

JUSTIN J. HONG

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EDUCATION

Ph.D., Economics, Boston University, Boston MA, May 2025 (expected)
Dissertation Title: *Three Essays in Development and Political Economics*
Dissertation Committee: Raymond Fisman, Dilip Mookherjee, and Martin Fiszbein
B.A., Economics, Xiamen University (WISE), China, 2019
Visiting Student, University of California, Berkeley, 2018

FIELDS OF INTEREST

Primary fields: Development Economics, Political Economy
Secondary fields: Labor Economics, Public Economics

JOB MARKET PAPER

[“The Costs of Leader Biases: Evidence from Superstitious Chinese Mayors,”](#) (with Yuheng Zhao)

WORKING PAPERS

[“Corruption and Human Capital Supply for the State,”](#) 2023,
Revise & Resubmit at *Journal of Labor Economics*.
[“Risk-Taking and Public Leadership: Evidence from Chinese Villages,”](#) 2022, *Submitted*.
[“Host Favoritism and Talent Selection in Chinese Science Olympiads,”](#) (with Xuan Li), 2022,
Revise & Resubmit at *Journal of Law, Economics and Organization*.
[“History Education and Identity-Building in Taiwan,”](#) (with Yuhang Lyu), 2020,
Conditionally Accepted at *Journal of Economic Behavior and Organization*.

WORK IN PROGRESS

“Southbound Bureaucrats and the Making of China, 1949 - 2019” (with Yuheng Zhao)
“Licensed Corruption” (with Yiming Cao, Raymond Fisman, Xuan Li, and Michael Luca)
“Robots and State Capacity” (with Yiming Cao)
“Legal Capacity and State-Building”

PRESENTATIONS

North American Winter Meeting of the Econometric Society (joint with ASSA), 2025
CEPR Symposium – Development Economics Program, 2024
Asian Meeting of the Econometrics Society, 2024
Conference of the International Association for Applied Econometrics (IAAE), 2024
Chinese Economists Society North America Annual Conference, 2024
Hong Kong Economic Association Biennial Conference*, 2023
BU Wheelock PREREQ Seminar*, 2023
ASSA Annual Meeting (Poster), 2023
The Northeast Universities Development Consortium (NEUDC), 2022

Development & Political Economics Graduate Conference, Stanford University, 2022
Cambridge China Politics Research Workshop, MIT, 2021
Asian Meeting of the Econometric Society, 2019

(*: coauthor presenting)

FELLOWSHIPS AND AWARDS

Rosenstein-Rodan Prize for Best Essay in Development Economics, Boston University, 2024
Best Teaching Fellow Award, Boston University, 2022
Dean's Student Fellowship, Boston University, 2019 - 2024
National Scholarship, Ministry of Education (China), 2017

WORK EXPERIENCE AND SUMMER SCHOOL

Price Theory Summer Camp, University of Chicago, 2022
Research Assistant for Raymond Fisman, Boston University, 2022 - 2023
Research Assistant for Guo Xu, UC Berkeley, 2018
Research Assistant for Xi Yang, Xiamen University, 2016

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Teaching Fellow, Empirical Economics I (EC 203), Boston University, Spring 2023, Fall 2023, Spring 2024, Fall 2024
Teaching Fellow, Empirical Economics II (EC 204), Boston University, Fall 2022
Teaching Fellow, Introductory Macroeconomics (EC 102), Boston University, Spring 2021
Teaching Fellow, Introductory Microeconomics (EC 101), Boston University, Fall 2020, Fall 2021, Spring 2022, Summer 2022

REFeree EXPERIENCE

Review of Economics and Statistics

DEPARTMENT SERVICE

Development Reading Group, Boston University, Co-Organizer, Fall 2021 - Spring 2023
MA-RA Mentor Program, Boston University, Mentor, Summer 2022 - Summer 2024

LANGUAGES: Chinese (native), Taiwanese Hokkien (fluent), English (fluent)

COMPUTER SKILLS: Stata, R, LaTeX, ArcGIS

REFERENCES

Professor

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Boston University
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The Costs of Leader Biases: Evidence from Superstitious Chinese Mayors

(Job Market Paper) *(with Yuheng Zhao)*

Biased and false beliefs – such as denialism and superstitions – influence human decision-making, potentially including key individuals that wield considerable economic and political power. This paper documents the substantial macro-level impact of leaders’ misbeliefs in China, exploiting prevalent Asian traditional beliefs that allow us to link quasi-random, leader-specific spatial biases to regional development within cities. We find that municipal zones that are supernaturally unfavorable to mayors (i.e., subject to mayors’ over-pessimism) have an average 2% lower GDP compared to other zones. Exploiting mayor reports and administrative micro-level data, we show reduced policy support and public investment as the key drivers. Downstream changes in firms and households further amplify the loss, with a 6% decrease in firm entry, a 4% reduction in the productivity of remaining firms, and a small population decline. Our back-of-the-envelope calculation suggests Chinese mayors’ spatial misbeliefs are associated with at least a 0.1% annual GDP loss over the past two decades. Overall, our findings highlight subjective beliefs as a key determinant of leader performance, contributing to a deeper understanding of why leaders matter for economic development.

Corruption and Human Capital Supply for the State, R&R at *Journal of Labor Economics*

I study the impact of corruption crackdown on human capital supply for the state, exploiting China’s staggered anti-corruption inspections. Using unique applicant data from state organizations, I find that anti-corruption induces positive selection for prosociality into the state sector, without significantly affecting overall ability. These shifts in supply are associated with enhanced work performance. Changes in occupational preferences from a representative household panel corroborate talent allocation as a prominent mechanism. I further document dynamic effects wherein households increase investment in human capital and the integrity of the next generation. Together, these findings highlight reward structures as an important determinant of the public sector’s human capacity.

Risk-Taking and Public Leadership: Evidence from Chinese Villages

This paper studies the causal impact of risk-taking on public leadership, exploiting Chinese zodiac culture that creates within-individual variation in risk appetite. Employing a representative village panel, I find that lower risk-taking of village heads leads to improved governance processes and greater responsiveness. I also observe consistent expenditure changes, with higher public good spending and a comparable decline in administration spending that is prone to misuse. However, risk-averse leaders are also less likely to promote policy innovation. Collectively, risk avoidance can improve leader performance when incentives for responsiveness are limited, with a potential trade-off between accountability and public entrepreneurship.

Host Favoritism and Talent Selection in Chinese Science Olympiad *(with Xuan Li)*,

R&R at Journal of Law, Economics & Organization

We study favoritism in the selection of elite scientific talent, by examining the host institution affiliation and performance in the Chinese Science Olympiad, where a gold medal guarantees a student’s admission to top universities. Using hand-collected participant-level data (2003 - 2021), we find that host-affiliated students have a significantly higher winning probability. We present evidence suggestive of cheating behavior using a portion of the contest vulnerable to information leakage, as well as the centralized post-Olympiad selection outside the control of host provinces. Together, our findings shed light on the crucial role of organizational structure in designing equitable assessment systems for talent.