

**Ralf Ruckus: *The Communist Road to Capitalism. How Social Unrest and Containment Have Pushed China's (R)evolution since 1949* (Oakland: PM Press, 2021); extract from the introduction, page 14–18:**

The core argument of this book is that discontent, unrest, and struggles of the exploited, repressed, and discriminated against occurred throughout the continuous CCP rule. It contends that important ruptures were produced by repeated sequences of proletarian or peasant unrest and by the regime's subsequent containment efforts and its attempts to implement structural reforms. These ruptures eventually led to profound changes in the forms of exploitation, repression, and discrimination—but they did not end CCP rule.

Unrest as the consequence of different interests and repeated conflicts between rulers and oppressed even constituted the motor of the PRC's historical development. Over the past seventy years, the ruling class represented by the CCP leadership has had an interest in improving the efficiency of the economic and political system. Its main aims were to tighten and secure its rule domestically and to improve the country's status and standing globally. In every decade since 1949, the exploitative and repressive character of the political and economic systems and the undertakings to instigate development and improve efficiency triggered mass upheavals, strikes, demonstrations, and other forms of social unrest by different class actors, including peasants, workers, women\*, migrants, or students. Social unrest has taken different shapes, from relatively short movements or events, such as the Tian'anmen Square Movement in 1989, to whole cycles of struggles like the movements for democracy in the second half of the 1970s or the waves of migrant worker strikes in the second half of the 2000s. The CCP regime took immediate or delayed measures of containment to stop the unrest, foster its own legitimacy, and stabilize its rule. These measures included repression, concession, and co-optation, used with different intensity and in different combinations, sometimes officially declared and visible, at other times concealed. Some measures were used frequently (especially repression), others rather sporadically, rarely, or partially (such as concession and co-optation).

Unrest and containment led to or constituted ruptures, i.e., historical turning points, that marked the beginning of new phases in which the ruling class repeatedly introduced reforms. These reforms included more intense collectivization efforts and the increased mobilization of the labor force, the restructuring of industries and the adaptation of economic institutions to develop productive capacities and increase efficiency, and the transformation of state structures. Most reforms turned out to be mere "fixes," as they only succeeded "in rescheduling crises in time and space" and provided no "long-term and stable" solutions. While some reforms in PRC history indeed led to

substantial political and economic changes, for instance, the Great Leap Forward (1958–1961) or the Reform and Opening after 1978, sooner or later, they produced new economic crises and eventually new social unrest by the same or other social actors. The course of domestic events and the timing, extent, and form of social unrest against the effects of containment and reform were also shaped by leadership conflicts, including factional strife, often expressed as ideological disagreement and based on personal interest.

These conflicts played a major role before or after every turning point, i.e., at the end of the buildup and beginning of socialism between the mid-1950s and early 1960s, before and after the transition and reforms started in the mid-1970s, and during the transition period and the beginning of the capitalist period between the late 1980s and the mid-1990s.

Global factors and developments also shaped the patterned development in the PRC—among them changes in the socialist world, such as de-Stalinization in the mid-1950s, social upheavals in Hungary 1956 and Poland in 1980, and wars in Korea in the early 1950s and Vietnam in the 1960s and 1970s. The socialist buildup in the PRC corresponded with the decolonization and establishment of socialist regimes in other countries of the Global South where popular mobilizations and guerilla wars had ousted colonial occupants. The Cultural Revolution coincided roughly with the youth and workers' movements in many countries in the late 1960s. The reforms and transition in the PRC in the 1980s prefigured glasnost and perestroika in the Soviet Union, and the Tian'anmen Square Movement in 1989 was a kind of forerunner of the uprisings in the socialist bloc in Eastern Europe soon after.

In the PRC, the patterns of social unrest and regime measures of containment and reform occurred repeatedly over the course of the past seventy years. They formed historical cycles that eventually led to systemic ruptures. To visualize patterns, cycles, and ruptures, this book uses a specific narrative matrix.

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This book uses a historiographical or narrative matrix as a descriptive tool that gives an overview of PRC history. The matrix took shape during the work on this book and is a visualization of the historical cycles of social struggles and regime countermeasures in the PRC. Yet the first aspect of PRC history shown in the matrix is the continuity of central social, economic, and political factors—CCP rule, the authoritarian state, surplus extraction, labor hierarchy, the rural/urban divide, the migration regime, and the patriarchal order (see Table 3, first column). At the center is the sequence of historical ruptures (or discontinuities) that form the base for the periodization of PRC history, i.e., the distinction of four periods that this book calls transition to socialism, socialism, transition to capitalism, and capitalism (second column). The last three periods—socialism,

transition to capitalism, and capitalism—each included two cycles of the above described pattern, i.e., a phase of social unrest that challenged CCP rule followed by regime countermeasures or reactions of the party to deal with the challenge (third and fourth columns).

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Continuities with gradual changes	Ruptures → periods	Pattern/cycles = <i>unrest</i> → containment/reform	Description
CCP rule + authoritarian state + surplus extraction + labor hierarchy + rural/urban divide + migration regime + patriarchal order	transition	1949–1956: buildup	New class divisions, Maoist patriarchy, and a garrison state
	socialism	1956–1957: <i>disruption</i>	<i>Strikes and open criticism</i>
		1958–1965: speedup	Great Leap and purges
		1966–1967: <i>rebellion</i>	<i>Cultural Revolution and radical critique</i>
		1968–1976: restoration	Military rule and factionalism
	transition	1974–1980: <i>discontent</i>	<i>Social struggles and the democracy movement</i>
		1976–1989: reform	Conversion and crisis
		1986–1989: <i>uprising</i>	<i>The Tian'anmen Square Movement</i>
	capitalism	1989–1999: resumption	Crackdown, restructuring, and economic rise
		1993–2005: <i>resistance</i>	<i>Peasant revolts and SOE workers' unrest</i>
		2000–2010: consolidation	Harmonious Society, boom, and crisis
		2003–2012: <i>strikes</i>	<i>Migrant struggles and the end of "cheap" labor</i>
		2012–2020: expansion	The New Normal and the leap outward

Table 3: narrative matrix of the PRC's past seventy years