

## Sungmin Rho

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- EMPLOYMENT 2016 – **Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies**,  
Geneva, Switzerland  
  
Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science and International Relations  
2016 **University of Pennsylvania**, Philadelphia, PA  
  
Post-doctoral Fellow, Center for the Study of Contemporary China
- EDUCATION **Stanford University**, Stanford, CA  
  
Ph.D., Political Science, Jan 2016  
  - Advisors: Jean Oi (Chair), Michael Tomz, Lisa Blaydes, and Beatriz Magaloni
  - Dissertation Title: *The Workers' Dilemma: Factory Workers and Collective Action in China***Seoul National University**, Seoul, South Korea  
  
B.A., Economics (Major) and Psychology (Minor), Jan 2008  
  - *Summa Cum Laude*
- BOOK “Atomized Incorporation: Chinese Workers and the Aftermath of China’s Rise,” Cambridge University Press, *forthcoming*
- ARTICLES “Why Don’t Trade Preferences Reflect Economic Self-Interest?” (with Michael Tomz), *International Organization*, 72, no. S1 (2017)  
“Blame Avoidance and Depoliticization of Labor Discontent in Contemporary China,” *under review*  
“Manufacturing Productivity with Worker Turnover” (with Moon, K., Bergemann, P., Brown, D., Chen, A., Chu, J., Eisen, E., Fischer, G., Loyalka, and J. Cohen), *under review*
- IN PROGRESS “Industry, Self-Interest, and Individual Preferences over Trade Policy” (with Michael Tomz)  
“Trade Union and Social Dialogue during the COVID-19 Crisis: Evidence from garment factories in Indonesia” (with Luisa Lupo)  
“Resisting with noncompliance: *Tangping* movement and politics of urban workers in China”

CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS	<p>“Interest-based Collective Action and Labor Protests in China”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• American Political Science Association Annual Meetings</li> </ul> <p>“Atomized Incorporation”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Brown Bag Series, World Trade Institute, University of Bern</li> <li>• Research Seminar, International Labor Organization</li> <li>• Political Science Speaker Series, UNIGE</li> </ul> <p>“Politicization of Labor Discontent and Blame Attribution”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• American Political Science Association Annual Meetings</li> <li>• China Social Science Workshop, Stanford University</li> </ul>	<p>August 2017</p> <p>May 2017</p> <p>Jan 2018</p> <p>Dec 2018</p> <p>Sep 2019</p> <p>Jun 2020</p>
OTHER PROJECTS	<p><b>Research Fellow</b></p> <p>for Apple Inc. Academic Advisory Board</p> <p>Project: Labor Conditions at Supply Chain Factories in China</p>	<p>Fall 2014 – Present</p>
HONORS AND AWARDS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The SEED Funding, the Graduate Institute, 2021</li> <li>• Post-doctoral Fellowship, Center for the Study of Contemporary China, University of Pennsylvania, 2015-2016</li> <li>• Pre-doctoral Fellowship, The Walter H. Shorenstein Asia-Pacific Research Center at Stanford University, 2013-2014</li> <li>• Pre-doctoral Fellowship, Stanford Center at Peking University, 2013</li> <li>• O’Bie Shultz Fellowships in International Studies: Dissertation Research Travel Grant, The Freeman Spogli Institute for International Studies, 2013</li> <li>• The John and Jackie Lewis Fund to Support Research on Asia, Center for International Security and Cooperation, Stanford University, 2013</li> <li>• The Chinese Dissertation Fellowship, The Freeman Spogli Institute for International Studies, Stanford University 2012-2013</li> </ul>	
LANGUAGE	Korean (native), English (fluent), Chinese (fluent), French (basic)	
REFERENCES	<p>Jean, C. Oi (Chair)</p> <p>William Haas Professor in Chinese Politics</p> <p>Department of Political Science</p> <p>Stanford University</p> <p>Michael Tomz</p> <p>William Bennett Munro Professor of Political Science</p> <p>Department of Political Science</p> <p>Stanford University</p> <p>Lisa Blaydes</p> <p>Professor of Political Science</p> <p>Department of Political Science</p> <p>Stanford University</p> <p>Beatriz Magaloni</p> <p>Professor of Political Science</p> <p>Department of Political Science</p> <p>Stanford University</p>	<p>Phone: (650) 723 2843</p> <p>E-mail: joi@stanford.edu</p> <p>Phone: (650) 725 4031</p> <p>E-mail: tomz@stanford.edu</p> <p>Phone: (650) 723 0649</p> <p>E-mail: blaydes@stanford.edu</p> <p>Phone: (650) 330 1995</p> <p>E-mail: magaloni@stanford.edu</p>

# Major Scientific Achievements

Sung Min Rho

My research bridges international and comparative political economy with a particular focus on understanding how and why structural labor market changes shape political discontent and conflicts. While a large body of literature both in IPE and CPE stresses the importance of material interests in explaining the relationship, my work contributes to the growing debate about the role of non-material factors. Through my work, I have sought to demonstrate that material consequences of job market conditions do not necessarily induce political discontent and conflicts; at the same time, material redistribution alone also cannot automatically appease political discontent once it forms. Understanding the relationship, I have argued, requires a more in-depth analysis of the underlying social processes.

## Book Project

In my forthcoming book *Atomized Incorporation: Chinese Workers and the Aftermath of China's Rise*, I ask whether the way in which the Chinese regime incorporates rural-to-urban migrant workers has appeased their discontent by analyzing labor protests. This project began from the observation that the majority of low-skilled workforce in industrial and service sectors are comprised of rural-to-urban migrant workers, who do not have formal residential rights in their place of work. Due to their unstable residential status, these workers are subject to economic, social, and political marginalization and sometimes engage in factory-based protests. The central and local governments adopt a relatively tolerant approach to these protests but ensure that there is no cross-factory mobilization and workers' demands are about job-specific economic conditions. In the extant literature, scholars have argued that this approach—which I call atomized incorporation—ensures the authoritarian society's long-term resilience as it functions as a “safety valve” to prevent radicalization of popular discontent. When workers protest for a higher wage and get economic concessions, it is suggested that their material satisfaction would prevent them from escalating the discontent and blaming the central government.

I challenge the existing assumptions by theorizing both the advantages and limits of atomized incorporation. Theoretically, I explore the nature of incorporation when it needs to accompany atomization and its inevitable limitation in appeasing labor grievances in the long run. Empirically, based on quantitative and qualitative data collected from

two years of fieldwork, I demonstrate that the underlying assumptions in the existing literature might be misplaced in two ways. Based on an original survey data, interviews, and participant observation, I show that workers' discontent about material conditions do not necessarily target the central government unless they have been exposed to the type of information that politicizes their discontent. This exposure, I argue, is socially determined even if workers remain atomized and cannot form independent labor organization; at the same time, those who form political grievances about the central government are less prone to protest because of the political and social environment that shapes the collective action dynamics within factories. As a result, I show that a growing number of rural-born workers—and particularly the younger generation in 20s and 30s—become aggrieved about the central government, but most of these workers do not engage in the tolerated form of protest. This suggests that when the regime only tolerates workers' claim-making as atomized economic agents but disregard their non-material discontent about the broader society as a social and political being, its selective material co-optation is not able to depoliticize labor discontent.

## **Trade Attitudes in the US**

In my co-authored work, we ask why US voters' trade preferences do not reflect their economic self-interest. The paper begins by showing that standard economic theories of trade do not predict individual support for trade liberalization and the majority of the respondents are ignorant about the predicted consequences of trade. Utilizing a survey experiment, we demonstrate that providing information about who gains and who loses changes the respondents' trade attitudes but not always in a self-serving way. The study taps into the ongoing debate about economic versus cultural origins of anti-globalization sentiment.

While my projects in China and the US seem to deal with different strands of literature, both are motivated by similar underlying questions. In IPE, China is assumed to be the “winner” of economic globalization that took away manufacturing jobs from the US and Western Europe; while export-oriented industrialization contributed to China's rapid economic development and provided a source of political legitimacy to the regime, my book demonstrates that it also ushered in an era of labor conflicts in which the most aggrieved actors are the very workers who took the manufacturing jobs. This shows that jobs do not have the same political implications regardless of where they are; depending on the sociopolitical context, those who gain jobs are not necessarily winners. Studying labor politics in both contexts helped me to understand that theorizing the political ramification of deindustrialization and automation requires gaining insights beyond the US and Western Europe.