

<b>Institution: University of Nottingham</b>
<b>Unit of Assessment: UOA27b</b>
<b>Title of case study: Challenging Conventional Wisdom on Chinese Politics for the Benefit of Policymakers and Other Stakeholders (Case Study 1)</b>
<p><b>1. Summary of the impact</b></p> <p>The China Policy Institute (CPI) at the University of Nottingham's School of Contemporary Chinese Studies (SCCS) has played a significant role in challenging simplistic and stereotypical perceptions of China at a time when the need for a fully nuanced understanding of the country is high on every policymaker's agenda. CPI has advised governments and other organisations on China-related strategies, offering guidance on topics including the nature of the political system and the drivers behind key international relations. Its work has helped inform policymakers, influenced and facilitated the strategic activities of groups including The Elders and the Royal United Services Institute and raised wider awareness of Chinese political culture.</p>
<p><b>2. Underpinning research</b></p> <p>A key consequence of China's increasingly pivotal role in global affairs has been the need for decision-makers and the media to have a fully nuanced understanding of the country, its systems and its motives. The CPI at the SCCS has been at the forefront of efforts to test longstanding and simplistic notions about the politics and governance of this emerging superpower and so encourage mutually beneficial relations between China and those with whom it engages.</p> <p>Research by Professor Steve Tsang has addressed a major geopolitical consideration, China's relations with its near neighbours. Building on earlier work at the University of Oxford, where he introduced the analytical framework "consultative Leninism" for studying contemporary Chinese politics, Tsang has produced a number of leading studies on Taiwan, its democratic politics and the social, economic and emotional significance of its historical and practical links to mainland China. Arguing that democratic Taiwan is "the most authentic inheritor of China's Confucian tradition", much of this work was cohered in 2012's <i>The Vitality of Taiwan: Politics, Economics, Society and Culture</i> [1]. By examining the politics of Mainland China and Taiwan side by side, his work has enabled scholars to understand what political practices in China are inherited from the Chinese political traditions, in contrast to those from the Marxist-Leninist tradition.</p> <p>Incorporating several of these themes, Tsang has been at the forefront in explaining the drivers behind the triangular relations between China, Taiwan and the West, particularly the US. Suggesting that many conventional views on the subject are misconceived, his most recent research on this issue, published in 2012, examined the US's assessment of the threat of a Taiwan Strait crisis and provided a "realistic framework" for assessing and minimising the risk of a military confrontation [2]. In tandem, work by Dr Hongyi Lai has critically examined China's growing tendency towards "soft power", especially in terms of foreign policy discourse and cultural diplomacy, in pursuit of cultivating its international image and a "peaceful rise" [3].</p> <p>Another concern uppermost in many policymakers' minds is what political changes will follow China's economic ascent. CPI has investigated China's governance to shed light on the true extent of the disparity between dramatic economic opening and resistance to change in the political system, as well as the influence of internal and external factors on policy. Research published by Lai in 2010 warned the state's "pro-growth authoritarianism", despite vast economic benefits and poverty reduction, could actually raise levels of social protest by paying insufficient attention to citizens' rights and discontent [4] and that domestic considerations – for example, preserving Party rule – may have a more profound effect on China's policies than widely appreciated.</p> <p>Studies by Dr Zhengxu Wang (Senior Research Fellow, 2007-2012; Associate Professor, 2012-present) have addressed another question central to the long-term strategic thinking of policymakers worldwide: will China become a democracy? Wang suggested the greater institutional powers embedded in the Chinese presidency could be characteristic of a one-party presidential system, which in turn, with further institutionalisation and the removal of major constitutional ambiguities, might trigger a gradual move towards democracy [5].</p> <p><b>Key Researchers:</b></p> <p><i>Steve Tsang</i> is Professor of Contemporary Chinese Studies and Director of the China Policy Institute, 2011-present.</p> <p><i>Hongyi Lai</i> was Lecturer (2007-2010), and an Associate Professor at SCCS since 2010.</p> <p><i>Zhengxu Wang</i> was Senior Research Fellow (2007-12) and Associate Professor since 2012.</p>
<b>3. References to the research</b>

## Impact case study (REF3b)

1. Steve Tsang (ed) (2012): *The Vitality of Taiwan: Politics, Economics, Society and Culture*, Palgrave Macmillan, ISBN-13: 978-1137009890
2. Steve Tsang (2012): The US Military and American Commitment to Taiwan's Security, *Asian Survey*, 52(4), doi: AS.2012.52.4.777
3. Hongyi Lai and Yiyi Lu (eds) (2012): *China's Soft Power and International Relations*, Routledge, ISBN-13: 978-0415604017
4. Hongyi Lai (2010): Uneven Opening of China's Society, Economy and Politics: Pro-Growth Authoritarian Governance and Protests in China, *Journal of Contemporary China*, 19(67), 819-835
5. Zhengxu Wang (2013): Chinese Presidency: Evolutions, Institutional Ambiguities and Trajectories of Democratisation, *China: An International Journal*, 11(2), 140-154

**Grants that underpin the above research:**

- University of Nottingham Taiwan Studies Programme, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Taiwan, 2011-2014 – £182,000 (Awarded to Tsang)
- Chinese Perception of the EU Project, EU FP-7 grant, European Union grant 2009-12 - £482,524 (Awarded to Wang)
- Prospect for democracy in China Project, Marie Curie Fellowship grant for Dr Yanhong Liu 2011-13 - £131,416 (Awarded to Wang)
- Local democracy in China Project, Marie Curie Fellowship grant for Dr Deyong Ma 2010-12 - £152,204 (Awarded to Wang)

**4. Details of the impact**

CPI has become a highly valued source of analysis and advice for those tasked with shaping policy and opinion in relation to China. Its academics are regularly asked to share their insights at senior levels, with the increasing frequency of such engagement reflecting recognition of CPI's expertise.

Tsang has played a key role in determining how some of the world's most respected diplomats and statesmen approach China – as illustrated, for example, by his briefing of a May 2013 board meeting of The Elders, an independent group of global leaders originally assembled by Nelson Mandela to campaign for peace and human rights. At the time the group, whose members include Kofi Annan, Jimmy Carter and Desmond Tutu, was preparing to send a delegation to China in recognition of the country's growing global significance. Drawing on his work on China's relations with its near neighbours and foreign powers, Tsang helped revise The Elders' tactical approach in terms of political engagement and other strategic concerns. Lesley-Anne Knight, The Elders' Chief Executive Officer, has confirmed his insights were "invaluable", adding: "The Elders... took [Tsang's] advice to heart when weighing up the options for engagement with the new Chinese leadership, notably on issues linked with regional security and international peace building. [Tsang was] instrumental in helping redefine the modalities of engagement with Chinese officials in a way that is sensitive, strategic and systematic." [a]

Tsang's insights into relations between China, Taiwan and the West have also helped facilitate rare engagement between Taiwan's Ministry of Defence and UK security experts, including MoD officials. In September 2012 he arranged and took part in a closed-door seminar with Andrew Nien Dzu Yang, Taiwan's Deputy Defence Minister, and the Whitehall Defence Group at London's Royal United Services Institute (RUSI). Although confidentiality considerations mean full details cannot be revealed, both sides have acknowledged the benefits in terms of strengthening ties and exchanging information. Dr Jonathan Eyal, RUSI's Director of International Security Studies, noted: "RUSI's relationship with the Taiwanese Ministry of Defence is currently the only avenue for defence diplomacy between the two countries, and, as such, both sides place great importance on these bilateral exchanges." [b] Yang, who also met with Tsang and other CPI representatives in Nottingham in March 2012 and read Tsang's article on the US's military commitment to Taiwan, has described CPI's input as "highly valuable", adding: "They have illuminated matters for me... and tested out hypotheses that we have been exploring as we deliberate on policy matters." [c]

In the last five years the CPI has regularly advised the Foreign and Commonwealth Office on Chinese domestic and foreign policy, economics, social issues and Taiwan, as well as providing training under the Foreign Secretary's Diplomatic Excellence initiative for staff new to working on China. Dr Ian Seckington, Head of the FCO's Asia Pacific Research Group, has described CPI's contributions as "important in supporting our efforts to improve understanding of China issues across Whitehall as we ramp up our engagement and try to build a China 'cadre' across government". [d] He also acknowledged that "Professor Tsang gave particularly timely advice on

Bo Xilai which was extremely useful in helping us shape our approach to what was a sensitive issue involving the death of a British national.” [d] Dr David Ellis, Political Counsellor at the Beijing Embassy, has highlighted how Tsang worked with the Embassy “to identify and cultivate thought leaders in China” and by creating a special Chevening Visiting Fellowship at the CPI helped the FCO “to shape views within the [Communist] Party”. [e]

CPI has also helped inform the EU’s thinking on China. In June 2012 Lai attended a European Parliament workshop where he drew on his work on “pro-growth authoritarianism”. He stressed the value of Europe better appreciating China’s perspective on major issues – including inequality, climate change and energy – to help China tackle such concerns more effectively. The workshop was organised for the Committee on Foreign Affairs and was co-chaired by Andrey Kovatchev, Vice-Chair of the European Parliament’s Committee of Foreign Affairs, and Crescenzo Rivellini, Chair of the EU delegation to China in Brussels. The aim was to inform its own-initiative Report on EU-China Relations, which was subsequently published in December 2012. Reflecting Lai’s remarks, the report noted the Committee’s “conviction that an enhanced and highly developed partnership will be mutually beneficial to both the EU and China” but called for a “strengthening of dialogues in the fields of human rights, the environment and energy”. [f]

CPI’s influence in policymaking circles has been supported by concerted efforts to reach a range of audiences. For instance, since 2008 Wang has presented his research at more than 30 symposia, colloquia, and workshops, many of them in China, including at the Zhou Enlai School of Government (Tianjin, April 2008), the International Conference on Legitimacy and Governance (Shanghai, July 2010) and the Chinese Views of the EU Conference (Beijing, October 2011).

The media’s understanding about Chinese political culture has been enhanced through CPI’s intense programme of awareness-raising. Tsang, Lai, Wang have been regularly quoted in the media, with expert comment featuring in newspapers or on TV and radio more than 350 times from November 2011 (when a record of such appearances was first kept) until the end of July 2013, including comment pieces for the likes of China Daily (Lai, August 2011 [g]), the Wall Street Journal (Tsang, September 2011 [h]), and the Guardian (Tsang, March 2012). Tania Branigan, The Guardian’s China correspondent, has described CPI’s contributions as “extremely helpful to us in understanding and explaining events and their context... given the general lack of knowledge in the West about Chinese political culture”. [i] Branigan has noted that Tsang’s work “proved extremely helpful throughout in enhancing our understanding of the situation”, particularly the “gradual decision-making process by senior leaders” and other complexities that “helped us to understand the full range of factors behind” the eventful changes in China. [g]

Tsang also played a key advisory role in the production of Chinese Murder Mysteries, Channel 4’s Dispatches special on the fall of Bo Xilai, which was screened on November 12 2012. Programme producer Cathy Scott-Clark has remarked that Tsang not only provided “insight into the character of Bo Xilai and senior colleagues [and] what impact this had on the party and the people” but also served as “an invaluable sounding board on a fast-changing and complicated story” and made “many good suggestions on who else we should contact to gain insight”. [j]

##### **5. Sources to corroborate the impact**

- a. Letter of support from Lesley-Anne Knight, Chief Executive Officer, The Elders, July 1 2013
- b. Letter of support from Dr Jonathan Eyal, Director of International Security Studies, Royal United Services Institute, June 28 2013
- c. Letter of support from Andrew Nien Dzu Yang, Taiwanese Deputy Defence Minister, July 1 2013
- d. Letter of support from Dr Ian Seckington, Head of Asia Pacific Research, FCO, July 31 2013
- e. Email of support from Dr David Ellis, Political Counsellor (Internal Affairs), British Embassy in Beijing, September 6 2013
- f. EU-China Relations, European Parliament Committee on Foreign Affairs, December 2012  
<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?type=REPORT&reference=A7-2012-0434&language=EN>
- g. China Daily, August 19 2011: “High growth can’t hide problems”  
[http://www.china.org.cn/opinion/2011-08/19/content\\_23246056.htm](http://www.china.org.cn/opinion/2011-08/19/content_23246056.htm)
- h. Wall Street Journal, September 26 2011: “How Beijing missed an opportunity in Libya”  
<http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052970204422404576592110959831664.html>
- i. Email of support from Tanya Branigan, China correspondent, The Guardian, July 22 2013
- j. Letter of support from Cathy Scott-Clark, True Vision, September 7 2013.