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Grassroots Makers of Chinese Digital Economy

David S. G. Goodman, *Class in Contemporary China*,
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- 1 Needless to say, one of the most important consequences of China's economic reforms is the reconfiguration of its social space. David S. G. Goodman presents a useful synthesis relying on his own investigations and the work of many Chinese and Western sociologists. He notes that identifying social classes lay at the heart of the Maoist project; in the early 1950s, a process of labelling, based on both political and economic criteria, assigned everyone a position. This categorisation, which took place in rural areas during land reform, and in urban areas during the Three- and Five-Anti campaigns, facilitated the Party's control over society. By the late 1970s, when this classification was abandoned, Chinese society was remarkably egalitarian and unstratified; 80% of the population lived in the countryside in great destitution. The launch of reforms and the economy's structural transformation rekindled social change. New social categories emerged: private entrepreneurs, owners of small or large enterprises, service sector employees, and new workers from the countryside. These upheavals opened the way for elaboration of new propositions for representation of social space. Now, sociologists found much to work on.

- 2 The book mainly focuses on a critical analysis of the main social groups. Upper classes and political and economic elites form the subject of a chapter that deals with their diversities in terms of generations and education levels, and in the case of the latter, politicisation. The middle classes are particularly difficult to identify. They are members of “old middle classes” —small private entrepreneurs and individuals in their own right—and members of “new” middle classes made up of managers or independent professionals. Quantitative evaluations by scholars vary widely. Discussion on the middle class mainly tends to include the largest possible section of Chinese society, distracting attention from situations of extreme poverty and wealth. In fact, the majority of China’s population (85%) continues to belong to subjugated classes such as state sector workers, migrant workers in the market sectors, and farmers. While such factors likewise vary according to province—rich on the east coast and poor in the interior—or gender and ethnicity, they share commonalities, especially in terms of growing mobilisation and participation in protest outbursts.
 - 3 The book closes evoking discussions that engaged sociologists or rather still do. Does the transition from a planned economy to a market economy lead to an erosion of the Party-state’s role? Victor Nee defends that controversial stand. Will the emergence of middle classes usher in democracy? The Chinese case helps test Barrington Moore’s theories on the link between social transformation and political change. Might the emergence of a working class endowed with class awareness be imagined? This is a position that Pun Ngai and Chris Chan defend, especially in regard to rising working class activism since 2010. Does rural mobilisation constitute a factor in transforming the political system? Some believe that modernisation could come from the countryside. The book ends with a reflection on inequality and the relevance of the class concept in contemporary China.
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