



GPA RESEARCH SEMINAR

Revolutionaries for Railways: Political Legacies and Implicit Lobbying in China's Local Development

- ▶ 10 March 2021 (Wed)
- ▶ 3:00 PM – 4:30 PM (GMT+8)
- ▶ Webinar via Zoom

SPEAKER:



Professor Xiao Ma
Assistant Professor
Department of Political Science
Peking University

ABSTRACT:

China's high-speed railways network is one of the largest government-initiated infrastructure programs in human history. What explains the significant geographical and temporal variations in the program's rollout? Conventional wisdom posits uneven distribution of infrastructural benefits as a result of technocratic planning or patronage exchange between politicians and their constituents. We argue that such variations can also be explained by whether localities have exclusive channels to influence central decision-making. Influential figures with local ties can act as lobbyists to facilitate localities' quests for preferential policy decisions. To test this argument, we build a biographical dataset of 1614 People's Liberation Army generals who fought in wars leading to the founding of People's Republic of China. We find that these generals' home countries have received systematic priority in high-speed railway station assignments. The effect is more pronounced among those counties that were home to generals who were subordinates of Deng Xiaoping before 1949 and those who survived Cultural Revolution. This association is also robust after accounting for a wide range of alternative explanations, including the sizes of counties' population and economy, distance to provincial capitals, geographical ruggedness, whether the counties are included in the conventional railway networks, and whether counties' party secretaries are connected with their superiors. Instrumental variable analysis that uses each county's distance to Chinese Communist Party's early revolutionary sites suggests that the association is likely causal. Further analyses of general's biographies also reject the patronage hypothesis: most generals never worked in state bureaucracies that have direct jurisdictions over railway construction. Qualitative case studies help illustrate different ways in which localities use generals as lobbyists to secure preferential treatment in infrastructure projects. Our findings highlight the existence of implicit lobbying in distributive politics under authoritarianism and also the important roles of revolutionary legacies in China's development.



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gpadept@cuhk.edu.hk