Book Review

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Guoguang Wu and Helen Lansdowne, *Socialist China, Capitalist China: Social Tension and Political Adaptation under Economic Globalization*, London and New York: Routledge, 2009, 215 pp. + xii.

Since the end of 1970s, China's marketization reforms have greatly diversified China's social landscape. While the wealthy urban Chinese enjoy a luxurious lifestyle, the poor rural folks continue to struggle for basic public amenities such as education and health care. At the same time, there are also widespread social discontents in China today. Conflicts exist not only between the state and society, but also within the state and society respectively. Significant inequalities exist in the society, which raise the questions of "who gets what and why" in the process of market transition. Together with market reforms, China has deeply integrated with the global economy. Thus, an examination of China's changing social landscape cannot be isolated from economic globalization, hence the necessity to ask "who gets what through China's globalizing" (p. 5)? The analysis of China's social development needs to be approached from a variety of angles. How to explain and define the root causes of these conflicts in China, including its economic, social, religious and political dimensions? This edited volume tries to answer these questions.

Socialist China, Capitalist China draws from the papers presented at the "Socialist China, Capitalist China: Social-Political Conflicts under Globalization" conference held in October 2006, at the Centre for Asia Pacific Initiatives, University of Victoria. The organizing theme of the volume addresses the social tensions generated by China's socialist legacy and its embracement of global capitalism, manifested in the phenomenon of rising mass protests, inadequate healthcare, the growing numbers of *xinfang* (petition), the rise of religious communities, and many other issues. All these issues are well addressed in this volume, but the chapters vary in quality. Although all chapters are in general good, some chapters are definitely better and contribute more to scholarship than others.

The opening chapter by Helen Landsdowne and Guoguang Wu introduces the major theme. It contends that "a new form of authoritarianism is emerging" (p. 4), and this form, rather than being "market socialism", should be more appropriately termed "Leninist capitalism". Accordingly, the "state makes use of the façade of freer society that globalization appears to bring to various aspects of Chinese life, while in reality it employs underlying

authoritarian mechanisms that ensure state control" (p. 6). However, authoritarianism under globalization contributes greatly to the rise of many social issues, in which political authoritarianism itself is unable to solve other than mere repression and coercion. Chih Jou Jay Chen provides an overview of the protest movements in today's China. He relies on a dataset he complies from press reports to illuminate the main causes and actors of more than 700 cases of rural and urban mass protests, and shows that much of these incidents were related to violation of people's rights (such as rural land seizures and urban forced relocation) and privatization (especially SOE workers). Xiaogang Wu looks at the socialist institution of *hukou* (household registration) and how it had meant to be an institution to keep rural villagers disadvantaged for the benefits of the urban working class during Mao's socialist era, and how it has become in today an essential tool to keep a vast army of cheap labour that makes Chinese production competitive in the world in post-Mao capitalist era. Feng Xu argues that in the field of unemployment policy, China has adopted the neoliberal international norms while maintaining its communist orientation. The result is that the authoritarian state is able to define "freedom" as being relived from dependency on the state. "Freedom", ironically, and in a truly Foucaultian sense, "is being framed and mobilized to steer people to government's desired policy goals" (p. 70). China's synchronization with the "international best practices" in unemployment policy helps to achieve the policy goals of the regime rather than fosters liberal democratization.

Yangzhong Huang analyzes another critical issue, China's healthcare system in which he tries to explain why the "healthcare reform in China appears to lead a situation in which none of the affected actors (patients, healthcare providers, governments, the new rich, the middle class, low-income group) are satisfied" (p. 75). The answer, Huang asserts, lies not in any pro-market healthcare policy, but in the nature and characteristics of China's decentralized "buckpassing polity" in which central leaders and local cadres are have an incentive to shirk their responsibility. Carol Lee Hamrin discusses the emergence of a variety of religions (but pays most attention to Protestants) in China, which it inseparable from China's embrace of globalization. Transnational religious ties have deeply penetrated the official atheist state, despite the best efforts of the party-state to manage and contain religious influences among the people. Furthermore, religious faith seems to have fueled rights consciousness, as exemplified by several high-profile rights activists who have embraced religion and sees it as a source of strength for their struggle against official injustice.

Barrett McCormick, using *Super Voice Girls* and *Freezing Point* as examples, argues that while China has successfully adopted some global trend setting entertainment formats, its arcane censors have (stupidly?) tried to regulate entertainment to the irk of China's consumers who otherwise remain

apolitical. On the other hand, the censors' heavy-handedness in dealing with outspoken journalists and news editors show that the state still relies more on domination to control the media and the cultural sphere, and have not achieved hegemony (in Gramsci's sense). Keyuan Zou examines the *xinfang* (petition) system, especially the new 2005 regulations on petitions. The new regulations attempt to bring the system under a legal framework. While these regulations give more legal protections to the petitioners, they also severely restrain the range of action and scope allowed. Zou also usefully points out several dilemmas of the petitions system, such as people's right to petition versus stability maintenance, the rule of law versus the rule of man, and the reliance on the judicial system versus the reliance on the petition system to solve disputes. Pierre F. Landry addresses the diffusion of legal institutions in China. Using diffusion theory, he argues that trust in the courts and presence social networks help explain the gradual diffusion of courts and the increasing use of courts by citizens to settle disputes in China. Finally, Yan Sun discusses the acute issue of corruption and its relations with democratization in China and India. Contrary to expectations from enthusiastic democrats (and somewhat out of sync with the theme of this volume), Sun finds that poor democratic India is not necessarily more "clean" than authoritarian China. Instead, the more important variables seem to be level of economic development and degree of state autonomy from private interests. In both variables China outperforms India. However, in the poorer and inland regions, the pattern of China's corruption resembles other poverty-stricken countries. In the end, Sun argues that "institutional continuity and partial reform" have "served to lessen insecurity of the stakes of contention for elites in a period of rapid transition, easing the pressures for out-of-control abuse and violence." "China's partial reform strategy, in other words, has served to prevent a worse scenario of corruption by building economic opportunities and market institutions before firing up political competition" (p. 185).

Guoguang Wu ends the volume with an excellent concluding chapter. He contends that the "social problems are rooted in the Chinese pattern of economic development and the authoritarian political institutions that govern that development" (p. 206). With the "fundamental political restructuring being absent", China's "policy adjustment and institutional adaptations [in response to the social tensions] cannot go beyond developmental and institutional constraints despite any effort the leadership may make" (p. 206). How about the future prospect for change? Wu seems pessimistic. He foresees a "China in dispersed, protracted, and in terms of ignitable issues and political impacts, spasmodic social unrest for years to come, and a party-state in a concentrated but nervous and insecure mood for making constant yet institutionally insubstantial efforts to deal with social discontent" (p. 207). Furthermore, "such state-society relations, in turn, imply an unfavourable

climate for political reform from above, while the incentives to push such reforms from the bottom will not be strong enough to realize themselves while state repression still works" (p. 207).

Many scholars in China actually resonate with such assessment. Reforms in China began with what Deng Xiaoping has described as "touching the stones to cross the river". But now, many scholars in China have warned that a small group of vested interests may be more accustomed to touching the stones but have forgotten to cross the river. (See the 2011 Social Progress Report produced by Tsinghua University Sociology Department.) This report argues that China is stuck in a "transition trap". Vested interests resist further reforms and bent on monopolizing their resources. Ordinary people also worry that further reforms might deteriorate their lives. To get out of the trap, the state, the vested interest, and the society, all have a role to play. The report suggests the difficulties and challenges lie ahead.

This book presents rich, original data about many of the social challenges faced by China; the authors' analyses of the various issues are very sharp. Reader can get a very clear picture of what has been happening in contemporary China. Nevertheless, perhaps the editors may have also overlooked some positive picture here. Actually, the chapters by Keyuan Zou, Pierre Landry, and Yan Sun are not that pessimistic. For example, in the conclusion chapter, Guoguang Wu cites Landry's chapter to show that "the ruling party's control over the judiciary contradicts the regime's self-proclaimed goal of building the 'rule of law'" (p. 201). However, this is neither the main message nor the main finding of Landry's chapter.

Also, McCormick also seems to contradict himself when, on page 110, he writes that "the Chinese government can carefully distinguish between the public goods that are necessary for economic growth and those that are politically sensitive," but then on page 120, he writes that "it is difficult to create institutions that carefully distinguish between the public goods needed for economic growth and those with political implications." On another matter, the editors should make the use of terminology more consistent. For example, Zou uses "petition" and "letters and visits" to describe the *xinfang* system in his chapter, but Landry (in Figure 9.2, p. 142) uses "complaints bureau", which is likely to be actually the same thing with the *xinfang* office. China specialists will have no issue with this, but a non-specialist reading this book may get confused.

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