

CP² Week 8: Co-optation and Representation

Dr Chao-Yo Cheng

Recap from last week

- ▶ Dictator's dilemma: Finding balance between coercion and co-optation
- ▶ Coercion and control: Preventing elite split and collective action
- ▶ Co-optation and representation: Sharing the stake of the regime's survival
 - Local elections and legislatures
 - Party membership and public employees
 - Social policy and welfare state
- ▶ Recent "innovations" in Chinese authoritarian governance



"I Want To Be A People's Representative" by Zhitian Jia (2013)

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Morning Post**

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TIMES**



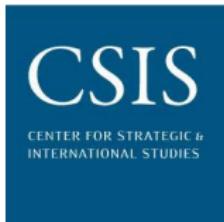
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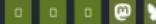




- ▶ <https://www.neican.org/> (Australia-based China watcher)
- ▶ <https://www.prcleader.org/> (US-based scholars of Chinese politics)
- ▶ <https://www.chinafile.com/> (published by Asia Society)
- ▶ <https://www.pekingnology.com/> (Former Xinhua employee)
- ▶ <https://madeinchinajournal.com/> (oversea China scholars)



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AMID BROAD PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR PROPOSED
ABOLITION OF DIVORCE “COOLING-OFF” PERIOD,
WEIBO CENSORS RELATED HASHTAG

by Cindy Carter | Mar 11, 2025

China's annual Two Sessions political meetings recently drew to a close, minus the presence of National People's Congress (NPC) Chairman Zhao Leji, the nation's third most senior official. (Zhao's unexpected absence....)

“DIFFERENT ARMIES, SAME HOLE”: HANGZHOU
JOBSEEKERS COMPARED WITH TERRACOTTA
WARRIORS

MINITRUE PLUS FIVE: MARCH 10, 2020 – TIBET
INDEPENDENCE, COVID RENT RELIEF,
WHISTLEBLOWER, EPIDEMIC TRANSMISSION AND
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by Sophie Beach | Mar 10, 2025

In late 2020, CDT acquired and verified a collection of propaganda directives issued by central...

“BEIJING +30” INSPIRES REFLECTION ON THE
EVOLUTION OF GENDER EQUALITY IN CHINA

by Arthur Kaufman | Mar 06, 2025

Convening next week for its annual gathering, the U.N.
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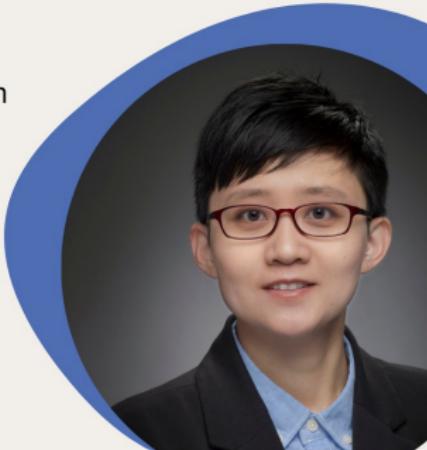
<https://chinadigitaltimes.net/>

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Public Service Resilience on the Cloud: State Mobilization and Digital Self-governance in China

**Speaker: Dr Xin Han, Assistant
Professor of Political Science & Public
Administration at Montana State
University**

**March 20
6:00pm - 7:30pm
Online event:**



Week 10 discussion on “Two Sessions”

ASIA SOCIETY POLICY INSTITUTE

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<https://asiasociety.org/policy-institute/key-takeaways-chinas-two-sessions-2025>

Week 10 discussion on “Two Sessions”

The screenshot shows a news article from Chatham House. At the top, there is a navigation bar with links for "Topics", "Regions", "Events", "Publications", "Become a member", "The Academy", "About us", "Sign in or create account", "Search", and a blue "Support us" button. Below the navigation bar is a banner featuring the Chinese national emblem and several red flags. A person's hand is visible holding a smartphone, which displays a smaller version of the same banner. The main title of the article is "China's 'two sessions': What did we learn about the Chinese economy?", written in large white text. Below the title is a subtitle: "With China's large trade surplus likely to remain intact and the Trump administration aiming to turn the US trade deficit into a surplus, the world is facing a 'clash of mercantilisms'." At the bottom of the article section, it says "EXPERT COMMENT" and "PUBLISHED 12 MARCH 2025 — 3 MINUTE READ".

China's 'two sessions': What did we learn about the Chinese economy?

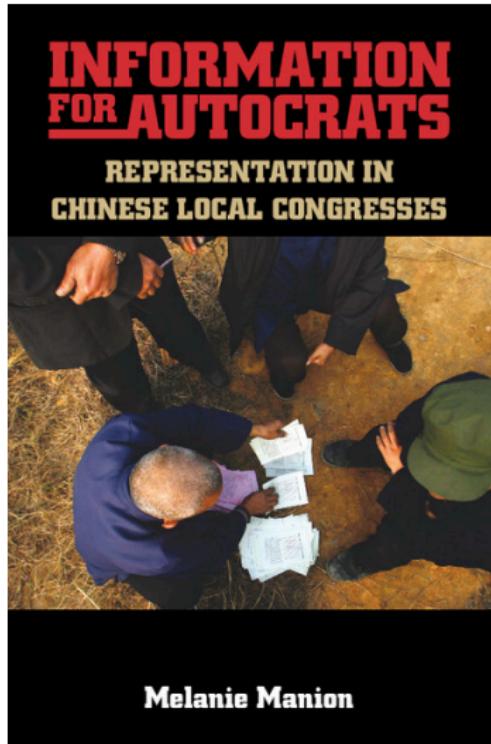
With China's large trade surplus likely to remain intact and the Trump administration aiming to turn the US trade deficit into a surplus, the world is facing a 'clash of mercantilisms'.

EXPERT COMMENT PUBLISHED 12 MARCH 2025 — 3 MINUTE READ

<https://www.chathamhouse.org/2025/03/chinas-two-sessions-what-did-we-learn-about-chinese-economy>



Co-optation through natl and local legislatures



- ▶ Representation in a Leninist party regime might take one of the following forms: **Mandate**, **Lennist** and **Trustee**
- ▶ Chinese legislature as an institution of "authoritarian parochialism:" Deliever targeted public goods to geographic constituency through extra-legislative means
- ▶ The People's Congress system provides a key solution to alleviate the classical "dictator's dilemma:" Information and loyalty
- ▶ Responsive without being accountable?

Table 2: Delegate Support for “Mandate” View of Representation, by Congress Level and Source of Nomination

Source of nomination	Township delegates			County delegates			Municipal delegates
	Voters	Party	Both sources	Voters	Party	Both sources	
Agree	69.8	63.0	68.3	61.9	57.9	59.9	50.4
Basically agree	23.0	31.4	25.3	30.7	33.2	32.1	39.5
Somewhat disagree	4.4	4.2	4.2	5.0	7.3	6.0	9.0
Disagree	2.9	1.4	2.3	2.4	1.6	2.0	1.2
Total %	100	100		100	100		100
Observations	735	357		1,421	1,405		858

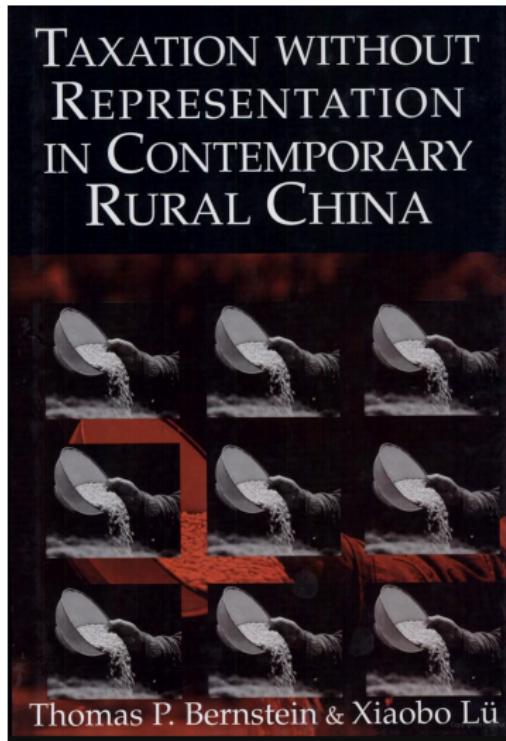
Source:

Author's surveys

..

Survey data shows that Chinese local congressmen and women view themselves and act as "delegates."

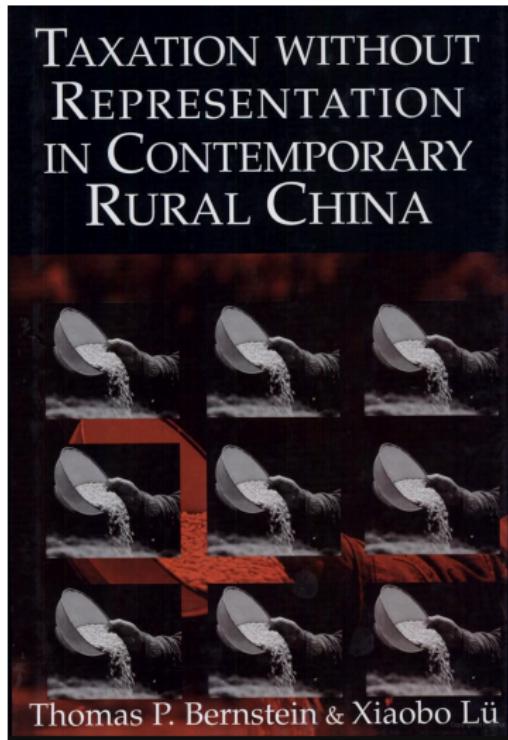
Co-optation through local elections



Thomas P. Bernstein & Xiaobo Lü

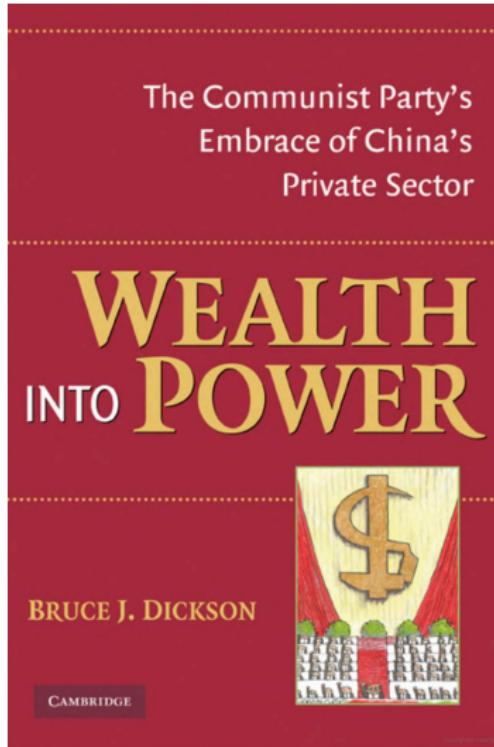
- ▶ Currently, the Party allows for village elections as well as local elections for the People's Congress delegates
- ▶ While elections are not uncommon among authoritarian regimes, few have national and executive elections

Co-optation through local elections



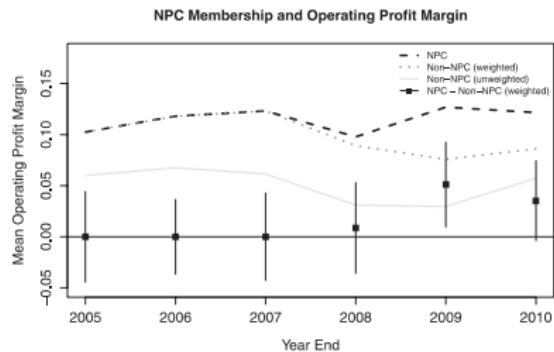
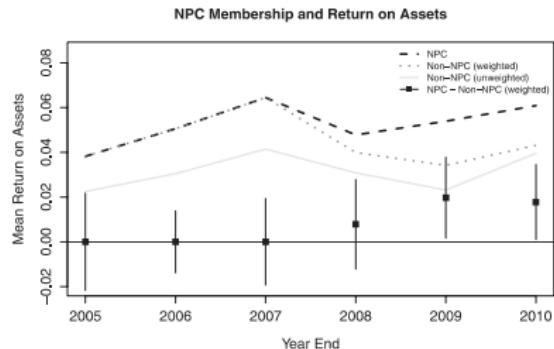
- ▶ In the case of village elections, they were introduced in the 1990s to tackle peasant grievances when it comes to fees collection (Berstein and Lu 2003)
- ▶ Broadly speaking, they provided an opportunity to monitor local officials and hold them accountable (Mayling Birney 2010)

Co-optation through Party



- ▶ People who joined the party under Mao were more likely to report ideological reasons; those in the post-1989 cohort mostly joined for the career benefits, and not just to work for the party or the government (Dickson 2013)
- ▶ Jiang Zemin's "Three Represents" opened the Party's door to entrepreneurs, and it appears as a good business opportunity especially when these entrepreneurs were "elected" into the People's Congress (Truex 2014)
- ▶ The demographic composition of the Party Congress has changed a lot in the past two decades

“Returns to Office in a Rubber Stamp Parliament” (Truex 2014)





The path to CCP membership

Five main application steps have to be taken



1) Written application

Candidates place a request with the local party cell explaining their interest and motivation. Within one month, the party cell sends a contact person to the candidate to outline the rest of the process.



2) Acceptance as a candidate

The candidate must provide a CV and information on their family, social connections and the political background of their parents. The party cell appoints two party members as mentors and supervisors.



3) One-year preparation period

The candidate must, at a minimum, complete a three-day course (e.g., at the party school). They must present a reflective report on Marxism-Leninism, the guidelines of the CCP, and current political developments every three months. The party cell verifies the candidate's information and political commitment by interviewing at least eight colleagues, neighbors and acquaintances.



4) Official acceptance process

Candidates can officially apply for party membership. They must name two guarantors (usually the two mentors). A superior party organization reviews the application in three to six months and interviews the candidate.



5) One-year trial membership

If the organization accepts the admission, the candidate is registered, sworn in, and begins a trial membership. Depending on income, members must pay between 0.5 and 2 percent of their net income annually as a membership fee.



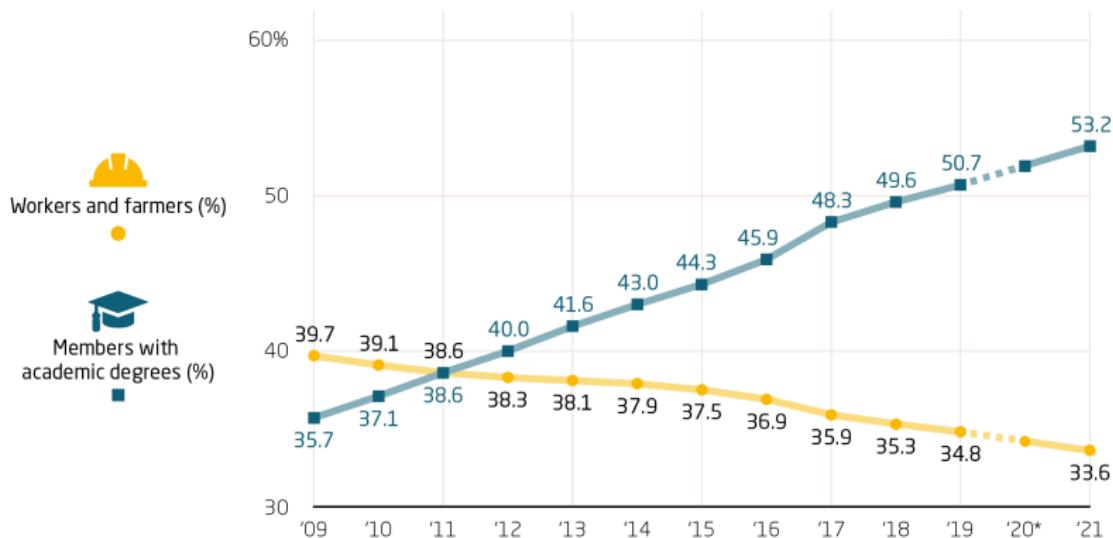
6) Official membership

If there is no breach of party discipline or law, official membership is granted after one year.



The CCP is becoming more elitist

Share of different professional groups



*Interpolated data (No data available for 2020).

Source: Central Organization Department of the CCP

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Meritocracy as Authoritarian Co-Optation: Political Selection and Upward Mobility in China

HANZHANG LIU | Pitzer College, United States

Why does an authoritarian regime adopt meritocracy in its political selection? I argue that meritocracy can be used to co-opt large numbers of ordinary citizens by providing them with an opportunity of socioeconomic advancement instead of income redistribution, as long as the selection process is viewed as inclusive and rule-based. Focusing on the civil service examination in contemporary China, I examine how this meritocratic selection has shaped the relationship between college graduates and the Chinese regime. Exploiting a spatial-cohort variation in applicant eligibility, I find that the exam boosts college graduates' perceived upward mobility, which in turn weakens their demand for redistribution even in the face of growing inequality. These findings point to an alternative mode of authoritarian co-optation and highlight the role of upward mobility in regime stability.

TABLE 2. Effects of Upward Mobility Experience on Individual Attitude

	Attitude			Trust in government		
	Redistribution	Influence	Participation	Central	Local	Cadres
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
A: OLS						
Mobility	-0.033** (0.013)	0.059*** (0.019)	-0.022 (0.017)	0.036** (0.016)	0.063*** (0.018)	0.043*** (0.014)
Experience						
Observations	2,653	1,999	1,324	1,992	2,600	1,996
R ²	0.040	0.072	0.057	0.138	0.100	0.197
B: Reduced Form (predictor: eligibility at introduction)						
Full sample	-0.194** (0.092)	-0.057 (0.137)	-0.075 (0.121)	-0.126 (0.090)	0.010 (0.094)	0.026 (0.089)
Observations	2,666	2,007	1,329	2,000	2,610	2,004
R ²	0.038	0.069	0.055	0.136	0.095	0.192
Age bandwidth = (-10, 10)	-0.175* (0.096)	-0.141 (0.139)	-0.135 (0.128)	-0.136 (0.094)	0.047 (0.099)	0.035 (0.093)
Observations	1,103	870	596	867	1,119	859
R ²	0.047	0.109	0.142	0.155	0.119	0.229
Age bandwidth = (-5, 5)	-0.200* (0.110)	-0.160 (0.166)	-0.095 (0.149)	-0.011 (0.113)	0.106 (0.104)	0.110 (0.099)
Observations	569	478	324	478	625	461
R ²	0.102	0.151	0.181	0.200	0.176	0.343
C: Instrumental Variable (predictor: mobility experience)						
Full sample	-0.595** (F-stat = 14.20)	-0.188 (0.284)	-0.231 (0.423)	-0.385 (0.374)	0.037 (0.280)	0.074 (0.292)
Observations	2,653	1,999	1,324	1,992	2,600	1,996
Age bandwidth = (-10, 10)	-0.519* (F-stat = 14.32)	-0.423 (0.285)	-0.400 (0.413)	-0.397 (0.381)	0.148 (0.282)	0.107 (0.294)
Observations	1,099	867	595	864	1,115	857
Age bandwidth = (-5, 5)	-0.702* (F-stat = 6.95)	-0.571 (0.391)	-0.339 (0.591)	-0.039 (0.531)	0.377 (0.402)	0.405 (0.369)
Observations	567	478	324	478	625	460

Note: This table presents the estimated effect of mobility experience on individual attitude; robust standard errors clustered at the province_xcohort level are reported in parentheses. All regressions include province, cohort, and survey year fixed effects, which can be found in the online replication repository. For full results of Panel A, see Table A10 in the Supplementary Material. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

“Social Policy in Developing Countries” (Mares and Carnes 2009)

Table 1 Regime type at time of first adoption of social insurance policies, by region*

Region	Regime type	Old age	Disability	Sickness	Unemployment
Latin America	authoritarian	12	16	13	0
	democratic	2	3	1	3
Advanced industrialized nations	authoritarian	7	8	7	2
	democratic	15	14	13	19
Eastern Europe	authoritarian	9	7	8	2
	democratic	0	2	1	2
Africa	authoritarian	3	4	3	1
	democratic	0	0	0	0
Middle East	authoritarian	5	8	3	-
	democratic	1	0	0	-
Asia	authoritarian	4	9	2	-
	democratic	2	2	3	-
TOTAL		40	52	36	5
		democratic	20	21	24

* Sources: Flora & Heidenheimer 1981; Mares 2005a; U.S. Social Security Administration, *Social Security Programs Throughout the World*, various years.

Three Welfare Models and Current Chinese Social Assistance: Confucian Justifications, Variable Applications

DOROTHY J. SOLINGER

To situate today's social assistance program conceptually and historically, this paper presents three ideal-typical stances states may adopt in welfare provision, especially for indigent populations: (1) extend assistance to accord with social citizenship rights—or to fulfill the Confucian concept of the rite of benevolence; (2) offer subsidies to attain support or to pacify anger and silence demands from the poor; or (3) grant benefits (education, health care) to enhance the nation's productivity. The intended beneficiaries of these projects are, respectively, individuals, society and the state, and politicians. This categorization can distinguish, in broad-brush fashion, official handouts at diverse historical moments; the models are meant not so much to characterize entire eras as to illustrate differential styles of allocation. Moreover, each era justifies its practice with reference to Confucian dicta. In this comparative context, today's political elite bestows financial aid—but just a conditional kind—mainly to preempt disturbances and prevent "instability," in line with the third of the types.

Three models of social protection in China (Solinger 2015)



- ▶ To extend assistance to accord with social citizenship rights (or to fulfill the Confucian concept of the rite of benevolence)
- ▶ To offer subsidies to attain support or to pacify anger and silence demands from the poor
- ▶ To grant benefits (education, health care) to enhance the nation's productivity

"Innovations" in Chinese authoritarian governance

- ▶ "Fragmented" and "responsive" authoritarianism: Controlled pluralism and accountability in the political system (Mertha 2009; Qiaoan and Teets 2020)
- ▶ From Hukou to fine-grained, pervasive grassroots "control"
 - Internet and digital space (Yang 2015; Roberts 2018)
 - Urban street-level grid (or cellular) management
 - Rural household-level targetting poverty alleviation scheme
- ▶ "Campaign-style" governance (Zhou 2022)

CENSORED

DISTRACTION AND DIVERSION INSIDE
CHINA'S
GREAT FIREWALL

MARGARET E. ROBERTS

WITH A NEW AFTERWORD BY THE AUTHOR

■ GUOBIN YANG ■



THE POWER OF THE
INTERNET IN CHINA

■ CITIZEN ACTIVISM ONLINE ■

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Dualist Land Regime, the *Hukou* System and the Welfare of Migrant Workers in Chinese Cities

Zhihang Ruan 

Hunter College, City University of New York, New York, USA

Email: zr588@hunter.cuny.edu

Abstract

Why is China's household registration system so resilient, and why are migrant workers consistently excluded from equal urban welfare? By disaggregating the *hukou* and land components of the rural-urban dualist regime, this article argues that dualist land ownership, formalized in China's 1982 Constitution, perpetuates the *hukou* system and unequal welfare rights. On the one hand, dualist land ownership results in an abundance of low-cost, informal housing in urban villages. This reduces the cost of short-term labour reproduction and diminishes migrants' demands for state-defined urban rights. On the other hand, dualist land ownership enables local governments to amass significant revenues from land sales. The prominence of land-based revenues prompts local governments to link urban welfare rights with formal property ownership and residency, obstructing substantive reforms to the *hukou* system. For comparison, this article highlights Vietnam, a communist country with a unitary land ownership system, which has made greater strides in reforming its household registration system.

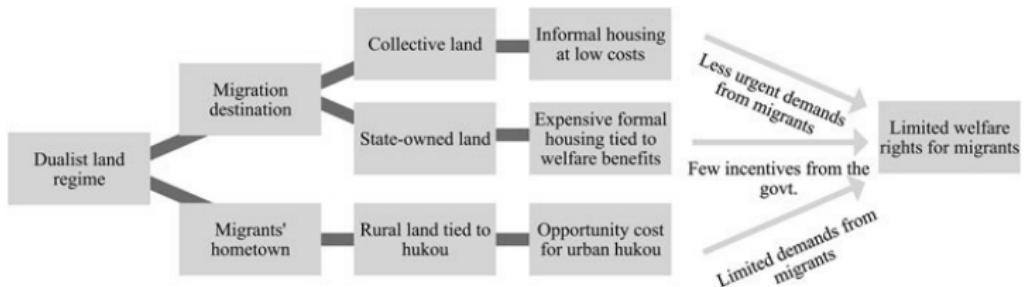


Figure 1. Dualist Land Regime and Urban Welfare Rights for Migrants in China

Cities, Redistribution, and Authoritarian Regime Survival

Jeremy Wallace The Ohio State University

How does redistributive policy affect the survival of authoritarian regimes? I argue that redistributive policy in favor of cities, while temporarily reducing urban grievances, in the long-run undermines regime survival by inducing urban concentration. I test the argument using cross-national city population, urban bias, and nondemocratic regime survival data in the post-WWII period. The results show that urban concentration is dangerous for dictators principally by promoting collective action, that urban bias induces urban concentration, and that urban bias represents a Faustian bargain with short-term benefits overwhelmed by long-term costs.

TABLE 2 Urban Concentration Harms Regime Survival

	Model 2.1	Model 2.2	Model 2.3	Model 2.4
Urban Concentration	0.981*** (0.369)	0.987*** (0.367)	0.883** (0.361)	0.929** (0.367)
Military Regime	0.787*** (0.160)	0.803*** (0.167)	0.802*** (0.167)	0.859*** (0.172)
Monarchic Regime	-1.018*** (0.327)	-0.988*** (0.326)	-0.871*** (0.323)	-0.954*** (0.329)
Single-Party Regime	-0.889*** (0.211)	-0.878*** (0.209)	-0.871*** (0.210)	-0.797*** (0.211)
Legislature	-0.374** (0.164)	-0.371** (0.165)		-0.451*** (0.167)
Real GDP per Capita (logged)		-0.038 (0.073)	-0.046 (0.074)	
Civil/Intl. Conflict				0.264* (0.149)
GDP Growth (%)				-2.460*** (0.580)
Observations	3,677	3,677	3,677	3,585
Regimes	337	337	337	330
Failures	246	246	246	240
Pseudo Log-Likelihood	-1160	-1160	-1163	-1107

Note: All models in this table are Cox Models. Positive coefficients reflect estimated effects that increase hazard rates of collapse. Baseline nondemocratic regime type is personalist. Robust standard errors in parentheses. *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$.

The grid management system in contemporary China: Grass-roots governance in social surveillance and service provision

Jean Christopher Mittelstaedt

University of Oxford

China Information
2022, Vol. 36(1) 3–22
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DOI: 10.1177/0920203X211011565
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Abstract

How should we understand the formation of the grid management system (网格化管理) of grass-roots governance in China? In this article, I argue that the grid system is an extension of existing governance structures. Facing conflicting central messaging, local grid development encountered isomorphic pressures, leading grids to resemble higher-level administration and to inherit a top-down and stability-focused mode of operation. To support this argument, I analyse five aspects: shifts in elite-level discourse, the proliferation of the grid system, recruitment standards for grid members, grid members' tasks, and their assessment. Showcasing wide local variety, the grid system retains a managerial approach while collapsing service provision into security.

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Poverty alleviation and state building in peripheral areas: evidence from China

Chao-Yo Cheng* 

Department of International Development and Department of Methodology, London School of Economics and Political Science, Houghton St, Holborn, London WC2A 2AE, UK

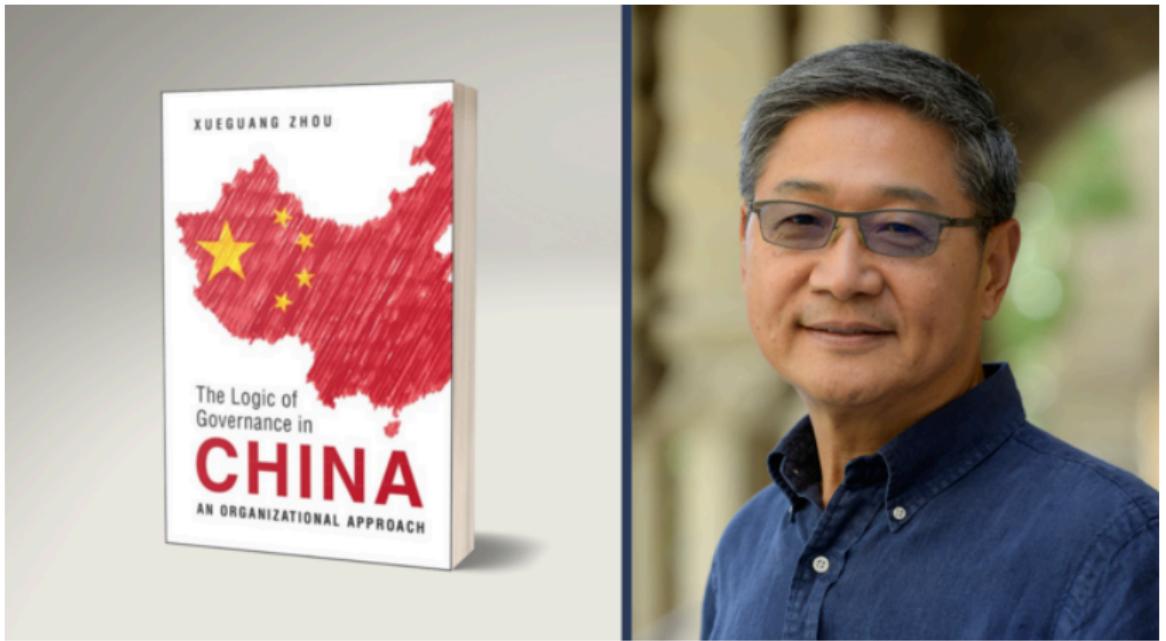
*Corresponding author. E-mail: c.cheng23@lse.ac.uk

(Received 3 June 2020; revised 18 May 2021; accepted 31 August 2021)

Abstract

The literature suggests that the distributive allocations of local public goods help politicians secure support and thus contribute to political survival. We argue that the selective assignment of state-led infrastructure projects can bolster political control in peripheral areas by inducing the government's investment in essential administrative and security apparatus for project implementation and long-term state building. Drawing on a unique county-level dataset, we study the effects of poverty alleviation transfers in Xinjiang. We find that poverty alleviation was associated with significant increases in government spending on public management and security. In contrast, these alleviation transfers had a small and ambiguous effect on increasing agricultural production and reducing ethnic violence in the province. Our findings highlight the importance of comparing the capacity and welfare implications of distributive politics, as fiscal subsidies may change the actions of the leader's local agents more than altering the behaviors and attitudes of those who may benefit from these transfers.

Key words: Authoritarian regimes; China; distributive politics; poverty alleviation; state building



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Conclusion

- ▶ Dictators rarely rule by force only, and they will try all means to induce compliance and loyalty
- ▶ Authoritarian governance involves intense coalition building (within and outside the inner circle) and strikes the general equilibrium of coercion and co-optation
- ▶ China is no exception, and yet a number of puzzles remain to be answered:
 - How can the Party sustain a system of responsiveness without complete electoral accountability?
 - How can the Party strike the balance between the stick and carrot?