

China's unique

UNDERSTANDING
CHINA PT.1/5

path to Development



CLIMATE VANGUARD



For the first time in 500 years, a country from the Global South is challenging Western hegemony: the People's Republic of China (PRC).

The Global North, led by the US, will not give up its centuries-long rule peacefully. Instead, it is mounting **a new Cold War on China.**

As eco-socialists in the Global North, we must actively resist our ruling classes' attempts to manufacture consent for imperialist war.

Instead, we must develop our own political conclusions on China and its role in an emergent multipolar world. **Without proper investigation, we have no ability to advance our struggle.**

With this in mind, we turn our attention to understanding China's revolutionary history and its unique path to development →



The Century of Humiliation

By the end of the 18th Century, China was the most advanced economy in the world, trading commodities like silk, ceramics, and tea in exchange for silver that Europe plundered from the Americas.

After imperial Britain unsuccessfully tried to liberalise China's tightly controlled system of foreign trade, it began to illegally smuggle opium into China, causing a social crisis of mass addiction.

In response to China's attempts at curbing the flow of opium, the British Navy laid siege to the Chinese coast in what became known as the first Opium War (1839-1842). Suffering a humiliating defeat, China was forced to open up its economy to imperialist European powers.



CLIMATE VANGUARD

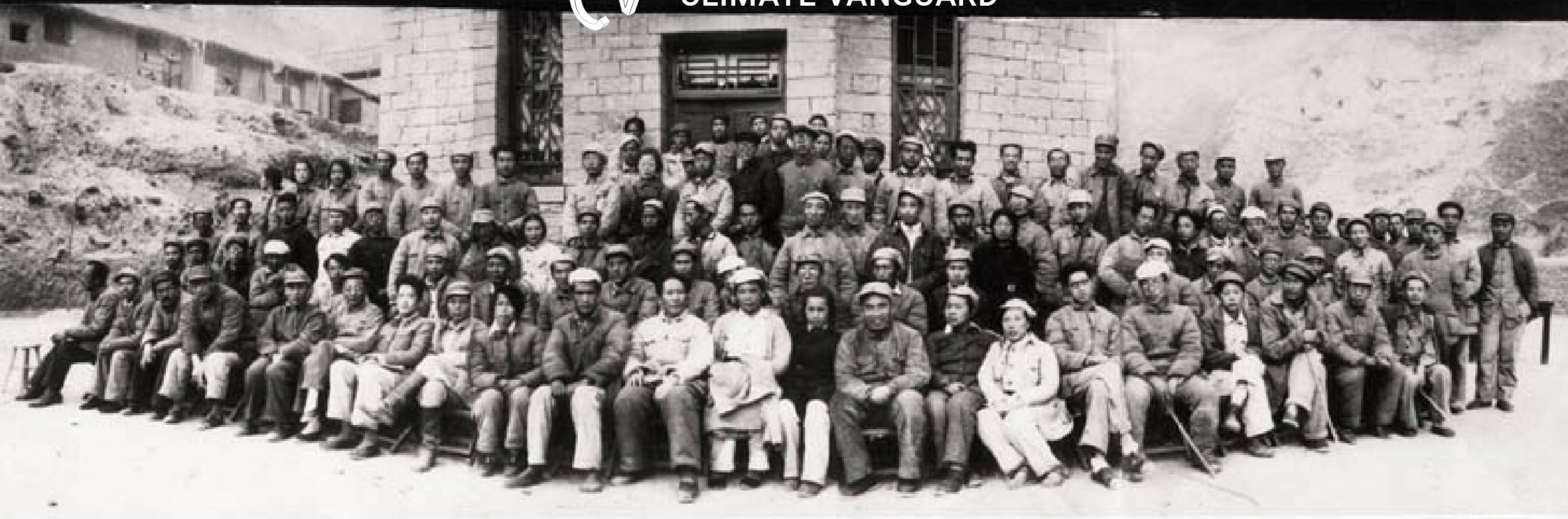


The Chinese People Stand Up

Under the pressure of imperialism, both from Europe and Japan, the Chinese Empire collapsed in 1911, and the country descended into warlordism.

In 1921, the Communist Party of China (CPC) was formed.

Source: PSL & Qiao Collective, *Liberation School* (2020). **Image:** Reverently looking up to the site of the first National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party, 1973. Chineseposters.net.



With the support of the Communist International*, the CPC would enter into a united front** with the Kuomintang (KMT), a bourgeois nationalist party. After the first united front collapsed in 1927, a second united front was formed in 1936 in order to resist Japan's war on China.

With the end of World War II in 1945, the CPC and KMT alliance descended into a civil war, which the CPC won in 1949. On October 1st, the PRC was formed. The Chinese people had "stood up" after a "century of humiliation."

*The Communist International, also known as the Third International, was a global organisation of communist parties dedicated to world revolution.

**A united front is a tactical alliance, usually between leftist social forces, to achieve common short-term goals (e.g. national liberation or fighting fascism).

The Maoist Period (1949-1976)

After winning power, the CPC's immediate objective was development. This was necessary to address the wounds left by a century of imperialist plunder, but also the "age-old" problems of hunger, illiteracy, and patriarchy.

Under the leadership of Mao Tse-Tung, the CPC pursued a development strategy that combined state control over production, exchange, and pricing with the bottom-up engagement of the masses. This model led to great accomplishments over the first decades of the PRC's existence:

A black and white photograph of Mao Zedong speaking at a podium. He is wearing a dark Mao suit and has a microphone in front of him. The background is a patterned screen.

Image: Mao establishing the PRC on October 1st, 1949. Getty images.

Sources: Prashad, Mronline (2022); Tricontinental, Serve the People (2021); L. Studies (2014); Martinez, The East Is Still Red (2023); Xu, From Commune t

- ↳ **Feudalism was abolished and land collectivised** into People's Communes, which organised production and social provisioning
- ↳ **Life expectancy increased** from 35-40 years in 1949 to 65.5 years in 1980, "the most rapid sustained increase in documented human history"
- ↳ **Literacy increased** from 20% to 93% of the population
- ↳ **Universal healthcare was established**, with millions of "barefoot doctors" dispatched to the countryside
- ↳ **Patriarchal marriage customs were abolished and women's role in society increased**
- ↳ **Heavy and light industry were established**

Barbarez et al., *Population and Capitalism* (2018).

Reform & Opening Up (1976-)

However, by the time of Mao's death in 1976, China was still a relatively impoverished country suffering from economic stagnation and international isolation.

Deng Xiaoping, who succeeded Mao as the leader of the PRC, argued that **"poverty is not socialism, that socialism means eliminating poverty."**

To increase the country's productive capacity and advance to a higher stage of socialism, Deng and the post-Mao leadership argued that a new development strategy was needed, known as **"Reform and Opening Up."**

Sources: Martinez, The East Is Still Red (2023); Losurdo, Has China Turned to Capitalism? (2017).



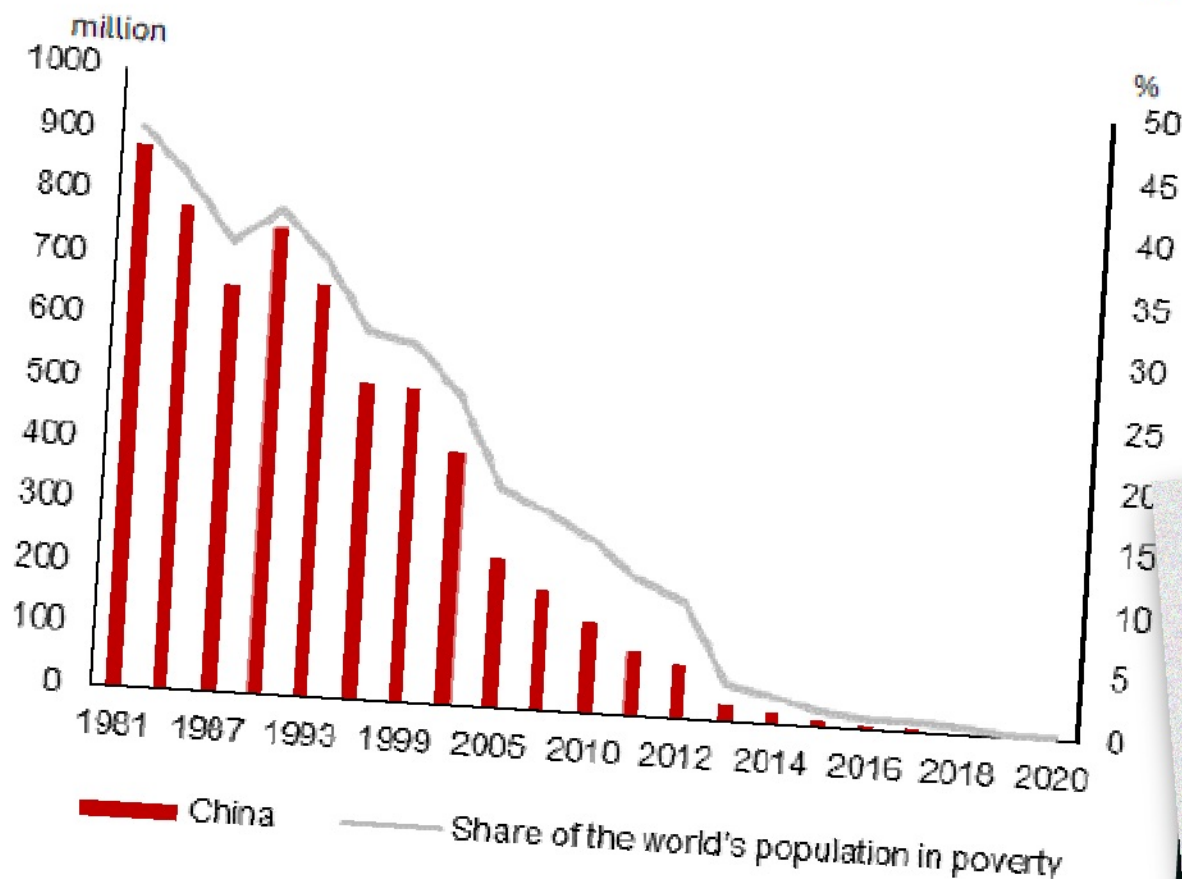
Reform & Opening Up introduced a series of market reforms to China.

This included the devolution of land management rights from the commune to rural households, the radical restructuring of state-owned enterprises, and the entrance of foreign capital into special economic zones.

However, the CPC placed **numerous restrictions on capital:**

- ↪ Foreign capital's market access was **conditioned on technology transfer**, which has been key to China's rapid development of advanced machinery and scientific innovation
- ↪ The state maintained **sovereign control over the "commanding heights" of the economy**, like finance, land, heavy industry, energy, transport, and communications
- ↪ The private and public sector remained beholden to **state-led planning for social and economic development**

Figure 1. China's population living in poverty



Source: World Bank PovcalNet.
Note: Poverty population is measured using the World Bank's international poverty line \$1.90 per person per day, 2011 purchasing power parity.

摸着石头过河

Crossing the River by Feeling the Stones

Reform & Opening Up led to significant social contradictions, including mass layoffs from the state sector, capitalist labour exploitation, environmental destruction, growing corruption within the party, and ballooning social inequality. However, it also created a massive social surplus, which helped enable the following:

↳ **Lifting 800 million people out of extreme poverty**, qualified by UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres as "the greatest anti-poverty achievement in history"

↳ **The sustained rollout of essential infrastructure**, including roads, railways, ports, airports, dams, electricity production, telecommunications, water and sewage systems, and housing

↳ **Funding for the Belt & Road Initiative**, which has provided Global South countries with a more equitable pathway to sovereign development than predatory Western institutions (e.g. the IMF)



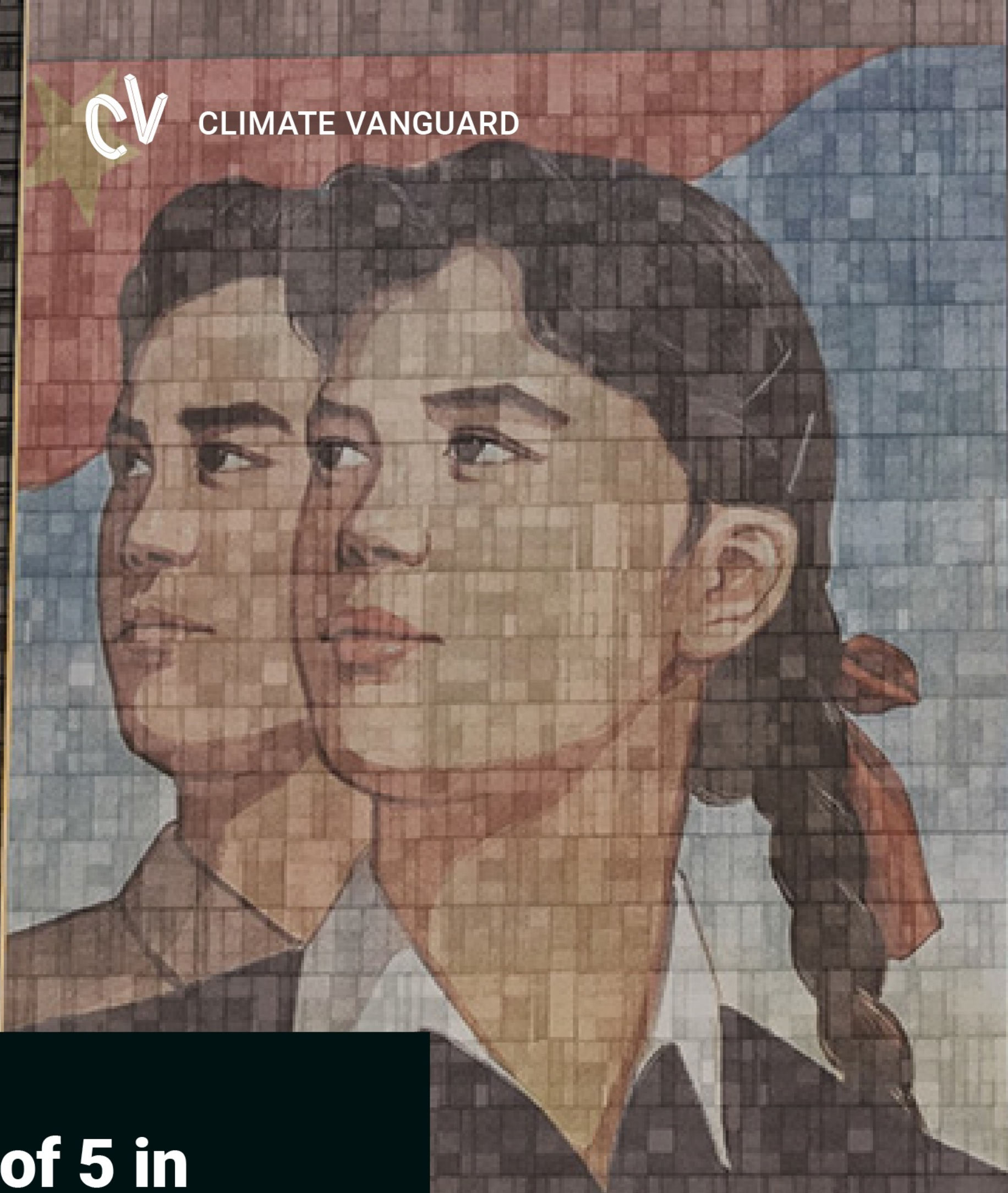
CLIMATE VANGUARD

Socialism with Chinese Characteristics

The CPC calls its fusion of state planning with a mixed public and private, export-oriented economy “socialism with Chinese characteristics.” Polling suggests that this developmental model remains extremely popular with the Chinese people.

According to the Alliance for Democracies, a Western non-profit organisation, public perceptions of government accountability remain among the world’s highest in China, even compared to Western liberal democracies. In the US, for example, 57% of people believe their government only serves a minority of people.

This is buoyed by clear social indicators. For example, the cost of living in China is 60.3% lower than the US, the world’s leading capitalist country.



**This is part 1 of 5 in
a series dedicated to
understanding China.**

In the following posts, we will critically examine China's poverty alleviation efforts, whether or not China is an imperialist country, China's approach to ecological sustainability, and the US-led Global North's new Cold War on China.

怀念我，也不必
，我离开以后，
人民万岁！”