

China - A Serious Analysis at last

Sunday 7 July 2013, by [FIRMIN Pete](#) (Date first published: 1 May 2013).

Pete Firmin reviews *China's Rise: Strength and Fragility* by Au Loong Yu and others.

There are lots of books around about China, its economy and its political system, but very few from a serious socialist perspective, and even fewer by socialists from inside China. Au Loong Yu is based in Hong Kong and has a long history of involvement in the working class movement, and is on the editorial board of *China Labor Net*.

This comprehensive book not only analyses in depth the nature of the Chinese economy and its political system, but also the state of working class and peasant resistance to conditions in the country and looks at debate within the Chinese Left about the nature of the economy and prospects for socialism. It even examines the "Tibet question."

Yu's contention is that China is "bureaucratic capitalist", an argument I find it hard to disagree with. For him the turning point was Tiananmen Square in 1989 when the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) reacted by brutally suppressing the democracy movement (and Yu shows that the 1989 protests were far from simply a student movement, but had significant working class involvement). Over the next 20 years around 40 million state workers lost their jobs through privatisation and a new working class built up from 250 million workers with little knowledge of their rights. The household registration system also prevents rural workers from gaining roots in the towns. By law their stay in the towns is temporary. Rights at work have been considerably eroded. The book points out not only how the ruling elite have formed from the upper ranks of the CCP, but also how the lower levels of the Party overlap considerably with the firms which are the face of Chinese capitalism.

There is resistance, described in some detail, including lengthy strikes, workplace occupations and struggles against the union machinery. But this comes with the rider that this resistance is often very localised (even to single workplaces) and late in the day with workers finding out late in the process that their workplace is being sold off, for instance. State repression and the fact that the CCP and All China Federation of Trade Unions are very much part of this bureaucratic structure also hinder the growth of opposition. The authors are in no doubt about the scale of the task ahead if Chinese workers are to mount a serious challenge to the system. Reportage of working class struggle in China can be followed on China Labor Net [[1](#)]

A review is too short to deal properly with all the issues raised in this book, there are substantial sections on how Maoism contained the seeds of present-day China, on nationalism, globalisation and neo-liberalism (and the debates around them in China) xenophobia in relation to Tibet. Well worth a read, and challenging for those who still hold to the view that China is some kind of socialist state.

Pete Firmin

* *China's Rise: Strength and Fragility*, Resistance Books, Merlin Press, 320 pages

P.S.

* Labour Briefing, May 2013, page 30: <http://titlestand.com/ebook/ebook?id=10026559&ts=1#/0>

Footnotes

[1] <http://www.worldlabour.org/eng/>