B13 — Adaptation and Legitimation as Factors of Effective Governance in China, 1949–1957

SFB 700 Governance in areas of limited statehood

Research Questions

How did the Communist Party of China (CPC) succeed in consolidating its rule, shrinking the existent areas of limited statehood, and ruling effectively at the local level between 1949 and 1957?

Hypotheses: We argue that

1. the flexible institutional design of the CPC's governance model played a central role in the effectiveness of its rule;

2. this effectiveness also resulted from the CPC's ability to generate legitimacy on a vast scale;

3. the generation of legitimacy can be explained largely through the creation of work units and residents' committees.

Project Team

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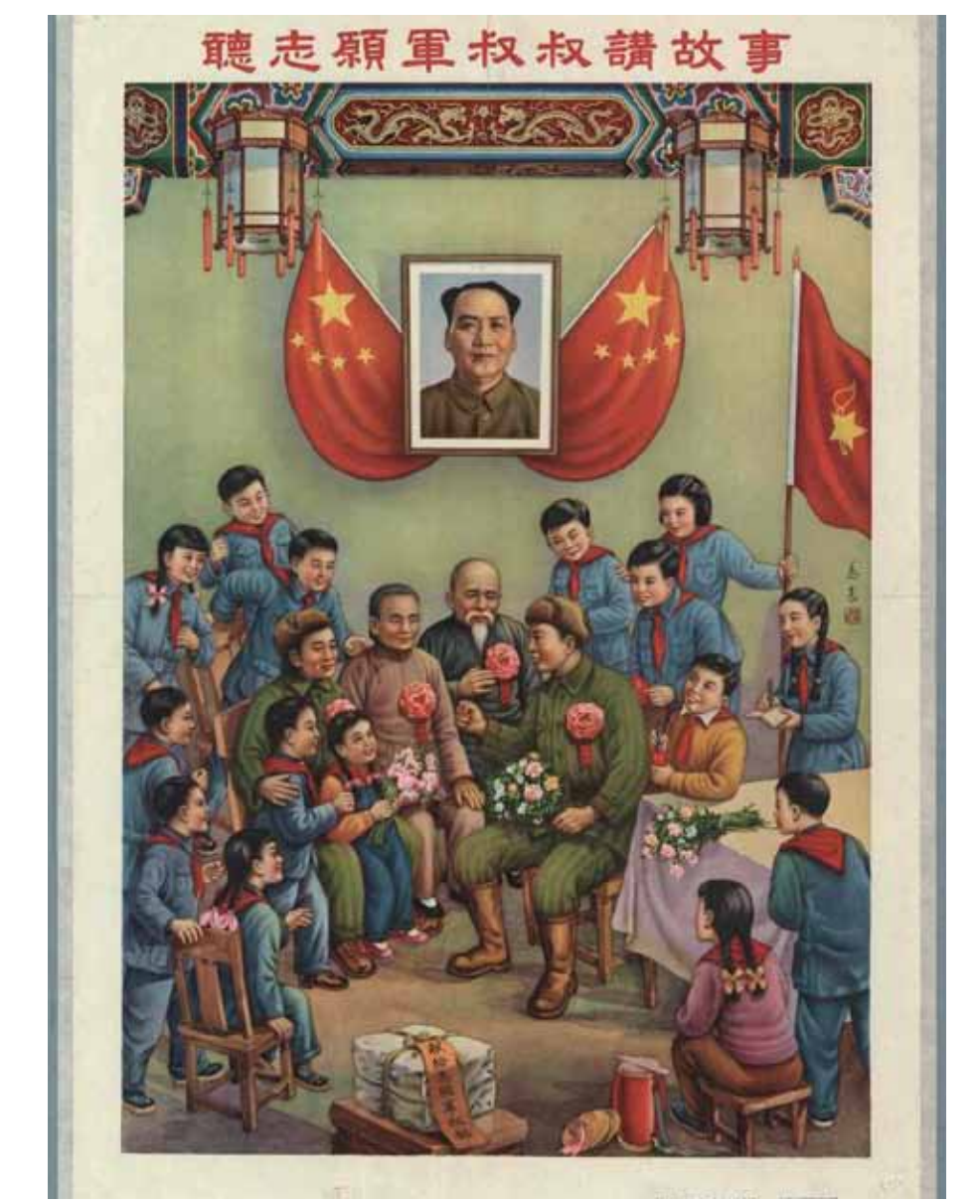Vanessa Bozzay
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Implementation

Conviction of landowners during the Campaign for Land Reform, 1952 (Photo: anonymous)

Street theater against "American imperialism," 1954 (Photo: Wang Shilong)

"After the workday ends," poster, 1954 (collection of Stefan Landsberger) chineseposters.net

"The uncle of the volunteer army tells a story," poster, 1954 (collection of Stefan Landsberger) chineseposters.net
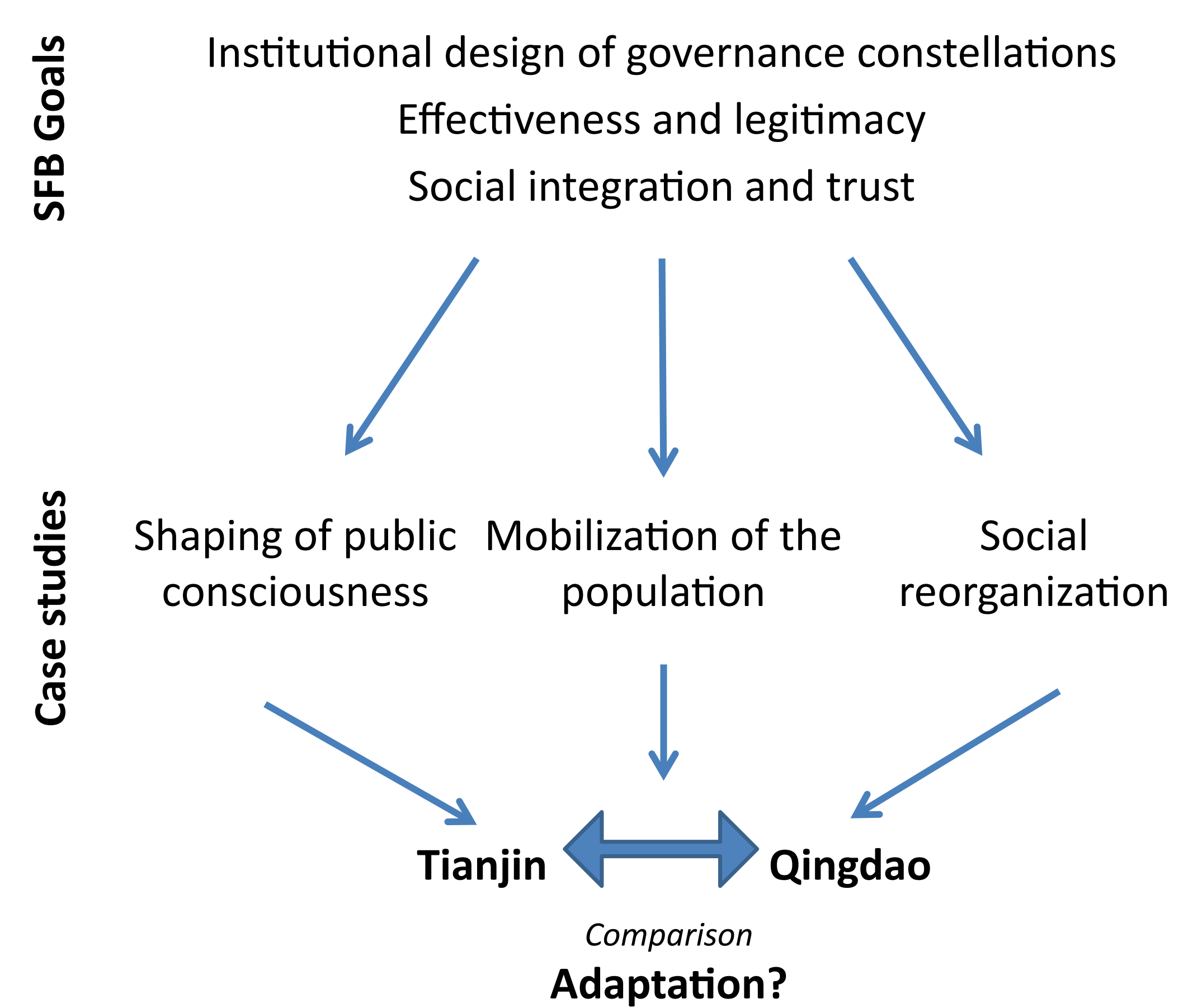
In the **first project phase (2012–13)**, our research showed that from 1949 onward, the CPC tried to strengthen the state's provision for and control of refugees to a much greater extent than the Nationalist Party (KMT) had done before. The long-term success of this policy can only be understood as part of the CPC's broader reorganization of society.

In the first nine years after the People's Republic of China was founded – under enduring conditions of limited statehood – specific constellations of governance emerged. We see these constellations as decisive for the CPC's consolidation of power and examine them more closely through empirical case studies. Our study focuses on:

- **the shaping of public consciousness** to legitimize the CPC's rule (propaganda through parades, processions, and mobile theater groups)
- **the mobilization of the population** (campaigns against drugs, prostitution, and gambling)
- **social reorganization** at the local level (work units and residents' committees)

The B13 project analyses each of these three areas in the northern Chinese cities of **Tianjin** and **Qingdao**, resulting in a total of **six case studies**. Through a subsequent comparison of the two cities, we hope to determine the degree of local variation in the institutional governance design and to better understand the role of legitimation.

Our methodology draws heavily on **microhistory** and **discourse analysis**. We examine campaigns and propaganda through the aspect of **performativity**.

SFB Goals: Institutional design of governance constellations / Effectiveness and legitimacy / Social integration and trust

Case studies: Shaping of public consciousness / Mobilization of the population / Social reorganization → Tianjin ⟷ Qingdao — Comparison — **Adaptation?**

Contribution to the SFB 700

This project contributes most significantly to the SFB by answering the question, "How can we explain the effectiveness and legitimacy of governance in areas of limited statehood?" To this end, we focus our investigation on the institutional design of governance constellations, as well as on empirical legitimacy, social integration, and local trust.

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