

Beijing attacks 'new left' magazine

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Since Beijing's push to speed-up privatisation in the mid-1990s, left-leaning intellectuals in China have increasingly made use of *Dushu* (Readings), a monthly discussion magazine, as a platform to challenge this policy direction and Beijing's overall pro-capitalist agenda. They highlighted the horrific social consequences of Beijing's course and have generated waves of debates on the way forward for China.

Presiding over and encouraging this process were two *Dushu* executive editors, Wang Hui and Huang Ping, who took up their positions in 1996. But in July this year, the magazine's publisher — the state-owned Joint Publisher Co. Ltd — sacked the pair. The move was preceded by a series of attacks on the editors in other official mass media. Their alleged shortcomings ranged from being biased (read: too pro-“new left”), to having allowed the magazine to become “hard to read” (not popular enough). They were also blamed for the magazine's allegedly declining circulation.

In an interview in a July edition of the *Southern Metropolis Weekly*, however, Wang Hui said *Dushu's* circulation has hovered around 100,000 during the last 11 years, marking a peak in circulation in the magazine's 28-year history.

A further official reason for the sackings was that Wang and Huang were editing part-time, and full-time editors had become necessary. Wang, 48, is teaching at Beijing's Qsinghua University and Huang, 49, is an honorary professor at Sichuan University.

Critics of the sackings have expressed their anger on the internet, arguing that this move was intended to muffle the voice of those who oppose Beijing's pro-capitalist policies. There has been considerable coverage in the mainstream media of the decision and its implications.

Addressing a July 22 public forum in Beijing on the sackings, Beijing University academic Qian Liqun likened *Dushu* to “an unofficial magazine within the official system” and said it had now become “a through-and-through bureaucrats-controlled organ firmly within the official system”. He said the main goal of the sackings was to end the unofficial character of the magazine and to limit the space for freedom of thought.

The fact that *Dushu*, despite being state-owned, was able to continuously push new boundaries during the last decade was itself a remarkable achievement in China. The sackings may be a clampdown linked to a realignment of power on the eve of the Communist Party's 17th Congress in October.

As China's privatisation escalated in the mid-1990s, an increasing number of neoliberal economists and intellectuals surfaced and actively sought to legitimise this process. Their more pro-socialist counterparts fought back, resulting in a series of debates following each new pro-capitalist policy offensive by Beijing.

The first such debate erupted in 1997, with Wang Hui a key participant. Since then, Wang has been seen as a member of the “new left” — shorthand for a loose tendency of opponents to Beijing's pro-capitalist policies. Wang endorsed neither the classification for the tendency nor his alleged

membership.

The neoliberal intellectuals who have dominated China's intellectual arena in the last decade have launched many offensives against *Dushu*. A prominent example was in 2001 after the magazine published a study by a China-born, US-based scholar on the views of peasants in his home village on the Cultural Revolution.

The peasants expressed some positive views of the period, running against Beijing's negative verdict of it in the post-Mao period. Through a series of articles in other official media, the neoliberals accused *Dushu* of seeking to reverse the official verdict on the Cultural Revolution. *Dushu* management subsequently instructed the editors to stay clear of the subject.

Under Wang and Huang's editorship, *Dushu* ventured into a broad and bold range of subjects rarely seen in magazines in China. For example, in the late 1990s it forced the issue of the country's multi-faceted rural crisis, a direct result of Beijing's pro-capitalist push, onto the national agenda. It also reported on the shambles of the country's health and education systems. The magazine discussed post-Soviet Russia, political developments in Asia and the environmental crisis.

Many commentators who came into the defence of *Dushu* highlighted the thought-provoking nature of the magazine's coverage, saying it contributed to the "renaissance of the mind" of a few generations of Chinese in this highly confusing but tumultuous period for the country.

P.S.

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