

CP² Week 7: Control and Coercion

Dr Chao-Yo Cheng

2025 “Two-Sessions”



Currently taking place in Beijing

- ▶ National People's Congress, March 5-14
 - Review the **Government Work Report** (政府工作报告)
 - Examine the report on the implementation of the **2024 National Economic and Social Development Plan** and the 2025 report and draft
 - Examine the report on the execution of the 2024 **Central and Local Budgets** and the 2025 report and draft
 - Review the proposal "**Draft Amendment to the Law of the People's Republic of China on Deputies to the National and Local People's Congresses**" submitted by the NPC Standing Committee (中华人民共和国全国人民代表大会和地方各级人民代表大会代表法 (修正草案))
 - Review the work report of the **Standing Committee of the National People's Congress**, the **Supreme People's Court** and the **Supreme People's Procuratorate**
- ▶ National Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, March 4-10

Plan for Weeks 7-8

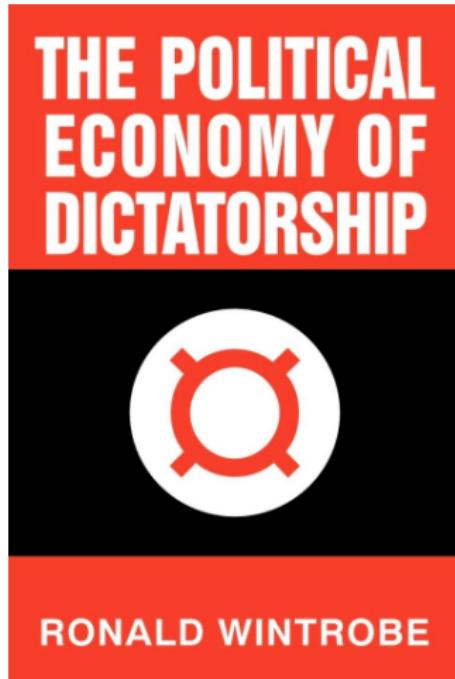
- ▶ Assessment: Reminders and Q&A
- ▶ Lectures: Control and co-optation
 - Puzzle: "The dictator's dilemma" (or is there one?)
 - Coercive control as the means to prevent elite split and societal collective action
 - Co-optation and representation (and yet without electoral accountability) as the means to stay responsive and give the mass a stake in the regime's survival

End-of-term bobba tea meet-up



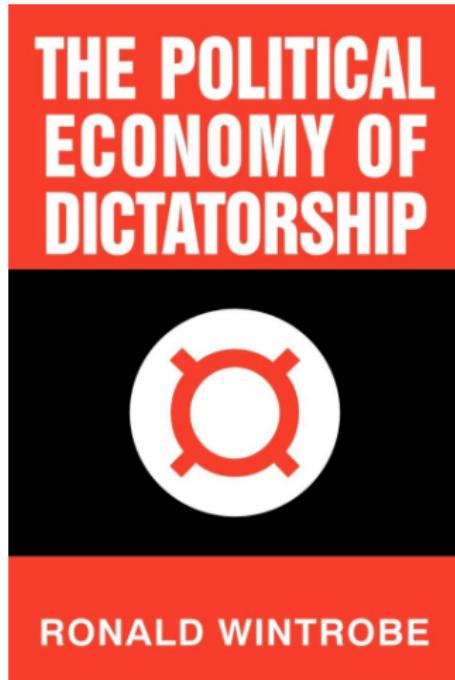
In Week 10, we can meet up at a bobba place nearby and walk to the classroom together – thoughts?

“The dictator’s dilemma” (Wintrobe 1998)



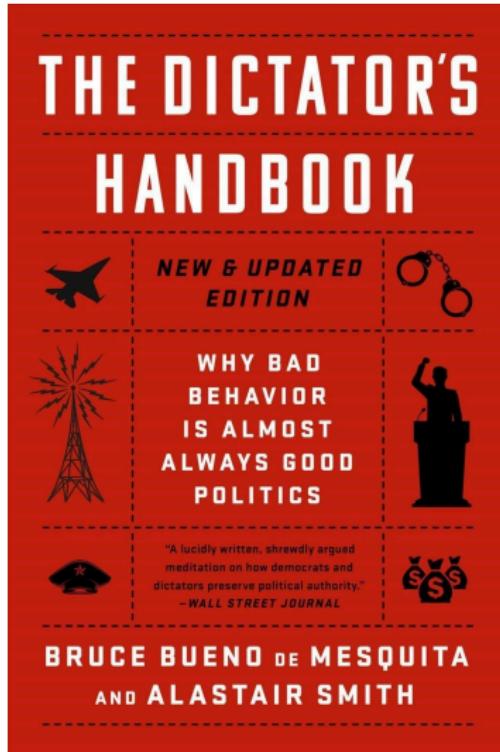
- ▶ Contrary to the popular belief, the use of repression can be counter-productive for dictators, usually dictatorship operates through political exchange (co-optation)
- ▶ The dictators seek the loyal support of interest groups, especially among the military and other political and social forces having the strongest capacity to depose them

“The dictator’s dilemma” (Wintrobe 1998)



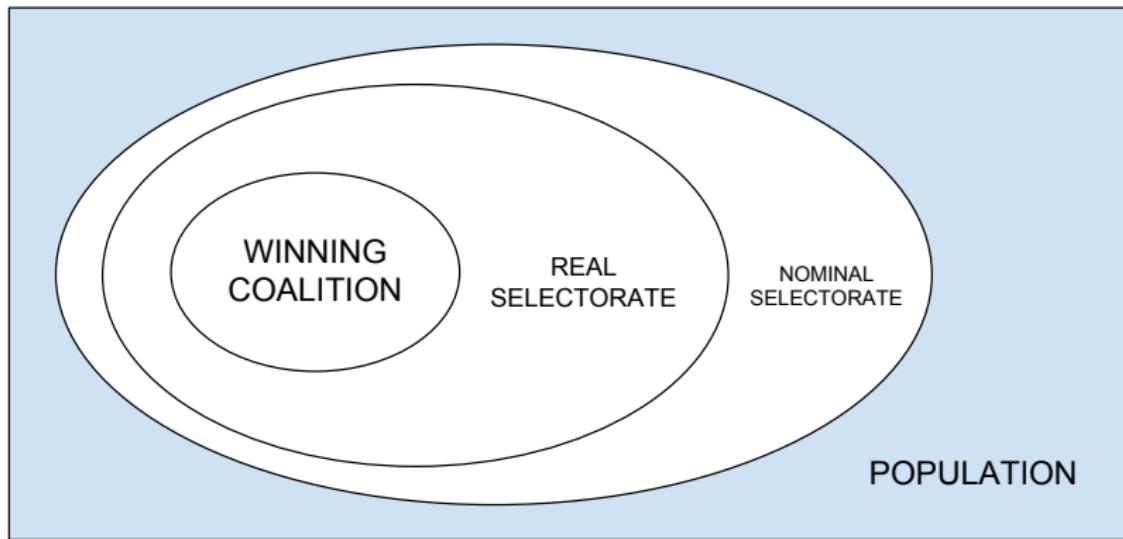
- ▶ Co-optation can be done by redistribution and incorporating groups into the regime apparatus
- ▶ democracies do not necessarily redistribute more than dictatorships; autocrats may distribute more to buy support

"The Dictator's Handbook" (Bdm et al 2011)



- ▶ The key to political survival is to properly manage the "3-D Politics": **Nominal selectorate**, real selectorate and winning coalition
- ▶ Any political leader, if conditions permitted, can reshuffle the members of these groups
- ▶ The relative size of real selectorate and winning coalition will determine the preference of redistribution using public goods or particularistic private benefits

Relative size of real selectorate and winning coalition is important



Military delegates lose sway at China's signature political gathering

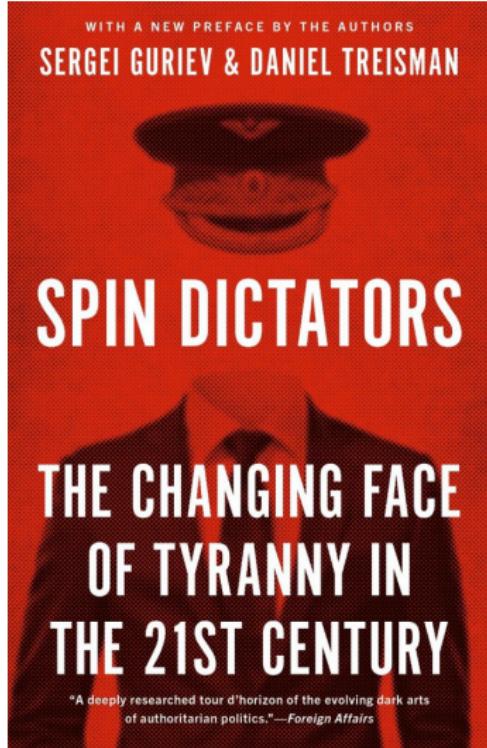
Xi Jinping's purges have cast shadow over Beijing's rubber stamp legislature



Xi Jinping's longer-term focus is to optimise China's military as the country competes with the US for dominance around Taiwan. © Hector Retamal/AFP/Getty Images

The military delegation at the annual plenary session of the National People's Congress, which opens on Wednesday, will number 267, down from the 281 appointed in 2023. Fourteen have been removed because of corruption investigations."

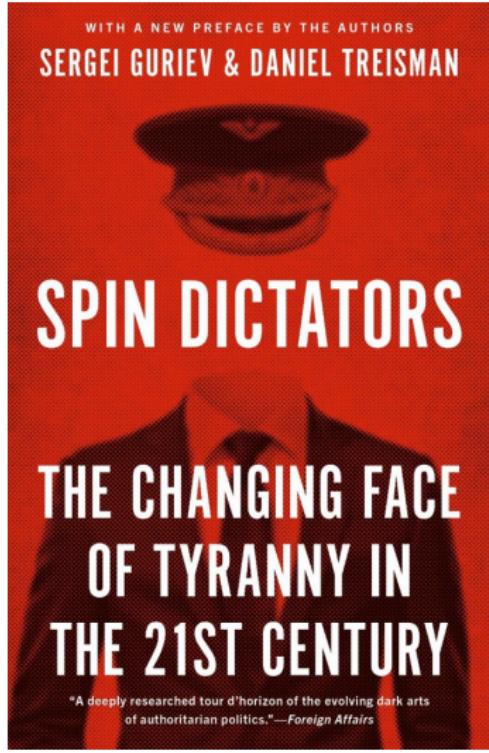
“Spin Dictators” (Guriev and Treisman 2022)



- ▶ **Fear dictators** maintains power by violently repressing and punishing opposition, controlling all communication tools, denouncing the pluralist democracy and blocking cross-border flows of information and people

- ▶ **Spin dictators**, in contrast, focus on shaping public opinion than directly repressing people, which appears to be a more efficient and less costly alternative

"Spin Dictators" (Guriev and Treisman 2022)



- ▶ Examples of "fear" dictators:
Stalin in the former Soviet Union,
Hitler in Nazi Germany and Mao in
China
- ▶ Examples of "spin" dictators:
Victor Orbán in Hungary, Lee
Hsien Loong in Singapore and
Erdoğan in Turkey
- ▶ Do you agree with the typology?
Any other examples you can come
up with?

Placing the discussion in the Chinese context

- ▶ Coercion and control: Preventing elite split and collective action
 - Elite purges and restructuring
 - Surveillance and micro-management over civil society
 - Media censorship and propaganda (or publicity)
- ▶ Co-optation and representation: Sharing the stake of the regime's survival
 - Natl and local legislatures
 - Local elections (villages and legislative)
 - Party membership
 - Party-state employees
 - Social policy

Elite purges and restructuring

- ▶ Cultural revolution under Mao, such as Liu, Shih and Zhang (2018)
- ▶ Anti-corruption campaign under Xi (allegedly), such as Lorentzen and Lu (2018)

"The Fall of the Old Guards" (Liu, Shih and Zhang 2018)

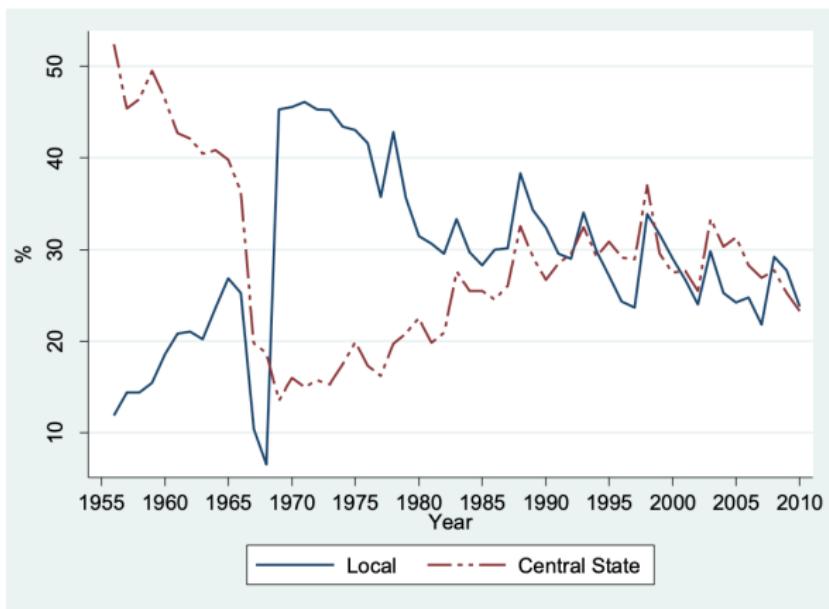


Fig. 4 Share of central and provincial officials in the CC. Source: COD & PHRC 2004

"The Cultural Revolution radically reoriented the composition of the elite selectorate from one favoring central agencies to one favoring local interests."

Lorentzen and Lu (2018)

Table VI: Connections to Politburo Standing Committee and Likelihood of Indictment for Provincial Standing Committee Members ^a

	Indicted			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Connected to				
Any CPSC member	-0.0148 (0.0356)	-0.0142 (0.0347)		
CPSC members other than Xi and Li		0.00865 (0.0361)	0.00852 (0.0357)	
Xi Jinping			-0.112*** (0.0264)	-0.116*** (0.0293)
Li Keqiang			-0.0935*** (0.0293)	-0.0880*** (0.0305)
Administrative Rank	-0.0486 (0.0439)		-0.0509 (0.0454)	
Ln(age)	-0.0889 (0.269)		-0.0925 (0.265)	
Central-level experience	-0.0770*** (0.0215)		-0.0750*** (0.0212)	
SOE experience	0.0980 (0.0663)		0.0920 (0.0660)	
CYL experience	0.0229 (0.0327)		0.0273 (0.0350)	
Constant	0.0899*** (0.0203)	0.458 (1.073)	0.112*** (0.0233)	0.494 (1.054)
Observations	322	322	322	322
R-squared	0.001	0.037	0.031	0.066

“Almost no individuals connected to the Premier were arrested, but connections to the broader Politburo Standing Committee were not protective.”

Surveillance and micro-management

- ▶ Propaganda and media censorship
- ▶ Strategic oppression of "key" societal groups, such as
 - Women and LGBT groups
 - Non-Han ethnicities
 - Religious activities
- ▶ Innovative models of control and coercion
 - Micro-level bargained authoritarianism (Lee and Zhang 2013)
 - Outsourcing state coercion to "thugs" (Ong 2018)
 - Societal "cellular" atomization and technology-assisted street-level management (Zhou 2022)

How Censorship in China Allows Government Criticism but Silences Collective Expression

GARY KING *Harvard University*

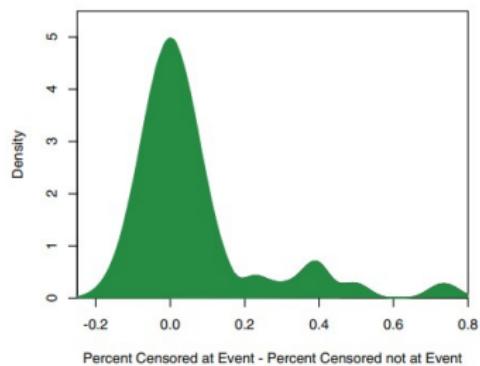
JENNIFER PAN *Harvard University*

MARGARET E. ROBERTS *Harvard University*

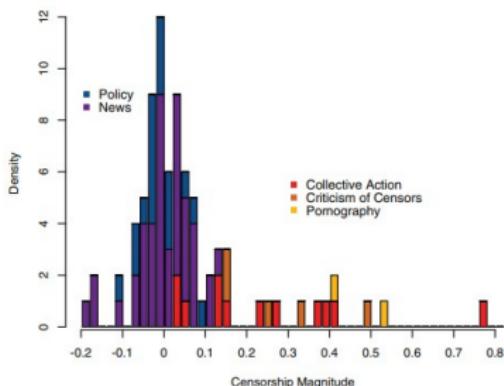
We offer the first large scale, multiple source analysis of the outcome of what may be the most extensive effort to selectively censor human expression ever implemented. To do this, we have devised a system to locate, download, and analyze the content of millions of social media posts originating from nearly 1,400 different social media services all over China before the Chinese government is able to find, evaluate, and censor (i.e., remove from the Internet) the subset they deem objectionable. Using modern computer-assisted text analytic methods that we adapt to and validate in the Chinese language, we compare the substantive content of posts censored to those not censored over time in each of 85 topic areas. Contrary to previous understandings, posts with negative, even vitriolic, criticism of the state, its leaders, and its policies are not more likely to be censored. Instead, we show that the censorship program is aimed at curtailing collective action by silencing comments that represent, reinforce, or spur social mobilization, regardless of content. Censorship is oriented toward attempting to forestall collective activities that are occurring now or may occur in the future—and, as such, seem to clearly expose government intent.

Topics are not equally sensitive

Figure 3. "Censorship Magnitude," The Percent of Posts Censored Inside a Volume Burst Minus Outside Volume Bursts.



(a) Distribution of Censorship Magnitude



(b) Censorship Magnitude by Event Type

Controlled media freedom for “local officialdom”

China’s Strategic Censorship

Peter Lorentzen University of California, Berkeley

While it is often assumed that authoritarian regimes inevitably fear and restrict media independence, permitting watchdog journalism can actually help such regimes maintain power by improving governance. Yet such a strategy risks facilitating a coordinated uprising if discontent is revealed to be widespread. A formal model shows that under some conditions, a regime optimally permits investigative reporting on lower-level officialdom, adjusting how much reporting is allowed depending on the level of underlying social tensions. This strategy yields many of the benefits of free media without risking overthrow. An extension shows why an increase in uncontrollable information, such as from the Internet, may result in a reduction in media freedom. The model sheds light on important aspects of China’s media policy and its evolution and on authoritarian media control more broadly.

Unpersuasive propaganda as signal of control

Table 2 Overall and Political Satisfactions

	China Overall	Center Performance	Local Performance	Government Competence	Political System
Propaganda Score	-0.003 (0.024)	0.037 (0.025)	0.004 (0.025)	0.005 (0.024)	0.029 (0.024)
Academic Standing	-0.045 (0.031)	0.024 (0.032)	-0.071** (0.032)	-0.018 (0.031)	-0.047 (0.031)
External Efficacy	0.205*** (0.057)	0.282*** (0.060)	0.293*** (0.061)	0.273*** (0.057)	0.198*** (0.057)
Internal Efficacy	-0.234*** (0.054)	-0.130** (0.054)	-0.111** (0.056)	-0.249*** (0.054)	-0.160*** (0.054)
Female	-0.015 (0.114)	-0.156 (0.117)	-0.074 (0.119)	-0.140 (0.115)	0.149 (0.114)
Family Income	0.091** (0.038)	-0.021 (0.039)	0.212*** (0.040)	0.066* (0.038)	0.033 (0.037)
CCP Member	0.442*** (0.145)	0.481*** (0.150)	0.027 (0.151)	0.244* (0.144)	0.419*** (0.146)



Micro-level management and surveillance

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The Power of Instability: Unraveling the Microfoundations of Bargained Authoritarianism in China¹

Ching Kwan Lee and Yonghong Zhang

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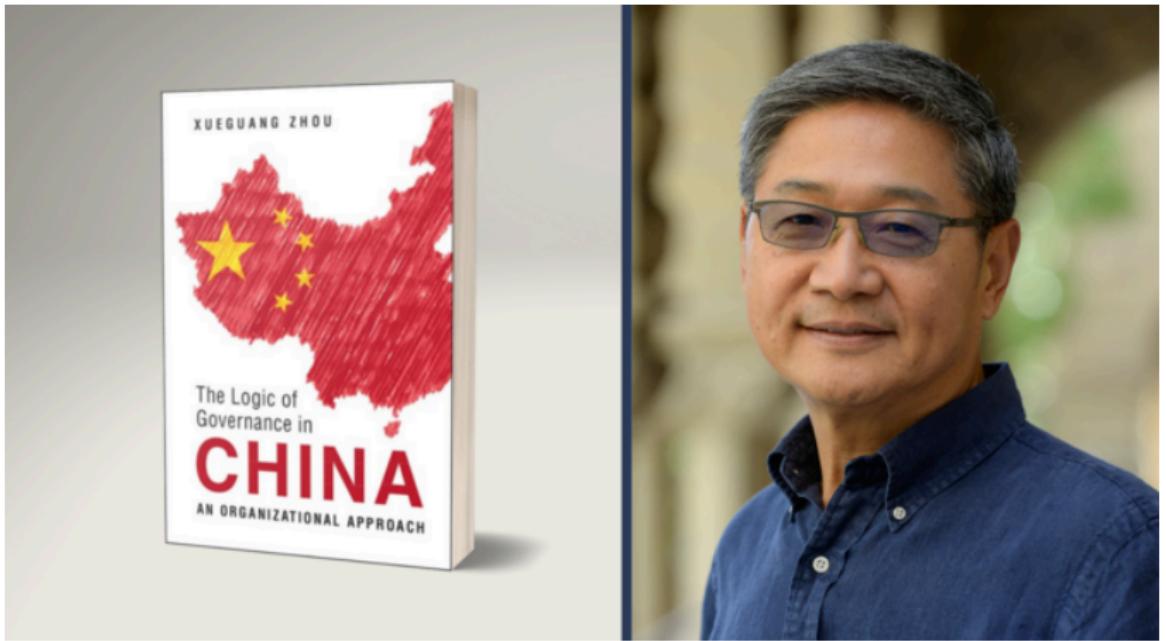
Abstract

Full Text



Abstract

This article develops an interactive and relational conception of infrastructural state power for studying the capacity of authoritarian regimes to absorb popular protests. Based on an ethnography of the grassroots state in moments of unrest in China, the authors identify three microfoundations of Chinese authoritarianism: protest bargaining, legal-bureaucratic absorption, and patron-clientelism. Adopting, respectively, the logics of market exchange, rule-bound games, and interpersonal bonds, these mechanisms have the effect of depoliticizing social unrest and constitute a lived experience of authoritarian domination as a non-zero-sum situation, totalizing and transparent yet permissive of room for maneuvering and bargaining. This heuristic framework calls for bringing the subjective experience of subordination back into the theorizing of state domination.



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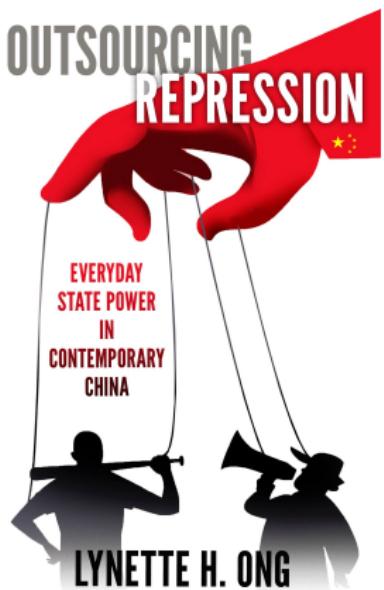
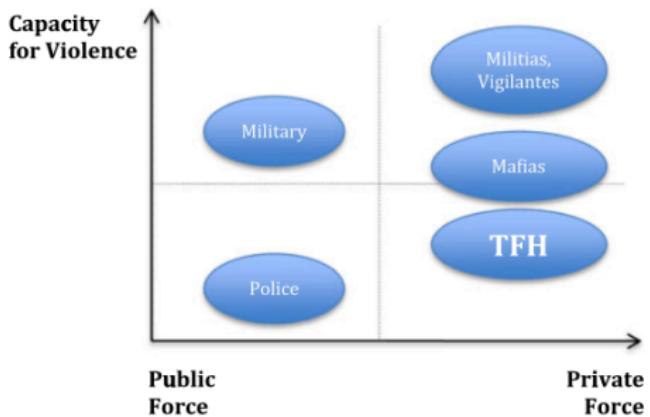
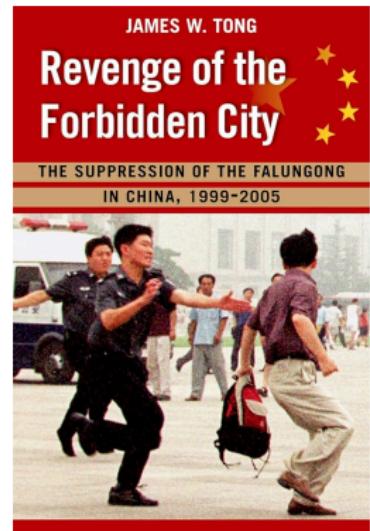
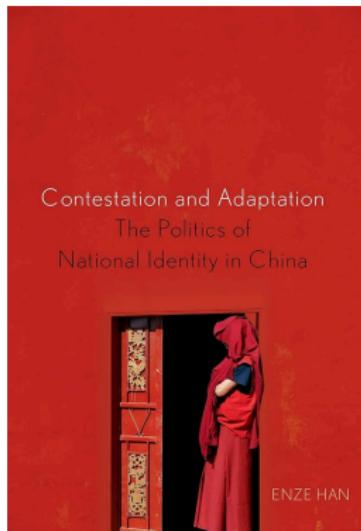
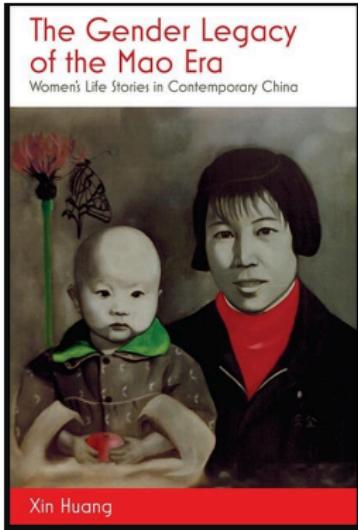


Figure 1
Public/private force versus capacity for violence





Conclusion and looking ahead

- ▶ 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?



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

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