make policy predictions and recommendations about China.
• With precaution, it is a welcome development that the China scholars and policy analysts, including non-China specialists, have joined forces in the study of contemporary China.
Western Studies and Chinese Studies of China

- For many years, very few Chinese scholars were able to make serious contributions to the Western scholarly studies of contemporary China due to the differences in academic training as well as ideological constraints.
- Because of China’s increasingly opening up and integration into the international communities, more and more Chinese scholars have been trained in Western countries. An increasing number of China scholars in the US have come from those who were born and bred in China and did overseas graduate studies. This group had experienced growing up in a turbulent China and maintained direct or indirect connection with their cohorts in reforming China.
- In addition, more and more Western trained Chinese scholars have returned to their homeland and an increasing number of indigenous Chinese scholars have received rigorous academic training in China’s elite universities to conduct sophisticated dialogues with their Western counterparts.
- This development not only led the gradual integration of Chinese scholarship into international scholarship of contemporary China studies but also enrich the Western scholarship by the often unique Chinese perspectives.
Conclusion

• Building these three bridges, the JCC has tried to facilitate the integration of traditional sinology and contemporary social sciences, a marriage of rigorous scholarly works and research of policy relevance and active conversation between Chinese scholars and their Western colleagues.

• In doing so, the JCC has attempted to not only fill the vacuum for a comprehensive and interdisciplinary China journal in the United States, but also to build bridges among different academic and policy study communities in both Western and non-Western countries, helping lay a foundation for establishing a new standard for scholarship that will demonstrate competence in integrating the analytic literature of Chinese and Western discourses.