

Wu, Alfred M. (2014). Governing Civil Service Pay in China. Copenhagen: NIAS Press (Nordic Institute of Asian Studies, University of Copenhagen).<http://www.amazon.co.uk/Governing-Civil-Service-China-Governance/dp/8776941442>

Discussion published by Alfred M. Wu on Tuesday, March 27, 2018

An H-PC member has recently published a book. This interesting book focuses on a greatly under-explored topic of how the Chinese central government governs civil service pay. The author's fundamental arguments are that although central government has tried four waves of civil service pay reform since the foundation of the People's Republic of China in 1949, China still has not found a strong solution to align cadres' motives to better public services and curb over-corruption within the complexities of central-local relations.

Alfred Wu adopts multiple approaches - quantitative, qualitative and historical - in the analyses to present a country-specific study on China enhanced by provincial and local-level case studies in Fujian and Hubei Provinces. He introduces a number of sub-topics, including but not limited to the evolution of the civil service pay regime in China since 1949, the retreat from performance-based pay, the pros and cons of the equal pay policy that was introduced in 2006, decentralised versus centralised pay setting, legitimacy change and income distribution and the past, present and future prospects of the 'pay and corruption' relations. This book is aimed at scholars and postgraduate students across economics, political science and sociology, particularly those who are interested in the public finance of civil services. It is also suitable for interested general readers.

The author has largely achieved his goals in the volume. It offers thorough investigations into civil pay reforms and their impacts on public governance in China since 1949, and in particular, it provides solid surveys of how improved remuneration has not alleviated corruption in the country successfully. After reading this book, readers will be familiar with public governance and civil pay in contemporary China, and may apply similar approaches to other transitional and developing countries.

The major contribution of Wu's work is to enrich governance theory with experience from China and to deepen our understanding of endogenous tensions within China's public administration system. It is more about theoretical application than theoretical innovation, and it displays a rich collection of empirical evidence and statistical data to support its theoretical arguments. The arguments are plausible and the book is well written in general. In another edition, the author may want to fill some gaps in the coverage of three aspects. First, to explore further the micro-foundations underlining central-local interactions; second, to construct a formal-theoretical appendix upon the strategic reasoning of these interactions; and third, to apply the rich data-sets to detect the determinants and consequences of civil service pay reforms. Yongjing Zhang (University of Ottawa)

Political Studies Review, 14(1), 2016

