

Purposeful or not, how did it happen? Education conceived as mere information transfer failed. Material incentives, doubly rationed by poverty and policy, were spent on subsidies – a *condicio sine qua non* of public health in poor rural areas. To this reviewer, adequate recognition must be given to the strategic use of social norms and the appropriation of its economies by the social planner. For example, the reliance upon pre-existing trust bonds, such as those between rural doctors and their village peers, to maximize the returns from scarce educational resources; or the recruitment of influential cured patients for campaign propaganda. Their advantage does not come from the relative cost of reputation-building vis-à-vis formal education, which might well be high, but from the fact that in most precapitalist, agrarian economies trust is abundant relative to technical information with development potential – which almost always comes from the outside. These are the sort of reflections this fine book will stimulate to readers interested in health and economic development – and the experience is strongly suggested.

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*The Internet, Social Media, and a Changing China*

Edited by JACQUES DELISLE, AVERY GOLDSTEIN and GUOBIN YANG

Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016

vi + 284 pp. \$49.95; £32.50

ISBN 978-0-8122-2351-4 doi:10.1017/S0305741016001326

The development of the internet and social media in China has received considerable scholarly attention, producing several important monographs and edited books. *The Internet, Social Media, and a Changing China*, edited by Jacques deLisle, Avery Goldstein and Guobin Yang, represents the latest contribution to the field. The volume consists of an introduction and ten chapters by authors from multiple disciplinary and methodological backgrounds. It serves as a solid foundation for understanding the relationship between the internet – social media in particular – and a transforming China.

The chapters are organized under three themes, namely the internet and civil society, law and the internet, and the internet and foreign relations. The first three chapters focus on the expansion of civil society and citizen engagement through the internet. Chapter one by Min Jiang identifies four types of online activities – real-time activism, political jamming, Weibo celebrities, and uncivil interactions – revealing the coevolution of civic activism and state control as well as the rise of uncivil interactions online. Chapter two by Marina Svensson examines connectivity and civic engagement in cyberspace. It argues that social media such as Weibo have enabled civic engagement in new forms like spectatorship, witnessing and sousveillance, which should not be dismissed as slacktivism or clicktivism. In the third chapter, Zengzhi Shi and Guobin Yang contend that public communication enabled by social media has contributed to “self-redemption” – individual citizens undertaking the moral responsibility to take action and make the change. Though engaging an “old” topic, the chapters on online civil society help nuance and deepen our understanding of digital empowerment in China.

The next three chapters examine the relationship between the internet and law. The chapter by Rogier Creemers explores the state’s attempt to maintain “privileged

speech” – speech as a privilege rather than a right, initially by extending traditional control to cyberspace, then through major institutional innovations and targeting media users. The next two chapters focus more on how the internet has facilitated legal activism online. Ya-Wen Lei and Daniel Xiaodan Zhou, analysing the South China tiger scandal case and the Asian Barometer Survey data, show that netizens have actively engaged with law and their experiences shape their perceptions of and trust in the government. The chapter argues that the state’s legalistic legitimation strategy may backfire because online interactions allow netizens to uncover problems in the legal system and the regime as a whole. Anne S. Y. Cheung also sees the internet as empowering, arguing that powerful legal narratives online have transformed state-dominated “public opinion supervision” into “public opinion monitoring” that is driven by the masses.

The remaining chapters look into the internet’s impact on Chinese foreign policy. Dalei Jie is sceptical. Through analysis of the public opinion mobilization and the state’s official stance on Japan’s 2005 UN Security Council bid, Jie argues that the connection is at best elusive. However, based on qualitative and quantitative analysis of the 2012–2013 Diaoyu/Senkaku Island dispute, Peter Gries, Derek Steiger and Wang Tao find that nationalist opinion is a powerful driver of China’s policy towards Japan. James Reilly confirms the power of the internet by showing that public pressure generated via social media has pushed the government to better protect Chinese citizens abroad. Yet the state’s responses are strategic, as it has taken the opportunity to shape public discourses and perceptions. In the last chapter, Chuanjie Zhang maps the connections between Weibo users’ political orientations and their views towards North Korea (DPRK). Through extensive analysis of Weibo messages, Zhang finds Rightists tend to be more critical towards North Korea than Leftists.

Chapters included in the volume not only add significantly to the literature, but also provide the foundation and momentum for future studies. In particular, the discussions of civil and uncivil society, diverse actors in legal activism, and the nationalist mobilization together highlight the necessity to examine and conceptualize the virtual “public” as a whole, as well as specific social groups online. To a large extent, the book suggests that one needs to disaggregate the internet, just as scholars have disaggregated the Chinese state. In addition, several chapters in the volume touch upon WeChat as the latest social media platform. But it is unclear whether WeChat marks the beginning of a new era of state–society interaction. Distinguishing and comparing different social media platforms not only helps us address the empirical question of whether the new technological development makes a difference, but also enables better “historical sensibility” to conceptualize and theorize the role of social media and how the internet has transformed (and is transforming) China.

In sum, this collection provides rich empirical, conceptual and methodological insights into the development of internet/social media and its implications for China in realms of politics, society, law and foreign relations. Readers from diverse backgrounds will find this book interesting and inspiring as the chapters – including those adopted the mixed methods approach – not only engage scholarly debates, but also include nuance analysis of real-life cases.

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