



**THE RISE OF CHINA, IN THEORY:
PEASANTS, URBAN-RURAL RELATIONS,
AND THE INTERNATIONALIZATION OF THE STATE¹**

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Abstract

Analysts of world politics routinely ask what a 'rising' China will want and what it will do. In this paper, we ask a different question: what is China? In dominant accounts of China's rise, adopting a Weberian model of the state and methodological nation-statism in analysis, the answer to this question is theoretically over-determined: China is either a rising power, a strong state, or it is weak and fragmenting. Against Weberian perspectives, we make two moves which together produce a different constitutive account of China's rise and what it means. First, we adopt an historical materialist conception of the state, drawn from internationalization of the state theory. Second, we focus empirically on the Chinese peasantry which, despite its centrality to Chinese economic development, is usually either marginal or invisible in analysis of China's rise. Such an account is both conceptually superior to Weberian accounts by integrating analysis across scales, escaping the territorial trap, and also empirically richer in being able to account for more of the available evidence of China's rise, its dynamics and implications. Specifically, it enables us to produce an integrated account of rural and urban developments, as together constitutive of the internationalization of the Chinese state.

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Introduction

In contemporary analysis of world politics scholars routinely ask themselves what a 'rising' China will want and what it will do (e.g., Legro, 2007; Ross and Feng, 2008). In this paper, by contrast, we ask a different question: what is China? In dominant accounts of China's rise, adopting a Weberian model of the state and methodological nation-statism in analysis, the answer to this question is theoretically over-determined: China is either a rising power, a strong state (e.g., Christensen, 2015), or it is weak and fragmenting (e.g., Hameiri and Jones, 2016). These assumptions powerfully shape how China is perceived and reinforce a conception of the international as comprised of sovereign territorial states. Within such accounts the over-riding emphasis is on the state itself, on how it is enabled or constrained by on-going engagement with the capitalist world economy, and how it seeks to shape society. Against these Weberian-defined perspectives, we make two moves which together produce a different, constitutive account of China's rise and what it means. First, we adopt a historical materialist conception of the state, in particular of the internationalization of the state (e.g., Panitch, 1996). This enables us to reconceive the state not as an institution or an actor but rather as a social relation. It also enables us to escape the territorial trap in analysis (Agnew, 1994). Second, we focus our analysis empirically on the Chinese peasantry², a subject usually either marginal or invisible in relation to China's rise despite its crucial significance to China's economic development. Here, as elsewhere, International Relations (IR) scholarship – and social science more broadly – reveals its' continuing commitment to a modernization narrative in understanding processes of global social change. Together these moves make possible a novel analysis of what China is that stands in sharp contrast to existing accounts of China and its rise, including nominally Marxist ones in which the peasantry is also often invisible (e.g., Stephen, 2014). Such an account, we argue, is both conceptually superior to Weberian accounts in being able to integrate analysis across scales, and also empirically richer in being able to account for more of the available evidence of China's rise, its dynamics and implications. Specifically, it enables us to give an account of the centrality of the peasantry and urban-rural relations in China's rise which, in contrast to Weberian accounts of China as either a strong state or a fragmented one, we reinterpret as the internationalization of the Chinese state.

Alexander Wendt (1998: 105) argues that constitutive analysis aims 'to account for the properties of things by reference to the structures by virtue of which they exist'. Phrased

² For a useful discussion of the concept of the peasant, see Watts, 2009. For Chinese discussion of the peasantry, especially in policy circles, see, e.g., Hayward, 2012 and Day, 2013.

differently, constitutive analyses ask how-possible questions. In this paper we ask how it was possible for China to undergo the diverse social and spatial transformations most commonly framed as 'China's rise'. In contrast to most analyses, ours focuses mainly on rural transformations. Partly this is because a substantial literature exists already on China's urban transformations, but more importantly because of the central role of the peasantry and urban-rural relations in China's post-1978 reengagement with the world market. Allan Pred and Michael Watts observe that "how things develop depends in part on *where* they develop, on what has been historically sedimented there, on the social and spatial structures that are already in place" (1992:11). It is widely acknowledged that the peasantry is the key source of accumulation for China's industrial development; this is true both before and after 'reform and opening' (e.g., Riskin, 1987; Hart-Landsberg and Burkett, 2006). What made China's rise possible was the reconfiguration of China's agrarian relations – including the reorganization of land and production, the subjection of the rural population to market forces, and the promotion of their spatial mobility so as to produce a free labour market on a vast scale. This amounted to nothing less than the deterritorialization and reterritorialization of the Chinese state; that is, its internationalization in our terms. It is precisely through the reworking of urban-rural relations that the Chinese state is transformed into a component within the capitalist world economy and, accordingly, these transformations are central to our analysis. It is also for this reason that we adopt a perspective that explicitly integrates both urban and rural spaces into the analysis, through an empirical focus on the Chinese peasantry and its shifting places in China's political economy.

The paper is organised as follows. In the next section we sketch the Weberian conception of the state which dominates analysis of 'China's rise', identify its implications for analysis, and then develop an alternative based on internationalization of the state theory. The remainder of the paper then cashes out this alternative in the form of an analytic narrative which foregrounds the integral role of the peasantry and urban-rural relations in the constitution of contemporary China. We begin, in section two, with a re-construction of the world historical context of China's rise, in particular the production of an expanded global proletariat through international processes of rural reform. In section three we show how China's 'opening' to the world economy implicated and impacted on the Chinese peasantry and on urban-rural relations. Section four then traces the discursive struggles around these transformations, as prevailing accounts of China's modernization and development were reworked in the service of internationalization and capitalist restoration. Finally, section five brings these transformations up to date with analysis of the current state project of urban-rural integration. In conclusion we draw out the wider implications of our argument.

I. Rising China in Theory

Since 1978 successive Chinese governments have renegotiated its relation to the capitalist world economy, resulting in what is frequently referred to as 'China's rise'. China's engagement with globalization through 'reform and opening' is typically conceptualised as increased foreign trade and investment, engagement with international institutions, and the adoption of international norms. It has produced high rates of growth, rapid industrialization and an increasing share of world trade, transforming China into what is now recognised as the world's second largest economy. Much contemporary analysis of this phenomenon in the academic study of China, particularly in the field of IR, and also in China Studies, takes for granted a set of categories derived from Max Weber's theory of the state. For Weber, "a compulsory political organization with continuous operations will be called a 'state' insofar as its administrative staff successfully upholds the claim to the monopoly of legitimate use of force in the enforcement of its order" ([1925] 1978: 54). The state is conceived – often unreflectively and without explicit consideration – as a set of institutions, separate from society, contained within a bounded sovereign territory over which it governs, and treated as if it were a conscious collective agent or actor. The interests of the state and the society it (nominally) represents may or may not coincide. Where they do not, the relationship is antagonistic, and society must struggle against the state in order to achieve greater political autonomy.

Global market forces are likewise conceived of as external to the state.³ Discussions of the Weberian state and its relationship to globalization originally emerged in the 1970s, around arguments that the state was being overwhelmed by global capital, which had 'escaped' the clutches of the state. Such arguments claimed that states were being rendered irrelevant by the growing power of transnational corporations, which were becoming the primary agents on the international stage (e.g., Ohmae, 1995). This position was rapidly challenged by a new conceptualization – in fact, a reassertion – of the Weberian model formulated in terms of *strong* or *weak* states (e.g., Evans, 1997). Strong states – defined through a combination of institutional capacity and independence from both domestic and international society – are

³ In Weberian analyses, capitalism itself is often left undefined, and so naturalised, or is equated with a specific set of institutions such as the market, trade and their globalization (Hung, 2016). The upshot is to see the state as in principle separate and distinct from capitalism rather than, as in historical materialist analyses, as a capitalist state (see, e.g., Panitch, 2002; cf. Benjamin and Duvall, 1985). This in turn enables analysis in terms of 'varieties of capitalism', defined as different inter-institutional configurations between the state and the market. For a useful overview and critique, see Coates, 2000.

able to adapt to the needs of the global environment, shape their own domestic policies without external interference, and protect their interests on the world stage. Weak states, on the other hand, while operating on the same principles, are vulnerable to external pressure and exploitative conditions imposed by other states or international bodies. This theory further developed such that strong states were able not only to adopt protectionist measures to resist destructive tendencies of globalization, but they were also able to *reshape* themselves to harness these forces to their own ends (e.g., Hirst and Thompson 1999). Linda Weiss (1997: 18) argued that a state's capacity to act autonomously and separately from society facilitated this process. It was thus via the conceptual separation of the state from both society and global forces that Weiss depicted the state as growing in importance in the context of intensifying globalization. Subsequently, emphasis has shifted from the state's transcendence by global market forces to analysis of its (self-)transformation but for most scholars without challenging the basic elements of the Weberian model itself.

China, unsurprisingly, is frequently portrayed as the archetypal strong state (but cf. Breslin, 2005). Indeed, the language of 'reform and opening' itself arguably plays into this Weberian conception, portraying the Chinese state as an agent able to control and regulate access to the international system outside it (cf. Agnew, 1994). This theoretical framework, which takes for granted what the state is, dominates current discussions and analyses in the China field, including realist models of geopolitical conflict between China and the U.S. (e.g., Mearsheimer, 2001), liberal models of interdependence (e.g., Ikenberry, 2008) and constructivist models of China's integration into the international system (e.g., Johnston, 2008). Discussions typically hinge on the nature of the state's conceptual boundaries – for example, whether the impetus for change comes primarily from inside or outside the country (e.g., Zweig, 2002), and how much the state (that is, state bureaucrats) chooses to expose its internal economy to global market forces (e.g., Lardy, 2002; Guthrie, 2012). Also significant is the stress laid on the relative weight of the state in the economy: in contrast to typical Anglo-American states, the Chinese state controls a significantly larger share of economic activity, leading scholars influenced by Weberian models to analyse China as a new hybrid combination of capitalism and bureaucracy, as 'state-managed capitalism' (Hameiri and Jones, 2015: 11), or a 'state-permeated economy' (e.g., Nolke et al., 2015: 538). The institutional fetishism of Weberian models is here in evidence and linked to claims about the relative power of the Chinese state to intervene in or otherwise shape the Chinese economy. This explicitly *dirigiste* conception of the Chinese state, focused on its institutions within a

bounded territory⁴, reinforces methodological nation-stateism in analysis, making it appear that 'domestic' spaces are ontologically distinct from international ones.

Within this institutional framework, however, scholars – particularly in China Studies – have also struggled to grasp the elusive nature of state-society relations in China (e.g., Shue, 2008), as well as the coherence of the state itself. Following political decentralization and the rising autonomy of localities such as regions, provinces and cities, the Chinese state appears either too complex to grasp in its entirety (e.g., Perry, 1994), or key political actors are operating independently of the central state bureaucracies, without any unified logic (e.g., Andrews-Speed, 2010: 22). Overall, the state is seen as incoherent, contested or possibly fragmenting. This stands in stark contrast to portrayals of China either as a rising power or as a novel kind of developmental state promoting a model alternative to the Washington Consensus (e.g., McNally 2012; cf. Hung 2016). These dynamics – of simultaneous economic integration and institutional fragmentation – are not restricted to China but are evident across the globe, reflecting in part the widespread adoption of a 'regulatory model' of the state (Majone 1994; cf. Brenner, 2004) in which central government increasingly withdraws from day-to-day oversight of society in favour of establishing a broad regulatory framework for diverse public and private actors. However, in China they are seen to have taken a particularly stark form as a result of the sheer size and diversity of the country as well as the intersections of multiple, rapid and often contradictory 'reform and opening' processes with the social networks that comprise Chinese society and the Party-state. For all these reasons, then, scholars influenced by Weberian assumptions have increasingly argued that the Chinese state needs to be separated into its constituent parts – a messy array of local, regional and national groups, bureaucracies, institutions, and processes – before meaningful analysis can take place (e.g., Hameiri and Jones, 2016).

This view of the Chinese state is also linked to the widespread tendency to view the effects of globalization and economic growth in national-level analyses as overwhelmingly urban (e.g., Smith 2000). Images of China's booming cities, routinely used to illustrate China's economic development and global prominence, reinforce this perspective, as does also the national and local states' aggressive pursuit of urbanization policies. This tendency to substitute cities for the whole of China is in turn shaped by, and replicates, teleological conceptions of modernization, development and historical progress in which backward peasant societies are transformed into urban civilizations (Escobar, 1995; Watts, 2009). In this sense, urbanization

⁴ McNally, 2012 is a partial exception. See also Callahan 2004 on 'greater China' and transnational relations.

and the transformation of rural peasants into urban workers is synonymous with development and understood as integral to China's rise.⁵ The countryside, until recently the locus of the majority of China's population, is conceived of as outside global modernity— and in these analyses, almost entirely excised from view (e.g., Naughton, 1996: 6, 52) – an invisible receptacle, off-stage, spewing out migrant workers which, driven by the simple logic of supply and demand, magically appear in the cities as if from nowhere. Here too there is evident a distinctly Weberian genealogy, in respect both of how modernity is conceived and the place of global peasantries within it (Zimmerman, 2006; see also 2010).

In contrast, we propose a different interpretation of the Chinese state and its transformations.⁶ While not seeking to dismiss Weberian accounts as simply wrong, we argue that a historical materialist perspective provides a more comprehensive and persuasive account of the processes at the heart of 'China's rise.' Over the past four decades, a well-established body of scholarship has emerged, located primarily in the fields of International Political Economy, Political Geography and Historical Sociology, organised around the concept of the internationalization of the state.⁷ This perspective views the state, made up of an ensemble of institutions, not as an autonomous agent, but as a structure – or social relation – which mediates, or structures, the ways that social forces relate to one another (e.g., Jessop 2016, chap. 3). The state is thus articulated to the various social forces which constitute society – in particular, class forces. The state operates as a site of contestation where these conflicting social forces compete, at the same time mediating and structuring their interactions, and is in turn restructured and reshaped as these contestations play out over time. The state has no power itself, therefore – it has only the power of the forces acting in and through the institutions of which it consists (Jessop 2002: 196; see also 2008). The form of the state is historically specific and spatially differentiated – that is, the institutional ensemble of which it consists is a product of previous rounds of political struggle regarding the state form and its institutional functions and capacities. These ongoing social struggles mould the state's changing modes of economic intervention, accumulation strategies, and hegemonic projects. The state as

⁵ Cf. Watts, 2009 and van der Ploeg, 2012 on the persistence of the peasantry as a constitutive element within modernity and the contemporary production of new peasantries in the context of globalization.

⁶ This is not to discount or ignore studies which analyse transformations in the countryside (e.g., Zweig 1991), on which we draw extensively. Rather, our analysis aims to relocate such work within an integrated account of rural and urban developments, as together constitutive of the internationalization of the Chinese state.

⁷ For influential statements, applications and overviews, see e.g., Murray, 1971, Poulantzas, 1975; Cox, 1981, 1987; Panitch, 1996; Robinson, 1996; Brenner, 1997, 1999; Glassman, 1999, 2004; and Aronowitz and Bratsis, 2002. See also Wissen and Brand's (2011) introduction to the special issue of *Antipode*. For applications to China see, e.g., Ling, 1996; Gonzalez-Vicente, 2011; Tubilewicz and Jayasuriya, 2015; and Hayward, 2018.

social relation thus can be analysed as, at once, “the site, the generator, and the product” of political strategies enacted by these social forces (Jessop 2007: 15, 35).

As such, the presumed boundary between state and society which must be assumed in Weberian models is rejected in favour of a model that sees social forces, and hence contradictions in an historical materialist sense, as internal to – or inscribed within – the institutions of the state. Moreover, against views which counter-pose the state and globalization, once the forces aligned with international capital achieve dominance within state institutions, then “globalization is authored by states and is primarily about reorganizing rather than bypassing them” (Panitch 1996: 85). That is, a state which is internationalizing is restructured in such a way as to facilitate processes of global capital accumulation. This includes, among other things, regulating finance and taxation, determining property rights and producing a land market, producing a mobile proletariat, and inculcating an ideology conducive to maintaining a stable, compliant population as these social transformations take place (Murray 1971: 88-92).

State strategies of hegemony and accumulation are enacted not just socially, but also spatially in what, according to Neil Brenner (1999: 432), “must be viewed as an intrinsic moment of the current round of globalisation”. Over time, such strategies reproduce the state as an uneven, overlapping, internally differentiated and hierarchically ordered set of spaces (e.g., Brenner, et al., 2003). Typical strategies in this respect involve both “rescaling”, and “reterritorialization” (Brenner 2004; Jessop 2007). The first, in what is sometimes considered the “denationalization” of statehood, involves the delegation of authority to both subnational, and supranational, levels – as with NAFTA, for example, or city-based enterprise zones in the UK. This is not understood in terms of the withering, or decline, of the nation-state, however, as in Weberian models. Rather, such strategies are “linked to attempts on the part of national states to reclaim power by managing the relationship among different scales of economic and political organization” (Jessop 2007: 209). The second, relatedly, involves the reshaping of space itself within the national terrain in the interests of global capital accumulation, such as the reorganization of land and production relations in the countryside, and the expansion of urban conglomerations, along with a corresponding reorganizing, and redistribution, of the population. Thus, to use Marxist terminology, the state, society and capital are not separate and distinct, but are part of the same (contradictory and internally differentiated) totality.

This is not, however, a straightforward functionalist argument about the institutions of the state being instrumentalized in the interests of the bourgeoisie, as is sometimes assumed of Marxist accounts of the state. Instead, the state is “shot through with many class antagonisms and

struggles” (Jessop 2002: 193), operating within state institutions, as well as outside them, and transnationally. The perspective therefore seeks to account for the contingent product of tendencies inherent to the internationalization of capital itself, and how they are produced over time – if indeed they are (Panitch 1996: 87). The internationalization of China, or any other state, cannot be taken for granted, but must be demonstrated, and the perspective calls for careful empirical analysis of the ways in which this takes place (e.g., Glassman, 2004 on Thailand).

This achieves several things. First, it challenges the assumption that the territorial nation-state is a bounded ‘container’ of society. Against such a view, it incorporates into the analysis the transnational interconnections and the contestations around them which have developed at both national and local levels as the state is rescaled. These are now theorized as an organic, and expected, part of the process, not a symptom of “incoherence” (cf. Hameiri and Jones 2016) or a failure of central coordination. Second, the attention to social relations and social forces operating within and through state institutions breaks down the state-society dichotomy. The reorganization of class and property relations, for example, and the contestations this gives rise to, are now viewed as constitutive of the state’s transformation. Third, this broadening of the analytical focus to encompass spatial and social relations highlights the role of the countryside and the peasantry, the ways they are articulated to the state and implicated within state projects of accumulation, as well as their integral relationship to urban transformations.

This focus on changing social and spatial relations enables us to generate a substantially different account of “globalizing” China from more conventional studies which focus on flows of trade and investment into urban areas or particular industrial sectors. We do so by adopting an analytical perspective that explicitly integrates both urban and rural spaces into the analysis, through an empirical focus on the Chinese peasantry and its place in China's political economy, both before and after ‘reform and opening’. Despite often being marginalised or overlooked in analysis of China's rise, and in IR more generally, the peasantry and the rural are integral to the transformations taking place in China (Hayward, 2012). For example, first, the emergence of hundreds of millions of migrant workers, commonly referred to as “the making of the Chinese working class”, can be seen more clearly for what it is – a result of state strategies pertaining to the growth of cities on the one hand, and to the destabilisation and decline of rural conditions on the other, both of which, equally, are manifestations of China’s integration with global capitalism. Second, the perspective takes into account the emergence of agrarian capitalism in China happening now, manifested by both the emergence of capitalist class relations in the countryside, and the displacement of the rural population into

towns and cities, exposing rural land to industrial and real estate capital. Meanwhile, third, the transformation and expansion of urban space with a view to attracting international investors, often framed as projects to 'build world cities', is understood not as a localised phenomenon driven by municipal governments striving for independence from the centre, but as reterritorializing strategies constitutive of the internationalizing state. Taken together, this allows for a more integrated and inclusive account of the social developments inherent to China's 'rise'. Instead of conceiving of China's state transformations as 'incoherent', this perspective, we argue, is better able to capture what is, in fact, a consistent logic at work in the overarching societal and institutional dynamics as China internationalizes.

As we will show, two different historical stages are apparent in the internationalization of the Chinese state, both of which hinge on the reorganization of China's urban-rural relations. The first stage, from 1978 to approximately 2003, involved reforming the infrastructure and institutions of the Maoist state to transform China's economy into an export-oriented one founded on a vast supply of low-cost migrant labour, attracting foreign investment and integrating China into the international division of labour that had formed over previous decades. This involved the reform of the *hukou* system and the urban-rural divide so as to transform a large portion of Chinese rural labour into a mobile, if transient, proletariat. The second, beginning around 2004, is currently taking place through state strategies of 'urban-rural integration'. This involves the comprehensive restructuring of urban-rural relations, both socially and spatially, in order to transform China's economy into one based on domestic consumption founded on a burgeoning middle class concentrated in strategically located and heavily regulated "world cities" – nodal points in the global circuit of capital accumulation.

II The Agrarian Question Beyond the Territorial Trap: Producing a Global Proletariat

China's transformation into an integrated component of the global capitalist economy has been a dialectical process, driven by a complex of forces both transcending, and emanating from within, China's territorial boundaries, and operating simultaneously across international, national and subnational scales such that, through the reorganization of labour and land, class and property relations have been – and are being – restructured so as to replicate more closely the social relations of the capitalist mode of production. To the extent that these processes have been driven internally by Chinese state leaders' and policymakers' successful promotion of economic liberalisation and internationalization, this has taken place in the face of, and despite, substantial internal opposition, including from 'conservative' state leaders and policymakers, as well as from various forms of domestic social resistance, sometimes violent.

The triumph of 'reformist' policymakers has often been understood as an internal phenomenon whereby Chinese state actors at last realized the benefits of opening up to international markets – as if finally coming to their senses, experiencing some kind of awakening, or managing to get the 'right people' into positions of power. Where outside influence is acknowledged, it tends to be couched in terms of Chinese policymakers being persuaded by foreign experts of the importance of "observing objective economic laws" (Gewirtz 2017: 269; cf. Weber, 2019). Such accounts, however, portraying these transformations as a victory for rationality over ideology, downplay the ways that these changes were bound up with the interests of international capital – including foreign governments, supra-national bodies, global financial institutions and transnational corporations, a pattern of relations which has arguably continued over time (e.g., Hayward, 2018a). These served to strengthen the forces promoting China's transformation from within state institutions, such that the internationalization of the state appeared to cohere with the natural and inevitable course of global history – an ideological trope itself which simultaneously served to overwhelm, and de-legitimize, strong internal (and, indeed, on-going) Chinese opposition to these processes. Indeed, as David Harvey reminds us, "[t]he spectacular emergence of China as a global economic power after 1980 was in part an unintended consequence of the neoliberal turn in the advanced capitalist world" (2005: 212). An adequate understanding of China's 'reform and opening' – and of the place of the peasantry in those processes – thus requires that it be located, in the first instance, in world historical context. What has taken place in China cannot be understood apart from these wider developments and their entailments.⁸

Through the latter half of the twentieth century social relations globally were restructured so as to produce a new international division of labour founded on a vast transnational proletariat, organized segmentally across different nation-states in the southern hemisphere. This came about initially in the course of the Cold War geopolitical struggle between communist and capitalist powers which, while most often associated with a nuclear arms race, was in fact fought largely over the hearts and minds of national peasantries in the third world (Kapstein, 2017). US foreign policymakers viewed peasants as dangerous to the interests of the 'free world' due to their inclinations to support indigenous communist movements. Therefore, US pioneers of modernization theory, notably Walt Rostow, came to dominate development thinking in the West with respect to those 'backward' parts of the world still up-for-grabs in the global capitalist-communist rivalry. According to him, it was by appealing to the peasant primarily through programs of private land distribution that the spread of communist revolutions around the world could be brought to a halt (Rostow 1955: 30). Thus, often through

⁸ The discussion below draws on Hayward, 2017, and 2018b.

alliance with the elites of third world states, 'persisting' peasantries were encouraged – by force if necessary – to embrace the capitalist market system through programs of privatized land distribution to individual households (Erickson 2008). This was a major transnational strategy on behalf of the US state to restructure the spatial and social relations of developing countries conducive to the international expansion of capital and markets. Once so organized, small, near-subsistence level farms mostly depended on state credit and subsidies to survive, but with the US sponsored food aid after World War II simultaneously importing cheap grain into developing countries, world food prices were depressed and domestic agricultures eroded, leading to the impoverishment and landlessness of large numbers of peasant households (Araghi, 2009).

By the 1970s, a new international economic order was beginning to take shape as the limitations on capital accumulation posed by the post-war Keynesian economic programs adopted by the US and many European states became increasingly apparent. In this new economic era states were driven by a new logic – “to compete directly with each other to offer the best site for accumulation in an integrated global capitalist economy” (Cammack 2007: 13). The arrival of neoliberal 'globalization' was a counteroffensive to welfare-statism launched almost simultaneously on both sides of the Atlantic, initially under Jimmy Carter and then more famously by Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher. It was rooted in privatization and free market fundamentalism – an accumulation strategy which “sought to reverse the protection of society from the market” (Araghi 2009: 131). In the developing world, the policy prescriptions promoted (or imposed) by neoliberal-dominated institutions such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank amounted to “a relentless assault on small farming by a new balance of forces” (McMichael 2006: 407). Paul Cammack (2004), for example, traced the ways that policy recommendations of World Bank reports from the 1990s consistently worked to reproduce class divisions within states, which then functioned to nurture global capital. Through programmes articulated to progressive rhetoric about raising living standards and increasing social benefits, such as education and healthcare for the poor, the World Bank simultaneously carried forward the more fundamental project of worldwide proliferation and deepening of the uneven capitalist relations of production. Poverty reduction programs based on the principles of 'participation and ownership', while designed and implemented with the genuine aim of reducing poverty, were premised on the overriding goal of increasing the availability of low-cost labour in developing countries to international capital – continuing a trend already started during the earlier decades of the Cold War.

The collapse of the Soviet Union and its large-scale systems of collective agricultural production further extended the global space for capitalist production and reinforced the

international drive for individual land entitlements championed by Rostow. Led by the principal development institutions and actively promoted by transnational agribusinesses, secure land rights came to be seen increasingly as central to the development of market relations, even in 'underdeveloped' regions (Akram-Lodhi et al. 2009: 221-2). Under this new international regime, previous policies of food aid to developing nation-states were subordinated to commercial food exports from the US and the European Union and, with the southern hemisphere now subject to a stricter regime of free trade, the result was the further erosion of domestic agriculture in developing countries. In neoliberal discourse, the ensuing impoverishment and dispossession of small-holder peasantries was typically understood in terms of "an inappropriate set of choices made by individual peasants" (Akram-Lodhi et al. 2009: 224). Out of the destabilisation of national agricultures and peasant livelihoods emerged a new global division of labour. Vast numbers of newly free-floating workers were produced within southern nation-states and, through the agency of primarily northern corporations, global commodity chains expanded as manufacturing industries moved out of the core into peripheral and semi-peripheral zones to take advantage of these armies of 'freed' labour. It is within this world historical context of 'globalization' that China's internationalization has been unfolding, as we will now show. What took place in China was not simply an effect of this context but equally neither can it be understood as separate from it.

III 'Rising' Revisited: China Joins the International Division of Labour

As Philip McMichael (1997: 646) put it, "[m]odernization theory was deployed as a tactic of decolonization and the institutionalization of western rationalism to secure the geopolitical frontiers of the Cold War. Globalization, on the other hand, is a tactic of recolonization, niche building being a polite way to restructure economic sectors, labour forces and nation-states to serve global investors". Under globalization, then, each nation-state was to become integrated into the global economy by deploying its own comparative advantage. In China's case, this was the imagining and subsequent production of a vast abundance of surplus labour – healthy, disciplined and located predominantly in the countryside, placing China in a uniquely advantageous position to participate in the newly emerging international division of labour. What this required was the reconfiguration of China's agrarian relations – including the reorganization of land and production, the subjection of the rural population to market forces, and the promotion of their spatial mobility so as to produce a free labour market on a vast scale. Taken together, this amounted to nothing less than the deterritorialization and reterritorialization of the Chinese state itself.

In fact, as is well known, the Chinese peasantry had long been the primary source of accumulation for China's industrial development. In the Mao era, this took place 'internally', whereby cheap produce for industrial labour in the cities was obtained via the intensified extraction of domestic rural labour organized and controlled under collective ownership, the people's communes. To ensure favourable conditions for industrial development, a system of urban-rural segregation was established, the household registration (*hukou*) system, under which peasants and urbanites were registered to their respective village or city households and their movements restricted, safeguarding the cities from inundation by the rural population. This quasi-apartheid system of labour regulation (Alexander and Chan 2004) helped define urban-rural relations and is a key mechanism through which the Chinese state has been territorialized (and reterritorialized) since 1949. After the communes were dismantled and agricultural production was reorganized on a household basis, the peasantry maintained its role as China's preeminent source of accumulation, but under a reconfigured set of social and spatial relations. A substantial proportion of the peasantry was to become a "floating", transient proletariat articulated to international capital. Rural production was reorganized and re-oriented to international markets, and reterritorializing strategies were implemented to attract both international capital and rural labour into carefully selected regions, in both rural and urban areas.

While most analyses focus on the urban, this in fact took place, first, in the countryside, through the reorganization of production "designed to turn the frown directed at foreign capital during the Mao years into a welcoming smile" (Riskin 1987: 325). Highly productive town and village enterprises (TVE's) were set up – initially intended, at least in part, to absorb the freed-up surplus rural labour following the dismantling of the communes and to prevent migration to the cities, under the slogan 'leave the land, but don't leave the countryside' (*litu bu lixiang*). The orienting of rural industry for export had originally begun in Guangdong province in 1978, when officials eschewed the previous 'grain first' policy of the Cultural Revolution to focus on the production of fish, poultry, pig and fruit geared towards the tastes of the Hong Kong market (Zweig 1991: 721). Many TVE's were set up as joint ventures, often with foreign capital from Hong Kong, which had developed as a major processing hub for global capital but by the late 1970s was suffering a severe labour shortage. China's timely opening was thus of immediate benefit to Hong Kong, which rushed to take advantage of the newly available cheap rural labour across the border in Guangdong, while providing the much-needed capital for inputs and machinery. The model turned out to be a successful one replicated elsewhere in China, particularly around Shanghai, where much of the capital came from Taiwan (Harvey 2005: 136). Three 'development triangles' were set up in the Pearl River, Min River and Yangtze River Deltas for the growing and processing of agricultural products for the international

market – one of the earliest reterritorializing strategies geared towards articulating specific localities within China to the global economy (Harding 1987: 167). The success of rural exports, including both industrial and agricultural products, was noted by Chinese leaders, particularly Zhao Ziyang, China's reform-minded Premier from 1980-7, who saw production for the international market – particularly in the areas such as the Pearl River Delta advantageously located for export – as a means to promote the marketization and modernization of the Chinese economy as a whole (Zhao 1984). By 1993, exports from these rural industries made up one third of Chinese exports and accounted for two-thirds of the growth (Zhou 1996: 107).

Secondly, state strategies promoted further reterritorialization as, in selected urban areas, Special Economic Zones (SEZ's) were established, likewise attracting both large amounts of international investment and influxes of now increasingly mobile peasant labour. These were first established in 1979-80, in four cities in the southeast of China chosen for being both coastal and close to China's gateways to the international market – Shenzhen next to Hong Kong, Zhuhai opposite Macao, and Xiamen and Shantou close to Taiwan. The SEZ's, offering modern infrastructure, a trained labour force and preferential tax treatments, were designed both to attract foreign investment and to act as 'laboratories' for testing new internationalized management techniques, economic policies, wage systems and labour regulations, before their introduction elsewhere in China. In attracting foreign investment, they were particularly successful. By 1985 Shenzhen alone had attracted US\$840 million – more than half the targeted amount set for the period 1980-2000 (Harding 1987: 164-5). The SEZ's were in large part the 'trigger' for China's vast west to east, rural-urban migration. Following mid-1980s labour shortages in the SEZ's in particular, and in the south-eastern region in general – including in the TVE sector – migrant labour began flooding into these areas, firstly from the surrounding provinces, and eventually from further afield – from Sichuan into Guangdong, and from Anhui into Shanghai (Bramall 2009: 377). This tidal wave of people accelerated throughout the 1990s as central and local governments began to ease restrictions on the *hukou* system. While exact numbers are difficult to obtain, 1991-2013 saw an estimated increase of 269 million in the urban workforce, 85 percent of which came from rural migration (Lin, 2015).

It was not simply the new demand for industrial labour which drew peasants to migrate from the land, however. Simultaneously, in processes often downplayed in more conventional analyses as “externalities of development”, state strategies of fiscal restructuring and centralized accumulation worked to destabilise and undermine rural living conditions. In 1994, key fiscal reforms enacted at the national level channelled substantial local tax revenue

towards the centre, much of which was earmarked for urbanization projects (Wang 2005: 22). This compelled local governments to exploit more aggressively their remaining sources of funds, including the imposition on peasant households of crippling extra taxes, fees and bribes, driving more peasants to migrate to find better paid work elsewhere. In what has often been described as China's 'enclosure movement' (*quandi yundong*), left-behind rural land was vulnerable to expropriation for corporate development. A steep rise in (often illegal) land requisitions ensued as local governments set up industrial development zones in a bid to attract both domestic and foreign capital. The resulting increase in rural-urban migration further lowered the price of Chinese labour in the interests of international investors. The mechanisms involved were not simply those of supply and demand however: relocation outside one's *hukou* cut off migrant workers from local public services, thus increasing their vulnerability and decreasing their bargaining power.

While the similarities with the classic enclosure movement model epitomised by the industrial development in England are clear, the specifics of the Chinese case are crucial. The *hukou* system and the institution of collective land ownership in the countryside, both established and regulated by China's state apparatus, provided a double advantage for capital accumulation. Migrants' remits back to their hometowns provided a buffer for strained peasant livelihoods, while collective village land constituted a social safety net in place of state welfare, shielding the central government from vast expenditures in times of economic downturn. At the same time, the central government's deliberate refusal to clarify rural land ownership provided a gaping loophole enabling local governments to ride roughshod over peasant rights and interests in their bid to requisition land for private profit (Ho 2001). Thus, an uneasy alliance between the localities and the centre, domestic and foreign capital worked together to restructure the social and spatial relations of China's countryside in the interests of extraction from China's vast peasantry.

IV Ideological and Political Contestations: Goodbye Marx, Hello Weber

These processes constitutive of China's internationalization have always been contested, viewed with suspicion by many, including those at the highest levels of China's state bureaucracy. Such conflicts cannot be reduced to factional in-fighting or competition between bureaucracies, however, without attention to the ways these struggles are articulated to broader social forces and class interests beyond the state institutions. Opponents, aligned with the interests of Chinese domestic labour and collective forms of property, deemed SEZ's to be hotbeds of capitalism, betrayals of the revolution, and tantamount to the treaty ports and

foreign concessions of the nineteenth century (Hardy 1987: 168). They decried the market-oriented TVE sector as a challenge to the job security of 60 million state industrial workers (Zweig 1991: 723). Thus, in important ways these disagreements amounted to a struggle for control of China's state institutions between the interests of international capital, and national capital and labour, each of which was in turn mediated by regional, sectoral and other forms of difference. By the late 1980s, this struggle had become epitomised in the conflicting voices of reformist Premier Zhao Ziyang, and Li Peng who succeeded him in 1987.

Reformist proponents at the national level sought to overcome these powerful oppositional forces by reaching, figuratively, both upwards and downwards, delegating authority to – and so drawing support from – external institutions at both international and local levels. Local and provincial leaders favoured marketization which increased their regional economic autonomy, including their capacity to engage transnationally with foreign capital (e.g., Oi 1992). Many had resented the unfair advantages bestowed on the SEZ's and sought to pressure the centre for comparable advantages for their own localities (Harding 1987: 166-7). Thus, for example, as Susan Shirk relates, when Li implemented administrative reforms to strengthen the planning bureaucracies within the central government structure, proponents of the market at the central levels skilfully manoeuvred the locus of national policymaking from the exclusive State Council to broader-based economic work conferences, to which provincial leaders could be invited to participate and bargain for their interests (Shirk 1993:111-3). Contrary to accounts of state fragmentation, this was not a loss of control by the centre to the localities, but a strategic restructuring of the architecture of the state in the interests of China's integration with international capital. Meanwhile, overcoming conservative opposition was cited as one of the key motivations for joining major international financial organizations, membership of which “would involve China in a series of international obligations that could be used to reinforce the reforms and to make them irreversible” (Jacobson and Oksenberg 1990: 93). Such was the case when China formally announced its intention to join GATT in 1986 under Zhao Ziyang's premiership. Likewise, in the late 1990s WTO accession was viewed as a means to force through the restructuring of China's state-owned sector in the face of strong social and political resistance, by exposing it to the rigours of international market competition (Zhang 2003). All of these moves, produced through shifting alliances between social forces within central state institutions, locally and transnationally, amounted to national strategies of state rescaling in the interests of internationalization and capitalist restoration.

In fact, despite the efforts of those seeking to resist, or even reverse the progress of the reforms, the intellectual and ideological groundwork for China's internationalization was already largely in place by the mid-late 1980s, helping to undermine the arguments of

opposing forces. A set of distinct but mutually reinforcing trends had emerged following the death of Mao in bureaucratic, academic and policymaking circles which brought to the fore notions of a particular form of scientific rationality as the route to modernity, quickly superseding the Maoist emphasis on class struggle. Ironically perhaps, this involved a turn – both in academia and in the language of state policymaking – away from Marx to the theories of Weber. 'Weber fever' kicked off in academic circles with the publication of the first translation of *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* in 1986. Prompting questions about the 'failure' of the emergence of capitalism in China, Weber's writings were framed as providing "a potential roadmap to China's future" (Baeker, 2013: 5) which eschewed Marxist notions of class struggle – an appealing prospect for many following the turmoil of the Cultural Revolution. Weberian thought instead supported notions of a modernity founded on a particular kind of cultural spirit (*jingshen*) and a scientific, rationalized bureaucracy. Such ideas facilitated perfectly the rise of a technocratic managerial class through China's bureaucratic ranks, deploying the language of scientific rationality and, in what Lin Chun has termed "a crooked fusion of marketization and bureaucratization" (2015: 32), closely allied with a rising class of entrepreneurs, many of whom were overseas returnees with interests deeply embedded in international capital. Indeed, it was 1986 also that saw the nationwide launch of the Spiritual Civilization Movement, a political campaign acclaiming productive labour as a moral act dedicated to the modern, 'internationalizing' (*guojihua*) socialist state. As it played out in the countryside in particular, this campaign sought to foster a class of 'new model peasants' (*xinxing nongmin*) which, no longer esteemed for their devotion to the socialist collective, was akin to the entrepreneurial pioneer of Weber's Protestant ethic – working hard to accumulate and reinvest in the interests of the new 'socialist commodity economy'.

At around this time the political discourse of Chinese state policymaking itself began to mutate, adopting a variety of key political-economic concepts and categories hitherto shunned, and excising others formerly taken for granted within the Chinese socialist lexicon. Most starkly, the language of 'class' (*jieji*), and with it the notion of class exploitation, once the discursive bedrock of the Chinese polity, dropped away. As Pun Ngai and Chris King-Chi Chan have pointed out, this took place "paradoxically" at the moment a new class of free-floating labourers was coming into being (2008: 76). 'Class' was replaced by the Weberian language of 'social stratification' and 'social inequality', serving to obscure the newly emerging capitalist class relations. This 'subsumption of class discourse' formed part of a 'quest for globality' driven by a neoliberal politics and ideology. It was a strategy to deny political identification, to 'unmake' the new working class at the moment of its formation, inoculating against workers' appeals to class solidarity. The erasure of 'class' enabled other capitalistic discursive categories previously considered at the heart of class exploitation to be incorporated into the new

discourse of socialist modernity, as it appeared in state media and policy debates, without disrupting its ideological coherence. Notably, the term 'labour reserve army' (*laodongli houbaijun*) was re-evaluated and co-opted as a necessary component of the new socialist commodity economy, creating ideological space for labour mobility and migration between economic sectors. Simultaneously, 'primitive accumulation' (*yuanshi jilei*) came to be framed as an inevitable part of socialist state modernization, allowing for a cycle of land requisitions and rural-urban migration, with clear similarities to the English enclosure movement, to be legitimised as a necessary, even desirable, component of China's modernization (Hayward 2012). The crisis in the countryside, when it occurred throughout the 1990s, was thus easily interpreted by many as an inevitable 'externality' of modernization, rather than the constitutive reworking of social relations involved in the transformation and internationalization of state-capital relations.

V Urban-Rural Integration: Reterritorializing Rural and Urban Space Together

By the turn of the century, however, rural conditions and the urban-rural wealth gap were so dire that a new strategy of national development was widely called for. This emerged around 2004, centred on the concept of 'urban-rural integration' (*chengxiang yitihua*), and the closely related 'co-ordinated urban-rural planning' (*chengxiang tongchou*), which refers to the practical administrative measures by which the former is to be realized. Together, these slogans call for the full-scale dismantling of the urban-rural divide and a complete renegotiation of the hierarchical relationship between city and countryside. In policy documents, urban-rural integration can be broadly summarised in terms of three 'flows' or 'transfers' (*liu*) – the flow of agricultural land into the hands of more efficient producers (*tudi liuzhuan*), the flow of people from the countryside into urban areas (*renkou liudong*), and the flow of urban and industrial capital into the countryside (*ziben liutong*) (Li 2009). These three 'flows' are brought about by reforming key national institutions, not least the *hukou* system, and the building of necessary infrastructure and facilities in both urban and rural areas. The building of infrastructure is required both to improve living standards in rural areas, and to prepare urban areas for new influxes of residents. This includes both large metropolises, and small and medium sized cities, as well as industrial development within villages, and the growth of rural townships, referred to as 'in situ' urbanization. Improved transport and communication links are needed between these urbanizing areas and the remaining less developed agricultural regions, so bringing the latter within the functioning orbit of these more 'modernized' spaces, enabling inhabitants there to benefit from access to the superior facilities, marketing and employment opportunities. This is a major state project of reterritorialization to transform China's economy

and society from one rooted in low-cost labour for export to one based on a well-off urban middle class capable of driving domestic consumption. The key sites of capital accumulation and articulation to the global economy shifted from coastal manufacturing zones into urban areas – including townships and major metropolises – in particular strategically selected “world cities” including Beijing and Shanghai – designed to attract investment primarily from high-tech companies and service industries.

Along with rhetoric about raising peasants’ living standards, in practice, urban-rural integration encompasses a bundle of policies and measures which work collectively to shift peasants off the land, exposing it to both agricultural and industrial capital. First, following China’s WTO entry, rural land organization is being transformed to attract outside investment and orient agricultural production to the world market (Hayward 2017). While China’s system of rural collective ownership remains, despite fierce contestation within state institutions over the question of the privatization of rural land, shrewd institutional and legal innovation dividing land rights into three – ownership, contract, and use rights – has been implemented in recent years. From 2008, the national government formally recognized the practice of land transfers (*tudi liuzhuan*) by which land remaining nominally under village ownership, and under contract to peasant households, can have its use rights “transferred” (leased) to another party or entity. The goal is to produce a quasi-land market so that different land parcels can be consolidated under the management of a single party, such as a large farm household or agribusiness. In effect, this amounts to the manipulation of the institution of collective property such that peasant land entitlements can more easily be exploited in the interests of capital accumulation – in what Mobo Gao calls a move “to privatize land in China surreptitiously, step by step” (2017: 39). In the process, China’s agrarian production relations are being transformed from an egalitarian system based on management by individual households, to one of largescale farms concentrated in fewer hands. These in turn require less labour, allowing greater numbers of the rural population to be shifted into cities or townships.

Second, along with the emergence of new production relations in the countryside, rural villages are being reorganized *en masse* under programmes of ‘new rural community construction’. This entails the application of urban planning practices to traditional rural villages. The stated goal is to provide rural residents with access to the same standard of public facilities and services as those living in cities, in fact, to enact “a coordinated and comprehensive program for urbanising the village and transforming its residents [into urbanites]” (Bray 2013: 54). The project involves applying modern landscaping principles to traditional, ‘natural’ village layouts – involving the wholesale restructuring of village space on a more rational and efficient basis. Sometimes several small villages in close proximity are

merged into one 'community'. Land-use is strategically reorganized based on 'three concentrations' (*san ge jizhong*) – segregated zones of scaled-up agricultural land, consolidated industrial areas, and dense housing settlements (Bray 2013: 55-6). The houses scattered around the village are demolished and rebuilt as high-rise tower blocks, freeing up land for agricultural or industrial use.

Both of the above widespread measures to transform social and spatial relations in the countryside are closely bound up with a new institution for the promotion and acceleration of rural to urban land conversions. The urban-rural land linking system hinges on China's shortage of agricultural land, which has become increasingly scarce as urbanization has progressed. This raises the value of agricultural land since no more of it can be taken over for urban construction, *unless* that plot corresponds to one somewhere else which has been newly brought back under cultivation. Newly acquired agricultural land plots can be “exchanged” – added to a regional system of land quotas and auctioned in return for the urban development rights to a corresponding plot of rural land elsewhere, generally in a more lucrative location on the borders of a city or township. The land linking system therefore facilitates urban development without reducing the national agricultural land area, while also providing funds for villages, or village households, involved in the land swaps.

What is most crucial for our argument, however, is the way that the urban-rural land linking system has the effect of tying the land transformations taking place in the countryside to processes of urbanization in and around townships and cities – such that rural transformations are themselves being driven by urban growth, and the drive of local urban governments to attract both domestic and international capital. Key nodal points of connection between the Chinese state and the world market, therefore, are located not in the countryside but in the cities where urban local governments vie with one another to attract international capital. Such dynamics are by no means disconnected from urban-rural relations, however, but rather presuppose them. First, the shifting of peasants off the land and into townships or cities is a key driver of the urban real estate market, and second, through the land linking system, the making available of new agricultural plots through village restructuring is connected, and enables, the rural-urban land conversions constitutive of urban growth spatially. Simultaneously, capital is rapidly diffusing into the countryside, in an acceleration and deepening of agrarian capitalist relations and spaces.

Thus, as many surveys indicate, the system of land swaps incentivises and enables the widespread exploitation of rural assets in the interests of both urban and agrarian capital (e.g. Chen and Ma 2012: 13), amounting to a strategy to “diminish peasant resistance and

accelerate the transfer of land out of peasant hands” (Andreas and Zhan 2015: 18). It provides both forms of capital with an interested stake in village community construction programs which shift peasants into concentrated tower blocks, while land transfer then enables the scaling-up of the remaining land. Studies provide accounts of the coercive strategies used by cadres to compel unwilling villagers to transfer their land to agribusinesses (Luo, Andreas and Li, 2017; Gong and Zheng 2017). Meanwhile, a tripartite alliance has emerged between local officials, agrarian capital, and the urban real estate industry which, using the offer of urban *hukou* as an incentive, works to shift peasants out of the villages and into cities, simultaneously fuelling the housing market while further freeing up rural land.

Conclusion

What is China? In this paper we have argued that much contemporary analysis of China and its rise rests on a set of conceptual and theoretical assumptions deriving from the Weberian tradition, in particular the conception of the state and of modernity more generally. In turn, these assumptions – often taken for granted and unexamined – channel analysis of China and its rise in highly specific ways, to the detriment of our understanding of what China is, how it has come to be, and what it is becoming. Notable by its absence in existing accounts is the Chinese peasantry, despite being integral to the processes of capitalist development highlighted in all analyses – Weberian or not – of contemporary China. Drawing on an alternative tradition, that of historical materialism, we developed a constitutive account of China and its rise, organised around internationalization of the state theory. Amongst other advantages, this enabled us to avoid the territorial trap in analysis and to situate China, the Chinese state and the Chinese peasantry in world historical context. Rejecting ahistorical assumptions about the peasantry as either external to modernity or inevitably disappearing, instead we showed how the peasantry and urban-rural relations are integral to the constitution of the Chinese state and its internationalization – and continue to be so. In empirical terms, this is what ‘rising’ actually means. Against the long-standing anti-peasant bias in IR scholarship, and in the social sciences more generally, we demonstrated that making sense of China and its rise requires us to make the peasantry, and urban-rural relations, central to analysis. Putting the point in slightly polemical terms, China, even after ‘reform and opening’, remains the state of the peasantry. Analysis of China’s ‘rise’ which ignores this fact is at best partial or misleading. Looking beyond China, our analysis also raises important questions for how we make sense of other ‘rising powers’, particularly those in the global south.

We have highlighted a set of social science problems generated by the adoption of Weberian models in the analysis of China. In addition to the social science problems, there are also at least two political problems. First, the adoption of Weberian categories and models is not external to the processes through which the Chinese state is being internationalized. What came to be known as 'Weber fever' in China - the turn in both academia and in the language of state policymaking to the theories of Weber in the mid-1980s - was not simply a belated discovery of the great German social scientist but rather part of the internationalization project itself. It was about reworking the social relations and forms of subjectivity in place in China in keeping with the overall thrust of that project. Adopting Weberian categories changed the common sense through which social scientists and broader publics understood themselves and their world amidst enormous increases in inequality and the sharp increase in insecurity for millions of people. At stake here, then, is a near explicit process of mystifying and legitimating the changed social relations responsible for this inequality and insecurity. Second, and related, as numerous scholars have pointed out Weberian concepts and models tend to naturalise capitalism while also shoring up the idea of the at least potential neutrality of the state. Such analysis also feeds into an assumed division between states in the North Atlantic and the Chinese state, focused on institutional difference. In the former, the growing integration of capital with the state is seen as evidence of excessive influence or possibly corruption in what are nevertheless still seen as liberal states in capitalist economies. In the latter, however, this integration is understood as a new hybrid combination of capitalism and bureaucracy. Yet there is little evidence that such institutional variation alters the basic dynamics of capitalism as a mode of production (Coates, 2000). From our perspective, less evident is the difference between these states than their growing similarity: these are all capitalist states, and as capitalist social relations and dynamics are intensified and extended to an ever-greater range of social practices and spaces, increasingly so. To the extent Weberian categories and models mystify these processes of state transformation and their class dynamics, they make it harder for us to see what is perhaps in fact less a continuing difference between China and the North Atlantic world and more a great convergence.

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