

China Perspectives, 30 Years of Academic Publication on Contemporary China

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While 2022 marked both the 30th anniversary and the last issues of the French-language academic journal *Perspectives chinoises*, it will soon be the turn of its sister-publication in English, *China Perspectives*, to enter its fourth decade of existence in 2025. Anniversary editorials are commonplace within academic journals, including in Asian and Chinese studies: such texts are usually an opportunity to evaluate major trends and changes in the field and to reflect on submitted and published articles amidst regional and global social changes (Shambaugh 1995; Edmonds 2009; Strauss 2009; Bramall 2011 among others for *The China Quarterly*, for example). Like us, Severine Arsène, *China Perspectives'* Chief Editor from 2013 to 2017, also took the opportunity of a “varia” issue (exceptional in the journal, which mainly publishes special features) to bend to this exercise in 2017: her editorial then rightly pinpointed the (still ongoing) challenges faced by academic journals in an era of digitalisation, the increased importance given to indexing, and a context in which Hong Kong – the city where *China Perspectives'* team is based and the journal is published – celebrated the 20th anniversary of its handover to China (Arsène 2017).

This year similarly marks a series of important milestones and changes, both for *China Perspectives* and the Chinese-speaking world. Despite unprecedented challenges related to the closing down of national borders during the Covid-19 pandemic, the French Centre for Research on Contemporary China (CEFC), located in The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology since 2020, managed to keep its publication agenda afloat thanks to tremendous collective efforts. During the past year-and-a-half, borders gradually reopened in Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Mainland China, bringing hope for a surge in much-needed publications based on first-hand fieldwork in the area, and shedding new light on the transformations of Chinese societies in the post-Covid era.

China Perspectives itself recently went through several transformations. Besides the termination of the French version and of printed issues in 2022 (decisions made in the midst of changes in the readership's profiles and reading practices, as well as in a context of increased digitalisation of scientific publications), it was also decided in 2023 to increase the number of published articles in each issue from six to seven, in order to adapt to a surge in submissions that followed *China Perspectives'* listing in the Social Science Citation Index (SSCI) in 2019.

China Perspectives is now an English-only, internationally recognised digital academic journal, published by a Hong Kong-based French research institution, which focuses on analysing contemporary Chinese societies with social sciences approaches. Its current shape, however, is the result of a rarely-told history that starts as early as the 1980s, and whose evolutions reflect transformations in both the fields of international academic publishing and French Chinese studies. We are not much older than the journal we have the honour to serve as Chief Editor and Deputy Chief Editor. Sketching its history therefore takes us back to eras of French contemporary Chinese studies that our cohort of early-career researchers (trained in France in the field of Chinese studies in the late 2000s and early 2010s) have never experienced, while also enlightening us on the legacy on which our current work is based.

When *Perspectives chinoises* was first published in 1992, it followed in the footsteps of previous French publications based in Hong Kong, and initially aimed at reporting on Chinese and Sinological current events. The *Monthly Bulletin of the French office of Sinology in Hong Kong* (*Bulletin mensuel de l'Antenne française de sinologie à Hong Kong*) was published from 1979 to 1983 by the French Consulate in Hong Kong and Macao, and continued under the name *Sinology Bulletin* (*Bulletin de sinologie*) from 1983 to 1992.

Those first publications were embedded in their time and context. In the 1980s, little information on China was accessible to non-Chinese speakers in France, and Hong Kong was then an amazing platform for international research on China and Chinese studies. The *Monthly Bulletin* therefore emerged with two objectives. The first was to report on Chinese news by translating articles or extracts of articles from the Hong Kong press in Chinese. The particular territory of Hong Kong, neighbouring Mainland China and being the home of a substantial press industry, made it the most appropriate place, in the manner of Simon Leys' *The Chairman's New Clothes: Mao and the Cultural Revolution* (*Les Habits neufs du président Mao*) in 1971. As Hong Kong was then also an important academic hub for Chinese studies, the second objective of these bulletins was to report on the rich Sinological life in Hong Kong, both including and going beyond what was done at the two universities existing at that time: The University of Hong Kong and The Chinese University of Hong Kong. In the same vein, the bulletin featured handwritten maps to find Hong Kong best bookshops by neighbourhood (see iconography). This period was therefore described as voluntarily "left informal, much like this Sinological life itself" (Jullien 1979).

Contributors at that time were essentially composed of French Sinologists present in Hong Kong, whether from the academic sphere or not. The presentation of the first issue of the *Monthly Bulletin* in 1979 illustrates this plural anchoring. Signed by a young François Jullien (then head of the French office of Sinology in Hong Kong and later a well-known figure in the field of Chinese philosophy in France), the text mentions that the bulletin would also be based on the volunteer work of "Chinese-speaking French residents in Hong Kong working in different sectors" (Jullien 1979). Nicolas Chapuis, for instance, who became a diplomat shortly thereafter and was notably appointed Ambassador of the European Union to China from 2018 to 2022, is also listed among the contributors to this first issue.

Much like China itself, the bulletin experienced a period of reform at the start of the year 1992, just as Deng Xiaoping was relaunching the programme of reform and opening up with his famous Southern tour in January and February 1992. In the last *Sinology Bulletin*, published in January 1992, Michel Bonnin and Raphaël Jacquet (the latter would move on to become *The China Quarterly's* Editorial Manager) announced without sadness the ending of the bulletin, which gave place to the birth of *Perspectives chinoises*, "a journal which (...) will increase its influence as well as the quality of the service it provides to its audience" (Bonnin and Jacquet 1992: 4).

In March 1992, the Chinese New Year of the Monkey left its mark on the cover of the first issue of *Perspectives chinoises*, while Michel Bonnin announced the scope of this new journal in its editorial. In both its continuity and its new format, the bulletin had a programmatic objective: that of giving space to more scientific publications written by specialists and departing from a sole focus on current events:

News from the Chinese world (People's Republic of China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, possibly Singapore and the Chinese diaspora)¹ will remain the main theme of the journal, and the Hong Kong press, poorly known or even unknown to non-

specialists, will remain an important source. But, with our resources (which are still weak), we will try to present this news in a more systematic way, favouring issues around a theme. Furthermore, we will publish more in-depth articles written by specialists on subjects which, while providing a better understanding of today's Chinese realities, will not necessarily be current affairs subjects in the strict sense of the term. (Bonnin 1992: 4)

In 1995, *Perspectives chinoises* gave birth to *China Perspectives*, its sister publication in English. The first issues of *China Perspectives* were not exact replicas of *Perspectives chinoises*, making up for a three-year gap by offering a selection of some of the best articles already published in French and then translated into English. Very quickly, however, the two journals came together, *China Perspectives* then becoming the translated version in English of *Perspectives chinoises*. While French had long been a language "that a Sinologist, whatever his native country and the place where he works, needs to be conversant with," and France occupied, until World War II, a position that was "at the center of international Sinology" (Will 2023: 574), this had no longer been the case for several decades. Therefore, the establishment of an English version of the journal aimed at making French research in social sciences on contemporary China better known to an English-speaking audience, through an original format that no other English academic journal offered.

In its first decade of existence, *Perspectives chinoises/China Perspectives* was therefore a journal whose identity relied on its broad scope, regarding both the topics tackled and their format, and which aimed at providing researchers, diplomats, businessmen, journalists, and the general public with cutting-edge yet accessible news analysis of contemporary Chinese societies. As in *Sinology Bulletin*, a lot of press reviews based on Chinese newspapers published in Hong Kong were included in the journal. In addition, one could also find translations of Chinese literature and short scientific pieces of a few pages written by specialists and scholars.

During that period, the journal nevertheless remained mainly "homemade" in the sense that most of its articles were written by CEFC researchers themselves. Thus, from 1992 to 1998, among all the texts published in *Perspectives chinoises/China Perspectives*, and whatever their categories (editorial, article, book review, translation, etc.), about 50 were written by Michel Bonnin, more or less the same number by Jean-Philippe Béja, more than 20 by Raphaël Jacquet or Jean-Pierre Cabestan, and around 15 by Eric Sautédé or Jean-François Huchet. Such a list could lead one to believe that in the 1990s, the journal was perhaps not exemplary in terms of gender diversity! To be sure, women were not entirely absent from the journal, but their minority position did testify to the journal's embeddedness in its time, as academic professions were then much less feminised than today (Chenu and Martin 2016). The successive teams of Chief Editors and Deputy Chief Editors are a good reflection of the growing feminisation of the academic sphere. In recent years, the positions of Chief Editor and Deputy Chief Editor have been occupied in majority by women, as evidenced by the two authors of this editorial. Echoing the "homemade" characteristics of the journal,

1. Macao was later added to this list.

the *Perspectives chinoises/China Perspectives'* editorial committee did not have access to software that processed Chinese in its early days. Chinese characters were therefore entered on a computer using an appropriate software that only employees of the French Consulate General in Hong Kong and Macao possessed. They were then printed and added at the end of the journal.

Little by little, the journal's identity evolved along with changes and evolutions in both the media and scientific spheres. From its one-of-a-kind initial format, *Perspectives chinoises* and its English version moved on towards the adoption of a more conventional scientific framework, following a process of greater academic professionalisation and internationalisation. From the late 1990s/early 2000s onward, the journal increasingly focused on the publication of research which, rather than sticking with the most recent transformations and events in Chinese societies, aimed at providing deeper, more structured analysis about larger social, political, and economic trends affecting Mainland China, Hong Kong, Macao, and Taiwan. Among other elements, this trend was reflected in the transition from a bimonthly journal to a quarterly one in 2007, as well as in articles that diminished in number but increased in length.

This academic professionalisation process started with that of the editorial team itself. During the journal's first decade of existence, several chief editors notably had a background in journalism or translation, which echoed the journal's ambition to render academic knowledge on China more accessible to a larger public. That was, for example, the case with Jacques Seurre (who was previously a press correspondent before becoming the journal's Chief Editor in 1995, and came to translate several important pieces of contemporary Chinese literature into French, such as Wang Xiaobo's *The Golden Age* in 2001), and also with Patricia Batto, who pursued a career in journalism before obtaining her PhD in Chinese studies from the National Institute for Oriental Languages and Civilisations (INALCO) in 2002 and joined the CEFC as Chief Editor in 2003-2006. Jean-Philippe Béja, the first researcher to be appointed to the CEFC by the French National Centre for Scientific Research (CNRS) in 1993, had himself been trained in one of France's leading journalism schools, and therefore cultivated a strong interest in the dissemination of academic knowledge on China. Rather than being given to local recruits, editorial positions were increasingly assigned to researchers appointed from France to the CEFC. In 2011, among the four researchers appointed by the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, two were explicitly dedicated to the journal as Chief Editor and Deputy Chief Editor. Additionally, in 2011, the functions of editorial manager started to be specifically assigned to international volunteers in administration (VIA) who had been present at the CEFC since 1998.

The format of the journal professionalised as well at the turn of the century. In 1998, under the direction of Jean-Pierre Cabestan, the CEFC website was created, which allowed for better promotion of the journal, a space to sell it online, and later on to offer additional information for those wanting to learn more about specific issues dealt with in the journal's articles (a practice that did not last, but nicely complemented the published issues). Greater attention was also given to the quality of iconography from 1999 onward, when Eric Sautédé was Chief Editor, and partnerships developed with photo agencies such as AFP, professional photographers, and companies promoting mainland Chinese photographs. In 2004, abstracts were systematically

included at the beginning of articles, and Chinese characters, which were initially selected and collected at the end of each issue, were integrated into the text itself. Special features were systematised in 2007 and keywords introduced in 2011. Until recently, though, the journal retained some format specificities that still echoed that of the original *Perspectives chinoises*: a section first called "China analysis" ("Nouvelles de Chine") and then "Current affairs" ("Articles d'actualité") remained from 2007 to 2021. This section provided readers with research notes on news articles or synthetic analysis of recent social trends and events, written either by researchers or CEFC research assistants.

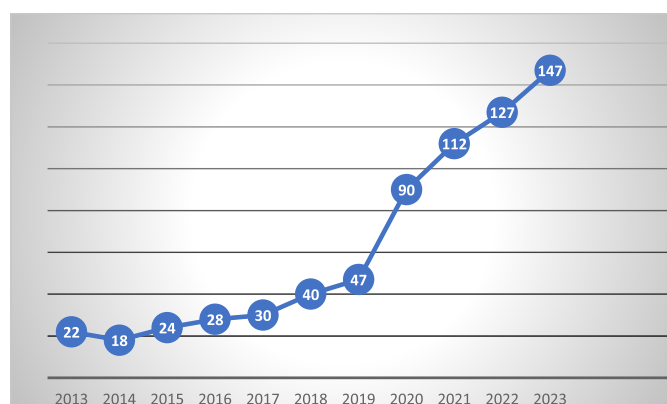
Most importantly, the publication of the journal has followed increasingly standardised and transparent scientific procedures in the last two decades, including application to SSCI and fostering the journal's international recognition. An editorial board was therefore constituted as early as 1998 and composed of about three dozen renowned international scholars in the field of Chinese studies, who were charged with anonymously evaluating submitted articles. Since then, however, external reviewers have increasingly been solicited for anonymous evaluations to ensure the greatest relevance in terms of thematic and methodological expertise. Today, anonymous evaluations are exclusively conducted by external reviewers. From 2013 onward, the peer-reviewed nature of articles started to be indicated explicitly in the journal, and greater attention was also placed on the regularity of publication following the journal's first application to the SSCI in 2009. These changes inevitably affected the readership of the journal, especially its French version, whose increasingly scientific format did not appeal as much to its initially larger audience of diplomats, businessmen, journalists, and French residents based in Mainland China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan.

Explicit efforts were therefore deployed by successive editorial teams to increase the visibility and accessibility of the journal while adapting to new reading practices and a more academic target audience. Exhibited at the annual congress of the Association of Asian Studies in 2000 and 2009, *Perspectives chinoises* and *China Perspectives* were also integrated with several international online platforms and databases, which largely helped in stimulating the journal's impact factor: EBSCO, Asia Studies, Ulrich's List (2009), RMIT (2012), ProQuest (2013), and JSTOR (2014), to only name a few – but also Revues.org (2007, now OpenEdition Journals) and Persée.fr (2010) as far as French platforms are concerned. The latter and JSTOR now offer access to the journal's articles free of charge following the first year of their publication, as the paywall of the journal has been reduced from three to one year in 2017.

These format and procedural changes, as well as publicising efforts, have allowed *Perspectives chinoises* and *China Perspectives* to benefit from increased recognition in both the French and international academic community alike, and to impose themselves as major references in the field of contemporary Chinese studies. Both were listed as reference journals in political sciences, sociology-demography, and anthropology-ethnology by the French High Council for the Evaluation of Research and Higher Education (HCERES, previously named AERES) in the early 2010s. *China Perspectives*, which was indexed in Scopus in 2014, finally attained inclusion in the SSCI in December 2019, ten years after its first application.

Such recognition has had an impressive impact on the journal and has profoundly transformed the challenges faced by the editorial teams. Being indexed in the SSCI set in stone practices put in place by successive editorial teams. At the same time, it also profoundly changed the dynamics of the journal, as this new-found attention in a context of “publish or perish” resulted in an exponential increase in the number of manuscripts submitted (Figure 1). Between 2013 and 2019, the number of manuscripts submitted had increased, but only in a relatively small proportion. 2020 marked a clear turning point, with a near-doubling of the number of manuscripts submitted to *China Perspectives*, from 47 in 2019 to 90 in 2020. The increase has remained constant since then. These figures only concern manuscripts submitted spontaneously to the journal, to which must be added those submitted as part of a special feature, around 30 per year in recent years.

Figure 1. Number of articles spontaneously submitted per year (2013-2023)



Source: *China Perspectives*.

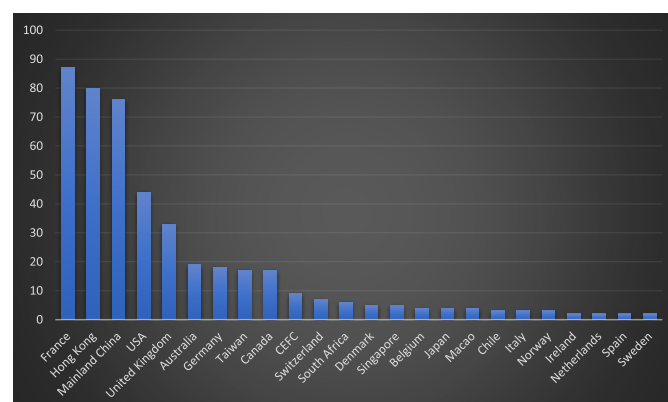
The recognition provided by indexing in the SSCI for the English version of the journal, *China Perspectives*, confirmed its evolution towards the adoption of international academic norms, and its inclusion in the international ecosystem of scientific publication. Originally published only in French, then offering translations in English of articles written in French, *Perspectives chinoises/China Perspectives* increasingly gained its place in the international academic world via the submission of articles directly written in English. In the 2010s, articles were submitted in both languages, French and English, but with a trend of submissions in English gradually supplanting those in French, even when submitted by native French-speaking researchers. The mutation was more significant in articles submitted as part of a special feature: in 2014 only two such submitted articles were in French, while five French-speaking authors chose to contribute to special features directly in English. As for the articles submitted individually 42% were written in French that year. The following years were marked by the increased primacy of English: in 2016, 2017, and 2018, 75% of the articles submitted were in English. This proportion rose to more than 85% in 2019, and 96% in 2020.

Such a trend can certainly be explained by the increasing diversity of national origins of authors that comes with a process of internationalisation in the world of contemporary China studies,

but also by the wish of the editorial teams to guarantee a high quality of evaluation for the articles. Indeed, the scarce pool of French-speaking reviewers compared to the possibilities offered by English led to difficulties in finding appropriate reviewers and also in retaining genuine anonymity. Therefore, the editorial teams of *Perspectives chinoises/China Perspectives* gradually encouraged French-speaking authors to directly submit their articles in English. From 2021 onward, in order to ensure fairness between scholars, the journal asked for submitted manuscripts to be written in English only (with the Editorial Committee reserving the right to exceptionally accept submissions in French). Although becoming academia's lingua franca, the use of English remains discriminatory due to unequal command between native and non-native speakers. Keeping this in mind, especially against the backdrop of a journal produced by researchers and editors whose mother tongue is most often French, the journal guarantees the quality of the language thanks to proofreading by Stacy Mosher, herself a translator, editor, and writer with an intimate knowledge of China. As such, the journal also plays an important role, at the core of the CEFC's identity, in supporting French researchers – initially by helping them having their articles translated into English, and now by providing them with free-of-charge English proofreading services.

While *Perspectives chinoises/China Perspectives* used to be written overwhelmingly by French contributors in the 1990s, the journal slowly gave place to a wide geographic diversity among its authors. Although we are not able to provide statistics about authors' nationalities, the increasing diversity of their institutional affiliations testifies to the internationalisation of the journal. As exemplified in Figure 2, over the period 2013-2023, France certainly remains the country most represented among authors' academic affiliations. However, authors from French institutions are no longer the majority. The very large number of authors from Hong Kong and Mainland China universities shows the journal's and the CEFC's strong integration into the local academic fabric. The other countries represented reflect the major centres of scientific production, with the USA, United Kingdom, Australia, and Germany being among those best represented. Finally, the great geographical diversity of the authors' universities should be highlighted, with all continents represented.

Figure 2. Institutions of origin of the authors of published articles by area (2013-2023)



Source: *China Perspectives*.

In this “varia” issue, the seven articles interestingly reflect recent trends observed in *China Perspectives* as well as in other major China studies journal: an internationalisation of the world of contemporary China studies, a rise of quality submissions from Taiwan, Hong Kong, Mainland China, and South East Asia, as well as an increasing number of collaborative research projects (Strauss 2009: 888). Three of the seven articles in this issue are indeed written by scholars based in Mainland China universities, two by researchers based in three different Hong Kong institutions, one by researchers based in Malaysia, and another located in the Netherlands. Three of these seven articles are also coauthored. Finally, a wide range of social science and humanities disciplines are represented (including literature, economy, sociology, and anthropology), and research methods employed are extremely diverse, going from online ethnography and textual analysis to interviews and quantitative methods.

These articles also touch upon important topics for the understanding of contemporary Chinese societies. Digital cultures, in particular, are well represented in this issue. In their article, Tingting Liu, Xizi Chen, and Zequ Lin dive into the Chinese ACGN (anime, comics, games, and novels) online subculture, which had made a home out of the video sharing platform Bilibili. More specifically, they use the ethnographic method to analyse how ACGN fandom culture and other types of social actors have reacted to the mainstreaming, platformisation, and re-conventionalisation of this digital platform. Focusing on another digital phenomenon in China, Louis Augustin-Jean and Vandana Saxena analyse in their article the changing ritualistic practices and meanings attributed to New Year “red packets” (*hongbao* 紅包) following the development of its digital equivalent, the *e-hongbao*.

Three articles also deal with topics related to identity and representations. Hao Jin’s article examines the literary and cinematic representations of ethnic frontiers in 1980s China, arguing that these representations “reflect intellectuals’ different views of China’s ultra-leftist history (...) as well as urbanisation and marketisation in the 1980s” (p. 11). In her paper focusing on two contemporary Chinese authors, Shuang Liu complements existing research on Chinese migrant worker literature by pointing out the importance of rural narratives in these authors’ works and the ways in which they can enrich our understandings of migrant workers’ relationships to their native countryside. Anson Au’s article finally deals with the issue of ethnonational identification in contemporary Hong Kong. Using mixed methods and adopting a relational approach to ethnonational identification, the author shows that rather than opposing a Hongkonger identity purportedly distinct from a Chinese one, one should understand these identifications as symbolic hinges “through which individuals switch (...) to appease dislocated segments of their social networks” (p. 51).

Finally, two articles deal with issues of religion and of education. In her article, Wenwen Chen addresses the issue of domination in the Chinese Christian Church and the resistance strategies associated with it. Through the analysis of the life experiences of three female believers punished for their “sins,” she argues that the process of Sinicisation of Christianity lies at the crossroad of both fundamentalist Church doctrines and disciplinary structures of personal life in China. The study by Hon-Kwong Lui and Jin Jiang compares the

impact of higher education expansion since the late 1990s on earnings premium in Hong Kong and Mainland China – which share the same cultural Confucian cultural background while differing in terms of economic system.

The French version of the journal, *Perspectives chinoises*, is not published anymore. Yet, its English version, *China Perspectives*, remains an incredible tool for promoting French – and European – research on China abroad. It is therefore from the perspective of increasing integration into global research networks that this evolution must be considered. Such a process takes time and has been built thanks to the inscription of the CEFC in local research networks. The centre had an office in Beijing from 2011 to 2021, which contributed a great deal to fostering academic exchanges with Chinese researchers and promoting the journal in these networks. Likewise, the CEFC has had an office in Taipei since 1994, which has strengthened academic exchanges beyond Hong Kong and Mainland China, both for the organisation of scientific events and for scientific publication, as evidenced by the number of articles published in *China Perspectives* by researchers from Taiwanese institutions. The journal therefore remains inseparable from the CEFC, with research, academic events, and publication activities mutually reinforcing and building on each other, while also remaining an indispensable instrument for the promotion of French social science research on China.

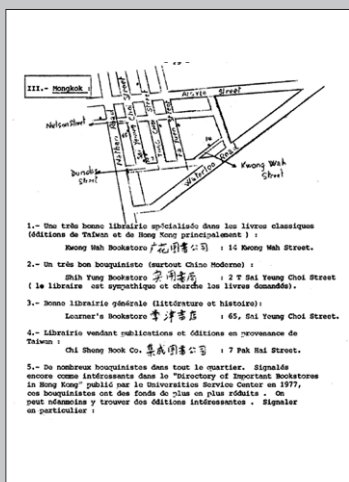
Acknowledgements

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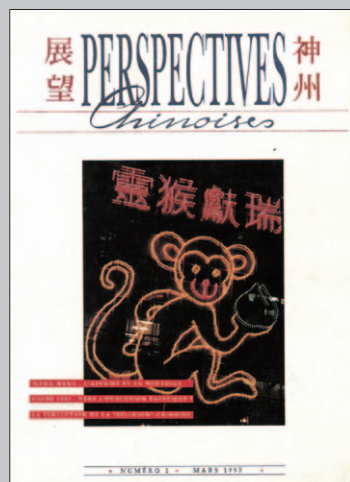
China Perspectives

30 years of publication in pictures

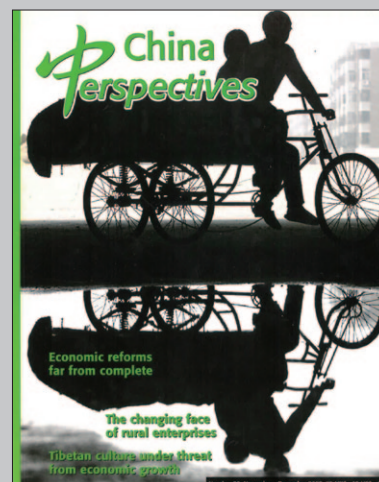
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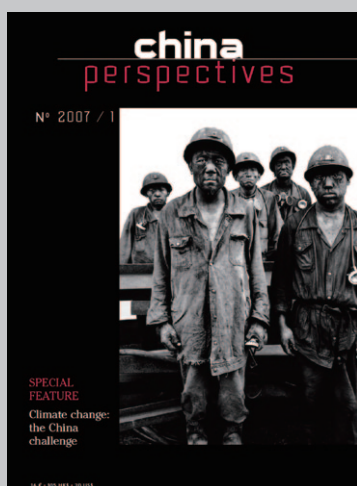
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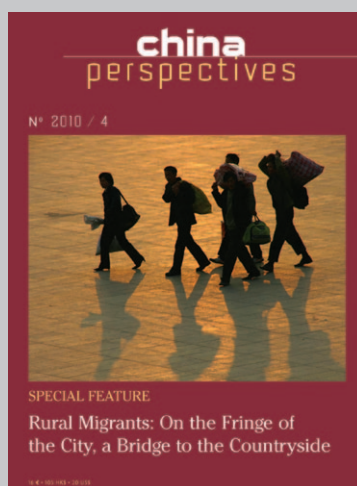
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