

China's reform and opening process - a new political-economic model in the making or just the accidental outcome of a step-by-step approach to economic reforms?¹

Christian Ploberger
Birmingham University

The reform and opening process led to a dramatic and persistence economic growth in China, which not only carries fundamental domestic implications, but also catapulted China among the major economic nations in the world. Yet, when focusing on this economic success it is all too easy to neglect the crucial role politics played in this process. It is critical to remember that in the aftermath of the Cultural Revolution the CPC faced a fundamental political crisis, which informed the underlining dynamics of the subsequent reform and opening process. Consequently, the reform/opening process not only provides an illustrative example of a political project but equally remind us that economic development does not happen in isolation from the political sphere. Indeed, it will be argued that the acceptance of alternative economic development strategies depend to a wide extent to what degree new economic approaches are fitting within an existing political, economic and administrative logic. Yet, particular institutional structures are linked with the developments of particular state structure. The plurality of state structure as well as the diversity of capitalism we can observe clearly indicates that there exist a variety of avenues for state development and how to organize the state-market relationship and the evolving Chinese model may indicate another specific example for development. In order to develop a deeper insight into the complex political-economic changes we can observe in China since the reform process began, a comprehensive analysis is required. The concept of 'regime change' with its focus on the dynamic of changes within the political economy of a state will enable us to identify these underlining dynamics. However, several clarifications are required: First, regime' refers to a middle level of cohesion in the political economy of a nation-state: to the shape, consistency, and predictability of a country's political economy over time. Second, a regime is a more permanent form of political organisation than a specific government, but a less permanent one than the state, as the state provides the framework within a regime can be identified. In applying this framework of analysis, it will not only enable us to address some of the puzzle of China's reform process, namely the co-existence of both: fundamental change and persisting continuity, but may also help us to identify the ability or inability of the Chinese state to address another critical issue of transformation: the strategic shift towards a low-carbon economy.

Keywords: China politics; State Theory; Complex Change; Crisis

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