

in the post-Mao period and the limited ability of such narratives to challenge those of the Center” (p. 149). Another aspect is the CCP’s deliberate efforts to erase all traces of the “Gang of Four” within the publishing sector, reflecting the enduring nature of the party-state’s control over public information. Additionally, the book explores the enduring memories of both those who perpetrated and those who endured atrocities during the Mao era, illuminating the prolonged controversies that persist to this day. The state’s current reluctance to engage in public discourse about its past errors further underscores the lasting impact of these contentious issues.

This volume exemplifies the remarkable quality of historical research on post-Mao China, with contributors drawing from a diverse array of primary sources. These sources include official records, grassroots materials, oral interviews and rare documents from the Maoist Legacy Project database. The official “history of the Reform and Opening-up,” promoted by the CCP as one of the “four histories,” aims to emphasize the Party’s success in achieving economic growth and social stability without adopting a “Western-style” democratic political system. This volume, however, counters this positive narrative by providing detailed accounts, particularly those of ordinary individuals, offering a more nuanced perspective.

My main critique of this volume centres on its overreliance on the “transitional justice” framework. As Leese states, the applicability of “transitional justice” to the Chinese case is contingent on the “the definition of the concept” (p. 286). This semantic approach can be unsatisfactory as it may limit deeper theoretical exploration. In this regard, “transitional justice” might not be the most suitable framework for discussing the post-Mao reversal of verdicts due to fundamental differences between the two. Conclusions, such as the assessment that the rehabilitation process in the early 1980s was constrained and characterized by paternalism, may appear less striking, particularly when considering the wealth of new primary sources consulted by the contributors in this volume. Instead of drawing comparisons between post-Mao China and transitional regimes, a more viable approach might involve a comparative study of China in the 1980s and the “normalization” period in Eastern Europe. Such an approach could lead to fresh inquiries, like understanding how the CCP convinced the people that things were returning to “normal.” Nonetheless, this book is an essential addition to the library of anyone with an interest in post-Mao China and the judicial processes in authoritarian states.

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The Central Politics School and Local Governance in Nationalist China: Toward a Statecraft Beyond Science

Chen-cheng Wang. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2023. 356 pp. \$135.00 (hbk). ISBN 9781666929690

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Historians of modern China have long debated the successes and, more often, the failures of Chiang Kai-shek’s Nationalist government during its brief period in power on the Chinese mainland. The debate often hinges on the question of why the Kuomintang (KMT) failed to maintain political control over China in the run-up to the Civil War, with some scholars highlighting the “seeds of



destruction” inherent to the Nationalist regime’s ideology and strategy while others have identified specific domains in which the Kuomintang was able to successfully implement its governance strategy. Chen-cheng Wang, an associate research fellow at Academia Sinica’s Institute of Modern History, has returned to this debate in his book, *The Central Politics School and Local Governance in Nationalist China*, a carefully researched account of public administration, both as a field of study and a governmental practice, in Nationalist China.

Specifically, Wang focuses on the experiences of students who graduated from the KMT’s Central Politics School (*Zhongyang zhengzhi xuexiao*, sometimes translated elsewhere as “The Central Political Institute”), a civil service training academy in Nanjing under the direct control of the party’s Central Executive Committee. The book provides a detailed account of how Central Politics School (CPS) students were trained according to the principles of public administration, a techno-scientific theory of governance that emphasized rationalization and efficiency. The political realities that these students encountered as local officials throughout rural China in the 1930s and 1940s, however, often confounded the modernist techniques of administrative science that they had studied. Wang argues that when public administration theory was applied to rural Chinese settings the “pursuit of objectification and rationalization rarely achieved its goal of building an efficient state” (p. 307). Moreover, he claims, these government interventions often led to adverse outcomes, and “the worship of a techno-scientific approach to politics” should be considered one of the fatal flaws that doomed the Nationalist government (p. 307). As an alternative to this failure, Wang describes students who abandoned scientific governance in favour of a more “humanistic” approach that drew upon indigenous political traditions better suited for solving local problems.

Chapter one explores the specific context in which progressive era scholars in the United States, particularly Woodrow Wilson and Frank Goodnow, first outlined the principles of public administration and how it then came to be the dominant paradigm at the CPS. This theory, born as a response to the political corruption of 19th-century US politics, was imported to Nationalist China where it appealed to many politicians and intellectuals who were looking for a form of government that would live up to the May 4th Movement’s ideals of democracy and science.

Chapters two and three focus on a pair of “experimental counties” where local governance was almost entirely carried out by CPS students and their professors. In Jiangning, just outside Nanjing, CPS graduates implemented an ambitious programme of administrative reform, but the prohibitive cost made the model impossible to replicate in counties without the same financial support. In relatively poorer Lanxi County, CPS officials eschewed these costly methods of modern social organization, instead opting to revive the imperial *baojia* system of household collective responsibility. Similarly, instead of basing land taxes on a comprehensive survey of ownership, a CPS official discovered 19th-century records in a supposedly haunted section of the county hall and extrapolated the modern taxation system on the basis of what it had been nearly 70 years prior under the Qing.

Chapters three and four are among the liveliest in Wang’s book, in part because they rely more heavily on archival materials from the Zhejiang Provincial Archives as opposed to the published writing of CPS students and professors that are the primary basis for most of the other chapters. The two chapters compare the achievements of two magistrates assigned to counties in western Zhejiang during the Sino-Japanese War, highlighting the ways in which wartime crises demanded specific solutions that were tailored to conditions on the ground in the two counties rather than designed according to universal formulas.

The remaining chapters focus on local governance in Guizhou, where CPS alumni made up roughly one-quarter of the province’s 80 county magistrates during the war with Japan. The reader is introduced to figures like Xu Shipu, the “rising star of public administration” who used Guiding County as a “blank canvas” for his administrative ambitions. More space is devoted to Guo Peishi, a “master of Confucian statecraft” who successfully governed the previously unruly county of

Houping. The final chapter details an uprising in Eastern Guizhou in late 1942 and into the first months of 1943, interpreting the local riots as a form of resistance against intrusive state policies.

Using evidence from a wide range of sources that include materials from provincial archives, memoirs, and articles published by magistrates while in the field, Wang convincingly argues that CPS students found the theories of scientific administration taught at the school ill-suited for their post-graduate work as county magistrates in rural China. Instead, they often had to rely on martialling the pre-existing social resources of their assigned locales and reviving cost effective, but distinctly unmodern imperial governance repertoires. A series of anecdotes underscore the tension between CPS students' education and the reality of their work: joss paper doubling as toilet paper in the name of efficiency, for example. In one instance, a young magistrate's bureaucratic reforms drove his entire staff to resign after just one week.

Wang notably valorizes officials who defied their training and revived governance techniques from China's imperial tradition (in fact, some may find his frequently interchangeable use of the terms "pre-modern" "Confucian" and "humanistic" confusing). This is most true in chapter seven, where Wang presents Guo Peishi's "Confucian approach" as a far more effective strategy than that of his more bureaucratic peers. The chapter, however, contains little direct evidence that Guo understood his work in Confucian terms. It does, however, include two lengthy ventriloquized quotations in which Wang imagines what Guo "might argue..." (pp. 244, 253) but does not quote the magistrate's actual words. Such passages suggest that the indigenous "statecraft beyond science" which Wang references in his subtitle and attempts to tease out throughout the book rests on negative assumptions about modern administration that are not always clearly consistent with the words and experiences of the historical subjects. Wang does at one point state that in a hypothetical county with full administrative rationalization, "solving problems and actually getting anything done would become increasingly unimaginable" (p. 285). Though some may question such assumptions about the inevitable failure of the modern administrative state in China, this book nevertheless constitutes a valuable contribution to the study of Chinese local governance, the history of rural areas in China's modernizing project, and the global history of public administration.

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Covert Colonialism: Governance, Surveillance and Political Culture in British Hong Kong, c. 1966–97

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The belief that the massive rallies that took place in Hong Kong in 2003, 2014 and 2019 were manipulated by the "invisible hands" of anti-communist foreign governments, which incited the "economically motivated but politically apathetic Hong Kong people" (p. 240) to take to the streets and clash with the police, is a prevailing one in Hong Kong. Such a belief echoes the narratives of an earlier generation of sociologists and political scientists who advocated for the view that politics in