

time developing a theoretical framework of broader relevance.

### **Public Opinion and Political Change in China.**

By Wenfang Tang. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005. 237p.

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— John James Kennedy, *University of Kansas*

In this comprehensive book, Wenfang Tang explores the nature and origins of mass opinion in urban China through survey research conducted between 1987 and 2000. The general theme is how some local democratic practices can develop within the People's Republic of China (PRC). However, rather than presenting a single theory or model, Tang examines a series of case studies on public opinion. He draws on a rich data set that consists of 11 large-scale urban surveys conducted by Chinese government and academic institutions, including his own 1999 six-city survey. With this data he examines a wide range of theories and explanations, such as regime legitimacy (Chapter 3), the influence of the media on opinion (Chapter 4), social capital theory (Chapter 5), political participation (Chapters 6 and 7), and the role of intellectuals (Chapter 8). Thus, this book has a broad appeal to those interested in political development as well as contemporary China.

Public opinion research is still a new and developing field in China. Tang provides an honest portrayal of the challenges and pitfalls of conducting survey research in the PRC. He lays out the political difficulties and possible solutions before presenting the statistical analysis. He addresses a number of issues regarding data quality, including questionnaire design, the truthfulness of respondents, and sampling problems. Questionnaire construction and choosing the right wording is a difficult task under the best survey conditions in industrialized democracies, but it is even more complicated in an authoritarian regime. The issue is political sensitivity. Certain topics cannot be addressed in Chinese opinion surveys, such as evaluations of specific national leaders or the efficiency of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). However, questions about local government, political behavior, and economic policies tend to be more acceptable. Tang correctly points out that political sensitivity is not a significant problem because of the numerous nonsensitive topics that can be explored (p. 52). He also deals with the issue of fear and assessing the truthfulness of respondents. This is done by identifying indicators of fear, which include specific survey questions that address trepidation in publicly criticizing the government, the nonresponse rate, and the number of "do not know" answers. These indicators allow the researcher to assess possible bias. Finally, drawing a representative urban sample is becoming more difficult due to the increase in rural-to-urban (and urban-to-urban) migration. Tang mentions several methods to resolve the prob-

lem, including the use of Geographic Positioning Systems (p. 45). More importantly, he reminds us that given the difficulties in obtaining a nationally representative sample, it is often safer to study the relationships between variables than the descriptive statistics about a single variable. Thus, he presents a convincing argument that despite the potential problems, "public opinion surveys can be effectively used as a research tool for studying China" (p. 50).

The book is divided into three parts and nine chapters. The first two chapters provide background for the reader, with a brief history of the important political and economic events in contemporary China (Chapter 1) and a detailed description of the surveys (Chapter 2). The next three chapters discuss how public opinion is formed in China. The results in Chapter 3 might be puzzling for American scholars who believe that regime support is associated with political legitimacy. Throughout the 1990s, no matter how the questions are worded, most of the surveys that address trust in the national leadership or trustworthiness in central government institutions report a strong level of support. Moreover, in his own 1999 six-city survey, Tang finds that the state-controlled media had an increasingly significant influence on regime support over time (p. 98). For scholars interested in social capital theory, another intriguing result is the high level of interpersonal trust among friends and neighbors and, at the same time, a low tolerance for other groups and alternative opinions. In Chapter 5, he concludes that in urban China, interpersonal trust is positively related with some democratic practices, such as voting in local elections and contacting officials, but it is negatively associated with democratic values such as social tolerance (p. 115). The last three chapters examine political participation and the responsiveness of local government agents. One of the key findings is that popular opinion can be expressed in urban China and that local government agencies are becoming more responsive. However, the author warns against too much optimism and states that "there was no evidence that the highest levels of the Chinese political system were responsive to broader political issues and challenges" (p. 139).

In general, this book challenges the pretransition or predemocratization literature that stresses the role of a growing urban middle class to make greater political demands on the authoritarian regime. Tang finds that the urban demands are focused on material or modern values, such as housing and job security, rather than postmodern values, such as human rights and individual political autonomy. Although there are increasing reports of urban protests and demonstrations against local government agencies, these disturbances represent only a small proportion of the urban population, and they currently pose no threat to the regime. In fact, the central leadership continues to enjoy a high level of popular support. This suggests that

reforms that allow greater political participation are absorbing a number of growing middle-class economic demands. The question is whether the CCP can or will continue to adjust for greater political demands in the future.

Of course, not everyone will agree with the various results presented in this study, but this is an engaging book that examines how China fits into general theories on political development. The data analysis presented here will also serve as baseline comparison for future studies. In sum, this book is a welcome addition to transition literature and the developing field of public opinion research in China.

**Regional Economic Voting: Russia, Poland, Hungary, Slovakia, and the Czech Republic, 1990–1999.**

By Joshua A. Tucker. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006. 444p. \$29.99.  
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— Jennifer A. Yoder, *Colby College*

On the heels of a generation of scholarship on democratic transition and consolidation in postcommunist countries, and after several election cycles, relatively steady economic growth, and the accession of many countries in the region to NATO and the European Union, the theoretical concepts and assumptions derived from studies of mature democracies have increasingly been applied to the new democracies of Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. One fine example is *Regional Economic Voting* in which Joshua A. Tucker effectively probes and refines the assumptions of economic voting in established democracies to suggest how variations in economic conditions have affected political support for postcommunist parties. In particular, Tucker explores whether—and under what conditions—traditional economic voting assumptions, that incumbent parties and certain types of parties (right-wing parties in established democracies) perform better if the economy is better, are supported in postcommunist cases.

This study makes a number of contributions to the field of comparative politics. First, it brings to front and center the relevance of context—in this case, the simultaneous political and economic transitions in Eastern Europe and Russia. Beginning with the standard hypotheses developed in the economic voting literature, Tucker considers two models for predicting election outcomes, the referendum model and the transitional identity model, and seeks to ascertain which model has stronger empirical support. The referendum model focuses on the governing status of parties, whether incumbent or opposition, and posits that incumbent parties will perform better when the economic conditions are favorable. The transitional identity model hinges on the type of party, which, in the postcommunist setting, cannot easily be dichotomized into right wing and left wing. Tucker, therefore, introduces the concepts of old regime and new regime

parties. Old regime parties include not only “unreconstructed communists” parties that continue to identify with the communist ideology, but also “remade” communist parties, many of which resemble West European social democratic parties, and former “bloc parties” that aligned with the communists in “national fronts.” New regime parties are either those derived from communist-era opposition groups that initiated the democratic transition or those that emerged as new entities associated with the transition. This transitional identity model suggests that old regime parties are likely to perform better where economic conditions are worse, because they now look preferable to the new regime parties associated with the painful economic reforms.

The study then skillfully offers a number of conditional hypotheses to account for the particularities of postcommunism. These conditional hypotheses concern things such as the uncertainty that confronts voters in these new democracies, the complexity of a system where institutions are changing, and the variety of postcommunist parties and orientations—whether old regime parties are unreformed or reformed, or if new regime parties are consistent in their liberalizing orientation or populist leaning. Ultimately, the author finds more consistent support for the transitional identity model and its hypotheses, but he is careful to note why we may see less support for these hypotheses in the future. In particular, the point is made that although the transition from communism is the last major event to shape the political attitudes of the electorates in Eastern Europe and Russia, it is likely to fade in voters’ memories and, perhaps, be replaced by another event or issue, such as European Union membership and its benefits.

Another contribution of the study is that it draws attention to an often overlooked level of analysis for comparative research, the subnational level. As the author notes, the economic voting literature largely ignores the relationship between regional variation in economic conditions and regional variation in the distribution of votes (p. 11). He has chosen to examine the regional level because it allows him to blend case study and general comparative analysis, facilitated by the fact that both economic and election data are available at the regional level. The author examines 20 elections across five cases—Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Russia. The result is a rich data set, the entirety of which is available at the Websites of the author and the publisher.

Although the arguments about economic voting in this book are convincing, the author might have mentioned alternatives to economic voting for explaining election outcomes in postcommunist cases. One alternative explanation might have to do with the relevance of past affiliations, or traditional party strongholds, especially when considering voting at the subnational level. The center-periphery