Book Reviews

Centrifugal Empire: Central–Local Relations in China
JAE-HO CHUNG
New York: Columbia University Press, 2016
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Jae-Ho Chung's *Centrifugal Empire* is that rarest of books, one that is rich with empirical and historical detail, structured along several illuminating analytical dimensions, and written in prose that is mercifully jargon-free and a pleasure to read.

Chung is broadly comparative, both spatially and historically. The cluster of questions driving the analysis include: "why did China not even pretend to adopt a sort of federal structure in nominal terms just as the Soviet Union did in the 1920s? What has been pulling China away from even a 'federalist' way of thinking, if not the structures and processes as such? What has made China so stuck on a highly centralized unitary system despite the so-called 'diseconomies of scale' deeply embedded in its sheer magnitude in size? Furthermore, what is constantly driving China and its leadership to pledge to safeguard domestic stability and territorial integrity even at the expense of almost everything else? What are the drivers behind China's perennial preoccupation with effective control over localities?" (p. 2).

These are basic concerns that go straight to the root of Chinese governance. Chung approaches these questions through five interwoven axes: functional (chapters two and six), spatial (chapters three, five, six and seven), temporal (chapters three, four and five), hierarchical (chapters two, three, four, five, six and seven) and horizontal (chapter seven).

Chung's argument is that the centrifugal forces constantly eating away at China's *territorial* and (thus) the centre's *political* sovereignty are "intergenerational transmissions of … history, perceptions, and preoccupations" that shape the thinking of China's contemporary leadership no less than they did their predecessors going back millennia (p. 3). This is most clearly illustrated by the constant dynamic of localities finding compelling reasons to increase the number of units to be administered, while the centre curtails these numbers to keep them manageable (chapter three). These quantitative concerns are further complicated by questions of the political role of local units – agents, principals, and/or representatives – and just how suspiciously Beijing views them (chapter four). Chung also delves into the actual inducements and, alternatively, coercive mechanisms Beijing uses to maintain control over its vast network of local governments (chapter five). In chapter six, he looks at policy area as a key variable in explaining discretion in implementation patterns, but shows us that this has less to do with function as it does with political threat levels to regime stability. Chapter seven is a *tour de force* in identifying and explaining the extensive and complex networks of vertical and horizontal linkages that make traditional *tiao–kuai* distinctions seem quaint.

Chung provides an important corrective to the widely-cited but deeply-flawed Montinola et al. argument of Chinese "federalism," arguing instead that Beijing's "ability and privilege to change the rules anytime it wishes matters dearly as Beijing can come up with countermeasures whenever it finds itself in trouble vis-à-vis localities" (p. 26). Indeed, one is reminded of just how much flux there is

in the demarcation of local border areas as well as the creation not simply of new units (i.e. counties) but entire new administrative layers (i.e. sub-provincial level cities [*fusheng ji shi*]) over time and the consistent interventions by Beijing to cut back these numbers to keep them manageable.

This is an excellent study, thorough and granular while also macro in its scope and argumentation. The historical and largely descriptive analysis may not satisfy some mainstream political scientists, but, I suspect, they are not Chung's principal audience. Although some might find Chung's self-references in the endnotes to be a tad excessive, one can also argue that he has earned the right to do so, given the sheer quantity and quality of his publishing output over the years. Chung's extensive use of Chinese sources is to be emulated, and his critique of Western scholarship – "China's local administrative hierarchy and its historical evolution to date received relatively scant attention in the scholarly literature… [particularly] in Western academia" (p. 32) – is well taken, as far as it goes. But it is slightly undercut by the paucity of citations of work by younger scholars over the past 10 to 15 years with whom Chung might have otherwise engaged (most of the endnotes are from around the 1990s and early 2000s). Finally, given that this book is an opus not only of Chung's own scholarship but also of the study of centre–local relations in China over the past generation more generally, I would have much preferred footnotes to endnotes. But that is almost certainly an editorial decision by the press, not the author.

In sum, this is a book that should be used in upper-level undergraduate classes on Chinese politics. It should also be a key text for graduate courses covering Chinese centre–local relations as well as seminars that look at broader question of state capacity. And it should be on the desk of every China scholar.

ANDREW MERTHA
am847@cornell.edu

The Making of the Chinese Middle Class: Small Comfort and Great Expectations
JEAN-LOUIS ROCCA
Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017
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Anyone who has lived in China or even visited in the last five years cannot but be impressed by the prevalence of a public discourse of the middle class. Television runs the message endlessly of a middle-class lifestyle: cars, housing, restaurants, clothing, holidays and so on. And that's the programmes before even the advertisements are mentioned. A middle-class lifestyle is a cultured lifestyle and the height of achievement for all Chinese citizens in the 21st century. Newspapers and magazines similarly reinforce these messages, as do commercial, public service and political posters on the streets and in shopping malls. A favourite example is from the Post Office Savings Bank depicting a young couple with a young daughter saving for her music lessons (violin) and education, their car, house and exotic (palm tree) vacation. Over the last two decades, repeated surveys of the Chinese population have revealed that when asked explicitly whether they are middle class the vast majority of respondents have demurred. Yet when asked to self-identify their class the vast majority (by