

Preface

Throughout history race, ethnicity, language, and religion have divided states into separate political entities as much as physical terrain, political fiat, or conquest. In China most provinces (or autonomous regions and municipalities directly under the central government) are on a size and scale equivalent to a European country in population and land area. They are considerably political and economical systems in their own right. The differences between these provinces have long been a defining characteristic of China's politics. In China, culture is not homogeneous across provinces; and many ethnic groups also have their own languages and religions. All of these imply that it is unlikely to enhance the chances of the adoption of a common standard among different groups of peoples.

In February 2013, when I conducted a quantitative analysis of the driving forces behind China's interprovincial (dis)integration, I found two strange results. The first one relates to the negative effect of distance-related transactions costs on interprovincial trade which tends to rise over time from 2000 to 2010, while the second one concerns the different roles that some non-Han ethnic groups have played in China's interprovincial relations. As for the latter, the Tibetan and 11 other ethnic groups, unlike the Uyghur and six other ethnic groups (each of which tends to contribute to China's interprovincial integration), are found to have contributed to China's spatial integration (Guo 2016). The first finding is unusual, as it doesn't reflect China's considerable improvement in transport infrastructures during the past decades; neither does it conform to the general dynamic pattern of international trade. More unusual is the second finding. Why have China's ethnic groups played different roles in its interprovincial trade?

This book is intended to provide the narratives and analytics of China's spatial (dis)integration. Indeed, the Chinese nation is far too huge and spatially complicated and diversified to be misinterpreted. The only feasible approach to analyzing it is, therefore, to divide it into smaller geographical elements through which one can have a better insight into the spatial mechanisms and regional characteristics.

To this end, I will choose Tibet—China's far western autonomous region—as an in-depth case study, focusing on its special geo-political and socioeconomic

features and external and boundary conditions. The rationale for this kind of case selection is threefold:

- First, Tibet and its surroundings, Tibetan-based areas, which have roughly one-fourth of China's total territory. In terms of land area, they are much larger in territorial size than any other Chinese provincial administrations (except for Xinjiang).
- Second, the Tibetans—who are the ethnic majorities of Tibet—are much more culturally different from the Han Chinese (the ethnic majority of China as a whole) than most other non-Han ethnic groups in China.
- Lastly, the Tibetan-based regions (including Tibet autonomous region and the surrounding areas that are under the administrations of Gansu, Qinghai, Sichuan, and Yunnan provinces), which had been independent states in history, have been treated by the Chinese central government as the most “sensitive” and, to some extent, “problematic” regions in China.

China's great diversity in physical geography, resource endowment, political economy as well as ethnicity and religion has posed challenges to the studies of spatial and interprovincial issues. Historical record provides an ample source of narrative. And narrative matters because it is inherently concerned with causality recognizing that from the historical perspective some specific events can yield a multiplicity of equilibria. But narrative alone is insufficient since many questions are related to events that did not take place (or have not yet taken place) or are concerned with the motivations behind why certain behavior or events have not occurred. This is arguably especially true when the accuracy or adequacy of the data and information on which the narratives are based is in question. Addressing these issues requires an appropriate model for linking what is observed (or observable) with what is not observed.

In this book, in order to produce more rigorous, convincing research results, I will use both analytic and narrative approaches. More often than not, analytics (focusing on theory and analytical models) and narrative (focusing on data and historical events) each have both advantages and disadvantages in presenting a research project. However, the combination of “analytics” and “narrative” can capture the conviction that data linked to theory is more powerful than either data or theory alone. A priori, the most relevant advantage of the analytic narrative method is that it allows us to model historical “one-off” processes and events that have unique characteristics. Likewise, the method renders some problems of empirical testing of hypotheses manageable. Some political and cultural events pose insurmountable difficulties to traditional panel data or time series methods.

The basic structure of this book was fixed during my trip to Qufu, Shanghai, and Hong Kong in October 2013. On my way back from Hong Kong, I was thinking about the historical evolutions of and the interchangeability between centers and peripheries in China. One and a half hundred years ago, Shanghai and Hong Kong had been China's most peripheral areas. They are now two major international economic centers. And both of them have been playing important roles

in China's institutional reform and economic development. On the other hand, Tibet—China's frontier in the far west—continues to be China's peripheral area. Of course, Tibet is quite different from Shanghai and Hong Kong; thus, the comparisons between them may not be appropriate. But I believe that if measures proposed in this book are taken into practice, they could yield positive effects for Tibet and for China as a whole. Maybe sometime in the future, there will be another Shanghai or Hong Kong in China's far west!

Tips for Readers

- Chapters 1–3, and 5 and Epilogue are either narratives or analytical narratives. They may be most interesting to general readers.
- Chapters 4–6 are either qualitative (narrative) or quantitative analyses. They may (also) be interesting to professional readers.
- Annexes of Chaps. 2, 4 and 5 include provincial- and interprovincial-panel data and information that are collected and compiled by the author. They may be useful for those who want to conduct their own research on China's interprovincial relations.
- Annexes of Chaps. 4 and 6 include some specialized mathematics and statistical techniques. They may not fit in with general audience.

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