

11-1-2015

Zang, X. & Kou, Chien-Wen. Elites and Governance in China. New York and London: Routledge, 2013.

Yu Xiao Ph.D.

Kyoto University, chelsea.yuxiao@gmail.com

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.lindenwood.edu/jigs>



Part of the [Anthropology Commons](#), [Critical and Cultural Studies Commons](#), [Environmental Studies Commons](#), and the [Sociology Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Xiao, Yu Ph.D. (2015) "Zang, X. & Kou, Chien-Wen. Elites and Governance in China. New York and London: Routledge, 2013.," *Journal of International and Global Studies*: Vol. 7: No. 1, Article 34.

DOI: 10.62608/2158-0669.1290

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.lindenwood.edu/jigs/vol7/iss1/34>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at Digital Commons@Lindenwood University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Journal of International and Global Studies by an authorized editor of Digital Commons@Lindenwood University. For more information, please contact phuffman@lindenwood.edu.

Zang, X. & Kou, Chien-Wen. *Elites and Governance in China*. New York and London: Routledge, 2013.

This edited volume on elites and governance in China gathers together a group of papers from an international conference of the same topic. As the title “Elites and Governance in China” indicates, the volume aims to “bring together elite studies and governance studies for an analysis of the relationship between elites and governance in China” (p.1). The editors broadly define elites as the privileged groups – *e.g.* business leaders, key opinion makers, important politicians, leading intellectuals – that wield disproportionately great power and influence in society. Governance is somewhat more ambiguously measured in terms of expectations, the allocation of power and resources and performance appraisal (p.1).

Such loosely defined core concepts make it possible to include elites of different levels across a wide range of governance forms since almost all sorts of governance involve power allocation, in which elite groups enjoy the major share of authority and influence. In this way, the book does broaden the scope of elite studies, which usually focus on national political elites. But unfortunately, the book does not have a strong position beyond this and surprisingly, there is only minimal adherence to the book’s theme in many of the chapters. Most authors only briefly discuss who elites are and then quickly move to discuss their own agendas. The last author does not even bother to respond to the book theme. As such, instead viewing the book as an integrated intellectual contribution, readers who are interested in particular topics that the book offers, would be better off going directly to individual chapters that interest them.

The first two papers regarding intellectuals as elites come from the same author Guo Yingjie. With its focus on discourse, the first of his papers proposes to differentiate intellectuals’ ideological orientations from their relationship with the Party-state and other social groups or their institutional affiliations. By comparing the intellectuals’ discourses with the Party-state’s perspective on social justice and class, the author tries to show how intellectuals might influence social policy. However, given that the role of intellectuals varies greatly across the issues under discussion, their impacts on social policy and governance are far from clear without supporting case studies.

Yingjie’s second paper loosely categorizes intellectuals into two groups, namely reformers and transformers, based on their attitudes towards the discourse of governance and good governance. While the reformers’ mild stance is more acceptable to the Party-state, both groups play a role in the discourse shift surrounding China’s political reform. The confusing point of the paper is the list of authors that Yingjie identifies as transformers since these liberal analysts do not refuse to use the term governance despite his claims that they do so.

Zhao QuanSheng examines a particular form of intellectual participation – that of think tanks in policy making. He summarizes the participation of think tanks in foreign policy making as “limited interactions between the inner circle and the outer circle”. The author’s general discussion of “seven channels”¹ between the two circles is informative, but it is a pity that the author does not show how the inputs of think tanks shape particular foreign policies with specific cases.

David Bray relates his study of master planning to elites by arguing that there has emerged “a dominant elite discourse of urban planning that defines, informs, structures and governmentalizes the ongoing transformation of China’s built environment.” (p.76) Besides Foucault’s governmentality, the author also acknowledges the influence of Latour and a school of urban geographers who argue the built environment has agency. In this line, he argues that the creation and implementation of urban plans involves complex interaction of different actors, in which government authorities and planning professionals planning officials produce the elitist discourse of master planning. Using the examples “urban planning exhibition center” and “*xiaoqu*”, meaning highly standardized, large-scale residential estates, he further demonstrates how this highly unified discourse on modernity is popularized in practice. The paper is weak in its elaboration of the theoretical framework, however. More

¹ The seven channels are 1) consultations with policy makers; 2) internal reports via government channels; 3) conferences and public policy debates; 4) policy NGOs; 5) outside-system (*tizhiwai*) discussions; 6) overseas scholars; 7) highly specialized professional community.

paragraphs in the theoretical part are devoted to quote those big names mentioned earlier.

Liu Chunrong chooses to study the supportive and cooperative acts of elite residents in an affluent gated community where business people and professionals live to exemplify what he terms as the elites' "constructive activism." He argues that the elites' constructive engagement in Chinese neighborhood politics functions as a mechanism of group socialization and identity transformation, which in turn influence the local institutional design that shapes the dynamics of constructive activism. The author makes some efforts in theorizing the interaction and socialization experience through which elites form their own group identity and participate in neighborhood governance. However, perhaps due to the chapter length limit, many points are not thoroughly illustrated.

Tao Yu and Liu Mingxing approach the issue of collective petitioning, referring to citizen's collective visits to state/party organs to lodge complaints, from the perspective of intermediate associations.² Using national survey data and in-depth interviews, they develop four ideal types of intermediate associations - shadows, puppets, mavericks and cooperators. All four groups are categorized based on two variables measuring organizational characteristics: whether the groups are "self-governing" and whether the groups have been "embedding" local elites into their organization.³ The cases of collective petitioning in each type well help understand the relationship between intermediate associations and collective petitioning. As the authors admit, the role of grassroots elites, in this context referring to village cadres are far more complex and are only briefly discussed in the paper.

Cai Yongshun's paper addresses the relationship between anti-corruption efforts and political will. According to the author, whether anti-corruption measures can successfully discipline the elites – *i.e.* – government officials – and, or more precisely, the effectiveness of the use of citizens' reports of corruption- is ultimately determined by a government's political will. The chapter proposes a fresh approach that focuses on the collection and processing of information on corrupt agents, which is useful in the studies of authoritarian states where free press and free elections are absent.

Overall, the collected essays contribute to our understanding of shared governance and broadened political participation in post-1978 China, especially with respect to the roles of leading intellectuals, technical experts, business elites, and grassroots cadres, although such topics are too disparate as parts of a book. As such, the text is relevant to both policy makers and scholars interested in Chinese politics and governance. Despite its imperfection, it represents a pioneering effort in filling the knowledge gap between elite studies and governance studies. More work can be done to bring the elites into the mainstream social science on governance for a better understanding of policy making and implementation in China as the editors would like to see happen.

Yu Xiao PhD
Kyoto University
chelsea.yuxiao@gmail.com

² The authors set three criteria for intermediate associations: 1) it has three or more members; 2) It is juxtaposed to family, enterprise, political party and government; 3) its member can join or leave the organization as they wish. (p. 112)

³ The exact measurement for "self-governing" is whether the members can make the final decision, while the indicator of "embedding" is whether at least one member is grassroots elites.(p. 122)According to the authors, shadow refers to an embedding but not self-governing intermediate association, for example, agriculture and aquaculture associations. Puppet refers to intermediate associations which are neither embedding nor self-governing. They simply and passively carry out instructions from the village government. Maverick refers to a self-governing but not embedding intermediate association, such as village churches and rights protection associations. Elderly halls or elderly citizens associations, self-governing intermediate associations, which are also embedding.