

Book Review: *The Capitalists of the 21st Century* by Werner Rügemer

Imbalanced Global Expansion of 21st Century Capitalism and
the Outward Friendly Cooperation of China

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Since the 2008 global financial crisis, there has been on the one hand the apparent trend of the United States in turning away from globalization, while on the other hand there has been a hidden agenda of continued global expansion by US financial capital. These two trends intertwine with each other, seemingly contradictory yet inherently interconnected. The United States, unable to implement effective institutional reforms after the financial crisis to check the disorderly expansion of financial capital and mitigate its domestic economic and political contradictions, views China, which is actively promoting globalization, as a challenger to the US hegemonic order and consistently pursues “de-Sinicization”, further exacerbating their own systemic crisis and global governance crisis. The world is experiencing a once-in-a-century major transformation, which is evolving at an accelerated pace. The world is entering a period of turbulence and transformation, facing more uncertainties and unpredictable factors. It is necessary to be prepared for significant challenges, even to face fierce storms and tumultuous waves. The major challenge appears to be on the surface, but its internal contradictions lie in the hidden agenda. The pressing concerns for China and the world are as follows: how to fully comprehend the inherent contradictions of the 21st-century’s new global expansion of US financial capital; the external impact of these developments on socialism with Chinese characteristics in its promotion of friendly cooperation around the globe; coping better with the significant changes and potential turbulence; and improve the global economic order.

Dr. Werner Rügemer, a well-known German scholar, has published a book entitled *The Capitalists of the 21st Century. An Easy-to-understand Outline of the New Financial Players* (Hamburg, Tredition, 2019, Chinese edition published by Oriental Press in June 2023, translated by Xiao Lei). In this book, Rügemer conducts a detailed and professional study of the global expansion and inherent crisis of 21st-century American financial capital, while acknowledging and anticipating the contributions of socialism with Chinese characteristics in promoting global friendly cooperation. The book clearly points out that since the 1980s, global capital, driven by globalization and informatization, has concentrated itself significantly and formed a few large capital groups that virtually control the most critical industries and companies in the West. These are called the “new capiatlists” of the 21st century. The deep and wide expansion of this new capitalism globally has not only intensified the concentration of wealth and power imbalances between labor and capital but also strengthened the economic and political control of the United States over Europe. It has triggered global financial crises and continues to dominate even after the crises, using distorted neoliberal policies in an effort to mitigate the neoliberal crisis. This further exacerbates labor instability and declining purchasing power, giving rise to political, social, and international relations crises, as well as intensifying the global governance crisis, which necessitates a new multilateral international order. Socialism with Chinese characteristics has successfully responded to the challenges and opportunities brought about by globalization and rapidly developed. It actively promotes the rationalization of the global economic order and facilitates a globalization of peace, equality, and cooperation. Countries worldwide need to overcome the negative influence of transnational financial groups led by the United States and work together to advance global cooperative development.

Firstly, this book conducts an in-depth analysis of the global expansion of transnational financial groups led by the United States, pointing out how they control crucial aspects of the economy through various mechanisms. The book categorizes financial participants into five tiers: the first tier includes major capital organizers such as Black-Rock; the second tier consists of private equity funds, hedge funds, and venture capitalists; the third tier involves elite investment banks and traditional large banks; the fourth tier comprises the five internet giants (Google, Apple, Microsoft, Facebook, and Amazon); and the fifth tier includes participants in the digital platform economy such as Uber and Airbnb. The book further provides a systematic empirical analysis of the collaboration within financial capital, financial capital’s control over digital capital, and the data monopoly of digital capital. It specifically reveals the logic behind financial capital, enhancing the targeted and credible critique of financial capital and digital capital, and dispels myths surrounding digital capital.

Secondly, this book takes the perspective of continental European countries to analyze how American financial capital strengthens its control over European capital. It examines how it replicates the labor-capital relations, media narratives, and data surveillance seen in the United States to suppress European local capital, diverting it towards the United States and enhancing America’s global capital dominance. This analysis contributes to dispelling the misconception of American “pseudo-multilateralism.”

Thirdly, from the viewpoint of Western left-wing scholars, this book presents a fair analysis and expresses earnest expectations of how socialism with Chinese characteris-

tics responds to the challenges and opportunities of globalization and promotes friendly global cooperation. This work aids in fostering deep exchanges between Chinese and western scholars regarding the achievements and international influence of Socialism with Chinese characteristics and helps break the isolation caused by the “Western values alliance” towards China.

From a theoretical perspective, this book further dispels the myths surrounding the American “free-market” and “democratic” hypotheses. It facilitates the expansion of a theory of neo-imperialism by advancing research on the new monopolies in production, circulation, financial capital, and international oligarchic alliances. It also promotes the study of the new trends of contemporary capitalism’s as monopolistic, exploitative, decadent, parasitic, transitional, and precarious. As the United States seeks to isolate China in the international community and attempts to downplay China’s economy amidst the after-effects of the pandemic, some intellectuals both within and outside China still hold unfounded illusions about the American-style market economy and its increasingly polarized political system. However, this book’s theoretical and practical analysis helps to break down these misconceptions.

From a practical standpoint, this book is valuable for professionals to understand and grasp the root causes and development trends of the current international relations crisis, and how to promote global friendly cooperation. It also provides strong insights and references for how China can strengthen normalized supervision of financial capital and digital platforms. As the combination of American financial and digital capital penetrates the global economy more covertly under the wave of deglobalization, China, in its openness to the world, needs to break various sanctions and blockades imposed by American neo-imperialism. China should adhere to a policy of dual-direction openness with the world, better guide international capital to serve the real economy and people’s interests, adhere to principles of peaceful development, reciprocal openness, and mutually beneficial cooperation, and promote the rationalization of the global economic order.

Reviewed Book

Rügemer, Werner. 2019. *The Capitalists of the 21st Century. An Easy-to-understand Outline of the New Financial Players*. Hamburg: Tredition.

(Editor: Sun Yexia)

