

Theorizing Foreign and Security Policy in an Era of State Transformation: A New Framework and Case Study of China

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Abstract

There is growing evidence of the transformation of statehood under globalization, specifically, the fragmentation, decentralization and internationalization of state apparatuses. While most pronounced in Western Europe, these trends are observable worldwide. Foreign policy analysis (FPA) and international relations (IR) theory have fundamentally failed to keep pace with this epochal development. These traditions still largely understand states as coherent actors whose territorial borders “contain” sociopolitical relations and where identifiable “decisions” produce unified policies and strategies. This article challenges this shortcoming, offering a new theorization of foreign and security policy-making and implementation that foregrounds state transformation and the rise of regulatory statehood. The theory is developed and illustrated using the case of China, which IR/FPA scholars typically depict as the quintessential authoritarian, “Westphalian,” unitary state, but which has in fact undergone enormous state transformation since 1978. The article argues that the concept of a “Chinese-style regulatory state” can help understand and explain how Chinese foreign and security policy is actually developed and leads to outcomes that less coherent and strategic than IR scholars usually suggest.

Keywords: foreign policy, security policy, state transformation, international relations theory, China

Introduction

Mainstream political science has long operated with an implicitly Weberian—or, in international relations (IR), “Westphalian”—notion of the state as a coherent set of decision-making bureaucracies exercising sovereignty over a bounded territory and population. However, particularly amid globalization, this increasingly fails to reflect reality because statehood is transforming in three key ways. First, state authority is *fragmenting*. It is no longer concentrated in all-powerful, coherent executive apparatuses, but is increasingly dispersed to diverse public, private, and hybrid actors including sectorial ministries, independent central banks, regulators,

and quasi-autonomous nongovernmental organizations. Second, authority is increasingly *decentralized* to subnational governments. Third, state apparatuses are increasingly *internationalized*. Many fragmented and decentralized institutions have networked with foreign counterparts. Subnational agencies have become international actors, pursuing quasi-autonomous paradiplomacy. Originally domestic institutions, such as law enforcement agencies, have acquired international roles and responsibilities. Although these trends are uneven and contested everywhere and most pronounced in the West, they are visible worldwide as developing countries’ states are reconfigured along similar lines.

Although neglected by most mainstream IR scholars, others increasingly recognize that these epochal developments profoundly challenge existing understandings of international politics. Foreign policy analysis (FPA) scholars increasingly note that foreign and security policy (FSP) making and implementation is “splinter[ing]” as authority “diffuse[s]” to diverse actors, domestically and transnationally, problematizing existing theoretical models that depict states as “bounded actor[s]” (Hill 2016, 101; Webber and Smith 2013, 33–35, 40–41; Alden and Aran 2012, 91). However, such incipient observations have yet to coalesce into a satisfactory theoretical framework for analyzing FSP in an era of state transformation.

This article undertakes this task. The first section establishes the empirical fact of state transformation and its importance for IR. It critically evaluates existing theoretical approaches, then outlines an alternative framework by analyzing FSP as the outcome of struggles within a disaggregated, “regulatory” state. Reflecting state transformation, traditionally dominant agencies like ministries of foreign affairs no longer monopolize FSP. Rather, they must bargain with and try to coordinate many other actors. Reflecting the regulatory state model, they strive to influence and make FSP coherent by delineating broad policy goals and guidelines for others to follow and by using coordinating mechanisms to “steer” other agents. Yet, these other actors also struggle to influence, interpret, or even ignore FSP guidelines. Policy and policy outcomes reflect this ongoing contestation.

The second and third sections apply this framework to a case study of China, insights from which also illustrate the preceding theoretical discussion. From a mainstream IR and FPA perspective, China should be a “hard” case for my argument. The literature typically depicts China as a “unitary, Westphalian state” (Tubilewicz 2017, 933), a “unitary and monolithic political system” (Taylor 2014, 53; see further Hameiri and Jones 2016, 72–78). However, this ignores decades of scholarship on Chinese politics describing China’s regime as an evolving, “fragmented authoritarianism” (Lieberthal and Oksenberg 1988), with some literature identifying important consequences for FSP (Lampton 2001, 2015). However, very few Sinologists have *theorized* these empirical observations, and those doing so remain constrained by IR/FPA’s inadequate conceptual models. Moreover, as single-country specialists, they implicitly present these developments as *sui generis*, rather than as country-specific instantiations of a general trend: state transformation. I therefore use Sinologists’ rich insights to elucidate a general interpretive model, offering both a corrective to IR/FPA accounts, which are often deeply misguided about the organization of Chinese state power,

and a properly theorized framework for Sinologists to guide empirical enquiry, communicate their findings to a wider IR audience, and engage in comparative work beyond their single-country silo. I argue that Chinese FSP is now made in a Chinese-style regulatory state. Central actors lay down broad principles and guidelines and have a range of mechanisms to steer other actors toward desired goals. But these other fragmented, decentralized, and internationalized actors may *influence*, *interpret*, or even *ignore* these guidelines according to their own interests and agendas. FSP outputs thus reflect an ongoing tug-of-war among diverse actors within the transformed regulatory state, rather than simply central commands.

The final section illustrates this argument through a brief analysis of China’s “go west” policy. It shows how a provincial government and powerful state-owned enterprises (SOEs) struggled to influence, interpret, and ignore regulatory FSP guidelines according to their sectional agendas, promoting local business interests over national-level foreign policy goals. Ultimately, this produced substantial deviation from central agencies’ intentions and led to a crisis with Myanmar in 2011, which compelled national-level agencies to try to recentralize control and significantly change China’s Myanmar policy. Although the contours of state transformation, and thus the operation of FSP, vary across states, reflecting their specific sociopolitical configurations, the Chinese case thus underscores the shortcomings of theories treating important states as coherent, static monoliths. It demonstrates clearly the need to put state transformation and struggles within transforming states at the center of our analysis of FSP.

State Transformation and Foreign and Security Policy

Transforming States, Transforming FSP

Despite its frequent depiction in IR as a natural or transhistorical unit (Agnew 1994), the Weberian/Westphalian state is actually a recent historical achievement. It consolidated in Europe during the industrial revolution following centuries of princely struggles to unify disparate territories into national formations (Spruyt 1994; Teschke 2003), and in the global South only after decolonization. The Bretton Woods settlement then bolstered this form of statehood by supporting Keynesian compacts between capital and labor. These developments helped to solidify “the primacy of national economies, national welfare states, and national societies managed by national states concerned to unify national territories and reduce uneven development” (Jessop 2009, 99).

However, the Weberian-Westphalian state form has been substantially transformed since the 1970s capitalist crises. Led initially by new-right forces in the United States and Britain, trade unions were defeated, wage growth was curbed, state assets were privatized, and international trade and finance were deregulated (Harvey 2005). Corporatist and developmentalist apparatuses were dismantled and replaced by new institutions focused on supporting markets global competitiveness (Cerny 1997). Further state transformation followed as ruling groups adapted governance structures to the resultant rise of globalization, fundamentally reworking the Weberian-Westphalian state in most jurisdictions worldwide. For analytical purposes, I summarize these transformations under three headings: fragmentation, decentralization, and internationalization.

The *fragmentation* of state authority stems from decades of piecemeal state reform and a general move toward regulatory governance. The privatization of SOEs and the abolition of developmentalist ministries and agencies dismantled Fordist-Keynesian institutions, with policymaking authority reassigned to quasi-autonomous or independent regulators (Majone 1994). Scholars have observed a general shift from the top-down, command-and-control structure characterizing Weberian-Westphalian states toward a regulatory state model. In the former, decision-making and authority is highly centralized in executive institutions that intervene directly to secure desired goals. In regulatory states, central agencies retreat to using negative coordination, issuing broad guidelines to steer diverse public, private, and hybrid actors toward preferred outcomes (Majone 1994; Jayasuriya 2001). This model has spread beyond the West through structural adjustment programs, adaptation to economic crises and the new international division of labor, and donor interventions designed to replace developmental states with market-supporting “governance states” (Harrison 2004; Minogue and Cariño 2006; Dubash and Morgan 2013).

Decentralization has also become ubiquitous, with the devolution of policymaking and control over resources and the rise of global cities and city-regions (Brenner 2004; Keating 2013). Decentralization has spread to developing countries through postconflict state-building interventions and development projects (World Bank 2007).

Finally, many newly empowered institutions and agencies have become *internationalized*. To support and govern increasing economic transnationalization, regulatory and judicial bodies have formed “transgovernmental networks” to harmonize policies and standards (Slaughter 2004; Brand 2007; Demirović 2011).

Similarly, functional ministries and agencies have networked with their foreign counterparts to manage economic and security issues (Bickerton 2012; Hameiri and Jones 2015). Rosenau (2003) dubs this “fragmentation”: state fragmentation enabling new forms of transnational integration. Furthermore, many subnational governments now engage in quasi-autonomous paradiplomacy (Kuznetsov 2015).

These epochal changes have significant consequences for FSP. Before the consolidation of national Weberian-Westphalian states, the division between internal and external policy was blurry, authority was fragmented, and what we now call foreign policy was the domain of diverse actors including “traders, investors, missionaries, soldiers, and spies” (Grynawski 2015, 693). As this form of statehood consolidated, such groups were gradually reined in and authority consolidated in increasingly professionalized and specialized state agencies, notably ministries of foreign affairs and defense (on China, see Zhang 2001; Stern 2011).¹ However, recent state transformation dynamics have fostered the following:

[T]he breakdown of traditional diplomatic domains and activities but also the creation of *new actors, new arenas, and new fields of diplomatic activity* . . . [Foreign ministries are] increasingly unable to act authoritatively on behalf of various domestic agencies, which not only have a degree of institutional autonomy but also may have [different] diplomatic agendas . . . [J]ust as public power is fragmented so are diplomatic functions, which are now not just concentrated in a traditional Ministry of Foreign Affairs but dispersed among a wide array of independent sites of public power. (Jayasuriya 2004, 39, 42, original emphasis)

As Hill (2016, 86, 101) notes, this creates “new problems of coordination and control,” with the risk of FSP being “splintered by powerful internal elements running their own line” (see also Webber and Smith 2013, 35–37). This challenges mainstream international theory, which predominantly understands states as coherent units.

Current IR and FPA Approaches

IR and FPA models have not kept pace with these epochal changes in statehood. They emerged during

1 The degree and longevity of coherence produced should not be exaggerated, however, as in IR’s “Westphalian myth.” By the early 1970s, US analysts already complained of “diffusion” and “chaos” in foreign policymaking (Malmgren 1972).

the postwar heyday of the Weberian-Westphalian state, when it seemed feasible to theorize states as units expressing a singular national interest (Agnew 1994). Theorists largely ignored the relative novelty of this form of statehood, projecting it backward to 1648 or even earlier. Even today, neoclassical realists—following Waltz (1979)—explicitly apply “the generic category of ‘states’” to politics from Ancient Greece to present-day China (Taliaferro, Lobell, and Ripsman 2009, 26; see also Taliaferro 2009).

Some, particularly International Society scholars, have challenged this and recovered the diversity of pre-modern politics (e.g., Cox, Dunne, and Booth 2002). Nonetheless, IR theory has not adequately recognized subsequent transformations. Early work in the 1970s and 1980s, particularly by liberals and Marxists, recognized growing cross-border flows and institutional connectivity (Keohane and Nye 1977; Cox 1987), and some more recent accounts, notably in the global governance sub-field, describe these changes (e.g., Slaughter 2004; Cerny 2010). Nonetheless, particularly with respect to FSP, mainstream theorists still largely cling to the state-as-unit model, writing about what “China” wants or what “the United States” is doing, as if states are “persons” (Wendt 2004). IR’s major disciplinary debates (e.g., on the impact of rising powers on US-led world order) continue to neglect recent transformations in statehood (see Hameiri and Jones 2016, 72–78). So, too, do those approaches that foreground the domestic constitution of foreign policy, which continue to assume that political contestation is resolved into a singular policy that the state-as-unit then follows, whether by a foreign policy executive (FPE) in the case of neoclassical realists (Taliaferro et al. 2009; Ripsman, Taliaferro, and Lobell 2016) or via pluralist institutions in the case of liberals (Solingen 2009). Overall, mainstream approaches generally ignore state transformation or dismiss its significance. Though they may recognize that states are no longer the only significant actors in global politics, adding nonstate actors into their narratives, they deny that “globalization is both associated with and reflects a new kind of state” (Hurrell 2008, 203).

FPA also remains wedded to theoretical antecedents, which reflects its disengagement from globalization studies. In fact, only a few FPA scholars have begun to critique and (very tentatively) address this shortcoming (Baumann and Stengel 2010; Aran 2011). Alden and Aran, for instance, rightly criticize FPA for having “no theory of the state [and] no meaningful incorporation of the systemic changes provoked by globalization,” such that FPA wrongly presents states “essentially as given and timeless, subject to no more than incremental change” (Alden and Aran 2012, 91–92, original emphasis). How-

ever, such recognition is thus far limited and has failed to generate new theoretical models. This arguably reflects FPA’s traditional focus on FSP decisions, through which contending perspectives supposedly resolve into a single policy that then guides the entire state—the hallmark of the Weberian-Westphalian state. For example, despite recognizing the risk of splintered FSP, Hill explicitly defines foreign policy as *intrinsically* involving “coherence” and “coordination,” generating “purposive action, on behalf of a single community” (Hill 2016, 4–6, 295). Unsurprisingly, then, he simply dismisses the possibility of quasi-autonomous behavior from subordinate actors or that foreign policy may fail due to poor coordination (Hill 2016, 206, 238ff, 298–99, 108). Hill insists that FPEs remain small—about twenty people—and that foreign ministries or government leaders are “ideally placed” to coordinate other actors, theorizing the process using a traditional bureaucratic politics model (Hill 2016, 80–1, 102–9). Similarly, despite recognizing the broadening of the FSP domain, Webber and Smith (2013, chap. 3) cling to existing FPA approaches without amending them to incorporate state transformation. Others also reject the need for any amendment by simply denying the existence of state transformation (e.g., Beach 2012, 200, chap. 9). Alden and Aran go further, sketching several ideal types. In “clustered states” (i.e., Western states that pool sovereignty, capabilities, and policymaking), FSP “agency exists at multiple sites and involves numerous players.” In “institutional states”—the traditional, Westphalian-Weberian type—FPEs remain autonomous and use “policy tools that accompanied the rise of the modern state” (Alden and Aran 2012, chap. 5; for a similar approach, see Robertson 2012). However, there is no theoretical guidance as to how clustered states make FSP. Moreover, China would inevitably be associated with the institutional state model.

By underplaying the impact of state transformation, FPA’s modest conceptual advances overstate central agencies’ coordinating capacity and understate changes beyond the West. Generally, even these more innovative scholars limit their observations to Western states, assuming that major non-Western countries retain their largely Westphalian character. Hill’s (2016, 243) characterization of China as a “highly centralized country” whose political structure “ensures top-down decision-making” is exemplary. This overlooks China’s widely documented “fragmented authoritarianism” (Lieberthal and Oksenberg 1988) and severe coordination challenges, including in FSP (Lampton 2001, 2015). Pace Hill, the number of actors involved in Chinese FSP, vastly exceeds twenty individuals. For instance, as of 2011, twenty-two different agencies had some jurisdiction over

maritime affairs alone, with no mechanism coordinating them. This produced power struggles that directly precipitated conflict with neighboring states (Bickford, Holz, and Velluci 2011, 64–66; ICG 2012). Clearly, state transformation is not limited to Western powers but extends even to apparently Westphalian states like China.

A New Model: The Regulatory State in Foreign and Security Policy

To transcend these weaknesses, this section develops a theoretical framework for analyzing FSP-making in an era of state transformation. Drawing on Gramscian state theory and historical sociology, this framework recognizes that the fragmentation, decentralization, and internationalization of state apparatuses have fundamentally altered the political processes of FSP-making and implementation. States are not simply unitary actors, nor can we assume that their agencies always resolve their differences into a coherent, singular policy that then drives all state behavior. Nonetheless, FSP is also not a chaotic free-for-all, with transformed state apparatuses empowered to do whatever they wish. Rather, the politics of FSP has shifted from old-style bureaucratic politics within a hierarchical, command-and-control system to a *regulatory* mode of governance. Central authorities try to coordinate and steer diverse actors toward broadly defined ends, but the latter may seek to influence, interpret, and even ignore central guidelines. Policy outcomes are understood to reflect constant bargaining and contestation within this broad institutional setting.

Gramscian theory as developed by Poulantzas (1976) and Jessop (2008) strongly informs this model. It is particularly useful because it foregrounds the contested evolution of state apparatuses. Gramscians theorize states as institutional ensembles structured by historically evolving conflict among sociopolitical forces—classes and class fractions, ethnic and religious groupings, state-based actors, etc. (Jessop 2008). Accordingly, state forms are not static but evolve, reflecting changing relationships between societal groups that struggle for power and control over resources. The state's historical evolution—first into a national, Weberian-Westphalian form and then its increasing refragmentation and transnationalization—is thus foregrounded and explained, rather than being downplayed or denied (Cox 1987; Brand 2007; Jessop 2009).

Gramscian theory, unlike Weberian approaches, does not presume the state's internal coherence and autonomy from society. On the contrary, the state's internal unity is constantly questioned due to the linkages between par-

ticular state apparatuses and different social forces. As Migdal (2001: 20, 22) observes,

The sheer unwieldy character of states' far-flung parts, the many fronts on which they fight battles with groupings with conflicting standards of behavior, and the lure for their officials of alternative sets of rules that might, for example, empower or enrich them personally or privilege the group to which they are most loyal, all have led to diverse practices by states' parts or fragments . . . [These] have allied with one another, as well as with groups outside, to further their goals . . . [producing outcomes] often quite distinct from those set out in the state's own official laws and regulations. These alliances, coalitions, or networks have neutralized the sharp territorial and social boundary that [Weberian state theory] has acted to establish, as well as the sharp demarcation between the state as preeminent rule maker and society as the recipient of those rules . . . [T]he state is a contradictory entity that acts against itself.

Accordingly, “we must examine the different strategies and tactics that state managers use to impose a measure of coherence on the activities of the state” (Jessop 2008, 36–37), rather than assuming its unity or the efficacy of coordinating mechanisms.

This underscores the importance of two analytical steps for explaining FSP in the context of state transformation. First, we must understand the main sociopolitical drivers of state transformation and the fragmented, decentralized, and internationalized state forms they generate. This identifies both the basic institutional framework within which FSP is made and implemented and the social forces struggling within it. Second, we must trace the effects of these struggles on FSP formation and implementation. This involves a significant departure from FPA's traditional bureaucratic politics model. Struggles over FSP are no longer limited to infighting within a small FPE, which resolves into clear decisions. They are now far broader, encompassing diverse, state-based, and societal actors at multiple territorial scales, not simply the national one (Jessop 2009), and they do not necessarily generate authoritative decisions or coherent implementation thereof.

Although Gramscian theory expects state transformation and forms to vary across countries, corresponding primarily to local sociopolitical struggles, the concept of the regulatory state can help us understand the institutional context and the tactics that state managers use in many contemporary settings. To reiterate, the traditional, Weberian-Westphalian state operates through a top-down command-and-control system, where

decisions are made by core executives that concentrate power and authority in their hands and intervene directly to secure specific outcomes. In regulatory states, where power is dispersed (fragmented, decentralized, internationalized), core executives instead use negative coordination, seeking to steer a broader range of actors toward desired goals. The generalized shift toward regulatory statehood restructures sociopolitical contestation, including in FSP. In Weberian-Westphalian states, conflict centers on the capture of executive state agencies, the direct levers of power. In regulatory states, however, conflict is more fragmented as actors contest the formation, interpretation, and implementation of regulations and guidelines (Jarvis 2012; Rosser 2015). These struggles shape what regulatory states actually do in practice, with regulatory capture or noncompliance among the possible outcomes. In China, for example, the emergence of truly independent regulators has been contested by entrenched party-state interests, resulting in continued authoritarian controls, regulations skewed toward dominant interests, and frequent legal and regulatory violations (Pearson 2005; Hsueh 2011; Jones and Zou 2017). Applied to FSP, this raises the possibility of fragmented, incoherent policy-making and implementation.

Within a regulatory state, contestation may occur at two analytically distinguishable moments: (1) the formation of national-level policy guidelines and (2) their further interpretation and implementation.² First, state-based and societal actors will seek to *influence* central guidelines to suit their sectional interests and agendas (e.g., through direct participation in policy commissions, drafting committees and coordinating bodies, or through indirect approaches like lobbying). National FSP guidelines are the contingent outcome of these struggles, reflecting actors' strategies, power, resources, and access to decision-making processes. Crucially, we should not simply assume—as in FPA's bureaucratic politics model—that this contestation resolves into a clear final decision or that coordination mechanisms are effective. These mechanisms, while forming an important institutional context, are themselves potential sites of struggle and their efficacy requires constant political action. Accordingly, state coherence is always “tendential . . . failure is an ever-present possibility” (Jessop 2008, 47), particularly amid contemporary state transformation dynamics. National-level guidelines may also be left broad and vague, particularly when competing interests make incompatible

demands, the stakes appear low, and/or coordinating agencies lack the will or capacity to resolve conflict decisively. Moreover, a hallmark of regulatory states is that central guidelines typically require subsequent interpretation by diverse actors tasked with implementing them.

This creates a second moment of contestation, where actors struggle to interpret and implement FSP guidelines in ways consistent with their interests and agendas and/or those of their allies. Three broad strategies exist here. First, FSP actors might simply *ignore* or not implement national guidelines, possibly even going rogue by pursuing their own policies instead. This is likely only when the costs of open defiance are low (e.g., when disaggregated actors are stronger than the agents seeking to coordinate them, or the stakes are limited). Second, and probably more commonly, agents may *interpret* national guidelines in ways that serve sectional interests. Where guidelines are closely specified, and/or where material or political support is needed from central authorities, other agencies may seek to repackage their existing preferences and programs as expressions of central directives. This will be easier where guidelines are general or vague, or where coordinating agencies are relatively weak, potentially generating outcomes that diverge substantially from central actors' original intentions.

In turn, centrally located agencies may react by struggling to *intensify* policy coordination and control. This could involve the activation of disciplining and control mechanisms, the tightening of policy guidelines, or efforts to recentralize power. Hence, the politics of FSP does not end with an original decision but involves a continual tug-of-war between diverse actors within a transformed, disaggregated state. These struggles clearly exceed the banal problems of miscommunication and bureaucratic disorganization discussed in FPA's implementation literature (e.g., Brighi and Hill 2012). State transformation has shifted the policy process away from “activating a ‘chain of command’ toward . . . ‘coalition building’ where politics is central . . . [to] a continuous act of negotiation on several fronts, with no final resolution of the central issues” (Webber and Smith 2013, 87, 102).

As noted, these dynamics will take different forms over space and time. Hence, careful contextual, historical analysis is required of particular cases, rather than crude generalization. For example, although India is formally a federal democracy, its constituent states enjoy considerably less autonomy in FSP than provincial governments in China, a formally unitary, authoritarian state (cf. Li 2014; Plagemann and Destradi 2015). Similarly, the relentless tug-of-war between different actors can change power relations over time. For example, Russian provinces enjoyed more FSP autonomy in the 1990s

2 In practice, these moments may be simultaneous or ordered counterintuitively (e.g., struggles to implement a policy may begin before any guiding framework exists [see case study below]).

than today (Makarychev 1999), while in China President Xi Jinping's recentralization drive has curtailed some of the free-wheeling behavior of subordinate actors (see below). Finally, dynamics may vary by issue area, with some matters subject to far tighter control (and potentially less fragmentation, decentralization, and internationalization) than others. For example, nuclear weapons are typically governed by far fewer actors than, say, aid or trade (Malmgren 1972).

Methodologically, this necessitates case study analysis, with historical inquiry into the dynamics of state transformation, and process-tracing to identify the consequences for FSP in a particular domain. The following questions may guide the analysis of a specific case:

- 1) What are the main drivers and contours of state transformation? How are state fragmentation, decentralization, and internationalization manifested? What are the main forces driving/resisting these changes? Which interests and agendas are dominant?
- 2) What state forms has this generated within the FSP field? What actors exist in this field and what are their respective remits and interrelations? What coordinating actors/mechanisms exist and how effective are they?
- 3) Focusing on a particular FSP issue area, what are the main lines of contestation within transformed state apparatuses?
 - 3.1) First Moment: Through what mechanisms do leading actors seek to define policy guidelines? How do key actors seek to *influence* the process? How do struggles to define guidelines policy unfold? What compromises are made in the eventual framework? Are guidelines tightly specified or left vague?
 - 3.2) Second Moment: How and why do actors *interpret* or *ignore* FSP guidelines? Is there evidence of "splintering," as actors ignore or violate central policy? Do actors creatively interpret central guidelines in ways that advance sectional interests, and does this create divergence between original intentions and FSP outcomes? How do central, coordinating actors respond to other agencies' maneuvers, especially when outcomes diverge? Do they try to activate or intensify coordinating or disciplinary mechanisms, rework policy guidelines, and/or recentralize power? What FSP consequences flow from this?

This framework's novelty and interpretive, context-sensitive approach make it hard to formulate testable

hypotheses at this exploratory stage, but certain benchmarks are identifiable. For instance, it should be possible to identify a far more diverse range of policy actors involved in FSP than expected in mainstream IR theory. Furthermore, actors' interactions should approximate struggles within a disaggregated regulatory state, with important policy outcomes traceable to these struggles. The framework should also provide more persuasive interpretations than existing approaches and better account for discrepant evidence. As Hameiri and Jones (2016, 91) note, analysts of China's rise frequently cherry-pick evidence that supports their viewpoint, while ignoring ample evidence that others within the same tradition use to support contrary arguments. A key test for this framework is whether it can persuasively explain (rather than ignore) these discrepancies as reflecting contestation within a transformed state. Similarly, Chinese conduct within specific policy domains is often incoherent; in the South China Sea, for example, Chinese behavior is "consistently inconsistent" (Santicola 2015). IR theorists, especially realists, often depict this as a cunning "strategic ambiguity," but offer little proof thereof. The framework developed here should offer a more compelling explanation of such instances of incoherent behavior.

State Transformation and Foreign and Security Policy in China

Given common depictions of China as "a highly centralized country" (Hill 2016: 243) or as the quintessential "Westphalian" state (Rolf and Agnew 2016, 16–17; Tubilewicz 2017, 933; see further Hameiri and Jones 2016, 74–78), mainstream IR and FPA scholars may see it as a "hard" case for my argument. However, extensive Chinese politics scholarship provides rich empirical evidence that supports my analysis. Nonetheless, the persistence of this misapprehension does underscore Sinologists' failure to communicate their findings to IR scholars using an adequate, theorized framework. Studies of the Chinese state and FSP are overwhelmingly descriptive-empirical, with little or no theory-building or application (see Liu and Teng 2006; Li 2012; Song and Zhang 2015). Even the most innovative work is atheoretical, describing but not theorizing the impact of state transformation (Lampton 2001; Hao and Lin 2007; Su 2007; Wang 2011; Li 2012; Wang 2012). Where theory *is* deployed, studies apply problematic IR/FPA frameworks that fail to incorporate state transformation adequately (Zhong and Wang 2007; Collins 2013). Deploying the regulatory state model therefore offers two advances. First, it makes

better sense of Sinologists' rich findings and encourages IR/FPA scholars to take them seriously. Second, it helps Sinologists see their object of study as part of wider changes in statehood, rather than as *sui generis*.

The Transformation of the Chinese State in FSP

China is a relatively young nation-state, evolving from a loose imperial system only in the early twentieth century (Zhang 2001) and acquiring a strong Weberian-Westphalian character only under Mao (1949–1976). Although China remained sprawling and hard to govern, and Mao also experimented periodically with (very limited) decentralization, he achieved unprecedented centralized control (Donaldson 2010, 25–28), largely monopolizing FSP-making (Gong, Men, and Sun 2010). The transformation of China's party-state in the post-1978 reform era has been far more dramatic than the center-periphery struggles under Mao, not least because it has been driven by the contested move from state socialism to state-led capitalism. This has shifted the party-state's primary social base from the peasantry and urban working class to an emergent "cadre-capitalist" class (So 2013; Goodman 2014; Hui 2016), largely through promarket reform and the opening up of the formerly autarkic command economy to international investment and trade. Accordingly, the Chinese party-state is now most strongly influenced by international, state, or state-linked capital (Hui and Chan 2016). Business interests have been incorporated directly into the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), the National People's Congress (NPC), and the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) (Dickson 2008). Mounting social unrest has compelled some concessions to urban workers (Chan and Hui 2017), but state coercion and nationalism remain crucial, alongside economic growth, to maintaining sociopolitical stability (Goodman 2014).

These changes have occurred through decades of piecemeal "reform and opening up." Central state apparatuses have retreated from direct, centralized control of investment, production, and distribution to a Chinese-style regulatory state model, whereby central policymakers now set targets and guidelines for diverse public, private, and hybrid actors to follow (Pearson 2005; Collins and Gottwald 2011; Hsueh 2011). The result is not the unitary, Westphalian state of mainstream IR/FPA, but rather a fragmented, decentralized, and partially internationalized polity—including in FSP.

Fragmentation in FSP-making and implementation reflects the growing international role of formerly purely domestic, functional agencies. China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), never particularly strong, has lost

ground to diverse national-level agencies, including: the armed forces (PLA) and the Ministries of Defense and Public Security, especially in security and military matters; the Ministry of Commerce (MOFCOM), responsible for foreign trade, aid, and investment; the Ministry of Finance (MoF) and the People's Bank of China (PBC), in financial and monetary matters; the National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC), on overseas investment and climate change; policy banks, which fund foreign trade, investment, and tied aid; the Communist Party's International Liaison Department (ILD), which manages party-to-party ties and dominates North Korea policy; and state-owned enterprises (SOEs), whose autonomous overseas actions have serious diplomatic repercussions (Jakobson and Knox 2010, 4–16; Shirk 2014, 404). The existence of extensively overlapping jurisdictions compounds this fragmentation, as the aforementioned example of maritime policy shows. Moreover, equally ranked units (e.g., ministries) cannot issue instructions to one another. Accordingly, the MFA has no power to control, or even coordinate, the diverse agencies now populating the FSP domain.

Thanks to extensive *decentralization*, many of these national-level agencies now have local counterparts under the quasi-autonomous direction of provincial governments. Decentralization through the 1980s and early 1990s spurred experimental, promarket reforms, unleashing a wave of privatization and predatory behavior in the name of economic growth (Chung 2000; Zhou 2010). Growing policy divergence and dwindling central control generated serious concerns about the Chinese state's "deconstruction" (Goodman and Segal 1994). Although some powers were recentralized in the late 1990s, the result was "*de facto* federalism" (Zheng 2007). Crucially, provinces control their foreign economic relations, conducting paradiplomacy and concluding transboundary agreements with governments from Asia to Africa (Chen and Jian 2009; Li 2014). Provincial-level foreign affairs and commerce bureaus, while notionally under central guidance, are staffed by locally appointed personnel, making them primarily responsive to provincial governors and party chiefs (Cheung and Tang 2001). Since the latter are ranked equally with national ministers, they enjoy considerable autonomy. As Jakobson (2014, 34) notes, "local officials focus on gaining profits and prestige for their organizations and themselves. They often do not consider the foreign policy ramifications of their actions."

Many formerly domestic state apparatuses have also *internationalized*, acquiring international functions or joining transgovernmental networks. For example, the PBC has joined the Basle banking committee and,

with the Shanghai and Hong Kong financial centers, is promoting the *renminbi's* internationalization to spur domestic liberalization (Brehm and Macht 2004; Gruin 2017). The People's Armed Police engages in cross-border cooperation with its regional counterparts, including province-led joint counternarcotics operations and multinational antipiracy patrols on the Mekong River (Su 2015, 78). Yunnan province and Guanxi autonomous region are China's lead agencies in the Greater Mekong Subregion, a regional economic integration project. Twenty provinces now play a leading role in China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), strongly defining its content and implementation (Jones and Zeng 2017). The Ministry for Environmental Protection cooperates with its Japanese counterpart on transnational environmental security, despite military-to-military tensions (Wirth 2010). National-level SOEs, converted into profit-seeking entities under arms-length management, have also gone global. They are not answerable to the MFA and some routinely defy even their notional government overseers in MOFCOM and the State-Owned Assets Supervision and Administration Commission (Jones and Zou 2017). Smaller, provincial-level SOEs operate largely below China's weak regulatory radar. Despite essentially being autonomous profit-seeking entities, these firms are regarded as Chinese state actors; accordingly, their antics can spark diplomatic crises (Jones and Zou 2017). As the International Crisis Group (2012, 14) summarizes, these diverse agencies "were originally established to implement domestic policies but now play a foreign policy role. They have almost no knowledge of the diplomatic landscape and little interest in promoting the national foreign policy agenda."

The Chinese-Style Regulatory State in FSP

The dramatic broadening of China's FSP domain does not imply a chaotic free-for-all, nor simply the "weakening" of the center's power. Rather, governance modalities have transformed with the emergence of a *Chinese-style regulatory state* (Pearson 2005; Collins and Gottwald 2011; Hsueh 2011). This combines broad negative coordination mechanisms—the outlining of broad policy guidelines and coordinating bodies—with more coercive instruments to steer diverse actors and discipline recalcitrant agents.

This conceptualization corrects the common misperception among IR/FPA scholars that Chinese FSP is simply dictated by a few top leaders, such as the CCP's Secretary-General and its seven-member Politburo Standing Committee (PSC). The rise of Xi Jinping has strengthened this misperception, as he is widely portrayed as a

"new Mao" who personally dominates decision-making in every domain, with a particularly powerful impact on FSP. However, this wrongly assumes that Xi has single-handedly reversed three decades of state transformation. In reality, no single person can control in detail the outputs of the Chinese state. It is more accurate to see Xi as a particularly tough player of the aforementioned tug-of-war, making stronger use of the party-state's mechanisms to steer fragmented, decentralized, and internationalized actors toward very broadly defined goals. These mechanisms are fourfold.

The first is top leaders' broad policy statements at major state events, on foreign visits, or at *ad hoc* diplomacy work conferences. These communicate top leaders' views of world order and China's place within it, define the overall tone and contours of FSP, and can initiate substantial policy change. Following such speeches, junior actors often race sycophantically to be seen as complying with top leaders' wishes, creating the (often misleading) impression of tight, top-down control. In reality, however, these speeches usually offer only "platitudes, slogans, catchphrases, and generalities," providing "atmospheric guidance" that *others* must then interpret (Norris 2016, 52). Examples include Deng Xiaoping's famous dictum *tao guang yang hui*, whose meaning is highly debatable (Chen and Wang 2011); Hu's "harmonious world" —"more of a narrative than a grand strategy" (Harris 2014, chap. 3); and Xi's "new type of great power relations," a vague slogan "subsequently filled with real meaning [by others], in an incremental manner" (Zeng 2016, 422); or Xi's slogan *fenfa youwei*, which has been interpreted to mean everything from totally disregarding other countries' interests to a modest increase in proactivity (Yamaguchi 2014: 2). Arguably, these slogans are *deliberately* vague to accommodate the diverse, competing interests now operating in China's party-state and society and to facilitate experimentation in pursuit of economic growth. However, as Lampton (2001, 21) observes, "[s]ometimes, the central government may not even 'know' what 'it' wants." Top leaders thus rely heavily on disaggregated bureaucracies, state-linked think-tanks and academic institutes to flesh out policies, even on seemingly crucial matters like the definition of China's "core interests" (Zeng, Xiao, and Breslin 2015). This allows other actors to harness their sectional interests to emerging national policy.

The second mechanism is the use of multiagency committees, "leading small groups" (LSGs), to coordinate agencies within a particular policy domain. Historically the Foreign Affairs LSG has ostensibly played this role in foreign policy. However, as the only LSG lacking a nationwide domestic bureaucracy, it was always weak

(Lieberthal 2004, 215), meeting “only infrequently, if ever” (Shirk 2014, 404; also Christensen 2013, 25). It also overlapped with other bodies including the National Security Commission and LSGs on Taiwan, functional issues like maritime interests, financial and economic affairs, energy, climate change, etc. Thus, state fragmentation appears even in the institutions created to counter it: as Lampton (2015, 767) remarks, “they too need coordination”! This results in many documented failures of LSGs to coordinate competing agencies (see Cabestan 2009: 88–90). Xi’s personal recognition of this fact—five years into an unprecedented recentralization drive—explains why the Foreign Affairs LSG was merged with the CCP’s ILD into a new CCP Foreign Affairs Commission in March 2018. Whether this fares any better remains to be seen.

A third mechanism is the center’s discretionary control over laws, regulations, and finance (Donaldson 2010, 33). For example, MOFCOM regulates SOEs overseas; the policy banks’ loans and insurance may be necessary to secure overseas deals; and the NDRC regulates major foreign investments—though its role has been downgraded under Xi, weakening already lapse central oversight. If other actors need such political or economic support, they must act in ways that at least appear commensurate with centrally located actors’ objectives.

The fourth and most important coordinating mechanism is the CCP itself, specifically its powers of appointment, appraisal, and discipline. The CCP’s central Organization Department still controls appointments to the top four thousand or so posts in the party-state, down to the level of provincial governor. This constrains senior appointees to toe the party line, particularly if they seek future promotion. However, below this level, appointments are made locally, permitting the emergence of “independent kingdoms” that give [local party chiefs] the latitude to disobey higher administrative authorities or to drag their feet” (Zhong 2015, 61–62). The CCP’s cadre responsibility system also regularly assesses CCP personnel against centrally determined targets. Again, its efficacy varies between documented successes and failures and often limited punishment for poor performance (Landry 2008; Heberer and Schubert 2012; Mei and Pearson 2014; Ahlers and Schubert 2015). Moreover, reflecting the state’s underlying class basis, there is a strong privileging of economic growth targets, with some arguing that violation of central directives is overlooked if growth targets are met (O’Brien and Li 1999; Zhou 2010: 189–190). Cadres going seriously astray, however, risk disciplinary procedures that might result in demotion, imprisonment, or even execution. Xi’s anticorruption

drive, which has disciplined over 1 million cadres is the case *par excellence*.

While this has made fanatical public commitment to Xi *de rigueur*, it has also consumed most of Xi’s energies while not necessarily improving his detailed control of party-state outputs—not least because his top-level policy frameworks remain vague, like those of his predecessors. To take one humorous example, in April 2015, Xi called for a “toilet revolution” to improve the presentation and hygiene of washrooms. Eighteen months later, the central government had to rein in local governments, which had splurged US\$3 billion on new facilities, doubtless enriching many state-linked construction firms (NPR 2018). More seriously, five competing maritime law enforcement agencies, maritime militias, and the navy seized upon Xi’s vague *fenfa youwei* slogan to justify ramping up their activity in the South China Sea, generating serious frictions with neighboring states (Jakobson 2014). Four of these agencies were then amalgamated into a single coastguard in 2013, but by March 2018 the merger was still incomplete, resulting in the coastguard’s reallocation to the Central Military Commission and the abolition of its previous overseer, the State Oceanic Administration (Interviewee A21 2018).³ This constant reshuffling of agencies strongly suggests that Xi has not yet surmounted China’s formidable coordination challenges. Similarly, Long (2016) argues that bureaucratic struggles lie behind the decision to deploy a massive oil rig in waters disputed with Vietnam in May 2015, which caused a massive diplomatic crisis. China’s compliance with the Paris climate accord is also in question as many provincial governments and companies have defied central instructions to reduce polluting output (Chen 2017). Local governments and firms also seem to be undermining international sanctions on North Korea, despite Xi’s ostensible commitment to them (Warrick 2017; Wong 2017). Indeed, some of Xi’s highest priorities still encounter routine noncompliance (Tangshan 2016).

The Chinese-style regulatory state, then, while robust in some respects, also has serious shortcomings. Clearly, top leaders have authoritarian and discretionary instruments absent in Western contexts, creating strong disincentives for truly rogue behavior by disaggregated state actors. However, many coordinating instruments are also compromised, and leaders must struggle to make them work effectively. This does not mean that the center has no or only weak control over subordinates; its steering mechanisms clearly have very real effects, even if

3 Author interview with head of think tank linked to Chinese Maritime Agency, Beijing, 23 March 2018.

they only partially achieve their objectives. As Lieberthal (2004, 189) remarks, “[n]one of these remedies has fully resolved the [coordination] problems, but all have affected the way the system has worked.” Thus, rather than seeing power as either totally concentrated or entirely dispersed, it is more accurate to view policy outcomes as reflecting constant struggles over power and resources between diverse actors within a Chinese-style regulatory state. This has not fundamentally changed under Xi, whose actions are best understood as a powerful move in a long game of tug-of-war, not the end of the game itself.

Moments of Struggle within the Regulatory State

The framework’s third step involves identifying how struggles within the transformed regulatory state shape FSP. For analytical purposes, we can identify four types of interrelated strategic behavior, though in practice these are interrelated.

The first strategy, reflecting the framework’s first moment, is *influencing*, whereby actors seek to shape the center’s broad policy contours. Importantly, the aforementioned coordinating mechanisms are not necessarily distinct from or superior to the various actors they ostensibly coordinate. For example, the minister of foreign affairs may sit on the Foreign Affairs LSG, but so too do equally or higher-ranked representatives of the State Council, the Ministries of Defense, Public Security and Commerce, the ILD, and the PLA. In functional LSGs like energy and climate change, which have major FSP ramifications, such actors are joined by diverse functional agencies ranging from the NDRC to the Ministry for Environmental Protection, to MoF, to the PBC, Agriculture, and so on. In these groups, the MFA is not in charge, and it cannot issue instructions to other equally ranked counterparts, many of which are far better resourced and more powerful. Rather, the MFA must bargain horizontally with other agencies, which in turn will push for guidelines that favor, or at least do not threaten, their particular interests. Actors outside such institutions can also engage in “lobbying with Chinese characteristics,” using personal networks and allies in the NPC, the CP-PCC, sectorial ministries, policy banks, and state-based policy institutes (Pearson 2001; see also Holbig 2004; Li 2012). They may seek to define their own agendas as “national,” “major,” or even “core” interests to attract political and economic support (Wang 2011, 132–133; Zeng et al. 2015). Hence, national guidelines are often the result of contestation and compromise between different forces and interests, which explains why they

are so often left vague. An example of bottom-up lobbying directly shaping national strategy is the 2000 “going out” policy, which encourages Chinese firms to internationalize. Going out was first adopted by the SOE China National Petroleum Company in 1991, without official authorization. Other oil companies followed, claiming compliance with general CCP policy on “opening up.” Following years of company lobbying, “going out” was adopted as official national strategy in 2000, with policy banks directed to help SOEs (Taylor 2014, chap. 6). Corporate strategy thereby became national policy.

The remaining strategic responses belong to framework’s second moment, comprising struggles over the implementation of central guidelines. The first of these is *ignoring*, where actors simply disregard central directives. Sinologists have documented this behavior using various terms: “obstruction,” “noncompliance,” “defiance,” “evasion,” “resistance,” “boldly ignoring,” “circumvention,” etc. (Lieberthal 2004, 297–298, 181; Andrews-Speed 2010, 13; Zhou 2010; Li and Wu 2012; Van Aken and Lewis 2015). While relatively rare, there is ample evidence of ignoring in FSP, generating significant departures from centrally dictated policy. SOEs operating overseas have violated many Chinese regulations, directly undermining and forcing changes in MFA policy (Jones and Zou 2017). Local governments have also supported illegal overseas activities by local business interests, damaging interstate relations (Hess and Aidoo 2016). SOEs have violated United Nations embargoes to which Beijing was committed, without MFA knowledge (Cardenal and Araújo 2013, 57–58, 116; Zhang 2013; Lampton 2015, 765). The PLA has conducted military tests and aggressive maneuvers coinciding embarrassingly with overseas diplomatic visits by Hu and Xi (Cabestan 2009, 89; Moore 2014; Cheung 2015; Lampton 2015, 765) and engaged foreign vessels without even informing the MFA or Ministry of Defense (Saunders and Scobell 2015). China’s multiple, overlapping maritime agencies—military and civilian—are frequently observed acting autonomously, creating significant diplomatic incidents (ICG 2012; Jakobson 2014). However, because of the party-state’s residual authoritarian controls, “*open defiance is [relatively] rare*” (Zhong 2015, 129–130, emphasis added).

Hence, the most common strategic response in this second moment is arguably *interpreting* central directives in ways commensurate with actors’ own sectional interests. Here, agencies and their societal allies present their preexisting interests and agendas as means of implementing centrally defined policies. This is easier if they have previously struggled to *influence* these policies and/or if policies are vaguely defined. As Zhong (2015, 129) notes,

local governments start interpreting leaders' speeches before central agencies have even begun to devise implementing policies, leading to immediate "resistance" to disliked elements and "distortion" of others around sectional interests. Reflecting the state's class basis and the resultant privileging of capital accumulation, this often involves efforts to harness local economic agendas to "national" policies. For example, national oil companies, ship builders, the Hainan provincial government and even village-level administrations have all leveraged Xi's vague slogans around protecting maritime rights to advance their sectional interests: hydrocarbon exploration; ship building; expanding local fishing industries; and upgrading local infrastructure (ICG, 2016, 5–6, 9; Kennedy and Erickson 2016). This has raised tensions with rival states in the South China Sea, even as the MFA ostensibly pursues a diplomatic solution to sovereignty disputes.

In response to these strategies, centrally located actors may also use the mechanisms available to them to rein in others, particularly if their behavior diverges seriously from central intentions or creates interstate tensions. In extreme cases, central actors may try to recentralize authority policy authority entirely (Li and Wu 2012; Su 2012). Thus, as indicated above, emergent FSP outputs reflect *ongoing* struggles within the regulatory state context. Power is never entirely recentralized, nor entirely dispersed. As Andrews-Speed (2010, 22, 27) remarks, outcomes reflect not authoritative decisions—as in mainstream IR/FPA approaches—but rather an ongoing process of "bargaining . . . horizontally between government ministries, agencies, and state enterprises, as well as vertically, between different levels of government" that "continue throughout implementation."

China's "Go West" Policy

I now briefly illustrate how the above dynamics play out in a particular instance: China's "Go West" policy, also known as the "Great Western Development" campaign. Adopted in 1999, with a second round launched in 2010, Go West encourages China's relatively poor, underdeveloped western regions to develop economically by deepening political and economic relations with neighboring countries. I focus on Yunnan province, which borders Myanmar, Laos, and Vietnam. The limited mainstream IR/FPA literature on Go West reflects the unitary state model criticized earlier, depicting decision-making as centralized and subnational actors as loyal, unproblematic policy implementers (e.g., Cornago 1999, 45; Ptak and Hommel 2016; Tubilewicz 2017). For example, Tubilewicz (2017, 933, 939) insists that "Yunnan's paradiplomacy affirms the central state's sovereignty";

the "central state" retains its "monopoly of external action," and there is "no evidence that Yunnan shaped decisions." Conversely, our framework reveals that Yunnan's provincial government and powerful SOEs influenced, interpreted, and ignored FSP guidelines to advance their own interests. Their behavior vitiated top leaders' intentions, particularly *vis-à-vis* neighboring Myanmar, prompting a bilateral crisis in 2011. National-level agencies therefore moved to recentralize policy control, generating further FSP changes. Our framework helps to reveal and explain these dynamics, which are absent in mainstream accounts.

We begin with the framework's first moment of contestation over the formation of the GW policy's basic contours. As with going out, Go West's emergence reflects bottom-up *influencing* strategies. Since the late 1980s, Yunnan had been lobbying for policy concessions to enable it to internationalize and expand the local economy, and by the 1990s was promoting the idea of a revived silk road (Summers 2013, 57–58, 65, 108ff, 148–50). Other western provinces, similarly envious of coastal provinces' freedoms and economic expansion, were demanding comparable concessions (Chin 2004, 152) and recruiting supporters in national-level policy institutions. Pressure mounted around China's World Trade Organization accession in 2000, which faced intense resistance from noncompetitive industries and their political patrons throughout the party-state, especially in backward, western regions (Holbig 2004, 336–344). Fear of social unrest compelled party-state leaders to respond, with President Jiang Zemin identifying "the great development of the west" as a "major strategic mission" in a June 1999 speech (Holbig 2004, 341).

Diverse FSP actors then struggled to *influence* the emerging policy framework. Go West was officially made national policy in November 1999 following Jiang's vague pronouncements. However, this did not involve top-down commands, but rather the development—through bargaining and lobbying—of very broad policy guidelines, in line with Chinese-style regulatory statehood. The State Council LSG on Western Region Development was established, containing twenty-three different agencies (Chin 2004, 139–42). Reflecting the state's *fragmented authority*, its secretariat, located in the State Planning and Development Commission (SPDC), faced intense lobbying from powerful, national-level agencies and SOEs, which were influential because their capacities were needed to implement eventual policy decisions (Chin 2004, 142–51). Given these contending interests, the LSG never produced a single, clear policy document or strategy, but rather several vague guidelines: a "general outline" in October 2000, "suggestions on

implementation” in September 2001, and the SPDC’s “overall plan” in February 2002 (Holbig 2004, 347–349).

In early 2000, however, well before any guidance was issued, LSG constituents and others were already *interpreting* Jiang’s “go west” slogan according to their own agendas. Indeed, the 2001 guidelines were issued to “rein in” “fierce competition” among “ambitious local governments” (Chin 2004, 160). Coupled with influencing strategies, this preemptive interpretation shaped the overall plan, which merely collated the various projects and agendas promoted by ministries, agencies, and provincial governments (Holbig 2004, 344–351). Thus, as Holbig (2004, 335–336) observes, from its inception, Go West was a “soft [policy]”—an amorphous set of diverse policy agendas and instruments not designed to form a complete and coherent program, but rather to appeal to as many interests as possible simultaneously.”

We can now turn to the framework’s second moment of contestation to identify how various actors creatively *interpreted, implemented, and ignored* national guidelines to produce actual FSP outputs. I focus here on Yunnan province and allied SOEs, which were the key Chinese actors implementing Go West in the neighboring states of Myanmar, Laos, and Vietnam. The remainder of this section shows how Yunnan exploited Go West and related central policies to advance local—primarily economic—interests, reflecting the class basis of the subnational Chinese state.

Yunnan’s consistent goal has been to exploit vague, national-level agendas to funnel patronage to local, state-linked construction and transportation countries. Accordingly, it has *interpreted* Go West as being primarily about constructing transboundary infrastructure, promoting this same agenda in various capacities: as China’s lead agency in the Greater Mekong Subregion; as the initiator of the Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar grouping, established in 1999; and through the Kunming-to-Kolkata cooperation scheme with West Bengal, launched in 2003. Facing growing competition from Guangxi, Yunnan has struggled to maintain central attention and patronage by promoting the province as a “bridgehead” to Southeast Asia (Summers 2013, 76–78). After President Hu Jintao used this phrase in 2009, Yunnan launched a Gateway Initiative, demanding more central funding to supposedly implement Hu’s wishes—which were merely Yunnan’s own slogans being recycled. Thanks to Yunnanese lobbying, the national government adopted the initiative in 2010, with a thirty-strong interagency steering group established under MOFCOM (Li 2014, 282–284). Overall, Kunming’s lobbying has been

phenomenally successful; by 2011 Yunnan had attracted RMB250bn (US\$38.5 billion) to fund transboundary infrastructure projects, securing another RMB500 billion (US\$79.4 billion) for Go West’s second round from 2011 to 2015 (Li, Guo, and Liu 2011; Toh 2011).

Yunnan has also allied with powerful national-level SOEs to interpret Go West in mutually enriching ways. A major focus has been transnational hydropower development in Myanmar and Laos. This again reflects prior state transformation, specifically the corporatization and fragmentation of state-owned energy firms. Facing increased competition, hydropower companies were forced to partner with provincial governments to access suitable sites at home and abroad. By presenting lucrative dam projects as implementing Go West, Yunnan and the hydropower companies have gained billions of dollars in central financing (Magee 2006; McDonald, Bosshard, and Brewer 2009).

Another example is the US\$4.3 billion Sino-Myanmar oil and gas pipelines project. This was proposed by Yunnan and China National Petroleum Company in 2003, but initially rejected on feasibility grounds. However, after President Hu made speeches about China’s energy security in 2004, Yunnan repackaged the scheme as addressing this concern and gained approval in 2006 (Guo 2007, 59). This subsequently allowed Yunnan to lobby successfully for State Council designation as a key base for petrochemical industrial development in 2011, further boosting the local economy (Su 2014, 100).

Yunnan has also used influencing and interpreting strategies to internationalize local agribusinesses under Go West. As Yunnan has gone west, it has been exposed to serious transboundary security threats, particularly narcotics from the golden triangle, which have fostered a crime wave and HIV/AIDS epidemic. From the early 1990s, Yunnanese counties, followed by the provincial administration, have promoted opium substitution schemes in Laos and Myanmar to address this issue. After lobbying efforts by the Yunnanese, these schemes were scaled up as part of Hu’s “people’s war on drugs,” launched in 2004. Yunnan’s commerce bureau thereby gained control of a RMB250 million opium substitution fund, which it used to subsidize the expansion of Yunnanese agribusinesses into Laos and Myanmar, and directed patronage to firms linked to local party-state elites (Shi 2008, 23, 27–30). As Summers (2013, 165–166) remarks, the national FSP “objective of drug eradication has been appropriated as a commercial and economic opportunity . . . by the commercial parts of the [local] bureaucracy.”

Reflecting the risk of incoherence that our framework foregrounds, this subnational activism eventually

generated outcomes that undermined Chinese national foreign policy goals, particularly in neighboring Myanmar. Since the Chinese-sponsored Burmese Communist Party collapsed in 1989, Beijing's official Myanmar policy has been one of "kinship" and cooperation: it aided Myanmar's military junta, adopted an official policy of noninterference in Myanmar's internal affairs, and encouraged ethnic rebel groups to sign ceasefires with the regime (Maung 2011). However, in implementing Go West, Yunnan has consistently prioritized local economic interests, sometimes *ignoring* or *interpreting* national policy in ways that have severely damaged bilateral ties.

For example, Yunnanese officials have openly supported and protected local businesses engaged in illegal logging and mining in Myanmar, often in collaboration with Myanmar's ethnic-minority armed groups. Although Beijing's official policy is to support Myanmar's ban on cross-border timber and gems trading, which is intended to squeeze rebel groups' finances, Yunnan has either ignored or only temporarily enforced these embargoes. This has created severe interstate friction, because Myanmar blames Beijing (Black and Davis 2008, 6; ICG 2009, 10–11, 25–26, 40–41; Li and Lye 2009, 266; Zhao 2011, 262–263). Yunnan's use of Go West to support agribusiness expansion has also generated land grabs, social conflict, forced displacement, and food insecurity in Myanmar, with local farmers denouncing Chinese "colonialism" (Shi 2008, 31–47; Transnational Institute 2011; Su 2015, 80). Coupled with Yunnan's aggressive hydropower development, particularly a controversial US\$3.6 billion Myitsone dam project in Myanmar's Kachin state, and the oil and gas development, these dynamics have inflamed ethnic tensions and contributed directly to the resumption of civil war in Kachin in 2011 (Brenner 2015; Jones and Zou 2017). This led to an influx of thirty-seven thousand refugees into Yunnan and a crisis in bilateral relations. Myanmar suspended the Myitsone dam, Chinese investment collapsed by 95 percent from 2011 to 2014 (ASEAN Secretariat 2015), and Chinese analysts bemoaned the disastrous loss of a key strategic partner to US influence (Sun 2013). This outcome—clearly contrary to MFA intentions—can only be explained with reference to state transformation.

Finally, in accordance with the framework's expectation of a response from central actors, we can observe a tug-of-war in response to this blowback from Yunnanese adventurism that substantially changed Chinese FSP. The MFA has sought to recentralize control over relations with Myanmar and clean up Yunnan's mess, by abandoning China's noninterference policy and intervening in Myanmar's internal peace process to help restore stability along the border (Sun 2017). Central Discipline In-

spection Commission teams have also been deployed to Yunnan to investigate SOEs that violated Chinese laws and created unrest in Myanmar, while central agencies and ministries have tightened regulations on overseas SOEs (Jones and Zou 2017). Thus, centrally located actors have activated the instruments of the Chinese-style regulatory state to rein in others, generating substantive policy change.

In sum, transformations of and ongoing struggles within the Chinese state fundamentally shape the nature of China's Go West policy. National-level bureaucratic bargaining have not merely produced an authoritative policy decision that is then distorted during implementation, as traditional FPA/IR models might suggest. Rather, reflecting the Chinese state's fragmentation, decentralization, and internationalization, diverse agencies that reflect specific societal interests have influenced, interpreted, and at times ignored national FSP guidelines, generating unanticipated outcomes and further struggles over policy.

Conclusion

This article has argued that FSP making and FSP implementation have undergone fundamental change alongside significant transformations in the nature of statehood—specifically the contested and uneven fragmentation, decentralization, and internationalization of state apparatuses. Building on existing but partial insights, the study develops a new analytical framework for analyzing and explaining FSP making and outcomes, foregrounding sociopolitical contestation within a regulatory state. This involves investigating the strategies centrally located actors use to steer others and how diverse public, private, and hybrid actors located at multiple territorial scales seek to influence, interpret, or ignore policy guidelines to suit their interests and agendas. FSP outcomes are a contingent product of these ongoing struggles throughout the policy formulation and implementation process. The case of China, often depicted in IR/FPA as the quintessential Westphalian-Weberian state but in reality a site of extensive state transformation, including in FSP, illustrates this framework. Analysis of China's Go West policy shows that this policy and its outcomes are not, as existing approaches suggest, merely the result of top-down decision-making, but the product of ongoing struggles within the disaggregated party-state.

Further research is needed to test and refine this framework. The framework could be deployed comparatively to other FSP domains within China, which could help identify key variables to explain FSP outcomes with greater precision. For example, the size and stretchiness

of the policy envelope set by central agencies could vary considerably by issue area, leadership commitment, etc. Importantly, even the most prominent issue areas are subject to state transformation dynamics. For example, the definition of China's core interests has been delegated to diverse state and quasi-private entities (Zeng et al. 2015); coastal provinces have thwarted central efforts to coerce Taiwan (Norris 2016, 123–7); and the ILD, not the MFA, has dominated North Korea policy, while local governments, SOEs, and private firms are openly violating MFA-backed United Nations embargoes (Shirk 2014, 404; Warrick 2017; Wong 2017). Nonetheless, the scope for influencing, interpreting, or ignoring national policy is probably narrower *vis-à-vis* Taiwan, Korea, and the United States than, say, smaller and more peripheral states.

The framework could also be deployed to different countries for comparative analysis. Though the framework explicitly anticipates cross-country diversity, comparing cases could identify some important similarities. For example, comparative analysis might reveal a stronger role for state transformation in certain FSP issue areas than others across states. This may help to transcend the clichéd and increasingly blurred high/low politics distinction and highlight greater centralized control in traditional, “hard” security domains than in nontraditional security governance (Hameiri and Jones 2015). Cross-country comparison may also reveal important differences in the mode of political contestation within transformed states. For example, in states where the rule of law is more central to the organization of state power than in China, we might expect stronger use of courts to contest FSP. Recent examples include the 2008 Kadi case at the European Court of Justice, which profoundly shaped EU sanctions policy; the British High Court's role in Brexit; and the legal struggles over President Trump's “Muslim ban.”

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