

Private Entrepreneurs as a “Strategic Group” in the Chinese Polity

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Abstract

China scholars have consistently described China’s private entrepreneurs as politically co-opted by the Communist Party regime. Since China’s economic development now overwhelmingly depends on the performance of the private sector, the political dynamics and power configurations within the current regime coalition between state and business may have seen change over the past decade. Drawing on the recent literature on state-business relations and fieldwork conducted in different provinces, cities, and counties since 2012, this paper hypothesizes that private entrepreneurs are a “strategic group” in Chinese politics. By working through the multidimensional networks that criss-cross different party-state units, administrative levels, and formal institutions such as business associations and local parliamentary bodies all over the country, private entrepreneurs act collectively, albeit in (as yet) uncoordinated ways. By looking closely at the evolving government-business nexus in China’s local state, this article sheds new light on private entrepreneurs’ strategic action in China’s political system and highlights that private entrepreneurs are increasingly influential within the existing regime coalition.

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