

tensions with unlicensed drivers, thereby making protests unnecessary. Legalization is not the end point; the process is iterative, allowing the state to continuously adapt to new circumstances.

This theory offers a persuasive explanation for other mysteries of state–society relations that political scientists, sociologists, anthropologists and historians of China have been wrestling with for years. It offers a compelling reason why protests and demonstrations are so common, even under Xi Jinping (China Dissent Monitor). For that matter, it can be used to explain government policies tracing back to the beginning of market socialism. When Deng Xiaoping permitted small businesses to flourish in the 1980s when they were technically in violation of the law, his regime was practising toleration and differentiation. This allowed the blossoming of Chinese entrepreneurship that led to the Chinese economic miracle.

The data Sun gathers for each of his three cases is impressive in breadth and depth. For the first case, Sun examined the effect of two earthquakes (Wenchuan and Lushan) on civil society organizations in southern Sichuan. Sun surveyed 1022 villagers across dozens of villages and interviewed over 60 organization leaders and a dozen government officials. He also conducted a field experiment, sending an inquiry to 114 county governors about registering a civil service organization. For the second case, Sun utilized two self-media publications that he founded, following the censorship experiences of 971 articles across Weibo, WeChao and TouTiao. For the third case, Sun joined three drivers' WeChat groups in Hangzhou and interviewed over 100 rideshare drivers in four cities. Because each of these case studies is so well researched, this book would also be highly useful for scholars in any of the relevant subfields.

My criticisms of the book are minor. The writing is reasonably clear, but too dense for most undergraduates. (However, there is a lovely appendix with tips for conducting fieldwork in China that would work well for students of all levels.) Sometimes the bigger argument gets lost in the details. Several of the chapters were previously published as articles and could be better integrated into the manuscript. Given how much Sun covers in this book, it feels churlish to ask for more, but I did have some questions that remained unanswered. Therefore, I hope that future studies using this framework provide more thorough analysis of the ways that the different layers of government interact with each other through the process, sometimes to the point of contradiction. I would also like to see an analysis of why the system sometimes fails to contain citizen anger, such as in the recent White Paper protests against zero-Covid restrictions. Lastly, this book focuses on the state's strategy, but I hope future studies examine the strategic ways that Chinese citizens take advantage of the system in order to accomplish their own goals.

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## The Left in China: A Political Cartography

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This is a necessary book. It is neither an “objective” academic work nor an anodyne journalistic one. Instead, and vitally, it is the product of the author's many years of activist engagement with “the

left” in China and elsewhere, and thus of his profound personal and intellectual commitment to justice and democracy as modes of life and politics the world over. Ralf Ruckus, whose previous book *The Communist Road to Capitalism* is also a work of engaged scholarship, may seem a throwback to a different era of partisan political writing; but perhaps that kind of writing should make a comeback. In any case, Ruckus is serious, seriously concerned, and his inquiry is deeply embedded in some of the most important social questions of our times as those are raised from and in China.

The book presents its topic in a series of overlapping and chronologically organized chapters, each taking up some incidence of “left” politics and organizing in China after 1949. The periodizing, then, gives an indication of what concerns Ruckus most: these are anti-systemic organized social movements that are neither Communist Party-led nor Communist Party-inspired, but rather that attempt to force the Party to live up to its proclaimed socialist pursuits. Meanwhile, the “left” label describes those who struggle for egalitarian, non-exploitative social relations in a “non-hierarchical society in which people control and share power” (p. 10). To be sure, this definition is somewhat amorphous and historically vague, but Ruckus relies on the idea that “the left” is readily recognizable when you see it. He is mostly correct. Refusing to cover already well-trodden ground, Ruckus does not focus on the intellectual or intra-/inter-Party debates on policy and theory, or on the factionalisms that often have pre-occupied scholars. Instead, he homes in on the practices of social struggle as these erupt in various times and places over the course of the Maoist and post-Maoist period. Herein described are workers’ movements emanating from inside the factory labour-life system (the *danwei*) that critique the excessive demands for surplus extraction in the late-1950s and into the 1960s; we find serial socially organized movements protesting leftist or rightist austerity in the 1960s; we read of students in the early 1960s and onwards who are disappointed in the high rates of youth unemployment and who demand more full integration into the productive life of “socialist construction.” And, arriving at the Cultural Revolution, we learn of the ways in which the more well-known theorizations – Shengwulian, the Li Yizhe Manifesto, the Shanghai Commune and others – were taken up from below to push for better wages, fuller democratic participation in factory management, and enhanced living conditions. Most of the book’s focus is on the urban areas. The only time this focus expands outward is in the 1980s and beyond, when village social life became thoroughly corrupted by land grabs, village taxation schemes and the overburdening of peasants in the drive to accumulate surplus from rural production. It is of course at this point that migrant workers and their struggles also enter the picture.

The lead-up to 1989 and the aftermath of the Tiananmen movement occupy a good deal of Ruckus’s attention towards the last chapters of the book. Here, in particular, he points to how feminist (or what he calls women\*’s) struggles have remained at the forefront of social movements to this day. As Ruckus is clear, vast mobilizations of women\* into productive life never actually touched the bases of the patriarchal organization of China’s social formation. The post-1978 reforms freed some women\* for more economic and political participation, even while tying most women\* more firmly to the family form. While the ostensible retreat of the state from everyday life was celebrated as a great Dengist achievement, the irony is that women\*’s bodies were more regulated than ever through this period with the burden of sustaining the one-child policy falling almost exclusively on women\*’s reproductive organs. Some retreat! Nevertheless, as he documents, urban feminists have been the most consistent social organizers to this day, provoking endless backlashes and suppressions and yet popping up in continuously re-imagined forms.

*The Left in China* will not be news for specialists in contemporary China studies. Yet even someone like myself, relatively well informed and engaged in similar kinds of inquiries, can learn a lot. One certainly comes away with a cartographic sense of the lay of the leftist land in China. Naturally, things have changed some since the book was written and published, as the COVID-19 pandemic emergency was declared over after the brief “white paper movement” seemed to force the cessation of the arbitrary lockdown regime.

Do leftist social struggles in China play the same role as they have in Western Europe and the United States? That is, if we understand that whatever progressive policies and measures actually do exist in Europe and the US are the consequence of sustained struggles from below, then what is the relation between leftist social struggle and politics in China? Are these social struggles cumulative or just contingently additive? Ruckus doesn't have a clear answer to any of this, even while he does seem to assume that leftist social struggles play a role similar in China as they do in Euro-America, a premise about which I am considerably less convinced than he is. But pointing out the lack of a clear answer is not necessarily a fatal critique. For, just by raising such questions at this point, Ruckus has given us a map with enough places marked out for others to start their inquiries, should they so wish. The importance of taking on the systems in China and globally that produce stunning privatized wealth along with abject poverty, environmental degradation, patriarchal repression, international antagonisms and militarisms, as well as highly exploitative social relations, cannot be overstated. Ruckus should be congratulated for insisting on staging the conversation.

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## The Making of a Neo-Propaganda State: China's Social Media under Xi Jinping

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How has China's propaganda strategy evolved in the digital era when social media and internet technology challenge the state's monopoly on information? In his new book titled *The Making of a Neo-Propaganda State*, Titus Chen has provided a comprehensive review of the evolution of China's propaganda machine and a strong argument of how it embraced the digital era to enhance the party-state's ideological work: they utilize marketized channels to conduct propaganda works in a large and efficient manner.

Scholars have reviewed the marketization of China's media sector as a challenge to the state's ideological and propaganda works. Chen's book, however, notes that state propaganda machines can utilize the market system to enhance their authoritarian system and ideological control. Chapter two of the book correctly identifies the Chinese regime's challenge in the digital media era. The state media lost both control and influence in the early days of social media in China when user-generated content provided alternative information sources and narratives. However, the Xi Jinping regime quickly adapted to such challenges and adopted dramatic reforms to reshape the entire propaganda strategy of the party-state. Calling it the "Grand strategy for taming social media," chapters three and four demonstrate that China's state media is tasked with developing marketized operations to increase its presence on social media and produce content that fits popular consumption patterns. The creation of new regulatory agencies, together with censorship strategies, also motivates private social media companies, such as Tencent, to cooperate with the state in