
Between 1993 and 2005, the number of public protests in China increased by tenfold (10). In 2007, approximately 300 million people, or 23 percent of the population in China, were religious adherents (92). Such a breakneck pace of social change is the focus of this edited volume, which draws from papers presented at a conference held in 2006 at the Centre for Asia-Pacific Initiatives, University of Victoria. The volume’s central question is "[how] much have market reforms, and in particular, globalization, changed China in the social and political spheres?" (1). Eleven social scientists, trained in political science, sociology, history, law and allied fields, and affiliated with academic institutions in Canada, China, the US and the UK, contributed 11 theoretically grounded and empirically rich chapters on some of the most pressing problems in today's China.

In chapter 1, the editors Lansdowne and Wu frame the volume by providing an institutional explanation for social problems: the Chinese regime is more concerned with basing its legitimacy on the economic benefits from globalization—and by "[exploiting] both the capitalist economy and the communist ideology"—than with its ability to deal with problems brought about by globalization. Examining both official data and compiled data from the media, Chih-jou Jay Chen, author of the next chapter, shows that the primary sources of public protests are economic grievances involving labour disputes, forced demolition and land seizure. Over time, protests have become more frequent, involved more social groups, and exhibited violence on a larger scale, which to Chen hint at new social forces and state-society relations. In chapter 3, Xiaogang Wu analyzes the statistics provided in two national samples for 1996 and 2005 and concludes that migrants in the city are socially excluded because of the institutional barriers arising from the hukou system rather than from urban residents' reluctance to accept these migrants.

Focusing on solutions rather than the sources of problems, in chapter 4 Feng Xu argues that the Chinese government mixes techniques from both neoliberal and Chinese communist orientations to approach unemployment. The emergence of job training and counselling centres in Shanghai, for example, illustrates how the unemployed are perceived and the expectation to be an active job seeker rather than a dependent on the state. The retreat of the state, likewise, underpins Yanzhong
Huang’s chapter on China’s health-care reform, in which the author concludes that the reform failed because governing bodies at central and local levels as well as health-care units are all motivated to shirk their responsibilities, an approach he calls "buck-passing" polity.

Using Christianity as a case study, Carol Lee Hamrin shows in chapter 6 that the exponential growth of religious belief and practice in China is an outcome of budding civil rights movements as well as interactions with a world religious community. In chapter 7, Barrett McCormick examines the recent media stories of the television talent show "Super Voice Girls" and the weekly magazine Freezing Point. He argues that successes in commercial television and failures in newspapers signal a transformation from "domination"--using Gramsci’s concepts and terminologies--to "hegemony," i.e., a more open society operated on a consensual basis rather than the use of force.

Both chapters 8 and 9 are concerned with legal institutions. Keyuan Zou describes how the xinfang system, a traditional mechanism for Chinese citizens to air their grievances, has changed from a means of connection between the Chinese Communist Party and the masses to a means of control. Using a national sample and court cases data, Pierre F. Landry analyzes legal knowledge and court trustworthiness. He concludes that a gradual diffusion process of legal institutions is taking place, a precondition for the rule of law to eventually take root.

Chapter 10 compares India’s and China’s records in tackling corruption. Yan Sun demonstrates that India has not done better than China and argues that democracy alone, in the absence of significant economic development, is not a sufficient condition for controlling corruption. In the final, concluding chapter of the book, Guoguang Wu paints a pessimistic picture by contending that today’s China "actually has neither capitalist nor socialist merit, particularly in terms of managing social issues" (190).

This book makes significant contributions to all fields that analyze contemporary China by documenting several profound social changes and problems. It does not seek to be exhaustive: demographic and environmental tensions such as aging and pollution and other social issues such as trafficking in women are not included. Most contributors employ an institutional approach and examine the impact of various branches of the state, such as the hukou system, legal institutions and healthcare. At the same time, the book presents a considerable amount of evidence to suggest that powerful forces are engendering a more open, vocal and multifaceted society, as seen in particular in media and religious preferences. As an edited volume, contributors’ styles are highly consistent. Most chapters consist of rich information from published or survey sources that will prove useful to anyone interested in Chinese society and polity. From both scholarly and policy points of view, this is a timely and valuable book that will find a wide and multidisciplinary audience.

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