various experiments, hybridisation might be said to be a common point: at the junction between fiction and cartography (Dung Kai-cheung), narration accompanied by music (Chan Ho-kei 陳浩基), and a story placed alongside a painting (*La mariée traversant l'océan* with the painting *The Soap Bubbles* and *De sombres choses* with *The Legend of the Baker of Eeklo*). We also notice a desire to bring attention to the literary heritage of Hong Kong, particularly in the work of Leung Lee-chi 梁莉姿 and Wong Yi 黃怡, who pay homage to the great master Liu Yichang 劉以鬯 (1918-2018). The former has created *Pièces vides* in the manner of *Troubles* 動亂 (1968), evoking the 1967 riots; the latter, in *Cette époque*, references the novel *Tête-bêche* (*Intersection*, 對倒, 1972) and its adaptation for the cinema, *In the Mood for Love*, directed by Wong Kar-wai 王家衛. Literary heritage can also be seen at the global level, with the mention or quoting of foreign writers, many of them French – Roland Barthes, Charles Baudelaire, Albert Camus, Marguerite Duras, Jean-Paul Sartre, J.M.G. Le Clézio, Françoise Sagan, Antoine Volodine, Patrick Modiano, etc.

The issue succeeds in offering a panorama of contemporary literature thanks to two editors, Gwennaël Gaffric and Coraline Jortay, themselves literary translators and university researchers, not to mention the translators who display ingenuity in the face of diglossia. How do they translate dialect, internet words, and the local hybrid language? What choices do they make between the experience of the foreign (Berman 1992) and the adoption of the dominant global language (Casanova 2015)? In this respect, the most notable text is the poem *Golden* by Nicholas Wong 黃裕邦, where the detailed translator's notes provide a real reflection on the poetics of translation.

This richly illustrated special issue ends with notes on the authors and translators together with publication references for all of the texts in their original language (in Chinese or English). It offers a valuable addition to the first anthology of Hong Kong literature translated into French and published in 2006 (*L'horloge et le dragon – The clock and the dragon*). In this issue, new contemporary questions such as ecology, democracy, and political autonomy contribute to renewing the fields of reflection on the literature of "resistance" (p. 6), which has become an important component of the literature of the Chinese-speaking world, a fact confirmed by *A New Literary History of Modern China* (Wang 2017).

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XIAO MA

LOCALIZED BARGAINING

The Political Economy of China's High-Speed Railway Program

MA, Xiao. 2022. *Localized Bargaining: The Political Economy of China's High-speed Railway Program.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

BINGZHAO CHANG

is a PhD candidate at the School of Social and Behavioural Sciences, Nanjing University, 163 Xianlin Road, Qixia District, Nanjing, People's Republic of China (bz_chang@163.com).

The Chinese government has invested over 800 billion RMB (129.2 billion USD) every year since 2013 and built more than 35,000 kilometres of high-speed railways, which is twice as much as any other country in the world. Xiao Ma's *Localized Bargaining: The Political Economy of China's High-speed Railway Program* is a pioneering study focusing on this state-directed infrastructure program. By unpacking China's Party-state hierarchies and the interaction between local governments and their superiors, the author demonstrates how institutions mediate public resource distribution.

Investment distribution remains a vital problem in public infrastructure programs, as government intervention often undermines economic principles. Conventional wisdom identifies the models of "loyalty purchasing" and "technocratic solutions" in distributive politics. Ma, however, notes that these models with a top-down perspective neglect the problems of information asymmetry and uncredible commitment within the state apparatus. Moreover, prior scholarly work also takes it as a given that China's administrative system is centralised, and most scholars overlooked local governments' constant bargaining actions and respective strategies.

According to Ma, Chinese localities (including municipalities and counties) play a more significant role than conventional wisdom acknowledges in the decision of many public issues, such as the allocation of high-speed railways and stations. His study refers to this as "localised bargaining," in which localities use strategic actions to shape their superiors' decision-making and extract more benefit for themselves. Furthermore, the author suggests that cities have different bargaining strategies based on their corresponding bargaining power (Chapter Two).

To reduce the bias of experience, Ma uses qualitative analyses, based on information from news reports and interviews, to make assumptions and judgments, and the quantitative data collected from questionnaires and files further verify his conclusion. Specifically, the interviews with central bureaucrats show that there are many veto points in the cumbersome approval process of building high-speed railways. The fragmentation of authority in the central government provides bargaining opportunities for local authorities. The survey

of 893 local officials suggests that localities also recognise the significance of efforts in bottom-up policy bargaining (Chapter Three).

However, bargaining power is unbalanced among different cities. Ma calculated the total number of times that each municipality was mentioned in the two recent waves of five-year plans (2011-2015 and 2016-2020). After considering certain properties for each city, such as GDP, population, revenue, and capital, Ma discovers that the municipality whose leader had a dual appointment in the provincial leadership (referred to as "the cardinal") could acquire more bargaining power than other cities ("the clerics") in procuring policy support from the province (Chapter Four). That means localities with greater bargaining power (including higher political status, more effort from local leaders, and some idiosyncratic opportunities) can obtain approvals more efficiently. To present effectiveness based on different bargaining power, Ma collected data on the duration of construction for 54 high-speed railways from 2004 to 2014. The data analysis showed that "cardinal" cities constructed their high-speed railways before other cities and at a faster pace. Furthermore, they were also able to build more stations within their jurisdictions (Chapter Five).

For unprivileged cities, inadequate bargaining power did not reduce their appetite for attracting high-speed railway investment. For instance, in Linshui County, Sichuan Province, civic protests over the absence of high-speed railways and stations compelled the provincial government to reconsider the railway location. Local officials acquiesced to the mass mobilisation and transformed public pressure into bargaining power (Chapter Six). First-hand information about protests against government mergers in eastern county C also present the same kind of strategic action on the part of local officials. Ma developed the concept of *consent instability* to signify their actions, which I believe to be highly insightful. If *consent instability* is accepted, it will reverse many established statements about Chinese conservative bureaucracy. To increase the credibility of *consent instability*, Ma issued a questionnaire to 368 officials from around the country. The results from the questionnaire also prove that China's bureaucrats are more likely to approve a request when they are put under pressure by the public (Chapter Six).

From a traditional perspective, centralised planning in economic affairs (including infrastructure investment) is criticised for rigidity and despotism. In contrast, *local bargaining* provides another possibility, as bottom-up policy bargaining enables local preferences to be considered in national policymaking. This would explain why the authoritarian state, compared with tyranny, is more beneficial for the economy and society. Similarly, Ma has never concealed his theoretical ambition in this book, as he declares, "The majority of the book's empirical evidence is situated in the context of China's high-speed railway program, the argument and findings of the book could and should be extended to explain dynamics in other policy areas" (p. 34-5). Apart from describing an administrative phenomenon, *Localized Bargaining* presents an alternative lens to interpret the cohesion and resilience of the authoritarian political system in China and other similar states.

However, although this book challenges readers' understanding of authoritarian politics, some aspects of Ma's study are not discussed sufficiently. First, considering the process of bargaining, many readers, including me, expect the author to use a story to introduce the effect of institutional and idiosyncratic factors in bargaining. But one should not be too demanding in this respect, as probing

bureaucratic processes is not easy in any political context. Second, it would have been better if the author presented a competition for resources between two cities with similar bargaining power. To do this, he could have used data obtained from news reports, participant observations, or interviews. These examples would facilitate understanding the significance of *local bargaining* and make it more credible. Third, other factors that affect bargaining over the construction of high-speed railways, such as geographic location, should also have been considered in Ma's study.

Despite these minor defects, Ma's book offers an insightful demonstration of localised bargaining, and thus has theoretical significance and current relevance. It is essential reading for those who want to understand China's high-speed railway program and authoritarian politics. I recommend this book to scholars of social science and anyone interested in the current Chinese government.
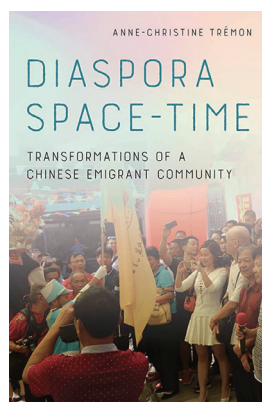
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I JUNMIN LIU
is a PhD candidate at the College of Arts and Social Sciences, Australian National University, Canberra ACT 2601, Australia (junmin.liu@anu.edu.au).

Despite the unprecedented success of Shenzhen in China's economic development, there has been a conspicuous lack of academic attention devoted to the city. While the prevailing narratives of the Shenzhen phenomenon primarily highlight the top-down policies and initiatives of the central government, grassroots-level sociocultural negotiations undertaken by local communities have also been instrumental in shaping the city's trajectory. In particular, rural villages such as Pine Mansion have been largely overlooked and under-researched in the broader discourse on the city. To address this gap in the literature, Anne-Christine Trémon employs Pine Mansion – an entity she calls the "lineage village community" (p. 13) – as a case study to explore the complex interplay between diasporas and local residents, as well as the implications of outmigration in contemporary Chinese society. The stories of Pine Mansion provide a microcosm of Shenzhen's urbanisation processes and China's evolving position on the global stage over the past few decades.

The book derives its content from an abundance of ethnographic data and a meticulous examination of archival sources. It is organised