From Empire to Nation State: Ethnic Politics in China. By Yan Sun. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020. 250p. $99.99 cloth, $34.99 paper.

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China's governance of its ethnic periphery is both contentious and polarizing among scholars and the public more generally. This is especially the case with Beijing's policies in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, where we can literally speak of competing realities. Communist Party officials say they are combating the global scourge of terrorism through much-needed education and vocational training for the Uyghurs and other ethnic minorities, whereas critics accuse China of crimes against humanity or even genocide.

It is increasingly difficult to find any common ground in the scholarly debate and discussion on this topic. Yan Sun's sophisticated new book, *From Empire to Nation State*, wades boldly in this disputed terrain and offers a range of new insights that deserve to be taken seriously. Some of her views and conclusions might stand in contrast to recent work by Western scholars of Xinjiang (Darren Byler, David Tobin and Sean R. Roberts, for example) or Tibet (Emily Yeh, Charlene Makley, and Benno Weiner), but they are based on more than a decade of careful research that provides what we might call a distinctly Chinese perspective on the modern Chinese state's approach to managing ethnocultural diversity and nation-building.

Her argument builds on the work of other Chinese scholars, especially Peking University professor of sociology Ma Rong, who has long criticized the ethnic policies of the PRC and whose thinking exerts a strong influence on the book's argument. Yan Sun herself has roots in southern Xinjiang, where many of her relatives still reside as a legacy of more than a century of Han Chinese colonialism. She has also conducted extensive field research across China's vast frontier and interviewed leading Chinese officials and scholars, including the jailed Uyghur scholar Ilham Tohti, and Wang Lixiong, who spent most of the last decade under house arrest with his Tibetan wife Woeser; Sun has thus gained the sort of access and insider perspective that are increasingly difficult, if not impossible, for non-Chinese scholars to get. She tackles the question of bias head-on, claiming a more even-handed analysis that avoids "western arrogance" and an "imperialist mentality" but is also aware of its own limitations (p. 24).

Sun argues that the "institutional design" of China's ethnic policies, rather than the individual policies themselves, is the primary cause of ongoing interethnic conflict in its outer periphery regions of Tibet and Xinjiang and, to a lesser extent, Inner Mongolia. On this account, the three key aspects of the Chinese Communist Party's ethnic governance are (1) formal ethnic classification, which was largely completed during the 1950s and legally constituted China's 56 officially recognized "nationalities," or what party officials now call "ethnic groups"; (2) the system of regional ethnic autonomy that promised, in theory, that minority nationalities could be masters of their own home and exercise political and cultural autonomy in those areas where they live in concentration; and (3) a series of preferential policies, such as judicial leniency, quotas for political representation, and educational benefits, aimed at assisting with the independent advancement of minority nationalities.

This system design, Yan Sun contends, engendered two contradictory dynamics during China's long transition from empire to nation-state: (1) "ethnic particularism" or the engineering and then strengthening of ethnic identities and ascriptions and (2) "political centralization," namely the concentration of power in the hands of a single party-state, which in turn propels a clash of civilizations, interethnic violence, and instability. This flawed blueprint became evident after the collapse of "class universalism" and "revolutionary idealism" during the Maoist era, the intensification of economic reforms in the reform era, and the penetration of the party-state into once-remote parts of China's ethnic frontiers.

This model of ethnic governance, which she argues the CCP inherited from the Bolsheviks, deviates from "Confucian universalism," China's premodern worldview that adopted "a neutral and inclusive approach to ethnicity" (p. 25) and led the state to adopt a "loose rein" or indirect form of rule that abated communal violence and sectarian divisions. Here Yan Sun overlooks critiques of "Chinese culturalism" and how competing forms of group consciousness and governing strategies marked the Chinese state's long history of contestation with its ethnic periphery, including wars of conquest, ethnocentrism, and the sort of xenophobia that contributed to the building of the Great Wall. At times, Yan Sun's structural-functionalist analysis feels too reductionist, a neat teleology that fails to examine both the contingent (and often arbitrary) exercise of power and identity and how China's political culture (especially its fear of instability) helps explain the dramatic swings between ethnic accommodation and assimilation.

Yet throughout the book, Yan Sun provides a range of new observations and empirical data. These contributions include a sophisticated discussion of Hu Yaobang's reforms during the 1980s, the top-down developmentalism accompanying the Great Western Development Strategy of Jiang Zemin, recent educational reforms, and the religious revival in Tibet and Xinjiang that unnerved top party leaders and contributed to a major rethinking of ethnic policy under Xi Jinping. In fact, Sun's manuscript was completed in June 2019 as the world was coming to terms with the party's brutal crackdown in Xinjiang, which included the mass extrajudicial internment of possibly a million Uyghurs and other Turkic minorities. She

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notes the “draconian measures” implemented by Xinjiang party boss Chen Quanguo but places the lion’s share of the blame on the state-backed religious revival that ultimately “backfired” by promoting ethnicization, radicalization, and the overreach of local state actors. In a subsequent blog post written for Cambridge University Press in 2020 (see t.ly/9o8J), Sun strikes a more critical note, speaking of a “human rights crisis” that is “counterproductive” and deserves global condemnation while also trying to explain why Communist Party officials feel threatened by the rise of religious extremism in the region.

Ultimately, Yan Sun concludes that China’s ability to maintain its territorial integrity and stability yielded only partial success, or rather is “incomplete” in her view, because it continues to require significant state investment to overcome its flawed design principles. She provides a comprehensive analysis of the three schools of thought for reforming China’s ethnic policies. Sun first dismisses the views of “liberal autonomists” like Ilham Tohti as politically subversive and unrealistic. The “integrationists” like Ma Rong resonate with the general public, but she contends that they were officially “rebuked” by Xi Jinping in 2014. For Yan Sun, the “social autonomists,” such as leading minority scholars like Hao Shiyuan and Ming Hao, are seen to have triumphed politically, with the Xi regime adopting a “grand bargain” of continued ethnic-based distributional benefits combined with a renewed focus on national integration.

However, on this score I believe that Yan Sun misreads (perhaps due to the timing of the book’s publication) what we might now call “Xi Jinping’s Thought on ethnic work in the New Era,” which is systematically scaling back ethnic-based preferential policies, aggressively proffering cultural and ideological conformity, and rendering ethnic autonomy meaningless. Finally, her policy recommendations—overcoming “social Darwinian bias,” creating a special autonomous zone for Tibet and Xinjiang, and passing antidiscrimination legislation—seem naïve in the face of an increasingly truculent and authoritarian China and at odds with her critique of the systemic barriers to national cohesion. Despite these misgivings, this important new book offers a welcome China-centric perspective on a highly contentious policy issue and is essential reading for anyone interested in ethnic policy and nation-building in modern China.

Ruling by Other Means: State-Mobilized Movements.

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This superb volume introduces a new research agenda into the comparative literature on contentious politics, namely the study of state-mobilized movements. Most of the existing literature in this subfield involves the collective action of groups, mobilized from below, making demands on a reluctant state apparatus. Less scrutinized are those occasions when agents of the state themselves mobilize, or allow to be mobilized, segments of the population to help them advance their interests.

In an age of rising populism and assertive authoritarianism, a call to study state-mobilized movements is certainly timely. As several contributors make clear, however, the tactics of “ruling by other means” is neither new nor limited to authoritarian settings. They also make clear that such tactics have not been entirely neglected in the literature. Kristen Looney reminds us in her chapter on Taiwan that Robert C. Tucker’s notion of the “movement regime” circulated widely in the study of comparative politics in the 1960s and 1970s. Useful reviews of more recent scholarship regarding the state’s involvement in social movements can be found both in the introduction by Grzegorz Ekiert and Elizabeth Perry and in the chapter by Samuel Green and Graeme Robertson (pp. 194–97). The editors maintain, however (and correctly as far as I know) that this is the first volume to gather analyses of such movements across diverse geographical and historical settings and to propose an initial framework for further research.

This proposed framework, as with the political process model of contentious politics, is not a deductive theoretical construct from which to generate hypotheses but rather an inductively derived heuristic schema of different categories, concepts, and patterns that can assist scholars in their analyses of similar phenomena. (The chapter by Ashley Anderson and Melani Cammet on Egypt is an exception here). In good Weberian fashion, the aim is to understand rather than to predict. The empirical chapters cohere nicely around this mission and are uniformly excellent. Though most focus on one country, they also provide focused comparisons within that country across time, regions, or regimes. As in the political process model, the units of analysis in these studies are usually aggregate social categories—students, workers, peasants, veterans—rather than the individuals who inhabit them. Many chapters emphasize the importance of ideology and acknowledge the significance of identity, but again like the political process model, structural variables do most of the explanatory work.

As one might expect, the empirical chapters find no definitive answers to the questions put to them in the introduction, but in combination, they do find some interesting patterns that are summarized earlier. First, they offer a useful typology of the different functions that state agents might ask a mobilized citizenry to perform. State-supported campaigns can channel public action into creating social infrastructure by forming rural community organizations in Taiwan or coordinating volunteers to assist in the Beijing Olympics. They can organize

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