



China Initiative
中国研究启动中心

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the CHINA INITIATIVE

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Building on Distinction, Building Toward China

The China Initiative is an interdisciplinary hub for the study of modern China at Brown University. The initiative's goals are threefold: to produce cutting edge academic research on the Chinese development experience, to apply that research to the resolution of real world societal challenges, and to connect China-focused research efforts to new forms of pedagogy and experiential learning. The Initiative seeks both to better understand China itself and to use the Chinese experience to better understand broader global phenomena in a comparative context.



In her *Building on Distinction: A New Plan for Brown* (2013), President Christina Paxson implored the Brown community to combine its unparalleled tradition of open-ended intellectual exploration with a new focus on the most pressing challenges of our time: the need to discover environmentally sustainable modes of living; the need to understand how peace and prosperity can be delivered to all global citizens, regardless of where they reside; the need to understand how extraordinary new capabilities in science and technology can be best channeled toward meeting human needs; and the need to discover new modalities for conquering disease and improving human health for individuals and populations alike. The Brown China Initiative, housed at the Watson Institute for International Studies, is premised on the idea that none of these challenges can be addressed without a deep understanding of — and deep engagement with — China. Moreover, solutions, whether in China or anywhere else, now require multidisciplinary, integrative approaches, the very style of scholarship so deeply intrinsic to Brown's DNA. Our ambition, simply put, is to generate China-focused scholarship that will have life-changing and world-changing impact.

To achieve these goals, we cannot simply duplicate what our peer institutions have done elsewhere with traditional China studies. Instead, we must involve a variety of new players — scientists, engineers, epidemiologists, urban planners, and other specialists who, though not China scholars in the traditional sense, now have China at the core of their research. So too must we reach out to new partners across China, colleagues who are equally committed to the resolution of global development challenges through the study of the China's contemporary growth experience. Thus, the Brown China Initiative will build a new kind of China-focused research — one involving new forms of cross-disciplinary research; new communities of scholars on campus; and a new, Brown-initiated network extending across China.



PROGRAMMATIC GOALS

In translating broad aspirations into concrete reality, the Brown China Initiative aims to undertake a series of specific programmatic measures.

First, **we will establish the largest U.S.-based post-doctoral studies program of its kind for Chinese scholars.** Focusing on the areas of industrial innovation, environmental cleanup, public health, and urban planning, all areas in which Brown University has existing faculty strength, this program will bring 5-8 post-docs per year to the Brown campus from China's leading universities. Particularly since an overseas post-doc experience is now a precondition for employment at China's top universities, this program over time will foster an entire network of Brown-affiliated faculty across Chinese academia. At the same time, the post-docs will immeasurably expand and enrich the community of China-focused researchers on Brown's campus.

Second, **we will couple the post-doc program with a program for visiting fellows from China.** These fellows, drawn from the ranks of Chinese government officials, business practitioners, and academicians, will visit Brown for one to two semesters, providing real-world experience to our on-campus research efforts at the same time they expand their own intellectual horizons.

Third, **with the growth of a community of Chinese post-docs and visiting fellows, we will strive to encourage policy-focused research in collaboration with a wide variety of Chinese institutional partners.** This research, centered on our focus areas within sustainable development, will involve not just scholars from top Chinese universities, but also researchers and policy practitioners from state agencies. We will proceed on a project-by-project basis in accordance with needs articulated by our Chinese colleagues. We have already begun such efforts with the Development Research Center of the PRC Government's State Council.

Fourth, **with our burgeoning portfolio of research activities, we will initiate a series of training programs for Chinese public officials.** Of course, we cannot nor should not tell public officials how to do their jobs. However, we can provide a platform by which officials can learn from one another, and learn from the types of solutions employed in the United States and other advanced industrial economies. In the near term, these training programs can involve short one to two-week courses on specific topics (such as regulatory remediation of air pollution or healthcare policy for aging populations). Our efforts, would focus on Brown's core strengths in public health, environmental management, and urbanization.

Of course, as our activities expand over time, **we must steadily add China-focused expertise to the Brown faculty.** Our hope is that over the next decade, we will add at least five new endowed faculty chairs in China-related areas across a wide variety of disciplines. Given that faculty expansion will move hand in hand with our growing programmatic efforts in China, we can hire strategically to carve out unique China-related specializations for Brown, thus further cementing the university's status as a preeminent center for the study of China.



GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR FUTURE GROWTH

Over time, our program will surely change and evolve, responding just as China has to new circumstances, new challenges, and new opportunities. As we evolve, however, we must remain steadfastly committed to the core principles upon which the Brown China Initiative is premised.

First, **we will always be committed to the idea of simultaneously learning about China, and learning from China.** As we tackle problems of global scale, China must be part of the solutions we provide, and China must be part of the knowledge we generate. As scholars, therefore, we must in all our efforts work in close collaboration with colleagues across Chinese academia, business, government, and society. We must do so not primarily to teach or advise, but instead to learn.

Second, **our efforts will remain inextricably linked with both the strategic vision outlined by President Paxson and the core focus areas of the Watson Institute: governance, development, and security.** Given existing on-campus expertise and talent, the China Initiative in its initial phase is concentrating particularly on governance and development. In the future, we hope to expand into the area of security. And as we evolve, we will remain, first and foremost, a research-driven program on China and global-scale issues of sustainability.

Third, **we will stand by the idea that effective scholarship on sustainable development must be multi-disciplinary.** The challenges we face by definition involve the interaction of technologies, natural systems, human institutions and markets, public policies, and societal preferences and values. Our research too must be equally boundary-crossing, integrative, and multi-faceted. Thus, although we are the Watson China Initiative, our overarching aim is to make the Watson Institute a platform and launching point for a far-reaching research network, one that within the Brown community extends across the natural and physical sciences, engineering, public health, medicine, and the humanities; and one that beyond Brown reaches out to colleagues and experts across Chinese society.

Guided by these three principles, we will work across disciplines, and work in close collaboration with colleagues in China, to contribute to the resolution of sustainability challenges faced by all people, whether Americans, Chinese, or citizens of any other country. And in so doing, we will generate knowledge and modes of learning critical to the perpetuation of Brown's greatest on campus asset, its tradition of embracing continual innovation, revitalization, and creative exploration.



A Sampling of Current Research Efforts

The Watson China Initiative has ambitious goals for programmatic growth and institution building, ones that we are committed to achieving within the next five years. However, our scholarly mission cannot wait. With existing talent on campus and established partnerships with colleagues in China, we are already deeply engaged in several key research efforts.

+ China and the Development of Technologies for Global Energy Sustainability

Watson Institute faculty member Edward Steinfeld and Brown postdoc Jonas Nahm, in collaboration with engineering faculty, are exploring the process by which Chinese, American, and European companies engage in collaborative innovation and product development in the energy technology domain. How do these firms actually work with — and learn from — one another, and how do their capabilities relate to the social institutions and public policies of their respective home countries? This work has been done in close connection with colleagues at Tsinghua University and the Chinese Academy of Sciences.

+ China and the Public Health Consequences of Airborne Pollutants

Gregory Wellenius, faculty member at the Brown School of Public Health, and Edward Steinfeld are working with the Chinese government to develop a research program on the complex health consequences of airborne pollutants. China today has obvious and urgent need for detailed information on how human health interacts with environmental pollutants. Such information is critical for guiding policy sequencing and policy emphasis surrounding remediation efforts, particularly for situations in which multiple sources of emissions and multiple types of pollutants are involved. Coupled with tools of analysis developed at Brown, Chinese data and the Chinese experience could prove critical for informing our knowledge about the health consequences of pollution in any context, including the United States.

+ China, Global Labor Standards, and Socially Sustainable Production

Watson Director Richard Locke, in close collaboration with numerous graduate students, and numerous colleagues in both Hong Kong and South China, has engaged in extensive research on the drivers of workplace conditions, particularly in manufacturing operations. Through extensive qualitative and quantitative data collection in China and other nations, he has demonstrated that substandard working conditions — safety problems, excessive overtime, contract breaches, etc. — stem not simply or exclusively from lax regulatory enforcement, but from complex buyer-supplier relationships in global supply chains. His work ties problems manifested in Chinese factories at least in part to corporate behavior in the advanced industrial world. In so doing, he offers both managerial and public policy solutions that are as apt for the United States as they are for China.

+ China and Sustainable Urbanization

Brown sociology professor and Watson faculty associate John Logan co-direct the “Urban China Research Network,” a global and multidisciplinary scholarly collaboration on China’s contemporary experience of urbanization. This platform for networked research and scholarly interaction has involved faculty members, graduate students, and academic institutions across Mainland China, Hong Kong, the United States, and the United Kingdom. The effort has led to the establishment of specialized working groups, conferences, and joint data collection.

+ Comparative “Gilded Ages”: China, India, and the United States

Brown faculty members Ashutosh Varshney, James Morone, and Edward Steinfeld have recently established a research program on rapid industrialization and rapid urbanization in the contemporary experiences of China and India, and the historical (late Nineteenth Century) experience of the United States. The research, using the urban municipality as the level of analysis, examines comparative patterns of business-government relations, public goods provision, government accountability, and social stability. To what extent can we discern common experiences across the three national cases and two major time periods? To what extent are outcomes influenced by institutions of governance, cultural factors, or technological advancements? Upcoming research workshops — all involving overseas scholarly partners — are to be held on campus, in China, and in India.





Edward S. Steinfeld is the inaugural director of the Brown China Initiative. Steinfeld, a professor of political economy, is a specialist on contemporary Chinese industrial development, technology innovation, and business-government relations. His books include *Forging Reform in China: The Fate of State-Owned Industry* (Cambridge University Press, 1998) and *Playing Our Game: Why China's Rise Doesn't Threaten the West* (Oxford University Press, 2010). Prior to coming to Brown, Steinfeld served for 17 years on the faculty of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Steinfeld's current research focuses on China's role in global energy technology development. At Brown, Steinfeld teaches courses on China's political and economic rise, as well as courses on global energy innovation. ■

