

collected via distinct research designs. Theoretically, Tang skillfully strikes a balance between generalizability and contextualization in proposing the populist authoritarianism model. Readers can easily identify similar cases in other regions and settings, which allow further comparative research, and can also clearly see the lasting imprint of the CCP's revolutionary experiences and governing style on contemporary China's public opinion. I believe this book makes an original contribution to existing research on China's public opinion, in particular, and authoritarian politics, in general. Furthermore, this book is easy to comprehend for graduate and undergraduate students in the fields of China studies, political science and sociology.

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*Land Bargains and Chinese Capitalism: The Politics of Property Rights under Reform*

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The undisputable centrality of land to the political economy of China over the past two decades has attracted tremendous attention from scholars and the general public alike. In an age of ubiquitous grassroots land conflicts and an economy excessively dependent on the real-estate market, understanding how land and property rights are governed is both intellectually exciting and practically important. In this well-researched book, Meg Rithmire examines an immensely interesting and yet previously underexplored issue, namely the significant subnational variation in property-rights institutions among Chinese cities, especially in the early reform period.

To explain this variation, Rithmire theorizes property rights as “political bargains struck between local state actors and groups in society under conditions of uncertainty” (p. 3), and relates these bargains to the broader local political economy that is shaped by local reform dynamics and central policies. She argues that when state-sector reforms were relatively easy to implement, local governments tailored property-rights institutions to direct land to capital accumulation, while when reforms were difficult due to resource or moral restrictions, local governments instead decentralized control of property rights to distribute land among potential losers of reform. Through a comparison of three carefully selected cities – Dalian, Harbin and Changchun – the empirical analysis shows that access to foreign capital, the local government's quest for legitimacy, and preferential policies from Beijing have jointly influenced local property-rights practices in Chinese cities.

In developing her theory, Rithmire systematically traces the evolution of land institutions in China, finding that after an initial period of liberalization and decentralization, the locally diversified property-rights regimes have gradually converged to a nationwide, more predatory one. This is because, she argues, the fiscal recentralization in the mid-1990s dramatically increased the local state's dependence on land revenues, giving rise to a more universal and active pursuit of “land finance” (*tudi caizheng*).

One significant theoretical contribution of the book, among many others, lies in its well-structured comparative perspective. While the significance of land in capital accumulation and as a locus of conflicts has not gone unnoticed in earlier works (for

example, You-tien Hsing's 2010 book, *The Great Urban Transformation: Politics of Land and Property in China* [Oxford University Press]), questions such as why some local states control land more effectively than others and why different local states use land in qualitatively different manners remain largely unexplored. Comparing the three otherwise similar cities – all located in north-east China and situated in similar socioeconomic circumstances at the onset of reform – offers a unique analytical lens through which the causal effects of various structural and ideological factors in the local political economy can be examined. This approach sheds interesting light on the elusive diversity of urban landscapes in Chinese cities in terms of urban planning practices, paths of territorial expansion and land conflicts.

While the development of the book's argument is based on three north-eastern cities, it holds strong explanatory power beyond that region. For example, my observation in Lanzhou, capital of the north-western Gansu province, suggests that bargains for land control unfolded and shaped property rights in a similar manner to those in Harbin. Nationwide, statistics show that a substantial number of commercial and residential land plots are still traded by local governments through negotiations (*xieyi churang*). Many of these non-competitive transactions indeed involve the interests of local state-owned enterprises and residents, and reflect compromises made to these groups by the local government. This suggests that even today, the kind of bargaining analysed in the book is still broadly visible and notably influential in local land-use practices.

In methodological terms, the book sets an admirable example of rigorous small-N qualitative analysis. It follows a fruitful tradition in the research of Chinese politics that focuses on subnational political economy, and draws on a combination of field interviews, government documents and city-level statistics. Rich in grounded knowledge, the three case-study chapters, I believe, would strike even readers who are familiar with the region as informative and interesting.

As a last point, the book's case studies include some inspiring observations that are worth further exploration in the future. In addition to the structural and moral factors discussed in the theoretical framework, the case studies provide clues as to how agency, in this case local officials, may also affect the governance of land and property rights. The chapter on Dalian, for example, suggests that the city's territorial politics cannot be understood separately from the motive and policy choices of Bo Xilai, who governed the city for years but had built political capital and ambitions far beyond that region. This is in sharp contrast with many of Harbin's local leaders whose careers were primarily locally oriented and thus more reliant on the political support of local elites. Therefore, it could be a promising future direction to theorize and test how local officials and the formal and informal relationships they formed with other political and social actors affect local property-rights regimes and land-use practices.

In short, Rithmire's study is a significant contribution to the burgeoning scholarship on the politics of land and property rights in China. Its cross-disciplinary focus, balanced discussion of English and Chinese literatures, and insightful case studies make it a must-read for political scientists, economists and geographers, as well as all others who are interested in understanding this important issue in contemporary Chinese political economy.

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