

<b>Institution:</b> SOAS University of London		
<b>Unit of Assessment:</b> 25 – Area Studies		
<b>Title of case study:</b> Engaging with China: informing governments, shaping business strategies and enhancing media portrayal		
<b>Period when the underpinning research was undertaken:</b> 2016–2020		
<b>Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:</b>		
<b>Name(s):</b>	<b>Role(s) (e.g. job title):</b>	<b>Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:</b>
Steve Tsang	Professor of Chinese Studies and Director of the SOAS China Institute (SCI)	2016–present
<b>Period when the claimed impact occurred:</b> 2016– 31 July 2020		
<b>Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014?</b> N		
<p><b>1. Summary of the impact</b> (indicative maximum 100 words)</p> <p>Research by Steve Tsang, Director of SOAS’s China Institute, on China’s foreign policy and policy making had a wide-ranging impact on governments, multinational companies and the media, as well as on the general public. His work resulted in: 1) increasing the knowledge of the governments of the United Kingdom, Canada, New Zealand and Taiwan as they shaped their China strategy; 2) informing decision-making and strategic thinking among major multinationals working in China; and 3) ensuring an accurate and rigorous representation of Chinese politics and history in documentaries and news reports. This allowed the general public to gain a better understanding of China’s history and politics</p>		
<p><b>2. Underpinning research</b> (indicative maximum 500 words)</p> <p>China is reshaping the world and challenging the traditional Euro-American dominance in global politics, commerce, culture and international norm. In order to accommodate this challenge effectively, it is incumbent on policy makers, business leaders and media workers to acquire a nuanced understanding of China’s approach to the outside world. But in this regard, however, conventional International Relations (IR) theories, mostly based on the experience of Western states, are woefully lacking. As a Leninist party-state, China does not define national interest as most states do and its behaviour often diverges from mainstream IR theories.</p> <p>Research conducted by Steve Tsang (Professor and SCI Director) since 2016 has tested longstanding hypotheses about China’s policy making and provides a more effective way of understanding 20th and 21st Century Chinese politics and, in particular, its foreign policy. Based mainly on analyses of Chinese government statements, news reports and scholarly works, Tsang’s research has addressed a major gap in understanding what drives China’s foreign policy. In particular, it highlights the concept of ‘consultative Leninism’, which Tsang formulated at the University of Oxford to explain how it shapes China’s domestic politics and can also be applied to its foreign policy. At SOAS Tsang adapted this concept to develop a new analytical framework to explain China’s approach to foreign and security policies. Described as ‘party-state realism’ [3.1], it postulates that the ‘consultative Leninist’ system puts the interests of the Communist Party at the core of China’s national interest calculus. Accordingly, the most fundamental goal of foreign policy – ahead of conventional national security and territorial integrity considerations – is to keep the Party in power. Hence the inability of leading IR theories to adequately explain China’s behaviour. ‘Party-state realism’ demonstrates that after putting its own interests first, the Communist Party either adopts a pragmatic approach, as in the period before Xi Jinping became leader, or, as has happened under Xi’s leadership, puts the ‘dignity of the Chinese state’ and its leader as the second key driver. Only then is there room for the application of a neo-classical realistic approach to making foreign policy. This framework explains the unconventional nature of</p>		

Chinese diplomacy, as well as the Chinese government's approach towards Hong Kong and Taiwan.

Tsang's work on the historical evolution of China's Taiwan policy [3.2], based on analysis of historical archives, government statements and scholarly works, contextualizes China's definition of a core national interest. He shows that contrary to the Chinese Government's insistence on Taiwan's geostrategic importance, until relatively recently the Communist Party not only disregarded Taiwan's strategic importance, but even advocated the island's independence. His work on Hong Kong [3.3], based on archives, government documents, media reports and interviews with retired officials, examines how its citizens have developed a distinct identity and core values fundamentally different from those prevailing in Mainland China. It underpins the knowledge required to map the key forces that shape Hong Kong's contemporary politics and development.

While Hong Kong and Taiwan are formally deemed domestic policy matters by the Chinese government, they are both intricately tied to its foreign policy. Hong Kong's future is governed by the Sino-British Joint Declaration of 1984, and Taiwan's status cannot be changed without taking into effect US policy and the American Taiwan Relations Act. Tsang's expertise in these areas and ability to contextualize China's policy approaches towards foreign relations, trade, cultural links, and the dynamics between domestic politics and foreign policy, have conferred on him a significant IR advisory role with governments and multinationals.

### 3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

3.1. Tsang, S. (2020). 'Party-State Realism: A Framework for Understanding China's Approach to Foreign Policy'. *Journal of Contemporary China*, 29(122), pp. 304–318.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/10670564.2019.1637562> **Double blind peer-reviewed**

3.2. Tsang, S. (2020). 'From Japanese Colony to Sacred Chinese Territory: Origins of China's "Taiwan Question" and the Implications'. *Twentieth Century China*, 45(3), pp. 351–368.

<https://doi.org/10.1353/tcc.2020.0029> **Double blind peer-reviewed**

3.3. Tsang, S. (2017). 'Modern Hong Kong'. In Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Asian History (online). <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190277727.013.280>. **Double blind peer-reviewed**

### 4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

Tsang's research into the nature of Chinese foreign policy and policy making generated significant practical value-added to research users. British, Canadian, New Zealand and Taiwanese policy makers as well as multinational corporations were the primary beneficiaries, raising their awareness of Chinese motivations and drivers in confidential meetings, increasing knowledge and understanding of political operators and/or informing back channel approaches. Beneficiaries also included documentary producers and their audiences. Through his outreach, Tsang consistently raised public awareness and understanding of China's policy. By explaining the central importance of the Communist Party and domestic politics in foreign policy making, Tsang's research and external engagement enhanced stakeholders' understanding of factors that truly determine China's foreign, security and trade policy, thereby facilitating an effective response to them.

#### *Helping governments make informed decisions relating to foreign policy, trade and security engagements with China*

Before joining SOAS in 2016, Tsang had acted as government advisor on numerous occasions. From 2016, through his publications and closed-door meetings with policy planners and civil servants in several government departments in the UK and with foreign diplomats, Tsang provided expert analysis to various governments, mostly on China's approach to foreign relations, security, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and trade. For the British Government, this included analysis on: 1) China-US-Pakistan relations (Foreign and Commonwealth Office [FCO], February 2018); 2) Chinese politics and foreign policy (for the former British Ambassador to China, Barbara Woodcock, May 2018); 3) China-North Korea relations (FCO, October 2018); 4) trade implications of the 19th National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party (Department of International Trade, January 2018); 5) issues relating to Hong Kong (Cabinet Office, January 2019 & FCO, July 2020); and 6)

changes in governance in China under Xi Jinping (for senior diplomats at the FCO in February 2020 including the Ambassador Designate, Caroline Wilson, now incumbent as of September 2020). Tsang also provided a 4,000-word analysis to the FCO (March 2020) on a subject kept confidential at the FCO's request. The Head of Asia Pacific Research Group of the FCO stated that Tsang's 'analysis and understanding has contributed to the upskilling of those working on China-related portfolios' and 'helped shape China expertise within the FCO, thereby contributing to the policy-making process' [5.1].

The other main beneficiaries of his expert assessments were the governments of Canada, New Zealand and Taiwan, which approached to share his research-based insights on Chinese foreign policy. The Canadian Government's High Commissioner in London, Janice Charette, commented that '[Tsang's] insights have been used in direct support of analysis and advice on China that has been provided to Canada's Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Prime Minister' [5.2]. The Senior Analyst at the New Zealand Office of Prime Minister and Cabinet, is on record that he and his colleagues had 'found the paper [3.1] very useful as a convincing model to explain China's modes of foreign policy' and that it informed 'our analysis of Chinese approaches to issues in New Zealand's region as well as globally' [5.3]. In a letter written after Tsang had shared his views on US-Taiwan-Mainland China relations, the Representative of the Taipei Representative Office in London quoted a Taiwanese Deputy Foreign Minister to the effect that he had 'found your insights helpful and extremely important' [5.4]. Tsang was also invited to offer advice to the governments of Australia, Japan, South Korea and Vietnam.

In addition, Tsang was asked to testify to both houses of the UK Parliament. He participated in a public session of the Foreign Affairs Committee (Commons) on the Chinese Government's approach to relations with the UK and the wider world, and in a private and confidential meeting with the Committee Chairman in January 2019. The Committee's Second Report for Session 2, 2019 quoted Tsang on Chinese interference in British universities [5.5 p6]. Tsang also testified on Chinese interference in the UK at the Intelligence and Security Committee (ISC) of the House of Commons (October 2019), part of which was conducted confidentially. The ISC secretariat noted that Tsang's 'frank and authoritative contributions have helped shape the Committee's approach to the rest of its Inquiry' [5.6]. In March 2018, Tsang testified on China's approach to outside world at the International Relations Committee of the House of Lords.

*Increasing knowledge and understanding among multinationals on the political drivers of Chinese foreign direct investment and energy policies*

Devised and implemented by Tsang, the SOAS China Institute's Corporate Membership scheme (annual fee for Major Corporate Members: GBP9,000) was created to function as a forum for sharing knowledge and insights based on research with the business community in the UK. After the scheme was instituted in October 2017, Tsang provided bespoke advice to various Major Corporate Members of the scheme – based on their research into Chinese foreign policy, politics and Hong Kong – on 16 occasions. Additionally, all Corporate Members benefited from insights disseminated through regular closed-door roundtable meetings conducted under the Chatham House rule.

The co-founder and co-CEO of Macro Advisory (a global advisory firm to multinationals) acknowledged that Tsang's scholarship not only 'enabled our firm to better understand the drivers behind Chinese decision making and foreign policy approach' leading to 'an important client impact', but also that SCI Corporate events 'challenged our own thinking on the outlook for the [Belt and Road] Initiative and informed a deep dive analysis we wrote' [5.7]. The Global Head of Geopolitical Risk at HSBC (the leading bank in Greater China since the 1860s, listed in both Hong Kong and London), described Tsang's advice as 'very useful in shaping our understanding of complex issues pertaining to China' [5.8]. Shell (a leading global energy company for which 'China occupies a special place in [its] global portfolio') confirmed that Tsang's advice and published paper [3.1] had 'helped us to understand China's actions, which appear contradictory to each other'. Its Chief Political Analyst added that 'there were two areas where it had direct impact': (1) Tsang's contributions to Shell's integrated strategic review had helped to set 'the course for Shell in China looking out the next 10 years'; and (2) 'Tsang's analytical framework was helpful, guided

our thinking in developing scenarios for long term trends in the [Asia-Pacific] region' [5.9]. Likewise, the Group Director of Anglo-American stated that the global mining company, for whom China is a key market, had used Tsang's insights 'to input into our strategic direction' and that Tsang's advice had been 'highly valued by our Executives' [5.10].

*Informing accurate media representations of China and Chinese politics, and raising awareness and increasing knowledge among audiences*

Between 2017 and 2020 – a period that saw important anniversaries (e.g. the First World War and the Beijing Massacre of 1989), as well as witnessing a change in Western perception of China as a rising power – Tsang's work with TV and film companies (including Channel 4, BBC 4, BBC2, BBC Radio 4, Al Jazeera, Thunder Road productions, and One on One productions) helped provide to the general public an informed, accurate and academically rigorous analysis of Chinese politics and history. He regularly provided expert comment to leading media outlets (on 150–300 occasions per year), enhancing the accuracy of media reports and assessments of China.

Tsang also contributed to the making of major documentaries. For Channel 4's *Britain's Forgotten Army* (Channel 4, 12 November 2017, 800,000 viewers) [5.11a], which unveiled the largely forgotten history of the contribution made by the Chinese Labour Corps in the British Army during the First World War, the producer and director stated that Tsang 'gave the film a veracity that made it possible for me to draw a connection between the events of 1919 and the rise of the Communist party over the next 30 years' [5.11b]. For the BBC's *I Was There* (BBC4, 1 & 10 June 2018; 4 June & 30 September 2019; 750,000-1,000,000 estimated viewers in total [5.11c]), Kate Adie asked Tsang to explain on camera the wider context of the events of 1989 as she reminisced on her memories of reporting the Beijing Massacre of that year. The show's producer told Tsang that 'the points you dwelt on had a major influence in shaping the whole film' [5.11d]. On Facebook, one viewer of the documentary commented: 'It was interesting seeing again the events unfold and **hearing some of the behind the scenes facts**' [5.11e, emphasis added]. For the 3-part BBC Radio 4 current affairs programme *China and the World* (October–November 2019, est 1,000,000 listeners [5.11f]), the Chief Producer of the show similarly stated that Tsang's published works and views 'ensured that we avoided presenting a simplistic picture to our audiences' and 'helped to enliven the debate which the programme sought to promote' [5.11f]. The 2-part Al Jazeera current affairs documentary *The Big Picture: The China Complex* (Al Jazeera, December 2019, 137,800 views on YouTube [5.11g p1 & p3]) was described by one commentator as: 'Bits of history intertwined with discussion between representatives of the alternative viewpoints, all mature enough to let each other state a viewpoint fully' [5.11g p2]. The documentary's producer emphasised that Tsang's 'specialised knowledge of . . . the second Sino-Japanese War . . . was crucial in altering our storyline' [5.11h]. In addition, Tsang also contributed to the making of the 3-part BBC current affairs documentary *China: A New World Order* (BBC2, August–September 2019, 973,439 viewers [5.11i]), and to the programme on Hong Kong for the Audible (Amazon) podcast *We Need to Talk About The British Empire* (Something Else Production, 2019, 10,000 listeners as of April 2020 [5.11j]).

Tsang also provided off-the-record briefings for journalists and editorial writers, including for The Guardian. The leader writer for international affairs, Tania Branigan, explained that 'Steve's research and analysis has been instrumental in shaping our editorials on China, particularly over the spring and summer [of 2019] as the protests have focused attention on Hong Kong' [5.12]. Other journalists who benefited from Tsang's briefings included the leader writer for the Times, Financial Times columnists, and a reporter at the Telegraph.

**5. Sources to corroborate the impact** (indicative maximum of 10 references)

- 5.1. Letter from the Head of Asia Pacific Research Group, FCO.
- 5.2. Letter from Canadian High Commissioner in London.
- 5.3. Email from the Senior Analyst, Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, New Zealand.
- 5.4. Letter from the Representative, Taiwan Representative Office in London.

- 5.5. The House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee Second Report for Session 2, 2019, 'A cautious embrace: defending democracy in the age of autocracies', p6.
- 5.6. Email from the Secretariat for the Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament.
- 5.7. Letter from the Co-Founder and Co-CEO, Macro Advisory.
- 5.8. Letter from the Global Head of Geopolitical Risk, HSBC.
- 5.9. Email from the Chief Political Analyst, Shell International,
- 5.10. Letter from the Group Director, Anglo American.
- 5.11. Broadcast and social media file
  - a. Email from producer and director of *Britain's Forgotten Army*.
  - b. Letter from the producer and director of *Britain's Forgotten Army*.
  - c. Email from producer of *Kate Adie I Was There*
  - d. Letter from the producer of *Kate Adie – I Was There*
  - e. Comment on BBC Points of View Facebook post, June 2018:  
<https://www.facebook.com/526813830804091/posts/kate-adie-was-reporting-on-the-tiananmen-square-protests-when-a-hail-of-bullets-/1050313871787415/>
  - f. Letter from the Chief producer of BBC Radio 4 *China and the World*.
  - g. *The Big Picture: The China Complex* – YouTube views and comments.
  - h. Email from the producer of *The Big Picture: The China Complex*.
  - i. *China: A New World Order* – Broadcasters' Audience Research Board (BARB) viewing figures report.
  - j. Letter from the producer of *We Need To Talk About the British Empire*
- 5.12. Email from Tania Branigan, Foreign Leader Writer, The Guardian.