Risk, Arbitrage, and Spatial Price Relationships: Insights from China's Hog Market under the African Swine Fever

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Motivation

- Spatial market integration occurs when all arbitrage opportunities are exhausted and the spatial market achieves Pareto efficiency (Barrett and Li, 2006)
 - A rich literature testing for market integration using time series data (e.g., Ravallion, 1986; Shiue and Keller, 2007)
- Lacking careful examination of dynamic spatial relationships of prices as the integration is being formed
 - Fundamental to how commodity demand and supply shocks spread over time and space
- Limited causal exploration for spatial market (dis)integration
 - Consumer preferences, producer risk attitudes, and political barriers may drive the integration (Fan, 2002; Goyat, 2011; Ruan et al, 2021)



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A Natural Experiment

- The 2018 outbreak of African Swine Fever (ASF) in China helps study spatial dynamics during the (re-)establishment of market integration
- China had a highly integrated hog market prior to ASF shock
- A temporary ban on inter-province shipment of live hogs was imposed to stop the spread of ASF
- The ban broke the initial integration, resulting in considerable, temporary spatial price divergence



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Research Question and Approach

- We examine and identify driving forces of spatial re-integration, after the shipping ban was lifted
- Use unique data of week-province specific hog prices from January 2016 to November 2020
- Our empirical strategy is multi-faceted
 - A innovative, generalized spatial model based on panel data to estimation spatial price links
 - Reduced-form tests to find determinants of price links



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Findings

- Prior to the shipping ban, geographic distances between provinces do not weaken inter-province price links
- Longer distances become a significant obstacle to price linkage post the ban; faster re-integration in hog prices between proximate provinces
- The negative effect of inter-province distances can be rationalized by a conceptual model of arbitrage under risks and imperfect information
- The findings highlight the value of providing transparent public information in enhancing market integration and efficiency of domestic trade



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Roadmap

- China's Hog Market
- African Swine Fever and Policies
- Conceptual Model
- Empirical Strategy
- Outcomes and Discussion





China's Hog Market

- China is the world's largest producer and consumer of hogs/pork
 - 500-600 million hogs are produced and consumed per year
 - Large producer provinces are not always large consumer provinces
 - Consumer preferences for "fresh" pork



2017 Hog Outputs across Provinces (mil head)





China's Hog Market

- China is the world's largest producer and consumer of hogs/pork
 - 500-600 million hogs are produced and consumed per year
 - Large producer provinces are not always large consumer provinces
 - Consumer preferences for "fresh" pork
- Large numbers of live hogs are transported across provinces, predominantly using open-air, trailer-trucks
 - Large numbers of small/medium-sized hog farms and slaughter plants trade with each



2017 Hog Net Imports across Provinces (10,000 MT)





ASF Outbreak in China

- ASF is a highly contagious animal disease which is spread via the ASF virus
 - Infection through infected hogs, leeches, birds, mice, and contaminated water/feed
 - The virus is able to stay alive in the air for days and remain active in blood/organs/droppings
- ASF was first found in NE China early August 2018
- ASF caused losses of tens of millions of hogs in the next two years
 - Hogs died of ASF or were culled by the government (Ma et al., forthcoming)



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The Shipping Ban

- Virus may spread through inter-province shipment of hogs
 - Trucks from various locations meet at a slaughter plant and may spread the virus to each other if ≥ 1 trucks carry the virus
 - Animal inspection stations on inter-province highways may spread virus among trucks
- Starting from late August 2018, provinces gradually banned shipping live hogs from an "infected province" to other provinces
 - An infected province is one with >2 infected counties or neighbor with an infected province
- By December, all mainland provinces except for Hainan, imposed the ban
 - By mid-March 2019, almost all of the bans were lifted
 - Since then, the ban was occasionally imposed on specific counties where ASF was identified, but not at the province level





Ban Weeks across Provinces (Aug 2018 - Mar 2019)







Price Divergence Caused by the Ban





Explaining the Slow Re-Integration

- The substantial divergence in provincial-level prices implies obvious arbitrage opportunities across provinces, after the ban was lifted
- The divergence endured for over a year after the shipping ban was removed
- To explain in theory, we build a model of cross-provincial arbitrage under imperfect information on ASF





Imperfect Public Information on ASF

- Continuing price increases post the ban implies continuing supply reductions
- Officially reported number of cases and losses were likely to be far below the actual number of cases and losses
- From 2018 to 2019, the number of officially confirmed cases is 144 and the number of infected hogs is ~2 million
- But the actual reduction in hog supply was ~100 million head comparing 2019 output to 2018



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Model Setup

- In week *t*, a hog farmer in province *i* sells to a slaughter in province *j*, taking province-level prices as given
 - Home province price is p_{it} , and the price in the other province is p_{jt}
 - $\delta_{ijt} = p_{jt} p_{it}$ net transportation costs and is positive
- Quantity of hogs for the farm is pre-determined at q_t
- Tradeoff between exploiting price wedges across provinces and catching the virus, when public information of ASF is imperfect
- If not infected, gain $\delta_{ijt}q_t$; if infected by ASF, lose $p_{it}q_t$



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Arbitrage Decision

- Expected return from arbitrage is $\Delta E(\pi_{ijt}) = q_t [p_{jt}(1 \theta_{ij}) p_{it}]$
 - θ_{ij} is the probability of catching ASF in shipping hogs from province *i* to province *j*
 - The expected return decreases in θ_{ij}
- θ_{ij} increases in the distance between the two provinces
 - Longer distance, less private information, less accuracy of ASF information in province *j*
 - Longer distance, more stations, and higher probability of catching the virus during truck shipments (e.g., $\theta_{ij} = 1 (1 \theta)^K$)
- Hypothesis: arbitrage opportunity is less exploited as the inter-province distance increases in the post-ban periods



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A Regional Policy

- In January 2019, a special regionlevel ASF policy was initiated by the central government
- Six southern provinces formed a co-managing agency to conduct actions over ASF and other animal diseases and share information
- Hypothesis: the distance matters less for provinces in the South region in the post-ban periods





Panel Data of Hog Prices

- A balanced panel dataset of weekly province-level hog prices from Jan 1, 2016 to Nov 10, 2020
 - 252 weeks and 29 provinces (2 mainland provinces excluded due to missing data)
 - Four periods: pre-ban, ban, post ban 1, and post ban 2

Variables	Mean	SD	Min	Max	Unit
Province hog price in Period 1	15.81	0.34	15.11	16.69	RMB/kg
Province hog price in Period 2	13.05	1.56	10.45	16.71	RMB/kg
Province hog price in Period 3	24.56	1.53	20.98	27.04	RMB/kg
Province hog price in Period 4	31.71	1.59	28.79	35.73	RMB/kg



Spatial Model

- Given the panel dataset, our first goal is to characterize the spatial price relationships among the 29 provinces
 - Estimate inter-province price links using a spatial model
- In the traditional spatial model, the elements of spatial matrix follow a prespecified spatial structure
 - E.g., geographic distances between provinces
 - Geographic distances may not be good basis for price links in the hog market
 - Complex spatial price relationships driven by factors other than the distance



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Spatial Model

- de Paula et al. (2018) develop a generalized spatial model
 - No pre-specified spatial structure, but allowing for data-driven spatial links
 - Take care of multivariate spatial connectivity
 - Estimated using a high-dimensional GMM method (adaptive elastic net GMM)
- The pre-determined spatial model is a special case of this new model
- Estimated inter-province price links allow us to further explore various determinants in each period of interest
 - Not possible in the traditional model where links are postulated



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Spatial Model Setup

• A panel-data spatial model:

$$p_{it_m}^m - \overline{p_{t_m}^m} = \rho^m \sum_{j=1}^{j=29} w_{ij}^m \left(p_{jt_m}^m - \overline{p_{t_m}^m} \right) + v_i^m + \mu_{t_m}^m + \varepsilon_{it_m}^m$$

- $m \in \{1,2,3,4\}$ denotes the four periods, each covering i = 1,2,...,29 provinces
- $t_m = 1, 2, ..., T_m$ weeks per period
- $p_{it_m}^m$ is period-specific price of province *i*, and $\overline{p_{t_m}^m}$ is the average price in that period
- $\sum_{j=1}^{j=29} w_{ij}^m \left(p_{jt_m}^m \overline{p_{t_m}^m} \right)$ is the spatial lag of prices
- $w_{ij}^m \in (0,1)$ is the inter-province price link, v_i^m province FE, and $\mu_{t_m}^m$ month FE
- Choose initial values based on AIC



Inter-Province Distance

- Consider two measurements of the inter-province distance
- First, D_{ij} is the geographical distance between province capital cities
 - Unit: 1000 kilometers
- Second, D_{ij} is the geographical "economic" distance between provinces
 - Use 2016 price wedges among provinces as a proxy
 - Take the mean price wedge as the average cost of arbitrage between two provinces, given that most province pairs are co-integrated in the pre-ASF period
 - Unit: real 2018 RMB/kilogram



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Price Links and Distances

Table 2. Summary Statistics of Estimated Spatial Matrices and Distances

Variables	Mean	SD	Min	Max	Unit
Estimated w_{ij} in Period 1	0.16	0.14	0.00	0.98	-
Estimated w_{ij} in Period 2	0.27	0.25	0.00	1.00	-
Estimated w_{ij} in Period 3	0.51	0.31	0.00	1.00	-
Estimated w_{ij} in Period 4	0.32	0.14	0.00	0.84	-
Geographic <i>D_{ij}</i>	1.31	0.70	0.11	3.46	1000km
Economic <i>D_{ij}</i>	0.56	0.24	0.11	1.57	Real 2018 RMB/kg

Source: Authors' calculation. *Notes*: The number of observations is 812. Statistics are weighted by observations.



Additional Explanatory Variables

- We add a few other province-specific variables that help explain the variance in estimated price links
 - Hog outputs, net pork import, and weeks banned

Variables	Mean	SD	Min	Max	Unit
Province hog outputs	2.42	1.90	0.11	6.58	10 mil heads
Province importer (0,1 with 1=yes)	0.55	0.50	0.00	1.00	-
No. weeks province under ban	25.16	4.64	12	34	-



Reduced-Form Model

• Identify determinants of price links:

 $\ln\left(w_{ij}^{m}\right) = c + \alpha \ln\left(D_{ij}\right) + \beta \ln\left(\overline{p_{jm}}\right) + S_{ij} + \Gamma_{ij} + \Omega_{j} + F_{i} + e_{ij}^{m}$

- w_{ij}^m is the estimated period specific price link between provinces
- D_{ij} is the distance between province capital cities
- $\overline{p_{jm}}$ is the period-specific average hog price in province j
- Γ_{ij} is the number of weeks under the ban
- S_{ij} is the south-south indicator for a pair of provinces
- F_i is province FE, e_{ij}^m clustered at the province level



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Baseline Findings: Geographical Distance

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	
	Pre-ban	Ban	Post-ban 1	Post-ban 2	
Distance between	0.08	0.07	-0.10*	-0.27***	
provinces <i>i</i> and <i>j</i>	(0.10)	(0.12)	(0.05)	(0.09) 🔶	— SE
	[0.42]	[0.56]	[0.05]	[0.00] 🔶	-p-value
#weeks under the ban		-0.02*	-0.02**	-0.01	
provinces <i>i</i> and <i>j</i>		(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	
South-south (1, yes)			0.40**	-0.04	
			(0.15)	(0.10)	
Province <i>j</i> average price	6.29*	-1.27***	-1.29**	-0.98*	
in the period	(3.16)	(0.45)	(0.51)	(0.57)	
Pre-ban $\widehat{w_{ij}}$	NO	YES	YES	YES	
Province <i>j</i> controls	YES	YES	YES	YES	
Province <i>i</i> FE	YES	YES	YES	YES	
R^2	0.57	0.48	0.64	0.36	
# observations	812	812	812	812	





Robustness Test 1: Additional FE

	(1)	(2)	(3) Post-ban 1	(4) Post-ban 2	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8) Post-ban 2
	Pre-ban	Ban			Pre-ban	Ban	Post-ban 1	
Distance between	0.08	0.07	-0.10*	-0.27***	0.09	-0.12	-0.19***	-0.26***
provinces <i>i</i> and <i>j</i>	(0.10)	(0.12)	(0.05)	(0.09)	(0.10)	(0.09)	(0.06)	(0.08)
	[0.42]	[0.56]	[0.05]	[0.00]	[0.39]	[0.22]	[0.00]	[0.00]
#weeks under the ban		-0.02*	-0.02**	-0.01		-0.03**	-0.01***	-0.02
provinces <i>i</i> and <i>j</i>		(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)		(0.01)	(0.00)	(0.01)
South-south (1, yes)			0.40**	-0.04			0.15	-0.04
			(0.15)	(0.10)			(0.13)	(0.12)
Province <i>j</i> average price	6.29*	-1.27***	-1.29**	-0.98*				
in the period	(3.16)	(0.45)	(0.51)	(0.57)				
Pre-ban $\widehat{w_{ij}}$	NO	YES	YES	YES	NO	YES	YES	YES
Province j controls	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Province <i>i</i> FE	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
R^2	0.57	0.48	0.64	0.36	0.59	0.60	0.67	0.42
# observations	812	812	812	812	812	812	812	812



Robustness Test 2: Economic Distance

	(1) Pre-ban	(2)	(3) Post-ban 1	(4) Post-ban 2	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8) Post-ban 2
		Ban			Pre-ban	Ban	Post-ban 1	
Distance between	0.18	0.22	-0.09*	-0.13	0.11	-0.17	-0.13**	-0.10
provinces <i>i</i> and <i>j</i>	(0.14)	(0.14)	(0.05)	(0.08)	(0.16)	(0.11)	(0.06)	(0.09)
	[0.19]	[0.14]	[0.10]	[0.12]	[0.50]	[0.12]	[0.04]	[0.27]
#weeks under the ban		-0.02*	-0.02**	-0.02*		-0.04***	-0.02***	-0.03*
provinces <i>i</i> and <i>j</i>		(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)		(0.01)	(0.00)	(0.02)
South-south (1, yes)			0.43**	0.08			0.27	0.16
			(0.17)	(0.09)			(0.18)	(0.10)
Province <i>j</i> average price	5.05*	-1.53**	-1.15**	-1.02				
in the period	(2.68)	(0.55)	(0.49)	(0.80)				
Pre-ban $\widehat{w_{ij}}$	NO	YES	YES	YES	NO	YES	YES	YES
Province j controls	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Province <i>i</i> FE	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
R^2	0.57	0.48	0.64	0.36	0.59	0.60	0.66	0.41
# observations	812	812	812	812	812	812	812	812



Policy Implications

- Inconsistency between public and private information about ASF led to uncertainty for producers and processors and efficiency loss
 - Market re-integration began relatively early where information transparency was greater
- The government should strive to maintain certainty and transparency in information regarding the disease outbreak if it wants to maintain safe trade and efficient within the region
- Developing cold chain logistics may help mitigate the spread of animal epidemics in the future
 - Confined transportation and lower survival of virus



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Further Discussion

- The value of providing high-quality public information applies to animal epidemics in general and to human epidemics involving travel within and across countries
- The generalized spatial model has broader applications
 - Used with regular panel data, no need for survey on network, etc.
 - Could be implemented in other context, including international trade and personal networks



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Topics for Discussion

- Other drivers of integration?
- Measuring efficiency loss?





Officially Reported Cases across Provinces (2018-2020)





Correlation Coefficients of Key Variables

Table A2. Correlation Coefficients of Key Variables

Variables	Estimate	Estimate	Estimate	Estimate	Geog.	Econ.
	d w _{ij} in	d w _{ij} in	$d w_{ij}$ in $d w_{ij}$ in		D_{ij}	D_{ij}
	Period 1	Period 2	Period 3	Period 4	-	-
Estimated w_{ij} in Period	1.00					
1						
Estimated w_{ij} in Period	0.20	1.00				
2						
Estimated w_{ij} in Period	0.29	0.21	1.00			
3						
Estimated w_{ij} in Period	0.08	-0.10	0.09	1.00		
4						
Geographic <i>D_{ij}</i>	-0.19	-0.01	-0.20	-0.32	1.00	
Economic <i>D</i> _{<i>ij</i>}	0.01	0.17	0.02	-0.16	0.54	1.00





Cointegration Tests (Periods 1 and 2)



(a) Pre-ban period



(b) Ban period





Cointegration Tests (Periods 3 and 4)



(c) Post-ban Period 1



(d) Post-ban Period 2





Local Spatial Autocorrelation Clusters (Periods 1 and 2)







Local Spatial Autocorrelation Clusters (Periods 3 and 4)





