

***Domestic Politics and International Bargaining in China's Territorial Disputes.* By Chien-Peng Chung. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge-Curzon, 2004. Softcover: 222pp.**

In 2006, as a first year Ph.D. student, I swallowed hard and clicked on the purchase icon at a popular online bookseller. The \$150 price tag was worth it, I told myself. I was going to write a dissertation about Chinese territorial disputes and Chung's book would be useful. As it turns out it was, and remains, invaluable. While it is rare to review books nine years after publication, the release of the paperback version of Chung's treatise on the domestic politics of China's territorial disputes merits discussion as to whether the next generation of students of Chinese foreign policy should spend considerably less on the paperback version. In light of developments in the South and East China Seas in recent years, does Chung's model — based on Robert Putnam's two-level games framework — still explain Chinese behaviour towards its territorial disputes?

Chung argues that, consistent with Putnam's expectations, bargaining outcomes are shaped by "societal preferences and government coalitions, the ratification procedures of political institutions and the strategies of the negotiators", which affect bargaining outcomes in China's territorial disputes (p. 145). Chung contrasts the recurrent bargaining failures in the East China Sea, with successful bargaining with Russia over the Zhaobao/Damansky border area. Territorial disputes with India and disputes over the South China Sea were "quieted" at the time of writing and thus fall somewhere in between (p. 145). The cases studies confirm the expectation that domestic factors, such as the diffusion of the costs of cooperation across different constituencies, regime type, and the impact of coherent domestic opposition to an agreement can affect bargaining outcomes over territorial issues.

Importantly, these findings remain relevant in China's two outstanding maritime disputes, over the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands with Japan and with several other claimants in the South China Sea. Chung observes that the impact of particularly negative historical memories can be sufficiently strong so as to prevent official negotiations from even taking place (p. 147), a fact overlooked by Putnam's original theory. Chung's work also pre-empts more recent work on public opinion and Chinese foreign policy by asking the question whether democracies are more responsive to public opinion than their authoritarian counterparts. In a particularly prescient comment,

due to the developing pluralism in the Chinese foreign policy-making process, it will be “more difficult in future to coordinate the making and execution of foreign policy in China, *especially with regard to sensitive issues like territorial disputes*” (pp. 150–151, emphasis added). This insight precedes more detailed work on domestic sources of Chinese policy on the South China Sea by the International Crisis Group’s “Stirring Up the South China Sea” published in 2012.

Indeed, Chung’s framework is a useful prism through which to view bargaining over territory by other states as well. For example, the Joint Marine Seismic Undertaking, an agreement among Chinese, Vietnamese and Philippine oil companies to explore for oil in the South China Sea, collapsed after it was revealed that part of the area was uncontested Philippine waters. Faced with accusations from opposition political parties of bargaining away Philippine territory ruling elites in Manila allowed the agreement to lapse in June 2008. The Japanese government’s decision to nationalize three of the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands in 2012 is also an example of domestic actors narrowing the terms of acceptable outcomes for policy-makers, by making it virtually impossible to ignore territorial issues. In the South China Sea, it seems clear that, in addition to the challenge of dividing the material spoils of disputed maritime space, like natural gas and fisheries, there are compelling domestic limits to the scope of cooperation as issues of territory become wrapped up in national identity.

For these reasons, analysts, scholars and students of international relations will continue to find Chung’s book useful. In particular, while scholars have concluded that China’s efforts to cultivate an assertive nationalist narrative were particularly successful because of an engrained sense of suspicion of others on the part of Chinese people, the literature on China’s territorial disputes has identified numerous instances of successful bargaining over disputed territories.<sup>1</sup> Chung’s book offers at least a partial explanation for cooperation in the face of domestic opposition, where cooperation involves keeping the terms secret (p. 159), “de-linking” certain aspects of disputed space from others (p. 155), and suppressing nationalist opposition (p. 159). While Chung is to be commended for introducing nationalists as an important domestic actor (p. 161), the empirical record reveals he may have underestimated their influence. Chung asserts that nationalist actors are unlikely to agitate on any issue beyond sovereignty questions as they lack the technical expertise to understand issues of maritime

delimitation or of joint development (p. 155). However, the empirical record in the East China Sea indicates nationalist sentiment has prevented cooperation on all kinds of different aspects of disputed space, including implementation of the 2008 joint development agreement.<sup>2</sup>

The book contains four well-designed, well-written case studies that explore both sides of the territorial bargaining process, not just the Chinese side of the story. Despite the subject of the book, equal attention is paid to dynamics within the Japanese, Indian, Russian and ASEAN bargaining processes, which add considerable insight to East Asian state behaviour towards territorial disputes. While many scholars still look to shifting regional power dynamics for an explanation of this behaviour, Chung's book is a useful reminder that China and its rivals face considerable domestic constraints and motivations that affect their posture towards disputed space.

In conclusion, although nine years have passed since it was first published, Chung's book remains required reading for scholars of Chinese foreign policy and of Chinese behaviour towards its territorial disputes. The book's framework is also a useful lens to analyse territorial disputes in other parts of the world. In this context, the paperback version is an affordable reference for students, analysts and scholars of territorial disputes, East Asian international relations and world politics as a whole.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> M. Taylor Fravel, *Strong Borders, Secure Nation: Cooperation and Conflict in China's Territorial Disputes* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008); Wang Zheng, *Never Forget National Humiliation: Historical Memory in Chinese Politics and Foreign Relations* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012).

<sup>2</sup> James Manicom, "Sino-Japanese Cooperation in the East China Sea: Limitations and Prospects", *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 30, no. 3, (2008): 455–78.