

yet coercive, creative yet stifling” (p. 154). His “rebellion” first took the form of minor infractions that were “always oriented toward the fulfilment of corporate objectives” (p. 155). After years of trying, though, he couldn’t endure working for Walmart any longer, and left while still retaining significant feelings of loyalty. Finally, Eileen M. Otis presents the story of her research assistant who took a job as a cashier and experienced the full brunt of Walmart’s “techno-despotism.”

A third section focuses on the curious unionization of Walmart in China. As Anita Chan documents once again, this “unionization” was a state-dominated affair that ultimately produced a form of organization that Walmart could control and with which it still lives happily ever after. Jonathan Unger, Diana Beaumont and Anita Chan show that “unionization” has improved neither wages nor working conditions. Finally, Katie Quan bemoans the unsurprising lack of popular mobilization against Walmart in China compared with the US.

What emerges from *Walmart in China* is a dystopian *aufhebung* of capitalism and state socialism. Like state socialism, Walmart is a monopsonist that produces serious economic distortions. It demands souls, not just obedience, and it deploys armies of cadres to achieve as much. Its core values feature abstinence and clean living. It legitimates itself as operating in the interests of the working class. It represents itself as the revolutionary creation of a venerated supreme leader. Yet like capitalism, it presses up against and, indeed, beyond the limits of its workers’ physical endurance. It fills all available space, and ruthlessly attacks its competition in pursuit of total domination. It spans the globe. It cannot be controlled. This may not be the transcendence that Hegel or Marx envisioned. But luckily, history isn’t yet done with us, or we with it.

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*China’s Crisis Management*

Edited by JAE HO CHUNG

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“China is a nation of risks,” Richard P. Suttmeier states at the start of his contribution to this edited collection: “Serious floods, deadly landslides, chemical spills, industrial accidents, drought and catastrophic earthquakes all point to China’s vulnerability to natural and human created hazards” (p.108). This is nothing new. In the next chapter, on the theme of natural disasters, Gang Chen points to a history of many centuries during which governments of former dynasties lived or died by the ability to respond to immense crises. The challenge has grown even greater since 1978, as rapid industrialization has placed enormous burdens on China’s natural environment.

There are two themes that weave their way through each of the contributions to this short book. One is the bureaucratic structures dealing with different kinds of crises, and how fit, or unfit, these might be. Crises like the severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) epidemic of 2003, as Hongyi Lai shows, highlight major problems in how provinces and the central government along with interlinking agencies try to deal with catastrophes. At that time, officials had very little guidance on how to deal with the disease within the legal framework provided to them (it wasn’t even classified

as a problem disease because of its newness). The authorities in Guangdong, where SARS first occurred, sat on the information they had till very late, and others simply covered things up. Leaders were demoted as a result of this, and the regulations have since changed. But the age-old battle between central and local powers, and the tensions between different levels of local authorities, infect crisis management today. Jae Ho Chung's excellent chapter on the management of political crises sketches out the complex network of security agents, bureaus and the different lines of accountability granted them. All of this underlines the fact that China's geographical vastness and its diversity militate against easy systemic approaches to crisis pre-emption and management. In the Hu–Wen era there have been many reforms and changes, particularly under the patronage of the dominant security czar over this period, Zhou Yongkang, who has striven for increased numbers of professionalized security and police personnel in order to address these issues. Even so, as the chaotic response to the extreme weather in 2008 makes clear, breakdowns can occur all too frequently and the bureaucratic structure is forever in need of fixing.

The second theme is the simple question of just how far China can really go in dealing with the needs for smooth information flows and good bureaucratic and non-state communication, when it has its current political structure. As Suttmeier states, “the successful modernization of China's crisis management system ultimately depends on changing the incentives of critical decision makers” and making them more transparent, collegiate and accountable: “whether this can be accomplished without fundamental changes in the information culture, and thus political practice, remains to be seen” (p. 125). Hongyi Lai partially supports this, stating that the “non democratic nature of the regime may undermine epidemic management” (p. 105). For Gang Chen, “if China wants to address natural disasters more efficiently, it has to improve the institutional environment for the vibrant growth of NGOs” (p. 145). Joining the dots, it is clear that when we talk of crisis response, and the various ways of preempting risk and then controlling it when things do get unsteady, we are usually also talking about political issues. The proclivity of the current system, despite the lessons that have evidently been learned over the last two decades and best evidenced in the very quick and unified response to the devastating Wenchuan earthquakes of 2008, is still for officials to be reluctant to collaborate, to share information, and to admit when things have gone wrong.

The most political issue of all is the treatment of potential unrest in the autonomous regions, and particularly Xinjiang and Tibet. Colin Mackerras covers this vexed subject well, showing the relatively static policy position of the leadership in Beijing, despite the huge shocks of the Tibet uprising in 2008 and the Xinjiang unrest in 2009. It is odd that he does not also refer to the Inner Mongolian riots in 2011, which, while less epic in scope, were perhaps even more unsettling because this has been one of the most assimilated of the major border regions, and the one where unrest has been least frequent. Mackerras shows that the central government's response, through their work conferences in 2010 on the Tibet and Xinjiang problem, has been part and parcel of a strategy since 1978 to allow economic development to continue, but to show zero tolerance to any sign of separatism. In this, they have largely been successful. Movements labelled separatist in Tibet and Xinjiang, at the moment at least, do not pose a direct challenge to the stability of the Communist Party's hold on power. This is particularly striking in view of the fact that the Beijing government has become increasingly hectoring in the promotion of its policy line abroad.

This is a useful collection, and there are some very valuable contributions, running from epidemics to environmental disasters, political and natural. A couple of chapters

could have done with better editing. Tuosheng Zhang's on military crisis management is written as though directly translated from the Chinese, with clumsy wording and a pervasive defensiveness that sits oddly with most of the rest of the book. Hongyi Lai's chapter on epidemics lists large parts of legislation and regulations almost direct from the Chinese sources, and might have benefited from more information on case studies. Nevertheless, this is a good survey of this critical area, one that is likely to become more pressing as the years go on. It is hard to see China avoiding a perfect storm of social, natural and environmental problems in the years ahead, and it is for this day that the organizations and entities described in this book are perpetually preparing.

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*Capitalism from Below: Markets and Institutional Change in China*

VICTOR NEE and SONJA OPPER

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Throughout his career, Victor Nee has been a leader in the analysis of China's economic reforms, and for the last decade his work with Sonja Opper has fed into this agenda. *Capitalism from Below* is a fabulous capstone to this body of work. It sets a standard for research in this field and will be essential reading for scholars of China's reforms for a generation to come.

In 1989, Victor Nee published "A theory of market transition: from redistribution to market in state socialism" in *American Sociological Review*. Only a decade into China's economic reforms, this study captured something of the country's transformation that would set off a firestorm of debate about how we should understand the transition from plan to market in the world's most populous nation. The study was controversial because of some claims that Nee made: that power was shifting from the political elite to market actors, or, to use the language of the debate, from hierarchy to market. Over the years, different studies produced many different results, fuelling a healthy debate that really began with Nee's early stake in the sand. Through it all, Nee and his co-authors maintained a faith in the power of unfettered markets, which sometimes made him sound to some a lot more like Jeffrey Sachs than might be expected from a sociologist. As a sidebar, it should be noted that Victor Nee has always been somewhat of a provocateur – to the sociologists he presents an economically oriented view of the world, extolling the power of markets, the invisible hand, and, yes, even some rational choice theory. Yet, to economists (and he is one of only a handful of sociologists who has published in the *American Economic Review*), he sounds a lot more like a sociologist, writing about new institutionalism (à la Meyer and Rowan) and the complex interplay between markets and social systems.

It is in this context that Nee and Opper have produced what might be considered a magnum opus, a bookend to this debate. But it is also much more than the previous papers that have defined Nee's market transition theory. Nee and Opper have written a book that is empirically rich but, more importantly, is also theoretically deep. As with much writing on China these days, the book begins with the puzzle of why China's transition to a market economy has been so successful. But the deeper question is much more fundamental: where do economic institutions come from; how do