
Wang Xiaoqi, *China's Civil Service Reform*, Oxon and New York: Routledge, 2012, 188 pp. ISBN: 978-0-415-57748-9 (hardback).

In a rare book-length publication on the subject, Wang Xiaoqi presents the reader with a detailed study of China's civil service and its development. Focusing on the more recent reforms – an effort to transform China's civil service into an efficient, professional administration – Wang gives a comprehensive overview of the sector and the significance of its embedding within the broader context of the Chinese party-state. Revolving around the question of whether the goal of creating an efficient administration capable of implementing and advancing political goals throughout the system has been reached, the study discusses the civil service sector's structure and the implementation outcomes of reform policies on different levels. A chapter on implications for other Asian developing economies is included, adding a comparative angle.

Field studies in three locations, Haidian District in Beijing, Ningbo and Changchun, form the location for the study, while the Environmental Protection Bureau and Education Bureau in the three locations are used in the study as specific cases. Wang adopts a principal-agent theory framework to analyse the results of the field studies, looking at the strategic behaviour of both the leadership and subordinates to explain the incentive structure and managerial outcomes the reforms of the civil service sector have brought about. While the principal-agent framework is not without pitfalls, Wang addresses potential issues by acknowledging the 'smart' nature of actors, who actively and strategically shirk, or support, their principals and/or specific policies (pp. 8–11).

The seven chapters aim to give a comprehensive overview of both structure (chapter 2) and developments in China's civil service (chapters 3–4). The political context is presented in great detail, which is important to understand the integration of civil service under the leadership of China's Communist Party (CCP) (chapter 5), and thus the underpinnings for both the bureaucratic and political missions vested in it. Wang manages to cut through the complexity of the Chinese administration, elegantly laying out the scope and networked nature of the system, an achievement deserving recognition in itself. Issues that are notoriously difficult to get detailed information on, such as size of the civil service force, wages and bureaucratic rank are included in this discussion. Moreover, the structural and contextual analysis follows the study's logic of assessing outcomes, especially of the civil service reforms of 1993, with the 'Provisional Regulations on State Civil Servants' and the

'Civil Service Law' of 2005. This longitudinal approach enables Wang to show both the logic and drivers behind the policies, but also to assess specific outcomes, both intended and unintended.

Some of the central issues discussed in more detail are recruitment and performance evaluation, wages and incentive structures, corruption and disciplinary policy, and the alignment of incentives and goals between the various levels in particular, but also between the administration and public in general. Against the backdrop of the case studies, Wang is able to show that reforms' achievements are mixed. While more targeted recruitment and evaluation has markedly led to a more qualified and better-educated civil service force (pp. 85–87), the wage reform has not fully reached its goal of creating an incentive structure that drives civil servants to perform better. Interestingly, while civil service employment has become competitive with that of state-owned enterprises after raising wages, the new system does not present enough motivation based on pay raises once in the service. On the contrary, status and the potential for high 'grey' income, especially in 'wet functions', where administrative services are sold, has become a main driver for entering civil service employment (p. 65; 86). These findings are important in themselves, but they also speak to the wider literature on the Chinese bureaucracy and the maturing literature on the political system. This also counts for another general trend in Chinese structural reform: simultaneously decentralizing personnel management in general, while reasserting control and selection by the central government in the case of leading cadres (pp. 95ff.). Allowing central government personnel authorities, especially the CCP Organization Department, to assert control over supervision and promotion of leading cadres, while decentralizing the huge task of managing the general civil service force to local organs seems to be a general trend, and Wang has added valuable new insights on how this development is working on the ground.

Standing out somewhat detached from the rest of the book, chapter six discusses implications for four other Asian countries: Vietnam, Laos, Indonesia and the Philippines. Discussing hardly more than the general structures and main reform efforts in these four very different nations, the usefulness of this chapter is questionable. And while a comparative approach *per se* would be a welcome addition to the book (perhaps in the form of another book-length study), 20 pages hardly seems enough to discuss the implications of the complex and path-dependent structure and development of China's civil service sector for *four* other nations. Not surprisingly, the conclusions turn out to be quite general, prescrib-

ing the governments to '... aim to improve the quality and efficiency of the civil service as well as to establish an ethical norm within the system'. While not trying to discredit these recommendations and the analysis that led to them, this reader found that the chapter does not speak to the rest of the book very well and the volume would not lose any value without it.

Apart from this comparative intermezzo, Wang's study has no issues worth mentioning. One, admittedly very minor, annoyance is the occasional misspellings in the Chinese *pinyin* used throughout the book (e.g. pp. 46; 71; 87). All in all, this volume is a highly valuable addition to the study of bureaucracy and civil service in general, and a good example of quality fieldwork in the tricky environment of the Chinese political system. It is a well-crafted piece of scholarship that anyone interested in the Chinese political system at large should read, and anyone working with the bureaucracy specifically must read.

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Victor Nee and Sonja Opper, *Capitalism from Below: Markets and Institutional Change in China*, Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2012, 431 pp., notes, bibliography, index. ISBN: 978-0-674-05020-4 (hardcover).

The contribution of privately owned enterprises to national output and employment has increased substantially throughout the course of the Chinese economic transition. Once marginalized, bit-part players, private industry had already grown large enough by the mid-1990s to absorb many of the state sector's laid-off industrial workers. The private sector now employs more workers than the previously dominant state and arguably represents the beating heart of future growth. The private sector's increased prominence is particularly noteworthy, given the government's previous attempts to stifle its development through restrictive policies. Given this context, there is clearly a need for an account of the development of the private sector in China, distinct from the numerous published works that have focused on state-owned enterprises exclusively. Victor Nee and Sonja Opper, in their meticulously researched, insightful and well-written book, seek to explain the rise of private entrepreneurship in an environment that has been often hostile to its