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Leading Schools of Thought in Contemporary China by
Licheng Ma, translated by Jing L. Liu

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the nation from the perspective of mass aestheticization” (5), neither the ethnographic nor the aesthetic is sufficiently rendered.

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Leading Schools of Thought in Contemporary China, by Licheng Ma, translated by Jing L. Liu. Singapore: World Scientific Publishing, 2015. 236 pp. US\$78.00 (cloth), US\$62.00 (eBook).

Since the late 1970s, there have been lively and intellectually rigorous debates on the reform and opening up policy in China. Ma Licheng, a well-known liberal journalist in China, presents an overview of the landscape of competing ideologies. Since it was published in China in 2012, the book has been reprinted 10 times, and this thin but pungent volume was also translated into Japanese. The English edition provides readers in the West an opportunity to understand Chinese perspectives on some of the important issues faced by China at its developmental crossroads.

The book offers a vivid account of eight major schools of thought that swept across China from 1978 to 2008. Chapter 1 deals with Deng Xiaoping’s “socialism with Chinese characteristics,” which is considered China’s dominant ideology. Under Deng, reform and opening up became China’s most basic national policy. In Ma’s view, this was entirely the brainchild of Deng (3–4). “Deng Xiaoping thought” achieved brilliant success in many respects, but reform of the country’s political system lagged behind.

Chapter 2 sketches major aspects of the Old Left. The Old Leftists inherited the legacy of late Mao Zedong thought and continued to hold to three core beliefs: class struggle, public ownership, and a planned economy. The Old Left opposed the reform and opening up, while the more extreme Old Leftists supported the Cultural Revolution and the theory of continuing revolution under the dictatorship of the proletariat that Mao introduced in his later years (15). Ma argues that while many Chinese do not agree with the opinion of the Old Leftists, their views were a reflection of the older generation’s emotions and apprehensions, especially in recent years (57).

Chapter 3 is devoted to the New Left, a term used to distinguish it from the Old Left, who are diehard Maoists. The New Left viewpoint has become a vogue among Chinese intellectuals. The scholars in this camp employ the terminology of the Western left and use it to analyze contemporary Chinese reality. It is “left” because it questions the dogma of the “free market” as the centerpiece of mo-

dernity. The chapter contains an account and analysis of the debates between the liberals and the New Leftists.

In Chapter 4, Ma traces the development of democratic socialism in China. The idea of finding a “third way” has been widely discussed since the late 1980s as a democratic alternative to the capitalism and communism. Over the past 30 years, social democracy has regained public attention and become part of scholarly discourse in China. The writings of Bernstein and Karl Kautsky have been reexamined, and Marxism reinterpreted. Writing in *Yanhuang Chunqiu* in February 2007, Xie Tao, former deputy president of People’s University, publicly and explicitly stated that democratic socialism is China’s future, which sparked heated debate.

Chapter 5’s focus is on liberal thinkers who call for political reform, expansion of democracy, protection of human rights, societal oversight as a means of checking and balancing power, promotion of accountability, budget transparency, judicial independence, freedom of speech, processes for the transfer and succession of power, increased transparency, and rule of law (121). Though liberalism used to be the most popular, widespread, and influential school of Chinese thought (125), Ma shares the view of Qiu Feng that it is in significant decline for two major reasons: First, as a result of the state-owned enterprises reform, large numbers of Chinese workers were laid off, while official corruption has been widespread. As a result, people’s trust in the market economy was weakened. Second, the global financial crisis of 2008 has further undermined their belief in the invisible hand of market.

Chapter 6 surveys the mind-set of the proponents of nationalism, which is very influential today. After reviewing several nationalist books and scholarly works on nationalism published in China, Ma concludes that, overall, the two most prominent expressions of nationalism were opposing the West and resisting globalization. In the words of Zi Zhongyun, nationalism has been used as a means of satisfying personal vanity at the expense of the country’s actual well-being and could lead to fascism (129).

In Chapter 7, Ma explores six major features of populism in contemporary China. First, populism elevates the common people while denying the contributions of the elites. Second, populists oppose representative democracy and are in favor of direct political participation and grassroots democracy (*da minzhu*). Third, they champion more equal wealth distribution. Fourth, the populists value morality above all but believe it exists among people of lower-class status. Fifth, they worship charismatic leaders who make appeals to the lower classes and reject criticism of such leaders. Finally, they are impatient with gradual reforms and seek change through violence (159–60). Ma concludes that populism is grounded in the grassroots, irrationality, and protest, while corrupt officials, bad police officers, and the sinful rich are their trigger points (170).

Chapter 8 examines the emergence, contents, and political implications of the Confucian revival that started in the 1980s. Ma reviews the major arguments of the prominent proponents of neo-Confucianism and analyzes the major works by liberal Confucianists such as Qiu Feng and political Confucians such as Jiang Qing and Kang Xiaoguang.

The book is valuable, first, because Ma has an impressive knowledge of Chinese political thought. Ma cuts through the sometimes bewildering and unfounded speculation of pundits and commentators to provide readers with critical views concerning China's reform: views originating within China itself. The range of primary source materials used in this study is truly incredible. Ma demonstrates that much of the dynamic reform in China, especially after the 1989 Tiananmen watershed, can be understood as a play between liberal trends and conservative ideas. In addition, Ma's analyses incorporate the intellectual influences on Chinese politics from within and outside of China. The impacts of leading intellectuals ranging from Friedrich Hayek and Samir Amin in the West to Wang Hui and Xiao Gongqing in China are discussed thoroughly.

Second, the book is well organized, with each of its eight chapters focusing on one of the eight major schools of political thought. With engaging depth, Ma's book offers a richly conceived guide to each of the sets of beliefs animating contemporary intellectual discourse and explains how each camp addresses salient issues in China's transformation.

The analyses of the political implications of China's economic reforms are less impressive. In addition, there are some problems with the translation. But readers will benefit from Ma's insights and critical analysis on the ideas shaping modern China's dramatic transformation. The book complements the edited book by Fred Dallmayr and Zhao Tingyang, *Contemporary Chinese Political Thought: Debates and Perspectives* (2012) and my own *Political Thought and China's Transformation* (2015).

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The China Model: Political Meritocracy and the Limits of Democracy, by Daniel A. Bell. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015. xii+318 pp. US\$29.95/£19.95 (cloth).

Herrlee G. Creel, in the introduction to volume 1 of *Origins of Statecraft in China*, contended that modern political theorists would be wise to explore ancient China because by the first century BC, China not only had become "one of the largest states the world has known" but also "had a centralised adminis-