


Bringing the Sector Back In and the New Political Economy: The Contextualized Comparative Sector Approach

Roselyn Hsueh

In the age of post-neoliberal globalization, complex interdependence has resulted in the integration of many economies and the industries within them and led to varied national and subnational political and economic responses. These forces have enabled the rise of a new political economy that requires the contextualized comparative sector approach (CCSA). This article advances a research agenda that contends theoretical and empirical leverage for explaining heterogeneity and assessing generalizability is gained by taking contextualized comparisons to the sector level of analysis. The CCSA identifies the multidimensional effects of sectors, uncovering new sites of inquiry connected to sectoral structural attributes, context-specific sectoral organization of institutions, and social and political constructions of sectors. Sectors are thus contexts that are embedded in multilevel contexts involving state and nonstate actors alike. Scholarship on industrial policy, technology and innovation, environmental transition, and regulation and governance demonstrates the analytical power and theoretical value of combining contextualized comparisons and sectoral analysis, which have been overlooked by the overly macro- or micro-level studies dominant in international and comparative political economy. The various strategies of the approach and a stepwise discussion of a research design underscore the possibilities for theory development and testing, adjudication of competing explanations, and case-specific discoveries.

Keywords: Sectoral analysis, contextualized controlled comparisons, international and comparative political economy, new political economy, new inquiries, theory development, heterogeneity, generalizability

We are in the age of post-neoliberal globalization, in which complex interdependence has resulted in the integration of many economies, as well as the industries within them, and has elicited varied national and subnational political and economic responses.

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International and comparative political economy scholars distinguish the new global context as a departure from postwar “institutionalized multilateralism” (Keohane 2020). The decentralization of production, finance, and the internet in open markets, as well as neoliberal conditionalities of privatization, austerity, and financial stabilization, characterized the “golden age” of globalization. In contrast, domestic governments and economic actors today engage in “weaponized interdependence” (Farrell and Newman 2019). In their economic coercion, protectionism, and decoupling of economies, they inhabit a much more complex macro-system (Blyth and Matthijs 2017; Oatley 2011; 2019; Rho and Tomz 2017). Paralleling its break from the Washington Consensus, China has strategically combined centralized and decentralized regulation in the introduction of markets, which varies by sector (Hsueh 2011; 2022). This has given rise to a new dependency (Stallings 2020) and a renewed focus on domestic systems of control (Weiss and Wallace 2021).

In the context of neoliberal ascendance and open economy politics (Frieden, Lake, and Schultz 2009; Lake

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and Powell 1999), it has become apparent that reactive forces, which often are neither liberal economically nor politically, have given rise to a new political economy (NPE). Less studied in the overall literature, which has focused on macro-structural and national-level factors, as well as behavioral micro-foundations, are the nuanced interconnections between domestic governments and economic sectors uncovered by scholarship conducting investigations at the sector level. Earlier work observed sectoral dynamics and shed light on the extent and scope of national variation in the distinct development trajectories and varying government–business relations of the newly industrialized countries of East Asia, Latin America, and the Global South (Amsden 1989; Evans 1979; 1995; Haggard 1990; Haggard and Cheng 1987; Kohli 2004; Wade 1990; Woo-Cumings 1991;1999). More recent scholarship shows that the rise of neoliberalism has led to modes of global economic integration (Cammatt 2007; Doner 2009; Hsueh 2011; Kurtz and Brooks 2008; Post 2014; Snyder 2001)—including the diverging globalizations of China (Eaton 2015; Hsueh 2011; 2022; Yasuda 2017), India (Mukherji 2014; Sinha 2016), and Russia (Hsueh 2022; Wengle 2015) that differ greatly from those in the Cold War era—and corresponding responses to such multifaceted challenges (e.g., Doner, Noble, and Ravenhill 2021; Evans and Sil 2020; Gonzalez and Snyder 2023; Kaplan 2021).

Rising to the forefront are the politics of industrial policy, global supply chains, and trade agreements; state and private choices and market governance and regulation; sector coalitions and global production networks; and natural resource management and environmental transitions. To tackle such inquiries with empirical clarity and analytical rigor, this article proposes a new research agenda to study the multidimensionality of sectors and advances the contextualized comparative sector approach (CCSA). This approach recognizes sectoral structural attributes, context-specific sectoral organization of institutions, and social and political construction of sectors as important contexts that are ripe for systematic inquiry and that are also embedded in multilevel contexts. The CCSA leverages investigation of the structural, institutional, and value-laden dimensions of sectors through controlled and contextualized comparisons at different levels of analysis. The multilevel contextualized sector and subsector comparisons made possible by the approach broaden and deepen analysis of contextual specificities, identify new sites of inquiry at the sector level for theory development and testing, clarify effects of other variables, and adjudicate competing explanations.

The agenda to promote the CCSA builds on and departs from the tradition of “bringing the state back in” by eminent political scientists and sociologists Peter Evans, Dietrich Rueschemeyer, and Theda Skocpol (1985). Their seminal scholarship, which centered on the state,

sought to understand the reconstruction of Europe following Keynesianism in the post–World War II period, the diverging development trajectories of the newly industrialized countries of East Asia and Latin America, and important changes brewing in the communist world in the waning days of the Cold War and the dawn of globalization. Today, several scholastic generations later and in a shifting time, “bringing the sector back in” recognizes the role of the state and the impacts, across issue areas and regions of the world, of the multidimensionality of sectors in the new political economy.

Studying Sectors as Contexts and as Embedded in Multilevel Contexts

The CCSA centers sectors—whether industrial or human and natural resources—as a basis for new theorizing to better understand the new complex independence and alternatives to the neoliberal paradigm. Contextualized controlled comparisons and mid-range theorizing of a limited range of complex political and economic interdependencies unified at the sector level are particularly critical for examining the domestic backlash and global tensions of the new political economy (NPE). The investigation of multidimensional sectoral contexts, as detailed in the next section, discovers and uncovers heretofore less explored politics in the NPE when dominant perspectives debate macro-level national and subnational geographic characteristics or micro-level economic preferences.

Although some studies in international and comparative political economy have incorporated sectors in their research designs, dominant perspectives have privileged national-level characteristics (Garrett 1995; Garrett and Lange 1995; Gourevitch 1978; Katzenstein 1978; Levy 1999; 2006; Rodrik 1999; 2007; Vogel 1996; 2006; Zysman 1994). In contrast, the political economy of development scholarship disaggregates the national and examines the impacts of local and regional state–business relations, institutions, and historical legacies (e.g., Giraudy, Moncada, and Snyder 2019; Hurst 2009; Sinha 2005; Snyder 2001; Tsai 2002). Subnational studies have identified bureaucratic and firm-level characteristics as key for understanding policy outcomes and industrialization trajectories (e.g., Ang 2016; Mertha 2008; Naseemullah 2016; Ong 2012; Post 2014). Other studies have uncovered local institutional and firm-level connections to the global economy (e.g., Tan 2021; Ye 2020; Zweig 2002).

Studying sectors as contexts that are embedded in multilevel contexts, researchers have identified rejoinders, which have occurred at the sector and subsector levels and shaped firm-level interactions that intersect national politics and global economics in the aftermath of the Soviet collapse, the Big Bang liberalization in India, and China’s accession to the World Trade Organization (WTO; e.g., Doner 2009; Doner, Noble, and Ravenhill 2021; Eaton 2015; Evans and Sil 2020; González and Snyder 2023;

Hsueh 2011; 2022; Sinha 2016; Wengle 2015; Yasuda 2017). The focused analysis of sector-level norms, values, and ideas and of technological structures and institutional arrangements in a single country and in multi-country sectoral-level comparisons reveals the ways in which sectoral characteristics interact and shape the role of state and economic actors in industrial and political development.

Representative studies, surveyed in the latter part of the next section, show that CCSA strategies vary in the types of inquiries solved, the strength of their internal and external validity, and their ability to maximize the deep contextualized knowledge offered by the approach. Comparative and multilevel sectoral analysis as a method, if thoughtfully situated in existing debates and when scope conditions are clearly delineated and claims are unambiguously defined, can theoretically and substantively further our understanding of individual and collective cases (Ahram, Köllner, and Sil 2018; 2025; Mahoney 2000; Seawright and Gerring 2008). Comparing national and sectoral contexts, as well as specifying where one context ends and where another begins, empowers the analyst to effectively define and recognize scope conditions and bolster internal and external validity (Falleti and Lynch 2009; Locke and Thelen 1995; Slater and Ziblatt 2013). This recognizes the contingent generalizability and therefore the power and limits of sectors as new sites for mid-range theorizing (Brady and Collier 2010; Collier and Elman 2008).

In the section “The CCSA and Comparative Capitalism,” the multilevel comparative case research design (country, sector, subsector, and time), as used to develop the unified Strategic Value Framework to study new market governance in Hsueh (2022), demonstrates the value of the CCSA. The final section reiterates how the various strategies embodied in the CCSA reinforce the value of multilevel contextualized sectoral comparisons to develop theory, adjudicate dominate debates, explain heterogeneity, and generate case-specific findings. The approach also facilitates the discovery of new inquiries and explanations grounded in recognizing the multidimensionality of sectors. The article concludes by showing how the CCSA offers opportunities and encourages collaborations for combining methods to examine the structural, institutional, and value-laden dimensions of sectors in the NPE.

Multidimensionality of Sectors and Contextualized Comparisons

In the context of neoliberal ascendancy and open economy politics, it is through the economic sector that countries and regions today are exposed to the global economy. Important studies conducting sectoral analysis at the intersection of international and comparative political economy have relied on macroeconomic and pluralist models of preference formation centered on material conditions,

production profile, and position in the international economy (on pluralist models see Frieden 1991; Frieden and Rogowski 1996; Hiscox 2001; Magee 1980; and Midford 1994; for an emphasis on mediating institutions, see Aggarwal 1985; Aggarwal, Keohane, and Yoffie 1987; and Garrett and Lange 1995).

Dominant perspectives have also emphasized the structuring effects of national domestic institutions (on the impact of national-level domestic structures, see Garrett 1995; Garrett and Lange 1995; Gourevitch 1978; Katzenstein 1978; Levy 1999, 2006; Rodrik 1999, 2007; Vogel 1996, 2006; Zysman 1994; on varieties of capitalism, see Hall and Soskice 2001; Lake 2009b; Nölke 2023; Schneider 2013; Streeck and Thelen 2005; and on democratization and economic policy, see Milner and Kubota 2005; Milner and Murkerjee 2009). The open economy politics-based explanations are also criticized for not recognizing the complex macro-system that domestic governments and economic actors inhabit (Blyth and Matthijs 2017; Goodman and Pauly 1993; Lake 2009a; Oatley 2011, 2019; Rho and Tomz 2017; Solingen 1993).

Understudied in the overall literature is how and to what extent context-specific sectoral characteristics (institutions, values, identities, and norms at the sector level) *interact* with sectoral structural attributes to determine political economic outcomes and how they vary by sector. By uncovering how sectoral structural, institutional, and sociopolitical characteristics shape political economic outcomes, the CCSA shows the limits of sector studies based on pluralist models of preference formation that do not consider the mediating effects of context-specific global, national, and subnational characteristics; it also shows the limitations of those studies that focus only on the global system or national and subnational institutions without rigorously investigating sector-level characteristics. The CCSA strategies discussed later in this section reveal how contextualized investigation of different levels of analysis centered on the industrial or human and natural resources sector enables the development and refinement of theory, in addition to delineating scope conditions.

Sectors as Contexts: Structures, Institutions, and Values, Identities, and Norms

Sectoral Structural Attributes. Sectoral structural attributes are measured by the technological properties of sectors, forms of industrial organization, and the global division of labor and global value chains. The CCSA posits that the nature of technological properties and the core competencies of sectors influence the choice and efficiency of governance structures and innovation strategies that, once established, are predisposed to solve certain types of technologically complex problems (Kitschelt 1991; Shafer 1994). The type of commodity chain dominant in a sector

or the spatial and organizational nature of production in the expanding scope of global production networks, which incorporates capital intensity, asset specificity, and global learning, additionally shapes how governance structures vary (Gereffi 2001; Gereffi, Humphrey, and Sturgeon 2005; Schrank and Whitford 2009; Thun et al. 2022; Yeung 2016).

Related key questions include the following: What are the purposes and who are the users of services and products? Is the service or product also an infrastructure? Does it operate on or plug into the infrastructure? Is the user a consumer or enterprise/industry? Thus, complex versus linear technology, low- versus high-asset specificity, labor versus capital intensity, knowledge- and skill-intensiveness, tangible versus intangible assets, and the nature of commodity chains are salient sources of change in this dimension of sectoral analysis. Contextualized comparisons of sectors (such as in Doner, Noble, and Ravenhill 2021, which is discussed later) show how the knowledge and technological requirements of sectors are salient in determining the ways in which the state and private actors employ finite resources and capacity.

Sectoral Organization of Institutions. The approach also incorporates the analysis of the relative political weight of preexisting sectoral bureaucratic and corporate stakeholders that comprise the sectoral organization of institutions. The existing sectoral-level organization of political economic relationships creates political interests, embodies complex motivations and interdependencies, and produces qualitatively different types of transactions (Atkinson and Coleman 1989; Campbell and Lindberg 1990; Hollingsworth, Schmitter, and Streeck 1994; Kurth 1979). Specifically, existing sectoral institutions and attendant political struggles for strategic control and power within economic exchange (and not necessarily the search for efficiency) affect the political choices of state elites who manipulate property rights and ratify or select market governance structures.

This organizational conception of the sectoral organization of institutions captures land, labor, and capital endowments and their implications for sectoral governance and development (Gaddy 1996; Gregg 2015). It also captures variation in national versus local forms of capitalist organization from craft manufacturing and mass production to high-tech services and manufacturing (Crouch, Schroeder, and Voelzkow 2009). Furthermore, the arena of actors and the transmission mechanisms that power global value chains are the state, firms, and non-governmental stakeholders and their standards, norms, and conventions at the sector level (Dallas, Ponte, and Sturgeon 2019).

Variation in state capacity and in societal mobilization reflected in bureaucratic arrangements and relationships with key societal actors at the sector level (whether within a

country or across countries) affects the degree and scope of the state's ability to intervene in the economy and to implement industrial policy, as shown in Hsueh (2011). Sector-specific challenges are bounded by, as well as shape, global, national, and localized institutional arrangements. Comparative sector analysis, as revealed in Shadlen (2017), teases out the ways in which interest groups or coalitional dynamics at the sector level in government bureaucracies or in civil society structure variation in the content and impact of policies and government–business relations.

Social and Political Construction of Sectors. Contextualizing sectors uncovers the ideas, values, and identities that state and nonstate economic actors hold about the significance of sectors and their effects (Hsueh 2011; 2022; Ziegler 1997). An *intersubjective* understanding of the role of sectoral structural attributes and the sectoral organization of institutions becomes salient when noneconomic factors at the sector level shape political action. This understanding follows bounded rationality approaches in economics and political science, which show that values and perceptions structure rational decision making (Bendor 2010; Krauss and Reich 1992; Simon 1985; Vogel 2006; Weyland 2006).

The sociopolitical construction of sectors builds on the understanding that objective political and economic conditions are interpreted intersubjectively by state and market actors as a function of the process of cognition, which is influenced by historical experience, institutional context, and local interpretation (Abdelal 2001; Herrera 2004; 2010; Katzenstein 1996; 1998). Importantly, the legacies of extinct political orders have compound effects on contemporary decision making (Simpser, Slater, and Wittenberg 2018). The leverage of the CCSA in identifying and testing the intersubjective assessments of “objective” economic and political indicators of sectoral impacts is shown in the section, “The CCSA and Comparative Capitalism,” which explores my concept of the perceived strategic value of sectors and interactions with sectoral structural attributes and sectoral organization of institutions. Table 1 outlines the multidimensionality of sectors as conceptualized in this section.

Contextualized Sectors and Strategies of Contextualized Comparisons

The focus on sectors as structures, institutions, and values and identities embedded in global, national, and subnational contexts avoids the “apolitical and ahistorical” reification of the political economy as neutral and natural institutions (Chaudhry 1993, 246). The focused comparison of the multidimensional effects of sectors in the approach maximizes analytical and empirical leverage, whether in single-sector studies or multisector comparisons

Table 1
Multidimensionality of Sectors: Structures, Institutions, and Intersubjective Values

Sectoral structural attributes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nature of technological properties and knowledge and skill requirements • Nature of core competencies • Type of commodity and value chain and domestic sector's competitive position
Sectoral organization of institutions (context-specific)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preexisting sector-level bureaucratic and corporate stakeholders, coalitions, state–society relations • Land, labor, and capital endowments reflecting as factor/asset flexibility
Social and political construction of sectors (context-specific)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intersubjective perceptions versus objective material circumstances • Values, ideas, and identities concerning sectors • Historical legacies-bounded cognitions

Source: Adapted from Hsueh (2022, 43–50).

within and across countries and regions. The CCSA investigates both how industrial, human, and natural resources sectors and subsectors operate within and respond to the global economy and how global and domestic interests are refracted by context-specific ideas and institutions at the sector level.

The growing literature on the contextualized and comparative sector level of analysis examines the role of the state in market governance and regulation; sector coalitions and policy networks; state choices and industrial development, environmental management and transitions, and industrial upgrading and technology transfers; and natural resources and political economic impacts. The rest of this section reviews primarily studies from 2010 onward to understand the various strategies used in the CCSA. These studies shed light on the multidimensionality of sectors and the relative impacts of competing explanations of open economy politics, global markets and institutions, subnational geography, and regime type. They probe and compare manufacturing to services, labor-intensive sectors to capital-intensive emerging technologies, and extractive sectors to renewable energy. Within-country, across-country, and transregional comparisons at the sector level address developed and developing democracies and autocracies in Africa, East Asia, Eurasia, Latin America, Southeast Asia, and South Asia.

Incorporating contextualized sectoral analysis at different levels of comparison serves different purposes, underscoring the causal importance of one or more dimensions of sectoral characteristics as outlined earlier or their interactive or relative effects. The approach can also serve as controls or leverage for identifying other political variables. Single (Mukherji 2014) or analytically equivalent sector studies (Eaton 2015) either in one country or across countries (e.g., Evans and Sil 2020) uncover political processes otherwise missed without disaggregation to the industry level. In contrast, comparing different sectors within a country (e.g., Fairfield 2015) or across countries

(including Hochstetler 2020) shows the relative impacts of one or more dimensions of sectoral characteristics vis-à-vis country-level factors. Furthermore, comparing disparate sectors within a country (for example, Hsueh 2011) can shed light on within-country sectoral variation and the relative impacts of subnational geographical factors. Table 2 highlights the various strategies, controls adopted, types of problems solved, and possible generalizability of representative studies.

Within-Country, Single-, or Analytically Equivalent Sector Studies. Incorporating sectoral analysis in single-country and cross-regional comparative country studies yields contextualized controlled comparisons in a variety of ways. Contextualized single-sector studies or the comparison of analytically equivalent sector studies within one country can illuminate political processes and identify contingent factors that are otherwise obscured or muted. Such research designs have demystified the actual extent, scope, and domestic or global origins of the casual mechanisms of neoliberal reform, for example. The cross-time single-sector examination or analytically equivalent sector comparison supports the study's internal validity. Process-tracing a single sector, Rahul Mukherji (2014) examined telecommunications policy making in India from prior decades to identify the “tipping point” when ideas and interests converged to introduce competition during Big Bang liberalization. Controlling for analytically equivalent sectors embedded in their nation-specific sectoral organization, Aseema Sinha (2016) underscored how Indian bureaucrats are influenced by international norms in her study of the liberalization of pharmaceuticals and textiles.

The in-depth study of one industry empowered Susanne Wengle (2015) to identify the centralizing role of the state in the liberalization and privatization of Russia's electricity sector; her study challenged conventional wisdom on shock therapy reforms and weak state capacity in the wake of the Soviet collapse. Unraveling how Russia has

Table 2
Sectors and Comparative Strategies: Controls, Problems Solved, and Generalizability

Contextualized comparisons	Within- country, single-sector, or analytically equivalent sector studies	Within- country, single- or cross-sector, and subnational geography studies	Cross-country, single-, or analytically equivalent sector studies	Cross-country, within- country, and cross-sector studies
Controls	Sectoral characteristics	Sectoral characteristics; national characteristics	Sectoral characteristics	Sectoral characteristics; national characteristics
Problems solved	National characteristics and/or temporal variation	Sectoral characteristics and/or subnational characteristics	National characteristics	National characteristics and/or sectoral characteristics
Explanatory power	Internal validity	Internal validity, external validity	External validity	Internal validity, external validity
Representative recent studies	Mukherji (2014); Eaton (2015); Wengle (2015); Sinha (2016); Liu (2024)	Snyder (2001); Hsueh (2011); Fairfield (2015); Post (2014); Yasuda (2017); Van der Kamp (2023)	Saylor (2014); Shadlen (2017); Evans and Sil (2020); Doner, Noble, and Ravenhill (2021)	Doner (2009); Hsueh (2011); Post (2014); Hochstetler (2020); Hsueh (2022); Ding (2024)

transformed from an importer to exporter of agriculture and food, Wengle (2022) in a later study traced political policies, daily cultural practices, and technological improvements from the Bolshevik Revolution to Vladimir Putin's presidency. She uncovered the effects of sectoral structural attributes and the nation-specific organization of institutions, in addition to changes across political regimes; her findings have informed the geopolitics of agriculture in the post-Ukraine intervention.

Within-Country, Cross-Sector, and Subnational Geography Studies. Comparing different sectors within a country can tease out sectoral differences (e.g., structural sectoral attributes) and other political variables, including subnational characteristics such as the geographic-specific organization of institutions, while controlling for national ones like regime type. Intranational cross-sector and cross-locality studies maximize internal validity when subnational and sectoral findings—for example, sectoral patterns based on the sociopolitical construction of sectors by state elites—verify national-level arguments. Such studies maximize external validity when sectoral and subnational-level arguments are verified across sectors or regions within country (e.g., sectoral or subnational patterns based on structural sectoral attributes and context-specific sectoral organization of institutions, respectively).

Among contextualized sectoral studies of market reform in Latin America are works that leverage controlled sectoral comparisons to show subnational regional or firm-level agency. Richard Snyder's 2001 controlled comparison of the coffee sector across states in Mexico identified subnational divergence in how political entrepreneurs and

societal groups created and responded to economic policies. Examining the development of infrastructural sectors (water and sanitation) across municipalities in Argentina, Alison Post (2014) controlled for national and sectoral characteristics to underscore the role of foreign versus domestic firms in volatile environments. A statistical analysis of sector trends in low- and middle-income countries validated her findings. To show how the instrumental or structural power of business shapes the state's ability to pursue tax policies, Tasha Fairfield (2015) conducted a nested comparison of tax politics in agriculture and finance in Argentina in her cross-country study of structural adjustment and economic liberalization. Underlining the impacts of clientelism motivated by electoral incentives, Veronica Herrera (2017) investigated public service provision and reform in water provision across Mexico.

In my 2011 study of the Chinese political economy, the contextualized comparison of labor-intensive, less value-added sectors such as textiles with capital- and knowledge-intensive, value-added sectors, including telecommunications, showed how China's emergent regulatory state introduced economy-wide competition after WTO accession, only to follow it with sectoral-level reregulation in a "liberalization two-step." The study further exposed the match between industrial sectors and subnational- versus national-level regulation based on the strategic value of labor-intensive versus capital-intensive value-added sectors for Chinese state imperatives. In paying close attention to the interplay between state goals and sectoral contexts, my study unraveled the causal mechanisms linking authoritarianism and economic liberalization in

China—at a time when conventional wisdom posited that economic competition would lead to a great political opening. In adjudicating bureaucratic fragmentation and international norms and markets arguments, I revealed the relationship between China's globalization strategy and industrial policy, shedding light on state capacity, authoritarian resilience, and indigenous technological development.

Recent China studies also have leveraged contextualized sectoral comparisons to uncover protracted state intervention based on sectors' political and economic significance and the causal effects of sectoral structural, institutional, and ideational characteristics. Comparing state-owned enterprises in analytically equivalent strategic sectors, Sarah Eaton (2015) shed light on the ideological underpinnings of market reform in telecommunications and aviation. Highlighting sectoral structural attributes, John D. Minnich's (2023) mixed-methods study of foreign technology transfers in technologically advanced sectors showed how market structure and bargaining power along the value chain determine clustering effects in downstream versus intermediate products. Furthermore, using structural topical modeling that interacts region and sector, Ling Chen (2024) highlighted the active manipulation of institutional reforms in state-owned enterprises by leaders and party cadres in strategic sectors and the performative resistance by lower-level workers in nonstrategic sectors. Lizhi Liu (2024)'s study of the predominantly privately owned electronic commerce sector, which operates on top of the state-owned telecommunications infrastructure, characterized the dynamics of context-specific sectoral organization of institutions created by the Chinese state.

Scholars of China in the post-WTO era have conducted within-country sector studies to shed light on the effects of sectoral attributes versus subnational geographical characteristics. Adam Segal and Eric Thun's (2001) comparison of the development of Chinese automobile and information technology examined subnational governments and how the sectors are organized. Also ascribing more causal agency to regional institutional factors, John Yasuda (2017) argued that geographical scale shapes the dynamics of multilevel governance in the foodstuff sectors. Denise van der Kamp's (2023) quantitative analysis showed that local bureaucracies take shortcuts in their regulatory implementation across decentralized sectors. Scholars, such as Douglas Fuller (2016) examining semiconductors, Jonas Nahm (2021) on renewable energy, and Xiao Ma (2022) and Karl Yan (2023) on high-speed rail, demonstrated that intergovernmental relations and economic coalitions affect variation in industrial growth and development. Jean Hong and Wenhui Yang (2024)'s quantitative study tested the effects of oil, natural gas, and coal production on local corruption levels, finding sectoral variation a function of local regulatory environment and labor intensity.

Cross-Country, Single-, or Analytically Equivalent Sector Studies. Systematic cross-national comparisons of single or analytically equivalent sectors control for sectoral structural and/or institutional characteristics to understand how theorized causal mechanisms shape and refract open economy politics. These studies maximize the external validity of the identified national patterns. Investigating the role of the state vis-à-vis business by comparing the textile trade in Morocco and Tunisia, Melani Cammett (2007) showed the balance of power between them before economic opening and that the preexisting business class structure shapes national variation in industrial upgrading. Examining policy making in the utilities and telecommunications sectors in transitioning democracies in Latin America, Maria Victoria Murillo (2009) revealed how electoral competition and reformers' partisan orientation mediate the impacts of open economy politics in the context of capital scarcity.

Examining national variation in responses to resource booms, Ryan Saylor (2014) highlighted the importance of export-oriented coalitions in the development of commodity sectors in countries across Africa and Latin America. Ken Shadlen (2017) characterized national variation in coalitional dynamics among transnational firms, domestic industry, and the state in intellectual property rights policy making in pharmaceuticals in Argentina, Brazil, and Mexico. In contrast, comparing single or analytically equivalent sectors across countries can tease out similar political effects of sectors, despite national differences. Highlighting the structural characteristics of extractive sectors, Allison Evans and Rudra Sil (2020) showed how fixed sites, volatile prices, and shareholder pressures led to similar labor militancy in Kazakhstan's oil fields and South Africa's platinum mines.

Cross-Country, Within-Country, and Cross-Sector Studies. Scholars have combined contextualized controlled comparisons at the national and sectoral levels to distinguish the functions of sectoral structural attributes from those of national institutional characteristics, as well as highlighting the sociopolitical construction of sectors. The multi-level sectoral comparisons support internal validity when country-level arguments are confirmed by within-country sectoral findings that reflect national characteristics or nation-specific sectoral organization of institutions. In contrast, sector-level arguments are confirmed when the sectoral findings match sector developments across countries. Moreover, the external validity of national-level arguments is checked by cross-country comparisons, and sector-level arguments can be evaluated by the findings of sectors across countries.

A comparative study in Thailand (Doner 2009) of textiles, sugar, and automobiles, which have different entry barriers to upgrading, showed that national-level

characteristics impeded development across the board in one level of analysis. In another level of analysis, which compared the Thai sectors to counterparts in Korea, Brazil, and the Philippines, the study uncovered the importance of institutional capacity and pressures on elites to promote industrial capacities. The country-sector case studies of telecommunications and textiles in Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan—nested in Hsueh (2011)’s investigation of China’s strategic use of inward FDI in industrial policy—revealed national-level variation in the context of sectoral variation. Kathryn Hochstetler (2020)’s comparative study of environmental transition in Brazil and South Africa similarly found evidence of national-level variation. How sector-level bureaucratic politics threaten existing interests in solar versus wind power in these countries emphasizes the ways in which the sectoral organization of institutions affects the national adoption of renewables.

In a recent study, Doner and his coauthors Gregory Noble and John Ravenhill (2021) investigated automotive value chain development across East and Southeast Asia by validating the match between national institutional capacities and technological requirements. Nation-specific sectoral organization of institutions and subsector-level linkages to global production networks shaped national differences in the extent and scope of automotive industrialization. Examining great power transitions, Jeffrey Ding (2024) attributed the rise of Great Britain, the United States, and Japan in successive industrial revolutions to each country’s skill and knowledge infrastructure and the structural attributes of general-purpose technologies.

Integrating the sociopolitical construction of sectors with the institutional and structural attributes of sectors in a two-step unified theory, my study (Hsueh 2022) extended the Strategic Value Framework developed in research on China to understand the role of the state in market coordination and the dominant property rights arrangements in globalizing India and Russia—countries of comparable size, federal structure, timing of market reform, and geopolitical significance. I showed that how economic and political elites perceive the strategic value of sectors and subsectors shapes the “national configurations of sectoral models.” The study’s multilevel comparative case research design—country, sector and subsector, and time—identified the multidimensional effects of sectors and uncovered causal mechanisms through within- and across-country comparisons and process-tracing of the services and manufacturing of textiles and telecommunications from their sectoral origins. In doing so, the study maximized internal and external validity, assessed the relative effects of competing explanations such as regime type and open economy politics, and informed the economic–security nexus in market governance in emergent new capitalisms.

The CCSA and Comparative Capitalism

As elaborated in the various strategies, the CCSA offers opportunities for developing grounded explanations, testing generalizability, and establishing boundary/scope conditions. This section evaluates the multilevel comparative case research design used in Hsueh (2022) to study the nature and scope of sectoral variation in institutional foundations of capitalism in late development. The cross-regional country comparisons, within-country comparative sectoral analysis, and process-tracing from industrial origins and in the neoliberal era test the theorized national and sectoral factors, as well as competing explanations. The stepwise discussion of case selection and operationalization of hypotheses show the approach’s utility in developing and refining theory and concepts for generalizability, identifying causal mechanisms, and generating case-specific knowledge.

Puzzles and Debates

The CCSA guided my analysis of empirical puzzles and existing debates on the institutional foundations linking development and globalization after the onset of economic liberalization. Economic and political retrenchment in China in the decades after its accession to the WTO in 2001 has paralleled other global departures from the neoliberal model. What is the relationship between internal development and global economic integration in developing countries? How and why do state–market relations differ? And do these differences matter in the post–Cold War neoliberal era of global conflict and cooperation? Extant studies have shown Global South countries have departed from the path taken by the developmental states of East Asia, which strictly regulated foreign direct investment (Haggard 1990; Hsueh 2011; Johnson 1987; Woo-Cumings 1999). They also eschewed the historical experience of Latin American countries in a similar stage of development (Evans 1979; 1995; Kurtz and Brooks 2008; Schneider 2004; 2013). There, liberalization facilitated the exploitation of physical and natural resources by coalitions of foreign investors, the state, and local businesses.

Developing countries and their businesses today operate in the context of neoliberal policies advocated by the Washington Consensus, the influence of economic groups vis-à-vis the state during the rapid disintegration of the Soviet Union, and the related dismantling of the communist state, and relatively high growth rates in China and India. Recent studies debate state capacity and policies to upgrade human capital and innovation and coalitional dynamics (Doner 2009; Doner and Schneider 2016), resource endowments (Smith 2007; Dunning 2008), and the role of regime type (Luo and Przeworski 2019; Przeworski et al. 2000). Varieties of capitalism perspectives emphasize strategic interactions between the state,

multinationals, and domestic firms as distinct path-dependent units with institutional effects (see Schneider 2013 on dominant family groups vis-à-vis the state and foreign firms). Another thread in the literature centers the role of subnational institutional arrangements and how they adapt and transform (Ang 2016; Ong 2012; Sinha 2005; Tan 2021; Tsai 2002).

Theory and Hypotheses

These dominant perspectives, however, pay less attention to the constellation of path-dependent values and institutions at the sector level. They are less informative about sectoral structural conditions that are less malleable and produce variable effects on or state agency concerning specific sectors. Sector-level structures, institutions, and ideas and values—negotiated by political economic elites during significant moments in countries' attempts at national consolidation—have profound impacts on governance models in today's NPE. I developed the two-step unified Strategic Value Framework (SVF) in China-sector cases (Hsueh 2011) and tested it by incorporating India-sector cases (Hsueh 2012) and Russia-sector cases (Hsueh 2022). In the first step, the SVF contends that state elite decision makers, socialized over time with values and identities deriving from significant phases of institutionalization, respond to internal domestic and external pressures to globalize. The resultant dominant patterns of market governance are a function of how state elites perceive the *strategic value of sectors* for social and political stability, regime legitimacy, and external security and geopolitics, on the one hand, and economic growth and the development and global competitiveness of domestic business, on the other. Objective economic and political measures of strategic value are important, but equally significant are how state elites *intersubjectively* perceive the strategic importance of sectors during critical episodes of national consolidation (see table 1).

Market governance structures, which I first conceptualized in Hsueh (2016), comprise two related but separate dimensions of the imperfect coordination mechanisms as they occur in practice: (1) the level and scope of the state in market coordination and (2) the dominant distribution of property rights arrangements. This conceptualization develops a taxonomy of market governance that recognizes the role of various state and market authorities in coordination mechanisms and broadens measures of institutional quality beyond de jure private property rights and credible commitment. Thus, the perceived strategic value of a sector shapes how the state formulates goals and methods, who controls industrial policy, and what kinds of measures are used. The higher the perceived strategic value of a sector, the more likely state elites will take purposive and deliberate action to regulate market entry, business scope, and ownership to achieve state goals. In contrast, the lower

the perceived strategic value of a sector, the more likely the state will relinquish its control to decentralized and non-state actors and use incidental control to coordinate markets and regulate market entry and business scope. The sectoral strategic value logic thus predicts how national level versus subnational geographical governance varies by sector.

Beyond that, in the second step, the SVF contends that *sectoral structural attributes* and *nation-specific organization of institutions of sectors* are expected to have the following impacts on how government goals associated with perceived strategic value are implemented and on what kinds of measures are used. When a service or product entails complex technology and knowledge intensity, which requires a large investment to learn by trial and error, the state is more likely to exert deliberate market coordination and enhance regulatory authority (table 1). It is also more likely to mobilize investment and coordinate industrial activities to maximize domestic exposure to research and development (R&D) when the drivers of producer-driven commodity chains are industrial capital, when R&D and production are core competencies, and when main network links are investment based. These measures and their implementation are observed in centralized governance or regulated governance.

Conversely, for products or services comprising linear technology, the state is more likely to exert incidental coordination because of the lower investment required in the incremental and programmed learning of less ambiguous technological structures. Likewise, the state is less likely to mobilize investment and coordinate industrial activities when the drivers of buyer-driven commodity chains are commercial capital, the core competencies are design and marketing, and main network links are trade based. These measures and their implementation are observed in decentralized governance or private governance.

Country and Sector Comparisons: Case Selection and the Contextualization of Hypotheses

To test and operationalize the study's hypotheses, I selected cases at different levels of analysis (table 3). The iterative inductive and deductive analyses evaluated the theorized extent and scope of the interplay between governmental and sectoral levels within globalizing political economies. The selected cases also test alternative explanations about open economy politics, resource endowments, and regime type. The country cases (China, India, and Russia) control for the similar timing of market reform, existing industrial bases, country size and federal structure, and geopolitical significance historically and in the neoliberal era.

As rising powers and the world's largest and fastest-growing developing countries, China, India, and Russia

Table 3
Multilevel Case Selection: Sectoral Characteristics and Regime Type

Regime type	Perceived strategic value of sectors (high)	Perceived strategic value of sectors (low)	Sectoral structural attributes and sectoral organization of institutions
Authoritarian	China Telecoms	China Textiles	China Fixed-Line and Mobile Services vs. Value-Added Services China Apparel and Clothing vs. Technical Textiles (high-tech, defense applications)
Hybrid Regime	Russia Telecoms	Russia Textiles	Russia Fixed-Line Services vs. Mobile and Value-Added Services Russia Apparel and Clothing vs. Technical Textiles
Democracy	India Textiles	India Telecoms	India Fixed-Line Services vs. Mobile and Value-Added Services India Apparel and Clothing (rural, small-scale, labor-intensive) vs. Technical Textiles

Source: Adapted from Hsueh (2022, 52–54).

introduced market competition and administrative and corporate restructuring in the late 1980s and into the 1990s. Macro-liberalization coincided with the height of the global neoliberal movement, the end of the Cold War, and the transformation of socialist economic policies. Although Russia is most often compared with countries in post-Soviet Eurasia, and China with East Asian countries, incorporating China and Russia in the research design controls for the combination of capitalism and political authoritarianism, in addition to regime type. Comparing India with the two countries and controlling for similarities, such as scope and timing in market reform, provide further leverage for evaluating regime type delimited within the cases (Read 2021).

From there, the systematic cross-national and within-country comparisons of the services and manufacturing of telecommunications and textiles investigate how and to what extent sectoral structural, institutional, and value-laden attributes shape variation in market governance details. The distinct industries comprise manufacturing and service subsectors, which produce goods and services that differ in use and purpose and are characterized by discrete institutional arrangements, legacies, and structural attributes at varying degrees of technological and labor intensity. Telecommunications is a technologically advanced and knowledge-intensive industry with new political stakeholders, whereas textiles is a labor-intensive and politically and developmentally established industry. Comparing the same industries across countries controls for sectoral characteristics, leading to an understanding of national variation in the perceived strategic value of sectors, which enhances the study's external validity. Comparing sectors and subsectors within a country tests the effects of sector- versus country-specific characteristics,

including how the extent and scope of perceived strategic value varies by sector and the structuring effects of sectoral organization of institutions, in addition to strengthening internal validity.

Cross-Time Comparisons: Causal Mechanisms and Dose Effects

Addition of temporal levels of comparison in the country and within-country sector cases enables the identification of causal mechanisms and approximates a natural experiment to strengthen internal validity. Cross-time comparisons uncover how the perceived strategic value of sectors is rooted in state elite responses to successive national episodes of internal and external pressures, thereby unraveling the significance of periods of time or important social and political outcomes (Pierson 2004). Longitudinal process-tracing from sectoral origins (historically and from 1980 to 2021) facilitates the periodization of significant internal and external pressures (table 4). Historical and more recent key episodes of global economic integration include the Multifiber Agreement, General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, and WTO accession. Economic and political reverberations include debt and economic crises, trade wars, and pandemics, as well as the Emergency in India in the late 1970s, the Tiananmen Square incident in China, and the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Importantly, starting a national-level analysis at its sectoral origins allows past events and experiences in history to assign scores for the extent and scope of the perceived strategic value of sectors. This creates an “as if” randomization of the within-country sector and subsector cases to account for possible selection bias and increases the internal validity of the strategic value logic. Comparing

Table 4

Comparative Case Research Design in Hsueh (2022): Cases and Levels of Analysis

Within-country comparisons: cross-sector, subsector, and cross-time comparisons

Type of cases	Description of cases	Number	Cumulative
Sector cases	Four primary sectors: telecoms services, telecoms equipment manufacturing, textiles manufacturing, textile trade and distribution	4	4
Subsector cases	Eight secondary subsectors: telecoms basic services, telecoms value-added services, telecoms terminal equipment, telecoms consumer equipment, and apparel and clothing, technical textiles, textiles internal trade, and textiles external trade	8	12
Country case	One country after initial liberalization	1	13
Temporal sectoral cases	From 1980 to 2020 in four primary and eight secondary sectors	12	25
Temporal country case	One country before initial liberalization	1	26
Sectoral origins cases	From origins in four primary and eight secondary sectors	12	38
Country total			38
Cross-country comparisons: composites			
Country composite total	3 composites (38 country-sectors-time)		114

sectoral origins allows for the evaluation of the impacts of boom–bust cycles and financial crises and reveals “dose effects” of theorized causes (Barnes and Weller 2017). The historical process-tracing unravels case-specific findings on national differences in the ways in which historically rooted values and institutions at the sector level replicate, reinforce, and transform over time. The combined cross-country and within-country cross-time and cross-sector analyses implement the “parallel demonstration of theory” and “the contrast of contexts” (Skocpol and Somers 1980, 175), in addition to concretizing mid-range theorizing (Thelen 1999).

Cross- and Within-Case Comparisons: Increase of Cases and Triangulation

Using cross- and within-case national, sector, and temporal comparisons with different scores on the hypothesized independent variables increases the number of cases under causal examination (Goertz and Haggard 2023). In addition to enhancing the internal and external validity of the SVF, the CCSA strategy adjudicates the relative importance of alternative explanations (Levi-Faur 2006). Relatedly, the different levels of comparisons generate triangulation opportunities (Sil 2018). Table 4 distinguishes the levels of variation and types of cases that test the study’s expectations and show the increase in cases in the research design.

For example, study of the service subsectors of telecommunications in China shows how the authoritarian state prioritizes and balances indigenous technological development versus national security imperatives (see table 3). The Chinese state more strictly regulates the ownership structure and FDI level of basic service (fixed-line and mobile) providers that operate backbone infrastructure with high asset specificity. In contrast, value-added service

providers with lower asset specificity and that operate on top of wireline and wireless network infrastructure connected by cellphone towers enjoy hands-off state control until political imperatives lead to protracted corporate governance intervention.

Examining the role of the state in market coordination and the dominant distribution of property rights arrangements in the context of the structural and organizational attributes of telecommunications services reveals that the Chinese government has retained state ownership of basic infrastructure but liberalized the market entry and ownership of the value-added services operating on top. The introduction of competition has enhanced knowledge and technology transfers, but the authoritarian state is able to control information transmission and dissemination and manage communications infrastructure through rules and regulations that calibrate market entry, level of investment, ownership arrangement, and business scope of FDI across subsectors.

Multimethod Data Collection and Illustrative Findings

The study’s (Hsueh 2022) multilevel comparative case studies harness data from (1) in-depth, semi-structured interviews conducted between 2012 and 2021 across sectors, subsectors, and geographical regions in China, India, and Russia, as well as in New York City, Silicon Valley, Taipei, and Washington, DC; and (2) published and unpublished documentary evidence and descriptive statistics by national and subnational governments, business and industry associations, foreign delegations, and international organizations collected during international fieldwork and through archival research. Interviews with more than 200 central state and subnational government, industry, company, and civil society stakeholders, including bureaucrats, executives, managers, and rank-and-file

technical and service workers, substantiate and triangulate the qualitative and quantitative data collected for the study.

The counterintuitive and divergent market governance of textile subsectors in authoritarian China, democratic India, and electoral authoritarian Russia shows the CCSA's theoretical and empirical leverage in comparing countries and sectors within countries across time and political regimes. Regime insecurities and performance-legitimacy imperatives in China beginning in Republican rule and continuing through the Cultural Revolution, its Open Door Policy, and the Tiananmen Square incident have undergirded "techno-security developmentalism," which shapes the country's "bifurcated capitalism." To promote the development of markets, the Chinese state dismantled the Ministry of Textiles Industry in 1993, shortly after Deng Xiaoping's Southern Tour and nearly a decade before China joined the WTO in 2001. Market coordination and property rights arrangements, however, vary between the more centralized governance of capital-intensive, value-added technical textiles and the decentralized governance of labor-intensive, less value-added apparel and clothing.

On the one hand, Chinese central-level science and technology bureaucracies subsidize research and development at the local level in technical textiles, which contributes to the national technology base and has applications for national security. Rules and regulations governing foreign-invested joint ventures and technology transfers in key areas bolster the manufacturing of technical textiles, which are used to build roads, outfit Chinese astronauts in space, and have defense applications (Hsueh 2022, 137–47). On the other hand, throughout the 1997 East Asian financial crisis and the 2008 global financial crisis, decentralized governance directed investment and interpreted and improvised state-sector reforms and central policies designed to stem overexpansion. Such central–local linkages have not changed despite the anticorruption campaign, political centralization under Xi Jinping since 2013, the COVID pandemic, and the ongoing US-China trade war.

Adding India-technical textiles to the analysis illuminates sectoral strategic value, the internal and external pressures undergirding it, and the path dependency of the nation-specific sectoral organization of institutions. Influenced by the political mobilization around Gandhian *swadeshi* self-reliance and cotton nationalism in response to colonial-era British mercantilism, "neoliberal self-reliance" shapes the dominant "bifurcated liberalism" of sectoral patterns of market governance in India. The importance of textiles, dominated by rural, small-scale, low-tech enterprises, in the nationalist imagination led to the establishment of a sector-specific, federal-level Ministry of Textiles at independence. The Indian state so deprioritized large-scale, high-tech producers of technical textiles that the federal government negotiated in the

Multifiber Agreement to exclusively protect handlooms and cotton industry products from the 1970s through the mid-1990s (Hsueh 2022, 216).

Since Big Bang liberalization was launched by the Bharatiya Janata Party in the early 1990s and maintained by successive governments through the election of Narendra Modi in 2014, the economy-wide introduction of competition has combined with fiscal policies and tariff exemptions to protect artisan handlooms and permit highly polluting power looms. The "organized sector," comprised mainly of large-scale producers, has for decades invested in the "unorganized sector" to take advantage of such tax incentives (Hsueh 2022, 228–32). In addition to implementing industrial-upgrading policies, a new federal-level ministry was established to serve small-scale, labor-intensive sectors and integrate micro, small, and medium enterprises. This further underscores the perceived strategic value and sectoral logics, regardless of regime type and open economy politics.

The inclusion of the Russian cases shows that structural attributes of sectors are generalizable across countries, the nation-specific organization of industries have strong path-dependent effects, and regime type matters. Before the Soviet collapse, perestroika policies implemented during the Gorbachev era in the 1980s deregulated and decentralized nondefense textiles and other labor-intensive and light industries that made a minimal contribution to the national technology base and had few security applications. The production of technical textiles, situated within the military-industrial complex, in contrast, remained under government ownership and control until the Soviet collapse.

Decades after privatization in the post-Cold War period, textile manufacturing is relatively underdeveloped in Russia and lacks national-level policy support. The political centralization by Vladimir Putin since 1998, however, has enhanced the perceived strategic value of technical textiles for national security imperatives. Leading up to and after Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014, perceived resource scarcity and security vulnerabilities became priority concerns under an increasingly authoritarian regime. Strengthened by the lobbying of regional governments and oligarchs, import-substitution industrialization policies at the federal and oblast levels have sought to develop technical textiles for defense applications (Hsueh 2022, 313–23). The sectoral strategic value thus explains how "resource security nationalism" has shaped the "bifurcated oligarchy" of the dominant sectoral patterns of market governance in Russia.

Bringing the Sector Back in and Real-World Problems

The contextualized comparative sector approach (CCSA) is a new research agenda to study the new political economy (NPE). The varied responses to the complex

interdependence created by neoliberalism and the Washington Consensus, as well as the rise of China and return of Russia in its near abroad, necessitates mid-range investigations of sectors and subsectors. The in-depth study and comparison of sectors in a contextualized manner embrace the call “to recognize the importance of context, place, and time” in the name of solving real-world problems (Gallagher 2024). Focusing on sectors as contexts that are embedded in multilevel contexts allows analysts to examine the dimensions of structural sectoral attributes, sectoral institutional arrangements, and the values, identities, and norms attached to how sectors are perceived in the new political economy.

In addition, contextualizing sectors exposes their interconnectedness to global, national, firm, and individual levels, even while disaggregating the national to study internal state dynamics. New technological advances and emergent, context-specific organizational structures have shaped and reshaped the NPE. The CCSA thus provides analytical and theoretical leverage over extant dominant perspectives on national-level and subnational geographical trajectories and on overly structural or micro-level studies. Finally, it departs from mainstream political economy with its focus on decontextualized large-N analysis or micro-level behavioral economics disconnected from contextual circumstances.

Explanatory Power of Contextualized Sectoral Comparisons

By systematically thinking about how to conduct contextualized comparative sectoral analyses, this article centers a powerful approach to studying the NPE that offers various strategies for what kinds of contextualized sectoral comparisons might be possible, why they are useful, and how to execute them. Emphasis on the different levels of analysis and dimensions of sectoral characteristics returns the political economy of development, at the intersection of international and comparative political economy, to the heart of contextualized comparisons. The empirical strategies process-trace single sectors and compare sectors within countries and across countries and in regional contexts. Such strategies build checks for internal and external validity, making generalizability possible, in addition to understanding causal mechanisms and explaining heterogeneity.

The various strategies of the CCSA thus inform issues of scope conditions and generalizability, concerns of the credibility revolution that question the rigor of area studies research but that tend to result in narrow and focused studies of a single place and a single point in time motivated by establishing causal inference. The analytical and empirical leverage of the approach empowers understanding particularity and the possibility of attaining generalizability. Sectors have structural attributes that are

unchangeable; yet there are also context-specific sectoral organization of institutions and social and political constructions of how sectors are assessed intersubjectively. The attention to sectoral structural attributes empowers the understanding of what might be generalizable. The attention to history and context in analyzing sectoral institutions and the social and political value of industries reveals how they are shaped by what are particularities. The approach also studies the substantive political phenomena that single-country, micro-level studies may not be able to address (Pepinsky 2019).

New Inquiries, New Discoveries

The contextualized and multilevel sectoral comparisons provide leverage to answer new questions from energy transitions to industrial policy and political economy of identity. These inquiries range from understanding modes of natural resource extraction—as a function of the interactions between multinational companies, subnational governments, and local communities in Latin America (González and Snyder 2023)—and green industrial policy making for emerging low-carbon industries shaped by respective domestic industries’ position in global supply chains (Allan and Nahm 2025) to studying finance sectors and how context-specific assumptions of the irrationality of the investor motivate the ideational foundations of the “East Asian regulator” (Yasuda 2023) and the ways in which India’s strategic linkages to the global economy reflect political networks across industries (Echeverri-Gent and Sinha 2025). The market reform of agribusiness and apparel subsectors in Chile and Peru reveals technocrats’ beliefs about the strategic importance of specific sectors influenced by prior development trajectories, as well as the power of sectoral interest groups (Hsueh and Puemape 2024). Studying the multidimensionality of sectors has also uncovered sectoral politics in the mass nationalist mobilization in Ukraine in opposition to economic integration with Russia in 2014 and beyond.

Contextualized sectoral investigations have also been used to problematize China’s external relations in the NPE. Original research identifies political versus market- and resource-seeking motivations in the relationship between Chinese outbound FDI and the technological intensity of trade and regional patterns across sectors (Frick and Hsueh 2023). The performative activities of Chinese state-owned enterprises in high-value sectors use China’s Belt and Road Initiative and Go Global policy to access global markets (Leutert and Coplin 2025). Research shows that the institutional and structural attributes of software development affect how US-China economic interdependence has become open sourced, rather than decreasing (Ding 2025). Recent public opinion studies examine the perceived strategic value of agriculture versus semiconductors and China’s economic coercion toward

Taiwan and effects on Taiwanese national identity (Hsueh, Liou, and Ye 2025), and the relationship between economic nationalism and consumer behavior in products associated with US-China technological competition, such as electric vehicles, versus low-tech, less value-added apparel and clothing (Hsueh and Nappen 2025).

Various strategies of implementing CCSA and the focused attention on the structural, institutional, and constructivist dimensions of sectors have also proven useful for understanding structural transformation in advanced industrialized economies. Past scholarship on US trade policy across industries shows that whether a sector is characterized as high-tech and competitive shapes the degree and type of executive response (Krauss and Reich 1992). Steven K. Vogel's (1996) cross-country and within-country sectoral comparisons of Japan and the United Kingdom (and France and the United States) examine whether national regulatory patterns hold across industries. Regulatory fault lines in telecommunications, finance, and other sectors reveal protracted changes and continuities in the Japanese model of capitalism (Vogel 2006). Differences in business models have led to the unique global production network positions of Ireland, Israel, and Taiwan in information communications technology (Breznitz 2007). More recent work includes how assumed tacit allegiance granted by consumers to technology firms in the platform economy affects their regulation and governance (Culpepper and Thelen 2020) and how policy makers' educational backgrounds influence upgrading strategies that have prioritized knowledge- and skill-intensive services and manufacturing in Spain and Korea, respectively (Calvo 2021).

Methods Pluralism and Interdisciplinary Synergies

The CCSA bridges the gap between qualitative and quantitative scholars by acknowledging the importance of deeply grounded historical and cultural knowledge of the places and locales in which sectoral structures, sectoral organization of institutions, and political and social constructions of sectors reside. It uses qualitative and quantitative methods either separately or together to examine sectoral dimensions. Cross-country, cross-region, and cross-sector investigations can be time consuming and labor intensive but are feasible with collaborative work and institutional investments in the in-depth and multi-disciplinary study of places, cultures, and languages that has been long embraced by traditional area studies.

Gaining in-depth knowledge of the functioning of sectoral institutions and an understanding of the structure and basis of competition across complex industries, whether intranational or across countries and world regions, may require archival research of primary documents, in-depth semi-structured interviews, or the shadowing of key political and economic actors from the

highest echelons to the shop floor (Bussell 2020). Quantitative or experimental studies or combined methods at the firm or individual level—if they are attuned to contextual and interdisciplinary knowledge about people and places—can assess how sectoral structural attributes, institutions, and strategic value are changing or being perceived by economic and political actors. The CCSA's cross-national and within-country sectoral comparisons are compatible with coordinated field experiments, such as those led by Thad Dunning and colleagues (2019), that assess contextual particularities for internal validity and external validity.

Interdisciplinary, multimethod collaborations to understand the social and political construction of sectors have proven fruitful. They include the contextualized analysis of conjoint experiments and open-ended survey responses, which reveals “a contested moral field” of advocacy frames and corporate assurances that legitimize state intervention in global supply chains across sectors on issues concerning labor exploitation and environmental damage (Amengual and Bartley 2021). The CCSA can also solve real-world NPE questions when used by city planners, environmental economists, and energy scientists in leveraging the industrial sector to study how planning models and the role of global finance, increasingly influenced by Chinese capital, shape the built environment in the developing world.

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