Qing Zhang

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Education

Ph.D. in Economics, Columbia University, 2019 (Expected)

M.Phil. in Economics, Columbia University, 2016

B.S. in Information Systems and Management Science, Tsinghua University, 2013

Undergraduate Exchange Program, University of Wisconsin, Madison, 2011

Honors and Awards

Fellow, Center for Development Economics and Policy, Columbia University, 2018-present

Sage Best Paper Award Honorable Mention, American Political Science Association, 2017

Dissertation Fellowship, Columbia University, 2018-2019

Ralph Erdman Holben Fellowship, Columbia University, 2016-2017

Dean's Fellowship and Faculty Fellowship, Columbia University, 2013-2018

Hang Seng Scholarship, Tsinghua University, 2011

Bibliophilia Scholarship, Tsinghua University, 2010

Fields of Specialization

Development Economics, Urban Economics, Political Economy

Job Market Paper

Sunlight, Urban Density and Information Diffusion

Does urban density facilitate the diffusion of information? This paper exploits plausibly exogenous variation generated by a unique national policy in China that requires all residential buildings to receive sufficient hours of sunshine. The policy creates higher degrees of restriction on density at higher latitudes, where longer shadows require buildings to be further apart. Data on individual housing projects across China reveal that the cross-latitude variation in regulatory residential Floor Area Ratio can be described quite well by a formula linking structure density

to latitude through the solar elevation angle. These differences in building density further induce differences in population density and land prices across latitudes. Using differential topic dynamics on a national petition platform to measure information diffusion, I show that people respond to shifts in government attention with varying speeds across latitudes. Increases in local government reply rate to a topic raises the volume of subsequent posts on the same topic, exhibiting an S-shaped time trajectory consistent with local information diffusion about shifting government priorities. These responses are systematically faster in southern cities, where density is higher. Survey evidence further indicates that otherwise similar individuals are more likely to gossip about public issues in a southern city.

Publication

From Internet to Social Safety Net: The Policy Consequences of Online Participation in China
Forthcoming, *Governance*, with Junyan Jiang and Tianguang Meng

Internet-based platforms are increasingly being used by governments around the world to facilitate public engagement with citizens. However, it remains an open question whether participation through these platforms can actually enable citizens to influence policies. We address this question by studying the patterns and consequences of online participation at a major electronic petition platform in China, a country with the world's largest Internet-using population. Content analysis of over 900,000 petitions reveals that a substantial share of them concern lower-class issues and are originated from less developed rural and suburban areas. Linking variations in petition volumes to an original dataset of government policy priorities, we further show that online participation led governments to place greater emphasis on social welfare policies and to increase the coverage of a key low-income assistance program. These results underscore the potential of online participation as an important mechanism to improve the quality of governance.

Work in Progress

Do Legal Rules Explain China's Economic Growth?
with Amit Khandelwal, Suresh Naidu and Heiwai Tang

We apply natural language processing methods to analyze a comprehensive corpus of 1.4 million legal documents issued by the Chinese government at central and local levels since 1949, and measure their market orientation in a data-driven fashion. We document an active introduction of market-oriented legal infrastructure from the mid-1980s to around 2000, which slowed down in the last fifteen years. These dynamics are present within fine-grained policy domains. We find that the market orientation of policies explains just an extra 2% of provincial variation in GDP per capita growth beyond province and time fixed effects. Variable selection based on richer representations of the text exhibits similarly limited predictive power for provincial growth. Taken together, these findings suggest the importance of studying the informal arrangements between market participants and government officials.

Conference/Invited Talks

Urban China Workshop, MIT, 2018

China Economics Summer Institute, Chinese University of Hong Kong, 2018

Young Economists Symposium, Yale University, 2017

Quantitative China Studies Seminar, New York University, 2017

Grants

Law and Public Policy Research Grant ($14,500, with Amit Khandelwal, Suresh Naidu and Heiwai Tang), Richard Paul Richman Center, Columbia University, 2018

GSAS and Department of Economics Travel Grants, Columbia University, 2018

Research Assistantships

Research Assistant for W. Bentley MacLeod, 2017

Research Assistant for Suresh Naidu, 2014-2015

Research Assistant for Chenggang Xu (CKGSB), 2012

Other Relevant Experience

University of Chicago Price Theory Summer Camp, 2017

Consultant, Asian Development Bank Mongolia Resident Mission, Ulaanbaatar, Summer 2015

Board Member, Association of Graduate Economic Students, Columbia University, 2014-2016

Teaching Experience

Teaching Fellow at Columbia University

Perspectives on Economic Studies (PhD course) with Joseph Stiglitz, Spring 2017 & 2018

International Trade with Réka Juhász, Fall 2016

Introduction to Econometrics with Seyhan Erden, Summer 2016

Cognitive Mechanisms and Economic Behavior with Michael Woodford, Spring 2015 & 2016

Political Economy with Alessandra Casella, Fall 2015

Intermediate Macroeconomics with Xavier Sala-i-Martin, Fall 2014

Section Leader at Tsinghua University

Principles of Economics, Spring 2013

Programming

Skills: Python, R, Julia, Matlab, LaTeX, C, Java, Stata

Personal

Languages: English (fluent), Mandarin (native)

References

W. Bentley MacLeod
Sami Mnaymneh Professor of Economics
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Suresh Naidu
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