

contribute more explicitly to a timely critique of ongoing capitalist transformations in China's countryside.

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Contesting Cyberspace in China: Online Expression and Authoritarian Resilience. By RONGBIN HAN. New York: Columbia University Press, 2018. xvi, 315 pp. ISBN: 9780231184755 (paper).
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The battle over cyberspace and the Internet in China is often depicted as one of state versus society. The pluralist nature of the Internet means that dissenting voices may undermine the legitimacy of the Chinese Communist Party. Thus, the party-state continually attempts to gain greater control over the Internet through state censorship and the “Great Firewall,” while netizens (citizens of the Internet who are actively involved in online communities) persistently resist censorship and find creative ways to oppose the regime. In *Contesting Cyberspace in China*, Rongbin Han unpacks this seemingly dichotomous state-society cyber relationship and finds that cyberspace in China is a fragmented and pluralist space. While China scholars over the last several decades have demonstrated a decentralized system with tensions between local and central governments in the areas of public services and economic reforms, Han successfully shows that the same logic applies to cyberspace and control over the Internet. Moreover, netizens are a diverse group of anti-regime, pro-regime, and politically neutral individuals who often compete against each other in an effort to influence public opinion. Few studies have closely examined the pluralist nature of the Internet in China. Han provides a well-written and comprehensive study on Internet censorship and online discourse in China and breaks down the assumption that the Internet is inherently regime-challenging. Indeed, he shows that the Internet is not a threat to the regime. However, this is not due to state control over the Internet and censorship, but rather due to the uneven control and pluralism of cyberspace.

Han presents a unique and complex picture of censorship and control. First, he shows the dual strategy that central and local governments use to influence online opinion. One is traditional propaganda and censorship through filters and keywords, and the other is direct state engagement in online discourse through an army of paid online commentators. Since the introduction of the Internet in China, the central government has attempted to block content, including regime critics and anti-regime discourse. At the same time, the central leadership has allowed some online discussions to expose local corruption. This serves as a “fire alarm” to alert higher officials to local misdeeds. Yet, motivated netizens are able to get around filters and firewalls. Han shows how the party-state has adapted to the changing cyber environment beyond traditional censorship. The government began to directly engage in cyber discourse through online news sources, programs, and an army of Internet commentators who can monitor and counter anti-government online posts. The pro-government online commenters are

called “the fifty-cent army” because these part-time state workers were paid fifty cents per post. While the fifty-cent army had the potential to be an effective Internet tool to shape opinion, Han points out that these commentators do not engage with netizens and the army soon became part of the central and local propaganda departments.

Second, Han discusses the decentralized aspect of state censorship and the system of online commentators. He demonstrates how the local interests of municipal party-government leaders can often clash with those of the central government, such as in the use of online discourse and message boards as a way to alert higher officials to local misdeeds. In fact, local leaders often use local censorship mechanisms to hide infractions and reports of corruption, including their own army of Internet commentators, to counter online accusations. Han provides convincing evidence that the central party-state reflects fragmented authoritarian rather than monolith central control over the Internet.

Although the central and local governments cannot completely control Internet speech, the regime can in fact benefit from pluralism and discourse competition when online regime supporters condemn regime critics. Netizens are not a unified community of anti-regime commentators attempting to avoid Internet filters and the state. Han provides solid evidence of a diverse and pluralistic community of online commenters. These include pop activists, regime critics, and pro-government netizens such as the volunteer fifty-cent army. This reflects the intense competition in cyberspace to influence opinion. Indeed, Han shows how nationalist netizens can undermine anti-state arguments and stifle regime critics. Thus the irony is that the decentralized control and pluralist nature of the Internet may be one of the factors that contributes to authoritarian resilience in China.

Han’s Internet ethnography provides a fascinating entrance into the complexities and pluralist nature of China’s Internet discourse. I believe this book makes a significant contribution to the study of Internet censorship and online discourse in China. Han delivers his unique and original analysis in a straightforward manner that is easy to comprehend. This book would be appropriate for graduate and undergraduate students in the fields of China studies, political science, economics, sociology, communications, and anthropology.

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Networking China: The Digital Transformation of the Chinese Economy. By YU HONG. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2017. 225 pp. ISBN: 9780252082399 (paper).
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Networking China by Yu Hong is an ambitious study of information and communications technologies (ICTs) in China, including their evolution, impact on social institutions, policies, and issues of equality and inequality from the 1980s to now. Its chapters loosely follow a chronological order, as does each category of ICTs in the economic development plan of the Chinese government.