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Zhaohui Hong

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# THE PRICE OF CHINA'S ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

POWER, CAPITAL, AND THE POVERTY OF RIGHTS



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**Zhaohui Hong : The Price of China's Economic Development: Power, Capital, and the Poverty of Rights (Asia in the New Millennium)** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Price of China's Economic Development: Power, Capital, and the Poverty of Rights (Asia in the New Millennium):

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. This is a fascinating book -- it captures the essence ...By RileyThis is

a fascinating book -- it captures the essence of the complexities and dilemmas of China's socioeconomic developments during the last three and half decades. I got the book at the recommendation of a colleague, started reading it on a road trip and simply could not put it down. I think anyone who is interested in obtaining a sophisticated understanding of the contemporary Chinese experience should get a hold of a copy of this book! The fact that the author managed to compress the multifaceted and often times puzzling changes in China into a 300-page book is in itself a tremendous accomplishment. Interesting and intriguing concepts such as "power-capital institution" and "power-capital culture" are explained with numerous examples and analyzed with insight. Many people, including scholars, have often commented on how China presents a gigantic puzzle for which few seem to be able to find all the fitting pieces. Well, I think this book provides at least a significant number of the pieces for the "China Puzzle." While giving due credit for the phenomenal economic growth in China, the author does not hesitate to point out the social, cultural, and political price that the Chinese have collectively paid for such progress. While the social estrangement between the "haves" and "have nots" is not an exclusively Chinese phenomenon, as it has historically underscored the stage of capital accumulation in any industrializing society, it is nonetheless made more glaring and blatant by China's rather unique (or peculiar) hybridity. While the legacy of Maoist communism has given rise to a whole new class of political elites that are at once ambitious and power hungry, the allure of capitalism has created an insatiable appetite for economic gains. The cult of both power and wealth has generated one group of individuals who are more than willing to use their political power to maximize their economic profits while also engendering a whole new genre of economic and intellectual elites who are more than ready to accommodate a seemingly outmoded political infrastructure and to trade their "talents" for political gains. Opposite the influential power-capital individuals and institutions are the various groups that have been shortchanged by the economic growth -- migrant workers, farmers, working-class women, and a growing number of house church members, among others. The deprivation of their collective rights is the ultimate price of China's modernization. Indeed China can be conceivably divided into two entities with vastly different social and economic realities. Yet, it is the convergence of the two that makes China simultaneously fascinating and aggravating. Such is the "charm" as well as the "curse" of the Chinese experience. All in all, I would venture to say that, given its breadth, depth and analytical cohesiveness, this is a highly valuable book for anyone who wishes to understand today's China. Kudos to the author!

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. An important book for a better understanding of China's transformation

By xiao bing li  
Hong's book is a timely work, presenting a new perspective on China's economic growth and ongoing political problems. I believe that it provides a better understanding of China's institutional transformation and social changes. Although the American public may be willing to accept the fact that China has become the second largest economy in the world, only after the United States, many people, especially college students, still ask the question: What is China's economic system today? A free market or something else? Hong for the first time describes the Chinese system as a "power-capital economy" (p. 2). His first main argument is that the reform in China during the last 35 years has generated a peculiar socio-economic institution--so called power-capital economy, accompanied by a new social group--the power-capital group. The group has connected power with capital by "making money through abusing power, seeking power through bribery, and pursuing power and/or money by pawning intellectual capital" (p. 12). Thus, corruption has become institutionalized. Hong points out in his second main argument that the institutionalized power-capital economy has contributed to the "power-capital culture and the power-capital entrepreneurs" (p. 24), and to the "poverty of rights" (p. 25). He argues that the economic growth has benefited few in the past decades at a cost to many, including underpaid workers, exploited migrant labors, discriminated minorities, divided society, and exclusive middle class. The author has made an ambitious attempt to reinterpret how China reformed its economy and why the government of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has survived or even succeeded. Hong challenges a popular perception that China's economy is undergoing a transition from a planned (or communist) economy in 1950s-1970s to a market (or capitalist) economy in the 1990s, and points out that it did not happen that way. Hong significantly identifies an additional course between the communist economy and free market economy. He proposes a triangular perspective which reveals a unique tri-polar pattern of the current Chinese economy with the elements of a planned economy, a market economy, and the power-capital economy in relatively peaceful co-existence. Hong argues that the power-capital economy is not a transitional stage that brings China closer to the Western type of market economy because it is, by nature, in favor of exclusive control against free competition. This is not a "phony capitalism" (p. 8); he warns us that the power-capital economy may not necessarily lead to the capitalist economy and democratic reform. As a result, the surprising trend of declining private sectors and growing public sectors became evident only recently (in the 2000s) (p. 48). His contribution to scholarship in the field will be a welcome addition to the ongoing debate on China's transformation.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. A must-read

By Xing Lu  
Zhaohui Hong's recent published book *The Price of China's Economic Development: Power, Capital, and the Poverty of Rights* is timely and has effectively offered the reader a tale of two Chinas: the rich and the poor. It has addressed pressing questions of what China's past and present can foretell its future, and if China's market economy will lead to a democratic government. The book provides detailed descriptions and in-depth analyses on the development,

circumstances, and interrelationship between two sectors of Chinese life: power-capital institution (e.g. Party bureaucrats, entrepreneurs, and social elites) versus power-deprivation marginalized groups (e.g. farmers, migrant workers, house church members), in contributing to China's economic development as well as hindering the country's social progress in fairness, human dignity, and civil rights. Hong presents a compelling argument that the polarizing wealth/power, lack of an equitable social and legal system, and poverty of rights in China have disturbed equilibrium of a society and have resulted in social injustice, abuse of power, dreadful conditions for the poor and powerless, the price the Chinese people have paid for the "economic miracles." Through employing convincing research evidence, case studies, and field works, Hong's assessment of China's situation is convincing and illuminating. Moreover, the author has challenged Western social-economic theories and apocalyptic predictions on China's future, but agreed with the political science scholar Cheng Li that a constitutional democratic China may emerge in the near future (p. 198). The book is insightful, thought-provoking and intellectually engaging. Anyone who is interested in and doing research on China should read it. X. Lu

The People's Republic of China has experienced significant transformations since Deng Xiaoping instituted economic reforms in 1978. Subsequent leaders continued and often broadened Deng's policies, shifting the nation from agrarianism to industrialism, from isolation to internationalism, and from centralized planning to market-based economics. As the world strives to understand the nation's rapid development, few observers have comprehensively examined the social and cultural price of the economic boom for the majority of the Chinese people. Zhaohui Hong assesses the sociocultural consequences of these reforms in this provocative study. He contends that modern China functions as an oligarchy or plutocracy ruled by an alliance of political power and private capital where the boundaries between the private and public sectors are constantly shifting. This "power-capital institution" based on three millennia of Confucian ideology and decades of Maoist communism exercises monopolistic control of public resources at the expense of civil society and social justice for the majority of citizens. *The Price of China's Economic Development* urges policymakers to alter their analytic lens. While industrial and commercial development is quantitatively measured, Hong argues that social progress should be assessed qualitatively, with justice its ultimate goal and fair allocation of resources and opportunity as the main index of success. This sophisticated analysis introduces English speakers to the varied and significant work of contemporary Chinese scholars and substantially enriches the international dialogue.

"This work provides a theoretically sophisticated analysis of major political, social, economic, and cultural trends in China. There are few other scholars as well versed in the Sino-American comparison or as systematic in attempting to work out the socio-cultural similarities and differences between the two societies." — Roger des Forges, author of *Chinese Walls in Time and Space: A Multidisciplinary Perspective* "This book offers an insightful and innovative perspective on modern China, and it brings an important current of contemporary Chinese thought to English language literature. The analysis is creative and novel, and the book will certainly be of interest to a broad range of China scholars. The balance of empirical and normative argument is commendable." — Barrett McCormick, author of *What If China Doesn't Democratize? Implications for War and Peace* "This timely work presents a new perspective on China's economic growth and ongoing political problems. It also provides a better understanding of China's institutional transformation and social changes." — Xiaobing Li, editor of *Modern Chinese Legal Reform: New Perspectives* About the Author Zhaohui Hong, professor of economic history at Purdue University Calumet, is the author or coeditor of several books, including *Dilemmas of Reform in Jiang Zemin's China*.