Second, Feldman's analysis is based on fieldwork conducted during 2015–2016. Feldman's data is thus drawn from the early days of Xi's campaign. As noted above, the crackdown has proven an open-ended affair and has morphed into what Wang Qishan, who led the anti-corruption machinery during its first five years, called a "new normal." As a result, while the "tiger hunt" seemed to generate a great deal of sound and fury in its early years it has since become routinized even though the number of tigers "bagged" in each of the past few years has rivalled the number bagged in the past. As a result, one might now wonder whether Xi's efforts to play on deep ressentiment as a way of inflating his popularity may have ended up engendering new and deeper feelings of cynicism about the regime's pledge to fight corruption to the end. Put differently, has a decade of tiger hunting helped or harmed Xi's image as the good emperor and champion of purity and justice?

Third, Feldman's fieldwork was based largely on interviews of ex-patriots, academics and students. This means that most of his data is second-hand and largely anecdotal in nature. The data represents the impressions of those Feldman interviewed rather than first-hand insights of those orchestrating and conducting the crackdown – or its targets. As a result, Feldman ends up inferring Xi's motives by juxtaposing his informants' observations and his reading of Nietzsche's concept of ressentiment, rather than deriving it from hard data. Absent access to Xi and his inner thoughts, of course, inference is unavoidable and Feldman's use of Nietzsche as a means to understand Xi is a commendable scholarly exercise.

Finally, Feldman's reliance on field interviews yields a somewhat confusing account. As is often the case, different informants have different views and takes on Xi's motives and the crackdown. In his presentation of his interviews, Feldman tends to give full due to the differing observations of his many informants, with the result that the narrative often consists of a series of disparate claims, which Feldman then seeks to interpret and reconcile. Although Feldman does an admirable job in this regard, the result is a sometimes jumbled and seemingly contradictory series of anecdotes rather than a tightly focused and pointed analysis.

In sum, Feldman proposes an innovative and fresh interpretation of Xi's anticorruption campaign but one which might have been more compelling if it rested on a more robust empirical foundation.

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The Rise and Fall of the EAST: How Exams, Autocracy, Stability, and Technology Brought China Success, and Why They Might Lead to Its Decline

Yasheng Huang. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2023. 440 pp. $35.00 (hbk). ISBN 9780300266368

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The durability of China's autocratic political system in history has long fascinated scholars. But few have offered a persuasive theory to explain its longevity. Yasheng Huang's *The Rise and Fall of the EAST* presents an original and provocative theory that has greatly advanced our understanding of the puzzle of enduring autocracy in imperial and contemporary China. Unlike previous scholarly attempts that focussed on political culture, Huang identifies a critical institution – *keju*, the

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examination system through which imperial rulers select administrators – as the central pillar of Chinese autocracy. In Huang's formulation, all nations face the challenge of finding the right balance between scale (homogeneity) and scope (heterogeneity). Greater homogeneity allows a nation to "scale up" by expanding its size and maintaining regime durability. But excessive homogeneity suppresses creativity and dynamism. On the other hand, greater heterogeneity fosters competition and change, but makes it harder for a nation to grow bigger or preserve the same political regime. In the Chinese case, its rulers preferred scale (homogeneity) to scope (heterogeneity) mostly because a more homogenous society is easier to rule and, more importantly, as Huang put it, "as China homogenized, it also became larger," thus fulfilling the imperial ambitions of its rulers (p. 4).

However, as the growing size of China increases heterogeneity through the incorporation of territories and communities with diverse cultural traditions, this poses a severe challenge to governance. Managing the rising tension between homogeneity and heterogeneity requires Chinese rulers to find an institutional solution.

This solution, what Huang calls a "scaling tool," is *keju*, which was invented in 587 to achieve homogeneity. The primary purpose of *keju* was to scale up the imperial bureaucracy as this novel institution was immensely proficient in selecting, training and intellectually homogenizing the officials that successive dynasties needed to administer the state. According to Huang, the credit of inventing *keju* goes to the Sui Dynasty, which is usually not considered a great dynasty. But it was under Sui Wendi (541–604) that a prototype of *keju* was established in 587. Another ruler, the much-maligned empress Wu Zetian (624–705), dramatically improved the system after she expanded the pool of eligible candidates for *keju* by allowing aspiring young men from outside the capital to sit for the exams.

After *keju* became the sole tool with which imperial rulers selected officials, it delivered the outcomes highly conducive to the perpetuation of autocratic rule. As the curriculum was dominated by Confucian texts (selected mainly because of their technical difficulties), *keju* homogenized thinking and resulted in ideological uniformity. The processing of studying and sitting for *keju* socialized potential ruling elites in similar educational tradition and ideological outlook. In short, *keju* produced standardized human capital that helped entrench autocratic rule.

To ascertain the impact of *keju* on stability, Huang examines the exits of 2,225 premiers from an imperial court database he has compiled. Voluntary exits – as opposed to executions – serve as an indicator of the loyalty of the most important official under the emperor, a critical factor in the longevity of dynasties. Using statistical tools, Huang finds that the "symbiotic relationship between the emperor and his most senior administrators," as reflected by safe exit options for premiers whom emperors deemed loyal, emerged only after the introduction of *keju*. Prior to Sui, more premiers were executed (most likely for disloyalty). But after Sui, on average more premiers exited office alive, implying that, before Sui, the emperor–premier relationship was antagonistic but turned symbiotic after Sui: not only could premiers exit office alive (although they did not necessarily serve longer), but also emperors stayed in power longer. Huang's reasoning is that because premiers after Sui were selected through *keju*, they were more loyal than their predecessors picked by other means. *Keju* inculcated norms of loyalty and unquestioning obedience, thus making premiers compliant and dependable administrators for the emperor.

However, *keju* may have benefited imperial rulers beyond their wildest dreams, but it has had a lasting negative impact on the Chinese nation. The state's monopoly of intellectual elites through *keju* made China a "state without a society," as Huang puts it. Unlike other autocracies without a similar "scaling tool," imperial China had no independent intelligentsia, aristocracy, landed gentry, organized religion or precursors of a capitalist class despite a culture of entrepreneurship. Such a "state without a society" stifled innovation. Huang used the China Historical Invention Database to gauge the impact of *keju* on Chinese innovation. He finds that the most inventive period was before the sixth century (when *keju* was established). China experienced a dramatic fall in inventions after *keju*. He attributes this development to the end of "contestability" of ideas as the result of the

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intellectual hegemony maintained through *keju*. He argues that inventiveness is closely correlated with "scope" or heterogeneity (measured empirically by political or territorial fragmentation and ideological diversity). Once China achieves "scale" or homogeneity at the expense of "scope," its capacity for innovation through intellectual contestation inevitably atrophies.

Huang also shows that the post-1949 regime under the rule of the Communist Party of China (CPC) has continued to favour "scale" over "scope" and, in essence, has retained "a state without a society." The only difference is that the system developed under China's one-party regime is vastly more sophisticated and powerful. However, the CPC regime, in particular under the rule of Xi Jinping, who has imposed the strictest ideological control in the post-Mao era, will unavoidably repeat the mistakes of its imperial predecessors. As long as it prioritizes control over dynamism, the Party will unlikely catch up with the West in technology or unlock the untapped potential of its people.

Besides its breathtakingly original, brilliant and insightful theoretical argument, Huang's book is also notable for its methodological virtuosity. It makes use of extensive comparative examples and robust statistical analysis to illustrate how the introduction of an institution has fundamentally altered Chinese history. Written in elegant and accessible style, this book will be a perfect textbook for both graduate and undergraduate students. For the China field as whole, *The Rise and Fall of the EAST* is an instant classic and an inspiring example of theoretical ambition and scholarly excellence.

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The China Record: An Assessment of the People's Republic

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The China Record is the middle part of what author Fei-Ling Wang calls a planned trilogy. The previous volume, *The China Order*, came out in 2017, and clearly supplied the key foundation for much of the argument of this subsequent work. There, Wang argued about a tradition of Qin-Han power reaching back over 2000 years in Chinese history, creating a highly autocratic, centralized state structure with unique cultural and political characteristics. The argument of this earlier book is given in brief, summary form in *The China Record*, being alluded to throughout the argument, presumably on the assumption that either readers will be familiar with the earlier book, or at least have an instinctive understanding of (and agreement with) this power dynamic that Wang so often alludes to.

The China Record stands pretty much as its title suggests. It is a report card, of sorts, looking at four key areas: political governance, economic record, social life, and spirit and ecology (with the subheading "Culture, Ethics and the Environment"). At the very start of the book, in a brief introduction, Wang presents what he labels his methodology and epistemology. From what appears here, that equates largely to committing to a data-led and statistical approach to understanding China since 1949, with the epistemological element being a very clear, very early announcement of deep scepticism towards whatever data the Chinese government produces and whatever achievements it trumpets.

With that out of the way, Wang embarks on his assessment. It is a rollercoaster ride. He has a fiery polemical style and a story where nuance and impartiality are expendable. In this book, the

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