

First, the book's central thread lends itself to the facile interpretation that the Chinese political system systematically promotes incompetence in order to achieve supreme leader dominance. The implication could be drawn that policy and outcomes are always secondary to loyalty. At a minimum this was less true for Deng and Jiang Zemin, than for Mao and perhaps Xi Jinping.

If one considers the entire PRC period (1949–2022), 73 years, about 50 per cent of that period (1978–2015?) was “relatively high performing.” Economic growth, military modernization, China's role in the global economy, development of export industries, and the domestic infrastructure build-out all were exceptional. It is hard to square an elite selection bias in favour of weakness (however defined) with this high, sustained performance. Also, the reform era had a high density of engineers in very high posts, and in my experience they were generally very data- and performance-driven – they were not uniformly sycophants. The word “engineer” doesn't appear in Shih's Index.

Shih's model is ascriptive, not achievement-driven. I found it interesting that the entire reform period leadership got less discussion than Zhang Guotao and his forces in the 1930s and thereafter. Zhu Rongji has one entry in the Index and Jiang Zemin very few. Qian Qichen, who was the Zhou Enlai-like face of Chinese foreign policy for much of the reform era, and very credible abroad, has no index citations. I also give Jiang Zemin credit for sharing the stage of national and international leadership with Zhu Rongji. Jiang tolerated a strong independent figure precisely because of their common commitment to high performance and shared policy goals. It takes a strong leader to coexist with other strong and competent leaders. When such coexistence occurs, high performance may provide its own legitimacy and strength.

This raises for me a second question. Is the coalition of the weak the dominant strategy over time and/or do different leaders pursue different strategies? Moreover, can central elite politics lean toward coalition of the weak dynamics while, at lower levels, locality and organizational performance and bureaucratic politics play larger roles? Shih seems to suggest this when he says: “Politics may be characterized by neopatrimonialism at the top and bureaucratic turf war and fragmented authoritarianism in the middle” (p. 197). In my interaction with municipal, provincial and ministerial-level leaders over the reform era, I generally have been struck by their competence and confidence – for example, Li Yuanchao (when he was in Jiangsu).

In short, this is a monumental book for specialists that raises important questions and advances a novel frame for the analysis of Chinese politics.

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Disaggregating China, Inc.: State Strategies in the Liberal Economic Order

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In *Disaggregating China, Inc.*, Yeling Tan presents a fascinating analysis of how China's adoption of the liberal rules of the World Trade Organization (WTO) has interacted with the unique features of the country's domestic political economy to shape its development trajectory since WTO accession. Unpacking the notion of

the Chinese state as a unitary actor, the book ascribes agency to government actors who navigated China's fragmented authoritarian political structure to design a diverse set of policies in response to trade liberalization commitments.

Specifically, the book focuses on policy responses among different levels of the administrative hierarchy (i.e. the central, provincial and local governments), within the central governing apparatus, and across different industries. In all three dimensions, she emphasizes how the probability of WTO sanctions for trade violations and the prospects of career advancement have shaped the incentive structures of government actors to give rise to heterogeneous policy responses. Such an analytical framework allows her to show, for example, that in contrast to the central government, which tends to adopt more market-enhancing (regulatory) measures, provincial and local governments have been more favourably disposed towards market-shaping (developmental) and market-substituting (directive) policies, respectively. In a similar vein, the degree to which the central leadership was able to effectively discipline the bureaucracy, combined with the strength of the WTO leverage, helped explain the rise of state capitalism under the Hu–Wen leadership. However, despite the shift towards more active industrial policymaking by the central government, continued conflicts between the central and subnational governments also limited the former's ability to promote globally competitive national champions. In industries where subnational authorities enjoyed greater control over foreign direct investment, the centre's regime promotion incentives have more frequently come into conflict with the subnational governments' career promotion objectives, undermining the coherence of industrial policy in these cases.

Tan supports her argument with quantitative textual analysis of an original dataset of Chinese government rules, regulations, and measures in the manufacturing sector. Utilizing a machine learning method, she identified the various topics embedded in these documents. This in turn allowed her to delineate the adoption of each of the strategies both across different parts of the government structure and along the time dimension. She further supplemented quantitative investigations with qualitative analysis of primary and secondary material as well as interview data. The use of both research methods enabled her to paint a rich picture of the policy instruments adopted by Chinese government actors to deal with the pressures of a globalizing economy and provided a solid foundation for a systematic account of the evolution of Chinese industrial policy in the post-WTO accession period.

In highlighting the diverse policy responses of Chinese government actors to global economic integration, the book challenges the notion that there exists a single, coherent Chinese economic model. This finding has important implications for ongoing debates about the degree to which policies of engaging China through the WTO may have failed to achieve their intended objectives and whether the diffusion of the Chinese model of economic development may negatively impinge on global economic governance structures. Although this observation does not necessarily depart from prevailing understanding that the complex and disjointed relationship between the central government and subnational actors has been a long-standing feature of China's model of fragmented authoritarianism, it does provide additional credence to such a conceptualization.

The book is most impressive in contrasting the responses of central, provincial, and local government actors. The variation in policy responses at the subnational level may merit further investigation. To the extent that provincial and local jurisdictions differ in their economic conditions and ability to withstand the forces of global economic competition, it seems reasonable to expect that these factors may have affected the calculations of subnational government officials either directly or indirectly

through their assessments of career advancement prospects. Relatedly, as China's domestic political economy has become more porous, with non-governmental actors gaining growing influence over the decision-making process, one wonders if government responses may also have been shaped by the demand for greater liberalization (protection) from the winners (losers) of globalization. Overall, given that industrial policymaking represents an arena for bargaining, negotiation and conflict not only among bureaucratic agencies with different organizational goals and priorities, but also between government agencies, financial institutions, and state and non-state companies, further exploration of the political and economic forces that influence the variation in government strategies may represent a fruitful avenue of research.

These quibbles aside, the book represents a valuable contribution to the study of Chinese politics, political economy and foreign economic policy. Tan effectively builds on the "fragmented authoritarianism" framework to illuminate the multiple economic policy trajectories within China's complex authoritarian structure and, in doing so, highlights the importance of an in-depth analysis of China's domestic political economy for understanding its responses to external pressures for trade liberalization. The book is highly recommended for students, scholars and practitioners seeking to gain a better understanding of the changing dynamics of China's domestic political economy, China's role in global economic governance, and the politics of globalization.

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Banking on Beijing: The Aims and Impacts of China's Overseas Development Program
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Banking on Beijing is the outcome of almost a decade's painstaking work by its authors since the AidData project was launched in April 2013 in Washington. While initially based on mass media data, the authors have improved the methodology by conducting triangular checks on project level data in great detail, teasing out unreliable data or double counting, to create a comprehensive, decent quality project level database (especially its version 2.0) covering 13,427 Chinese ODA- and OOF-financed projects in 165 countries between 2000–2017. Each project has at least ten informative features or variables, including its starting and completing dates, types, level of concessionality, sources of finance and amount of finance. The work led by the authors has greatly promoted transparency, accountability and governance, and has enabled better coordination and knowledge dissemination across governments, international organizations, think tanks and researchers. This open data work is indispensable.

The book presents a balanced picture of China's overseas development cooperation activities, concluding that China is "neither hero nor villain." In chapter seven, the authors point out "there are several reasons why Chinese development projects might be equally effective as – or even more effective than – development projects from OECD-DAC aid agencies and multilateral development banks" (p. 197) and