

Are we on the brink of war then? Jean-Pierre Cabestan adopts the most reasonable position, which is that “war is likely not imminent but the risks of incidents and military crises (...) have significantly increased” (p. 262). In fact, from a rational point of view, one that is supported by the many arguments developed in the book, the cost of war would seem to outweigh its benefits for China, the United States, and the other players. However, the multiplication of the fronts opened up by China in its neighbourhood and the increase in conflict in the region mean that the hypothesis of a non-desired war cannot be excluded.

Jean-Pierre Cabestan thus considers a “new asymmetrical bipolarity” (p. 272) in favour of the United States for many years to come. As he points out, Raymond Aron’s well-known phrase, despite being pronounced at the dawn of the Cold War, is still relevant today: “peace impossible, war unlikely” (1948).

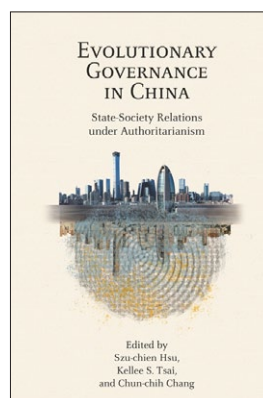
Beyond the question asked in the title, to which only the future holds the answer, this essay gives an excellent account of the major questions of our time and of the terms of the strategic equation being played out in these early years of the 2020s. In addition, it provides an excellent handbook to students, researchers, and decision-makers seeking to understand, in a comprehensive and detailed manner, China’s rise and the areas of crisis that might one day erupt into conflict.

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HSU, Szu-chien, Kellee S. TSAI, and Chun-chih CHANG (eds.). 2021. *Evolutionary Governance in China: State-society Relations under Authoritarianism*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press

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In the book *Evolutionary Governance in China: State-society Relations under Authoritarianism*, the authors address the question of the sources of authoritarian resilience in China by examining the (co-)evolutionary state-society relations. This evolutionary framework holds that interactions between the state and societal actors are dynamic rather than static – they change over time, vary across issue areas, and shift with the strategies taken. Although there have been works recognising the dynamism of state-society interactions in China (Zhang and Barr 2013; Qiaoan 2020), this volume offers the most systematic analysis of the topic.

As Kellee S. Tsai’s introduction incisively points out, the existing scholarship on state-society relations in contemporary China has recently extended into an “authoritarian with adjectives” literature (p. 5). Although this research agenda has produced fruitful research results that offer valuable insight into the nature of governance in China, the discrepancies indicate the lack of a more integrated typology in the literature. Instead of providing another ostensibly conclusive conceptual term on state-society relations, this volume synthesises various observations into a broader framework that yields a stylised 2x2 typology of dyadic interactions: hard state/hard society, hard state/soft society, soft state/hard society, and soft state/soft society (p. 21).

In Chapter Two, Szu-chien Hsu and Chun-chih Chang employ a quantitative case survey to investigate state-society interactions. This method is refreshing in a study field dominated by a qualitative approach. Hsu and Chang coded 125 cases of state-society interactions published from 2005 to 2015 in leading social science journals focusing on China, according to issue areas, state strategies, societal strategies, and political outcomes. They identified a pattern in the regime’s pursuit of authoritarian resilience, namely that while repressive strategies enable the state to maintain political power, softer strategies help the state enhance its quality of governance. The rest of the book shows how this tension is baked into each case.

The 11 empirical chapters that follow are divided into four parts based on their issue areas: community governance, environmental and public health governance, economic and labour governance, and social and religious governance. In Chapter Three, Yousun Chung focuses on the private property rights issue. Through longitudinal

fieldwork conducted in Beijing, Chung traces the evolutionary process through which homeowners have influenced legislation and concludes that soft/soft interaction is the dominant model in this case. Similarly, Szu-chien Hsu and Muyi Chou also identify a soft/soft interaction in community governance (Chapter Four). However, Hsu and Chou specify that this model of state-society cooperation occurs only within limited administrative, spatial, or issue boundaries, thus naming it "cellularized civil society." In Chapter Five, Yi-chun Tao analyses rural land requisitioning, a more "sensitive" issue in community governance. Tracing the process of a 10-year-long movement in Guangdong, he identifies different stages and explains how an initially weak contention turned into a strong one and was finally suppressed by the state.

The shifting pattern in governance is also observed in environmental and public health governance. In Chapter Six, Chanhsi Wang shows how from 1995 to 2011, AIDS governance went through three phases, starting with a strong state/weak society interaction, shifting into a weak state/strong society interaction, and then returning to a strong state/weak society model. The next chapter on anti-incinerator campaigns in Beijing and Guangzhou also highlights different phases in one area of governance. The authors claim that when initial contention is replaced by cooperation, the state and society are more likely to reach effective interaction that leads to better governance.

When it comes to the economic and labour section, the three chapters all point to the fragmented nature of the state. Through investigating the implementation of China's Labour Contract Law in the Pearl River Delta, Chih-peng Cheng analyses how the central/local division of the Chinese state makes the local government the target of protest and the central government the arbiter, which consequently contributes to regime resilience and stability (Chapter Eight). Chapter Nine and Ten on governing foreign capitalists and enhanced labour legislation also confirm this pattern of fragmentation.

While the above three chapters focus on the non-monolithic state, Chapter Eleven centres on the diversity in society. Tracing campaign against domestic violence in China since 1988, Weiting Wu notices that three social organisations at different stages of their development chose three strategies and ended up with different degrees of autonomy and empowerment. Finally, the last two chapters in the social and religious governance section make a good comparative reading of the state's treatment of indigenous and foreign religions: while the state and society have reached mutually beneficial outcomes in terms of the cultural legitimisation of Mazu belief (Chapter Twelve), the fate of Christianity, as an "undesirable" religion in the eyes of the government, has been very different (Chapter Thirteen).

The illuminating epilogue by Elizabeth Perry shifts our attention to the Chinese Communist Party (CCP)'s revolutionary tradition reflected in its "mass campaign" against Covid-19. Such campaign-style governance – extremely effective but falling short on sustainability – has occurred many times in the history of the People's Republic of China (PRC); for example, the 1952 Patriotic Health Campaign (when five million Chinese were inoculated with anti-plague vaccines in two weeks), the One-child Policy in the 1980s and 1990s, and the more recent Anti-corruption

and Precision Poverty Alleviation (p. 391). By reflecting on the revolutionary tradition in China's Covid-19 governance, Perry reminds us that despite the adaptability and flexibility of the CCP's governance since the reform era, we should caution against seeing the PRC as having advanced into a new type of authoritarianism that is decidedly different from its Leninist Party-state origin. Perry points out that the hard and soft strategies of the Chinese state and society resemble the cycle of *fangshou* (放收 release and tighten) performed back in the Mao Era (p. 393).

Evolutionary Governance in China adopts a refreshing new angle to investigate state-society relations under authoritarianism. Nevertheless, just as the editors have acknowledged, any summary of Chinese state-society is shooting a "moving target" (p. xii). Two years into the pandemic, some early statements on China's public health governance in this book, such as claiming that Covid-19 has "eroded the CCP's legitimacy under Xi" (p. 193), need to be reconsidered. Instead, as Perry has reassessed in the epilogue, the initial "Chernobyl moment" might even "contribute to regime legitimacy" (p. 388). On another note, it would have been interesting to see case studies on how this book's framework applies to the border regions or non-Han communities. For instance, can we draw the same conclusion regarding governance in Hong Kong and Xinjiang?

All that being said, this book makes an undeniable contribution to the debate on state-society relations in China. The eloquently written introduction and epilogue, the elegantly designed book structure, and the detailed case studies make the book excellent reading for scholars and students in the fields of China studies and political science.

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