

Book reviews



Felix Wemheuer,
Famine Politics in Maoist
China and the Soviet Union,
 New Haven, Yale University Press, 2014,
 XIX-325 pp.

LUCIEN BIANCO

After seeing the extent to which the famine remained one of the most terrible periods in the lives of peasants he interviewed in the Henan Province, a young German sinologist (born in 1977) carried out over a decade of research into the Great Leap Forward. This resulted in a number of works focusing on the famine,⁽¹⁾ including the present comparison between the famine of 1959-1962 and that which hit the USSR. Such a comparison is relevant not only because of the similarities between the two revolutionary regimes, but also because more than 80% of the world's famine victims in the twentieth century died in these two countries.

The structure is not the most satisfactory aspect of this good book. Excluding the third part (Chapters 5 to 7), which is dedicated to Ukraine and Tibet, the comparison between the Soviet and Chinese famines is covered essentially in the first part (Chapters 1 and 2). The second part, which covers only China, takes up and develops the themes introduced in the first part: Chapter 3 refers to Chapter 1 (conflicting reports between the state and peasants before the famine) and Chapter 4 refers to Chapter 2 (the way in which the famine was managed sacrificed the countryside in order to protect the cities). An epilogue details the lessons drawn from these catastrophes by the two regimes, which have not experienced further famines since 1962 in China's case and 1947 in the USSR. A substantial conclusion summarises the main contributions of the book, in a similar way to how the last page (or a little more) of each chapter sums up the themes developed in that chapter. The reader pressed for time might therefore be tempted to limit himself to these mini-conclusions and the general conclusion.

In doing so, he would miss out on the objective intellectual reflection pursued throughout the book on what is a burning issue. While clearly demonstrating the main responsibility of the two regimes in causing the disasters, the author also underlines the enormous burden inherited by both agrarian empires. Russia, too, had been a "land of famine."⁽²⁾ A peasant born in south Russia in 1890 and living until 1950 would have lived through the famines of 1891, 1921-1922, 1932-1933, and 1946-1947, the latter following a famine fomented by the Nazis during the Second World War. A Chinese peasant born in 1900 in Henan and dying at the beginning of the Cultural Revolution would similarly have experienced the famines of 1931, 1943,

and 1959-1962 (pp. 32-33). The author could also have included the famine of 1920-1921, which struck the northern part of the province. Even during famine-free years, hunger was never far away and killed thousands of people, for example in 1950, 1951, 1955, and 1956, while tens or even hundreds of thousands of peasants fled regions hit by the "spring shortages" (*chun-huang*) every year (p. 86). The situation was therefore very strained throughout the first decade of the regime, and was nearly as tense in the Soviet Union during the civil war and the 1920s. This was the very difficult legacy that the two regimes managed, as best they could, before embarking (in 1929 and 1958) on modernisation drives that were excessively ambitious, impatient, and radical, and gave rise to famine. In terms of the periods prior to 1929 and 1958, Chapters 1 and 3 are indispensable when it comes to understanding the famine, which was brewing before it broke out: the "contribution" demanded from the peasantry in order to finance industrialisation set the scene for the crisis, and the politicisation of hunger (saying that there was a lack of grain was proof of ideological deviance) prevented the victims from complaining when the famine was at its height.

In terms of the food crisis itself, the mechanisms that made agricultural production fail have been exposed amply in many works.⁽³⁾ Wemheuer rightly draws attention to relations between the cities and countryside. The swift growth of the industrial workforce and the rapid influx of country folk into the cities suddenly made the provision of food to citizens holding an "iron rice bowl" much more delicate. As food shortages worsened, both Stalin and Mao gave absolute priority to this group, for food riots had to be avoided in the cities, where the regime felt vulnerable and wished to maintain stability. In the USSR, the cities were even split into three categories: Moscow, Leningrad, Kharkov, Dnepropetrovsk, and a handful of other industrial cities had access to the grain harvested on a national level; 80 others cities were supplied in part by the central stores, but had to turn to their surrounding areas to make up gaps in their supplies; the remaining cities and towns had to rely solely on local harvests (p. 63). In order to protect themselves, the two regimes exacerbated the rural famine by requisitioning excessive quantities from the producers so as to reduce urban rationing as much as possible. Similarly, Wemheuer reasons and demonstrates that the Chinese famine was finally overcome less by concessions that were granted

1. Among others, Felix Wemheuer, *Steinnudeln: Ländliche Erinnerungen und staatliche Vergangenheitsbewältigung der « Grossen Sprung » Hungersnot in der chinesischen Provinz Henan* (Stone Noodles: Rural and official memories of the Great Leap famine in China's Henan Province), Frankfurt, Peter Lang, 2007; Kimberley Ens Manning and Felix Wemheuer (eds), *Eating Bitterness: New perspectives on China's Great Leap Forward and famine*, Vancouver, University of British Columbia Press, 2011. This book was the subject of a review essay in *China Perspectives*, No. 2013/3, pp. 85-90.
2. Walter Mallory, *China: Land of Famine*, New York, American Geographical Society, 1926.
3. Apart from Manning and Wemheuer, and in addition to many other studies: Frank Dikötter, *Mao's Great Famine: The history of China's most devastating catastrophe, 1958-62*, London, Bloomsbury, 2010, reviewed in *China Perspectives*, No. 2011/2, pp. 74-75, and above all Yang Jisheng, *Mubei: Zhongguo liushiniandai dajihuang ji shi*, Hong Kong, Cosmos Books, 2008, 2 Vol. (English translation by Stacy Mosher and Guo Jian, *Tombstone: The Great Chinese Famine, 1958-1961*, New York, Macmillan, 2012). This book has been the subject of review essays in *China Perspectives*, No. 2009/1, pp. 98-101, for the Chinese version and No. 2013/3, pp. 88-90, for the French version. For the USSR, a good starting point is R.W. Davies and Stephen Wheatcroft, *The Years of Hunger: Soviet agriculture, 1931-1933*, NY, Palgrave Macmillan, 2004.

– too late – to the producers (private plots of land restored, the unit of accounting delegated down to the work team level, the contract responsibility system, etc.) than by the decision – which also came too late – to send 20 million recently-arrived city dwellers back to the countryside and import grain from capitalist countries such as Australia and Canada. These imports helped provide food for the city dwellers, who were now fewer in number, in turn making it possible to reduce the collections demanded from producers. The latter were nevertheless left with the task of feeding those returning from the cities, in waves staggered over several years. This departing manpower was missed less acutely in industry because the end of agricultural exports and the import of grain meant it was no longer possible to import machine tools: industry was condemned to mark time even before the leaders had reversed the priorities by placing “agriculture at the forefront.” A birth control campaign was also started in 1962, and – until a major turnaround in 1978 – the rural exodus was restricted, as a result of which the level of urbanisation increased only minimally, from 17.3 % in 1962 to 17.92 % in 1978 (p. 230). The lessons to be learned from the disaster are analysed in the epilogue, but to my eyes, Chapter 4 (“Preventing Urban Famine by Starving the Countryside, 1959-1962”) represents the best section of the book.

On the other hand, Chapters 5 to 7, which make up the third section (“Famines on the Periphery”), are less important and, in my opinion, too long. They compare Ukraine, which was struck harder than any other region of the USSR by the famine of 1932-1933 (Kazakhstan was proportionally hit harder still in 1931), and Tibet, where the losses were less serious than those in Anhui, Henan, and many other provinces populated almost exclusively by the Han. These three chapters deal less with the famine itself than with the contradictory accounts concocted by the official historiography and the Ukrainian or Tibetan nationalists. Interest therefore shifts to questions concerning the autonomy, separatism, or secession of outlying regions occupied by national minorities, a subject that is no doubt interesting in itself,⁽⁴⁾ but that diverts us from the essential subject and contributions of the book.

The final shortcoming of the book relates to its few instances of inaccuracy or inconsistency. China’s population in 1964 loses 13 million people between page 229 (704 million) and the following page (691 million), which is an excusable error, corresponding roughly to the natural annual growth at the time. Table 4.3 (Average annual consumption of grain per inhabitant in the cities and countryside, China 1952-1966) and the text on page 133 raise a more serious problem: 362 *jīn* is probably a typographical error that should read 312 *jīn*, but on the next line, an incorrect calculation matches up 386 *jīn* annually with 493 grams per day (instead of 529). Incidentally, the incorrect calculation is possibly closer to reality than the 386 *jīn* taken from Table 4.3, which indicates, probably incorrectly, that urban consumption was higher in 1960 than in 1958.

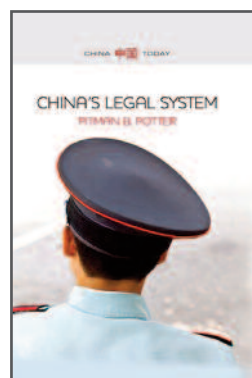
These are trivialities compared to the gems unearthed elsewhere, starting with two evocative graphs on pp. 88 and 245. That on p. 88 illustrates the operation of the unified grain purchase and sale system that was in force from 1953 to 1960; that on p. 245 shows the hierarchy of grain consumers, placing at the bottom the producers of rice and wheat consumed by the upper levels. In addition to these examples, in no particular order, are Kropotkin’s warning (past revolutions failed because they were unable to feed the population during times of radical change, p. 46), the comparison between the Soviet internal passport and the *hukou* (p. 65), and the millions of deaths that could have been avoided by an earlier end to grain exports

(in the USSR, all of the deaths resulting from hunger, p. 247). Furthermore, solidly reasoned theoretical discussions introduce or provide the crowning achievements of the empirical research. To cite but a few examples here, the author refutes the theories amplifying the peasant resistance and its impact (pp. 78-82, 149, and 152), and offers a critical examination of the theories of Armartya Sen and Jean Drèze. Sen’s famous “entitlement approach” (the distribution of commodities and the denial of rights were more significant factors in the famine than the reduction or lack of availability of food) is ultimately shown to have its limitations, without being entirely disproven (pp. 149-152 and 246). The theories of Drèze and Sen as to how democracy is more capable of preventing famines than authoritarian regimes succumb much more quickly to the author’s reasoning (pp. 237-239). His arguments are as convincing as they are learned, the Soviet case following the Chinese case before itself being encapsulated by other examples (India and Africa) and other centuries (Imperial China and its system of organising assistance).

■ Translated by Will Thornely.

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4. As far as the USSR is concerned, the standard reference is Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939*, Ithaca, London, Cornell University Press, 2001.



Pitman B. Potter,
China's Legal System, Cambridge,
Malden, Polity Press, 2013, 267 pp.

ROGIER CREEMERS

How does one begin to understand Chinese law? How does one do justice to the complexity of the legal (re)construction process that has taken place since the late 1970s? Observers must navigate between the Scylla of teleological approaches that too easily assume trajectories towards ill-defined notions of rule of law and democratisation, and the Charybdis of historical determinism. They must do justice both to a continuing dominant view of law as an instrument of state power and the agency of lawyers, judges, academics, and activists inside and outside of the legal system who seek to develop and apply their own conceptions of professionalism and justice. They must explore the influences of socialism and foreign legal transplants, and the impact of autochthonous traditions and concepts. They must cater to the preconceptions of legal scholars, for whom the relative immaturity of China’s legal system is sometimes difficult to conceive, and those of China experts, who are often predisposed to seeing law as merely a continuation of politics and power and lacking autonomous existence.

Enter Pitman Potter's most recent book *China's Legal System*, which seeks to provide the sort of primary introduction to this topic that has, thus far, been sorely lacking. Potter's approach in this volume is to present China's legal system as a historical artefact, constituted through the vagaries of twentieth century statecraft. In the first section, Potter leads us along the legal development from the last days of the Empire through the Republic and on through the People's Republic. He succinctly identifies continuities, such as the reinterpretation of relational justice, and disruptions, paying particular attention to Maoist nihilism and the subsequent restoration of some idea of law as central to contemporary governance.

The next three sections address how law has served efforts to generate political stability, economic prosperity, and social development. Under the heading of political stability, Potter, like China's rulers, lets Party leadership precede a discussion of the renewed formal, constitutionally defined structures of state power, including the National People's Congress, administrative agencies, courts, and legal practice. Lastly, he situates criminal justice and administrative detention in a broader coercive order aimed at deterring behaviour deemed to endanger stability. The section on economic prosperity explains how, after the demise of class struggle as a dominant political concern, the ideological emphasis shifted to the "productive forces" in the process of development. Starting from notions of "corporatism" and "clientelism," Potter from the outset qualifies the extent to which law has been able to provide predictability and certainty for economic actors. Furthermore, by contrasting economic law as a mode of state policy implementation and as a facilitation of autonomous economic interaction, Potter puts his finger precisely on the nub of some of the most conflicting elements in the relationship between law and the market. At a more technical level, this section addresses the fundamental elements of contract and property law, as well as taxation and its relationship to economic growth. Turning to questions of social development, Potter points at the profound conflicts between the single-minded pursuit of economic growth and social concerns, which he divides into traditional and emerging categories. On the traditional side, we find labour relations, healthcare, education, and the rights of women and ethnicities. Emerging concerns include media and the Internet, environmental protection, and corporate social responsibility. Yet, in spite of efforts to create regulatory norms in these fields, Potter acutely draws into question the permanence and consistency of the government's commitment to ensuring implementation in practice.

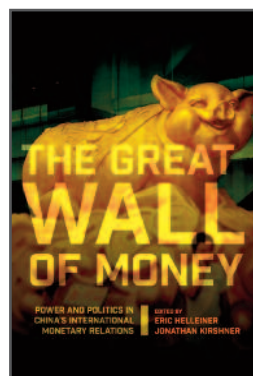
The last section is dedicated to Chinese interaction with international law and engagement with international regimes. It ably describes the ambivalence with which these matters were approached: during the Mao era, China denounced international law as bourgeois, yet sought to join the UN. After 1989, China was ostracised from international society, yet rapidly expanded its dialogues in areas as diverse as trade and human rights. China's WTO membership has had a profound influence on its domestic legal order, yet in other areas, such as environmental regulation, China has sought to limit its commitments.

This volume is principally directed at students, and must therefore be evaluated as such. Potter's narrative recounts little that isn't known to more experienced observers and scholars of Chinese law, nor does it offer novel theoretical insights. But that is not the point. Rather, this book must be assessed on the contribution it could make to providing the next generation of China law researchers with the initial tools and concepts with which to tackle the issues mentioned earlier in this review. Within these parameters and the approach that Potter has taken, this book succeeds admirably. At

all times, Potter avoids unnecessary jargon and abstruseness, and provides useful discussion questions and reading suggestions at the end of every chapter. Substantively, the nuance and sensitivity of his previous works shines through. Perhaps most importantly, Potter shies away from making grand statements on the future of Chinese law, leaving it to the reader to ponder the complex issues he raises.

The answer to the question of whether this reviewer would use this book in an introductory course on Chinese law is unreservedly yes. However, it is also necessary to point out that despite the breadth of the issues tackled in this book, it is not comprehensive. It tells us relatively little about, for instance, the processes of legislation and enforcement, or about black letter law in many areas. This criticism should, nevertheless, not be laid at Potter's feet. Rather, the pithy and incisive insights with which this volume is replete should enable a course organiser to set deeper discussion topics, supplemented with more specialised reading.

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Eric Helleiner and Jonathan Kirshner (eds),
The Great Wall of Money:
Power and Politics in China's
International Monetary
Relations, Ithaca, New York,
Cornell University Press, 2014, 288 pp.

ADRIEN FAUDOT

This collection is edited by two experts in international political economy, their association having already produced reference works on international monetary relations, notably *The Future of the Dollar* (2009). The two academics repeat the experience, this time focusing on China's monetary relations and the internationalisation of its currency, the renminbi (RMB). The book seeks to understand the political stakes in China's international monetary relations and the type of power it is acquiring from them (p. 2).

Benjamin Cohen's chapter considers the strategy China is pursuing in internationalising its currency – how far will the RMB go? – bearing in mind the failures of previous competitors to the dollar. The vagueness of the response is due to ignorance of the strategy of Chinese power, knowing that it cannot be integrated into the monetary system dominated by the United States as were West Germany, Japan, and the Euro Zone, as China is not a historical ally of the American hegemon and "it is not at all clear that the Chinese are ready to dance" (p. 40). While strong economic incentives could link China to the current international monetary system by according some rights and admitting it to the "club" of international powers, geopolitical considerations could upset this economic logic and make China adopt a conflictual attitude vis-à-vis the existing monetary order.

Eric Helleiner and Bessma Momani examine China's relations with international organisations, the IMF in particular. They note that Chinese positions have their origins in the early twentieth century. Sun Yat-sen had already formulated the bases of a project for China's international development, defended at Bretton Woods by the Chinese delegation. Helleiner and Momani observe that after 1945, China pursued similar objectives in negotiations with the IMF: reaffirming the Chinese economy's importance in helping balance the global economy; conserving autonomy and sovereignty in capital controls and choice of exchange rate while demanding a macroeconomic surveillance of member states; finally, increasing the importance the institution accords to developing countries, especially in financing. Although the Cold War constituted a major break, as China was kept out of the IMF for 31 years in favour of Taiwan (until 1980), these objectives still largely determine China's attitude within the institution.

David Steinberg's contribution studies the determinants of China's considerable accumulation of foreign exchange reserves (about three trillion dollars in 2014). The two periods of rapid accumulation he distinguishes are 1994-1997 and 2003-2008. Steinberg sees in this accumulation the results of a domestic conflictual force equation between those who view it as a concrete advantage (financial stability and vitality of export industries) and those who consider it a disadvantage (for industries making non-exchangeable products, for example, or even the central bank, which is held responsible for the inflation that this accumulation helps fuel). The succession of periods of more or less rapid accumulation of reserves could have resulted from this balance of force in national policy, in Steinberg's view.

Hongying Wang deals with the global imbalance and China's considerable current account surplus (10.1% of GDP in 2007 and still largely positive, albeit now shrinking). Wang stresses the need to study it, apart from as mere exchange rate, in its growth regime. Characterised by rising inequalities, China is pursuing an export dependent regime due to institutional inertia while the poorest populations, which could impart dynamism to internal demand, have very little political influence. Political determinants are therefore essential. China's nationalism and quest for autonomy if not influence vis-à-vis the rest of the world also explain its zest for accumulating reserves.

Andrew Walter considers policies of macroeconomic surveillance, retracing the evolution of China's current account surplus with the United States and the IMF's reactions as well as those of US leaders. A dialogue that had long been courteous, thanks to numerous American multinationals' dependence on China, turned quite tense in 2007. The 2008 financial crisis doused these tensions by reducing the trade surplus, to the extent that from 2011, Chinese leaders declared the objective of reorienting the growth regime – via an augmentation of household consumption and reduced investments. It is nevertheless difficult to envisage that the Chinese government's new objectives have been influenced by international macroeconomic surveillance, given the role of different interest groups in the country and the political projects pitting them against each other.

Yang Jiang likewise highlights these dissensions, observing that the still very limited internationalisation of the RMB is not a priority for Chinese leaders. In the author's view, internationalisation would require liberalisation and a far-reaching opening of the economy (especially capital account), something the CCP leadership does not seem keen to initiate. This explains why China has so far opted for bilateral partnerships – rather than multi-lateral – with neighbouring countries and BRICS members and the European Union, which hardly seek to engage China in reform issues.

Gregory Chin is evidently more optimistic. In his view, China has developed a monetary strategy after the Asian crises leading to the twin resolves that the dollar-based monetary system requires reform as do international institutions. Early in the last decade, China sought to engage with international institutions, especially the IMF, but had great difficulty getting a hearing, ignored as it was by Western interlocutors who put forth demands unacceptable to Beijing, such as opening the capital account and making the RMB fully convertible. The 2009 crisis served to unleash a strategy to overcome these obstacles. China mobilised partners (notably the BRICS) agreeing on the principle of diversification of monetary practices: the reserve currency and that for the BRICS' international exchanges would have to be that of the BRICS themselves. In this context and on the strength of its macroeconomic performance, the Chinese currency has emerged as an instrument of monetary diversification, helping international actors expand their range of possible choices – especially in respect of reserve currencies. In this, China has developed a form of structural power and is shaking up that of the United States.

This ability to acquire international monetary might is further developed in the last contribution by Jonathan Kirshner. While the author warns that an economic catastrophe could well overtake China for different reasons (environmental, banking, social, and political), the economy has kept to a growth rate higher than that of the United States, at the same time raising the issue of the RMB's internationalisation, which is seen as a means of insulating the Chinese economy from troubles caused by dollar fluctuations and of building a relationship of strength so as to modify the functioning of institutions of the international monetary system. Chinese leaders thus have ambitions of challenging the "dollar's monopoly."⁽¹⁾ More fundamentally, it is the model driven by the United States that China contests through its monetary strategy. Kirshner's contribution contains a salutary account of the major liberalisation movement of the 1990s. While the Asian crises could have been foreseen in such a framework, they contributed to Asian countries' distrust of financial liberalisation. They became receptive to the Chinese discourse of a need to challenge the international monetary system and constituted a solid base for the RMB's internationalisation, at least regionally.

Overall, the book does not defend just one thesis but contains several. The divergences are to be found essentially in the evaluation of factors that could slow down if not block the RMB's expansion: the nature of the nation's political project, internal political dissensions, integration and adaptation in institutions of the existing monetary order... The theses defended are often contradictory, and it is left to the reader to synthesise them. Add to this the bibliography – 20 pages – which helps interested readers to go deeper into the reflections offered in the book's various contributions. It may be noted that Benjamin Cohen, known for his past demystifying analyses of the internationalising abilities of currencies supposedly competing with the US dollar, is more measured in his contribution this time, leaving open the possibility of an overhaul of the international monetary system, especially in view of the Chinese case.

While it would have been agreeable to find descriptive and analytical elements helping track the RMB's internationalisation both qualitatively – in institutions engaged with their technical instruments – and quantitatively – what is the rhythm and geographic extent of this internationalisation? –

1. "Only by eliminating the U.S. dollar's monopolistic position' can the system be reformed" (Li Ruogu, president of the China Export-Import Bank, quoted by Kirshner, p. 223).

this collection of essays nevertheless constitutes a reference text for the study of international monetary relations. Experts in this field pay special attention to China, understandably: in December 2014, the RMB ranked fifth for payments according to SWIFT, the global operator of international financial messages, thus confirming an extremely rapid growth rate, to the extent that the RMB should catch up with the yen in 2015.

■ Translated by N. Jayaram.

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Han Dongfang (in collaboration with Michaël Sztanke), *Mon combat pour les ouvriers chinois* (My struggle for Chinese workers), Paris, Michel Lafon, 2014, 290 pp.

CHLOÉ FROISSART

Published in 2014 to mark the 20th anniversary of China Labour Bulletin (CLB), the book is based on interviews that French journalist Michaël Sztanke carried out with Han Dongfang, the prominent Chinese labour activist and founder of the Hong Kong-based CLB. Presented as a first person account organised chronologically as well as thematically, the book is divided into two parts: the personal journey of Han Dongfang (first five chapters), and CLB's activism (the following six).

The first part retraces the formation of a political consciousness right from adolescence, the time when Han joined the army before being employed as a railway worker, his participation in the 1989 Democracy Movement in Beijing and the creation of the first workers' autonomous federation, whose spokesman he became; imprisonment for 22 months, illness, his stay in the United States and the impossibility of returning to China. It lays stress on key figures and events that have informed this consciousness: his peasant mother, who sacrificed her marriage in order to ensure that her children received an urban education in Beijing, and who taught him to care for others; the January 1987 student demonstrations in support of Hu Yaobang and his policies of reform and opening, which were quelled by a police baton charge; and of course, the 1989 events that signalled Han's entry into politics.

Han could have had an altogether different destiny: as a migrant worker dependant on others, had he remained in the countryside with his father; or pursuing the path of the PRC's elites, given that as a great admirer of Lei Feng he was promoted to deputy chief of his regiment and applied to join the Communist Party: "I behaved like a real soldier serving the people," he stresses (p. 21). But his rebellious spirit willed otherwise. His distrust of hierarchy, his awareness of abuses of power within the army, and his wish to "live in truth,"⁽¹⁾ so to speak, finally convinced him that the Party needed

reform: he resolved to "become an actor for this change" (p. 23). The students who risked their lives to organise his evacuation from Tiananmen Square when the crackdown began sealed his destiny by giving him the mission to become China's Lech Walesa. This independent spirit manifested itself again and again, as when facing violence and humiliation in prison and afflicted with serious tuberculosis, he stubbornly refused to admit to any "crime," or when in the United States for ablation of a lung, he converted to Christianity while resolving not to belong to any church: according to him, faith had to remain in the private and intimate domain. And while in the United States, he grew determined not to join the dissident movement in exile but to return to his country and work for change from within. Turned back twice at the Chinese border he was trying to cross from Hong Kong, Han was stripped of his nationality and found himself stateless until the Hong Kong authorities issued him a passport in 1997.

Part Two of the book opens with his decision – or rather painful acceptance – to stay in Hong Kong and use the place as a base to pursue the struggle on behalf of Chinese workers with the founding of CLB. Han gradually managed to symbolically cross the border with two radio transmissions: China Labour Bulletin, which he has presented thrice weekly via Radio Free Asia since 1997, and Radio Express News, during which he interacts with Chinese workers, gathering and verifying information in order to present the facts on social events in China. Han has also breached the border with the help of colleagues at CLB and partners – lawyers and NGOs – in China who are his "eyes and ears" and help realise his objectives to "put in place a network of supportive workers" (p. 16) and facilitate the emergence of worker leaders.

The second part then turns to militant action, reflecting on this action and the search for strategies, not only to help workers defend their rights but also to promote lasting change. It provides a concrete and detailed description of CLB's action through successive battles: redress for *xiagang* (laid off) workers, justice for the families of workers who died in mine explosions and silicosis victims, and finally, the emergence of collective bargaining. Some of these battles helped advance matters incrementally, especially in terms of public policy: starting in 2002, the Ministry of Labour and Social Security (renamed the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security in 2008) created its own website for disseminating information on mining accidents and has required local authorities to report them within 24 hours. Meanwhile, Gansu and Sichuan provinces have adopted a system to compensate silicosis victims, now that there is no question regarding the link between the disease and mining activities. CLB's advocacy has also influenced public opinion and has helped to open social space: today the media regularly report injustices against workers, and some local governments let "workers defend their interests without subjecting them to repression and harassment" (p. 168).

The organisation's elaboration of its methods and its positioning are set out through an analysis of exemplary cases, their impact, and what CLB has gleaned from them. This part is presented above all as an effort at defining and defending the organisation's action methods (CLB is not a union, but neither is it an "NGO for aid and advice," p. 109), addressed as much to the Chinese government as to dissidents in exile. To both sides, Han repeats that he is not a dissident but a labour rights activist, and that his work does

1. This expression is taken from Vaclav Havel, who explained it in his 1984 essay "Politics and Conscience," available at www.vaclavhavel.cz/showtrans.php?cat=clanky&val=73_aj_clanky.html&typ=HTML (accessed on 21 April 2015).

not consist of fomenting revolution or fighting for democracy, but rather of protecting workers' interests within the existing system. For Han, democracy essentially consists of resolving concrete problems, especially through collective bargaining. Two recurring themes run through the book: on the one hand, distrust of ideology, especially grand theories on democracy, abstract objectives in whose name individual interests could be sacrificed; and on the other, the idea that effective action must necessarily be apolitical, that is to say, an action that helps to identify the meeting point for the interests of all party – workers, employers, and the authorities. To those who hoped he would become China's Walesa, Han's response is that the country has to find its own path and he abides by pragmatism: *ex nihilo* formation of independent unions is not a prerequisite for the emergence of collective bargaining; in practice, independent unions will emerge through such collective bargaining and from reforms within official unions.

CLB is thus representative of the new civil society born at the turn of the century, rising from the ashes of the 1989 Democracy Movement. Whereas that movement was characterised by demands for abstract rights, the current effort is toward the emergence of practical rights through their concrete exercise. It is also about taking into account – instead of ignoring – the constraints of the authoritarian system to pursue a “constructive dialogue” with the party-state – which should also keep its part of the bargain – for defending the rights of individuals within the system itself. But will a civil society that seeks to abandon all political messages manage to have a political impact some day? Rejecting opposition and systematically pursuing compromises and win-win solutions that serve to smooth out social and political contradictions could merely lead to a dose of “harmonious democracy” that helps the regime preserve itself even longer...

Despite a relatively large number of typographical errors, anglicisms, and some repetition, *Mon combat pour les ouvriers chinois* is a reference text on more than one score: it provides a valuable account of militant activity in China and Hong Kong and of the evolution in the conditions of Chinese workers, especially stressing that they have become full-scale actors in the defence of their rights. It also raises fundamental questions concerning the role of workers and of civil society in the evolution of the Chinese regime.

■ Translated by N. Jayaram.

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****This book review's digital version was updated on 30/10/2015 to edit slight translation inaccuracies****



Christophe Falin,
Shanghai – Hong Kong, villes de
cinéma (Shanghai – Hong Kong,
cities of cinema),

Paris, Armand Colin, 2014, 168 pp.

LUISA PRUDENTINO

This work is dedicated to Shanghai and Hong Kong, two cities that occupy a mythical position in the eyes of the West and in Chinese cinema as, respectively, the birthplace of the industry in China and the place where it developed. Through their dual material and symbolic significance, the two cities continue to contribute to the history of cinema to this day.

The author has divided the book into three sections. The first is given over to the history of Chinese cinema in the two cities, and in particular to the exchanges that took place between the two over the course of the twentieth century. In this section, Christophe Falin reveals the major events that resulted in these exchanges, from the birth of sound film to the handover of Hong Kong to China in 1997, also observing the Sino-Japanese War (1937-1945) and the Communist victory of 1949. This section also includes an interesting paragraph concerning the mixing of Chinese cinema in the 1950s, resulting from the creation of two flagship companies in Hong Kong, MP&GI and Shaw Brothers, which made this city into one of the most important centres for film production in Asia. Of course, the importance of these two studios in Hong Kong cinema at the time (and even afterwards) is well known, but there is precious little awareness of the strategic role they played in the distribution of film throughout Southeast Asia as a whole. From Malaysia to Singapore, every step in the creation of a film was controlled by these two companies, from the producers and directors through to the scriptwriters, actors, and technicians.

The second section covers the many ways in which Shanghai and Hong Kong have been portrayed in Chinese and Western films since the 1930s. The aim of the author is to show how the urban planning of the two cities has helped create an image of the two that is as real as it is fantastic. The reader is taken on a tour of Shanghai's 1930s *lilong*, which were, according to the author's definition, “aligned rows of two-level houses, built from brick,” thus revealing both the luxurious properties of the foreign concessions and also the extreme poverty of the city's slums. The chapter covering Hong Kong and its overpopulated and hyperactive neighbourhood of Tsim Sha Tsui, which has provided the backdrop for many Chinese and foreign thrillers, contains even richer descriptions.

Finally, the third section is given over, in particular, to three major directors with close links to their cities: Lou Ye of Shanghai, and Wong Kar-wai and Johnnie To of Hong Kong. The author portrays Lou Ye as the natural heir to the generation of Chinese urban film-makers who emerged at the start of the 1990s, following the crackdown on the student movement at Tiananmen Square. Lou Ye's portrayal of Shanghai, the city of his birth, is lucid, even disillusioned. Wong Kar-wai, meanwhile, has a more intense bond with

the city of Hong Kong, capturing “its heartbeat and its beauty.” In Johnnie To’s films, on the other hand, Hong Kong is a more tangible presence, and each feature film provides the film-maker with the opportunity to show several different faces of the territory.

Falin adopts two approaches in his book: the history of cinema in the two cities, and the study of how they are portrayed in film. Although the combination of these two approaches allows the many links between the two cities and their film-making to be approached in an original and complimentary manner, it also gives rise to a number of repetitions, especially in terms of film titles and historical facts, which ultimately weigh down the text. This is felt especially strongly in the first section of the work, in which the task of recounting the intertwined histories of the various film studios has led the author to make so many cross-references between the two cities and their film-making heritages that the pace of the narration is sometimes broken.

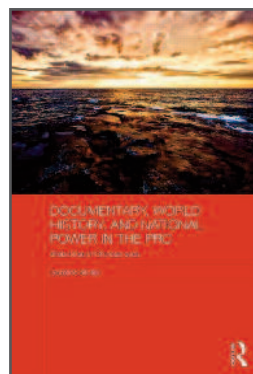
The second section, on the other hand, is far more fluid and effective; that said, while it is understandable that the author is not able to delve deeply into the various aspects of how the cities of Shanghai and Hong Kong are portrayed in film, it is unfortunate that certain fundamental films are not cited (such as Jacob Cheung’s *Cageman*) or are only covered fleetingly (for example, *I wish I knew*, by Jia Zhangke) rather than being the subject of greater reflection and analysis.

The eighth chapter of the third and final section of the work also contains a few repetitions before offering portraits of the three major directors mentioned above (Lou Ye, Wong Kar-wai, and Johnnie To). Falin’s analysis of the impact their film-making has had on the imaginary and social representation of the two cities is astute and pertinent.

An exhaustive and detailed bibliography concludes the work, and will doubtless prove very useful to any readers wishing to make their own contribution to research into relations between cities and film, an area that the author currently considers to be excessively “Eurocentric.”

■ Translated by Will Thornely.

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Gotelind Müller,
Documentary, World History,
and National Power in the PRC:
Global Rise in Chinese Eyes,
London, New York, Routledge, 2013,
xii+252 pp.

YVES RUSSELL

Gotelind Müller has for a number of years been studying the formation of Chinese historical consciousness and, more specifically, the way in which conceptions of the national Self and the foreign Other are conveyed through representations of history. It was this research that led her to carry out a detailed analysis of *Zou Xiang Gonghe* (Towards the Republic), which was broadcast in 2003 on the state channel CCTV, and to then study the way in which foreign and, more particularly, European history have been covered in various academic curricula in China since 1900.⁽¹⁾

In *Documentary, World History, and National Power in the PRC*, Müller returns to televisual analysis, studying three historical documentaries broadcast in multiple episodes in China between 2006 and 2007: *Daguo jueqi* 大国崛起, *Fuxing zhi lu* 复兴之路, and *Ju an si wei* 居安思危, which she chose to translate into English respectively as *The Rise of the Great Powers*, *The Road to Revival*, and *Alert to Danger while Dwelling in Safety*.

The author argues convincingly that by studying these three documentaries produced by state institutions, it becomes possible to grasp “the ways in which the Chinese officially favoured view of history is transmitted via the media so as to guide perceptions of foreign and Chinese history towards legitimization of PRC policies” (p. 4). It can be seen that the author views the documentaries as three moves made by the Chinese state in the same game in order to legitimise its political agenda. By focusing on the rise of nine “great nations” (*daguo* 大国) – Spain, Portugal, the Netherlands, Great Britain, France, Germany, Japan, Russia, and the United States – since the fifteenth century, *Daguo jueqi* shows that “What is to be learned from history is therefore only what a country needs in order to ‘rise’” (p. 8). *Fuxing zhi lu* recounts the history of China since 1840 from the perspective of its “revival,” allowing China to be tied in with the history of the great nations while setting it apart. *Ju an si wei*, whose full title is “Alert to Danger while Dwelling in Safety: The historical lesson of the perishing of the Soviet Communist Party” (*Ju an si wei – Sugong wangdang de lishi jiaoxun* 居安思危——苏共亡党的历史教训), shows what China (or rather the CCP) needs to avoid (p. 8).

One could quibble endlessly on the choice of these three documentaries or even on the influence of the documentary format on the popular historical consciousness. In the introduction (Chapter One), Müller justifies her choice by pointing to the increasing success of the documentary format with the Chinese public, and in particular the aura of objectivity and scientificity it enjoys (p. 1). The three documentaries studied also allow three

1. Gotelind Müller (ed.), *Designing History in East Asian Textbooks*, London, New York, Routledge, 2011. This work was reviewed in *China Perspectives*, No. 2013/3, pp. 96-98.

sub-genres telling of the use of this format by the single-party state to be addressed: the "historical documentary" (*lishi jilu pian* 历史纪录片 or *lishi wenxian pian* 历史文献片) in the case of *Daguo jueqi*, the "political edification" documentary (*zhenglun pian* 政论片) for *Fuxing zhi lu*, and the "reference document" (*cankao pian* 参考片) for *Ju an si wei*. In this way, "we can see the whole range of functions connected to 'official' documentary: to document, to transmit political views, and to educate" (p. 14).

One of the important contributions of Müller's work lies in the light it sheds on the origin and conception of the three documentary series. The three chapters (out of five, including an introductory chapter) given over to the analysis of the three series, episode by episode, account for 150 of the 200 pages of the study. The process of creating the three documentary series, by bringing together the academic, political, and media worlds in collaboration, is fascinating and well documented. This is particularly true of *Daguo jueqi* and *Fuxing zhi lu*, two projects that are part of a political discourse thought through at the highest levels of power. The narrative, musical, and indeed symbolic (colours, themes, etc.) analysis of the documentaries also reveals the use of a production style that aims, with varying degrees of subtlety, to promote the world view of the current political agenda, and of a style of narration that is controlled and adapted to the different target audiences. Müller shows the "legitimisation strategies" implemented by the CCTV producers, such as the use of "expert commentaries," in particular from foreign contributors. At the same time, she also shows that the apparent plurality of voices in *Daguo jueqi* is no more than window dressing: the authors remain in control of the narrative through the way in which it is produced (editing, cuts, soundtrack, etc.). The interviews merely legitimise and punctuate a script written in advance, and Müller mocks the clumsy truncating of certain interviews conducted in foreign languages, such as that with former French president Giscard d'Estaing. In *Ju an si wei*, on the other hand, the amusement is provided by the soundtrack. While leaders with a "positive" image (Lenin, Stalin) are associated with popular Russian songs or marches, those with a "negative" image (Khrushchev, Brezhnev, and in particular Gorbachev) are associated with gloomy or disturbing music, often taken from American blockbusters. Moving beyond the realm of anecdotes, there is evidence of expert use of the "unnoticed instrument of narrational manipulation" (an expression Müller borrows from W. Guynn), which serves to legitimise a discourse whose aim is to reinforce and modify opinions about China and foreign countries in the manner desired by the elites in power.

In the fifth and final chapter, entitled "Framing visions of China and the world – The state, documentary and history in contemporary perspective," Müller refers – among other things – to theories pertaining to historical narrative (Ricoeur, etc.) and the media (Rosenstone, Nichols, Guynn, etc.) in order to position the role of the three documentaries studied in a comparative and global perspective. The use and appropriation of the documentary format by the Chinese state are linked to the changing demands of an increasingly exacting and critical Chinese public, which is not so easily satisfied by conventional propaganda films. *Daguo jueqi* is a response to this expectation of "truth" and "authenticity" held by Chinese viewers who are more educated and have a more open world view, and are consequently prepared to challenge the official version of history. However, although in terms of its form this documentary (like *Fuxing zhi lu*) appears to be "designed in a less 'dogmatic' and more 'polyphonic' way than [it] used to be during Mao's life time" (p. 180), the editing and controlled, pre-planned narration help ensure the uniformity of the official line. This is conveyed by re-

peating stereotyped and "fetishised images," which help construct a national collective memory and reinforce "prefigured" views of history (p. 184). These stereotypes echo those transmitted in schools and by other television productions (soap operas, films, etc.).

However, this final chapter, while being of interest in terms of offering a theoretical and comparative perspective, is not satisfactory as a concluding chapter. For more coherence, it could have been positioned after the introduction and before the detailed analysis of the three documentaries. This would have emphasised the need for a genuine conclusion that could have been an analysis summarising the ability of the Chinese state to use different formats (documentaries, series, books, etc.) and vehicles (media, education, etc.) to impose and standardise a conception and role of history. Moreover, the historian Zi Zhongyun, cited by Müller and appearing in *Daguo jueqi*, observes that the conception of "history as a mirror" (*yishi weijian* 以史为鉴) imposes a memory-based and patriotic relationship with the past that serves to keep the ruling dynasty in power.⁽²⁾

Müller has scattered the book with links between the history told in the documentaries and the history taught in schools, making the most of her previous line of study. These references could also have been summarised and systematised in order to emphasise the continuities and discontinuities of the historiographical narrative of the Chinese state. The author underlines how these documentaries also have the function of "updating" the official historiography, while school textbooks are only published and replaced at a much slower rate. This holds particularly true given that episodes of *Daguo jueqi* and *Fuxing zhi lu* are sometimes screened in class in order to illustrate the lesson, as I was able to confirm when interviewing junior high school teachers.

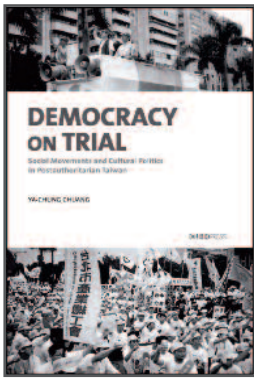
In terms of form, while the many notes and bibliographical references are to be applauded, a list of the people interviewed in *Daguo jueqi* and *Fuxing zhi lu* would not have gone amiss. The bibliography would also have benefited from being organised by theme, with the 26 pages of references thus bringing together not only works on the emergence of China, media theory, and collective memory, but also references to blogs or commentaries on the three documentaries studied.

In conclusion, Müller's work sheds an interesting light on the use of the documentary format by the Chinese state as a vehicle for collective historical representations, and also offers a rich and detailed analysis of three documentaries that have different narrative forms but share the same intention. However, it is unfortunate that this study, which is the outcome of a project carried out with students in a research programme (in this case the "Cluster of Excellence" of Heidelberg University), does not offer a summary of the various projects undertaken by Müller concerning the representation of history on the television and at school. The wait goes on for such a synthesis, which would surely be extremely interesting and fruitful.

■ Translated by Will Thornely.

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2. Zi Zhongyun, "Gexin Zhongguo chuantong lishiguan" (Reforming the conception of the traditional history of China), *Yanhuang Chunqiu*, No. 7, 2014, pp. 5-9. Also available online at www.yhcnw.com/html/yjy/2014/77/3845.html (accessed on 21 April 2015).



Ya-Chung Chuang,
Democracy on Trial: Social
movements and cultural politics
in postauthoritarian Taiwan,
Hong Kong, CUHK Press, 2013, 269 pp.

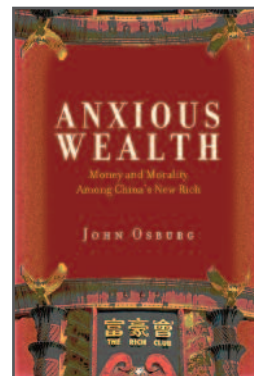
GUNTER SCHUBERT

The “Sunflower Movement” of spring 2014 has re-activated much scholarly interest in the world of Taiwan’s social movements, which had somewhat declined over recent years. Ya-Chung Chuang’s book, although published before the events leading to the occupation of the Legislative Yuan last year, is therefore timely. One of its major intentions is to highlight the importance of a vital civil society and self-confident social movements for a stable and healthy Taiwanese democracy. Chuang is an anthropologist (teaching at Taiwan’s National Chiao Tung University), and he has written, as he notes himself, an anthropology of Taiwan’s democracy by looking at the relationship between *state and civil society* (Part I), *identity and ethnicity* (Part II), and *place and politics* (Part III). The six Chapters deal with topics covering a wide range of issues that the author has investigated since his days as a young researcher doing ethnographic studies in downtown Taipei. In Chapter One, he looks back at the 1980s and early 1990s when the Nationalist Party, the KMT, opened up the political system, entailing a new sense of community through which Taiwan’s society became deeply politicised. Chapter Two looks at the professionalisation of Taiwan’s social movements under these new conditions, which gave leeway for unexpected alliances between older and newly founded NGOs and triggered a political awakening among movement members. Soon many of them opted to cooperate with the state and push reforms from the top down. This cooperation, however, was critically observed by others who insisted on a strategy of persistent change from below – a cleavage within Taiwan’s social movements that plagues them to this day. Chapter Three traces the formation of a vibrant civil society by looking at the rise and significance of “talking public” in the 1990s, i.e., the politicisation of everyday life in Taiwan during that time. Chapter Four looks back at the highly controversial construction of *bentu*-identity starting in the early 1990s as both an intellectual project and a courageous undertaking of many social movements. Chapter Four continues this investigation by looking at those “ethnicities” that presented a counter-narrative to the *bentu* (*fulao*)-ideology: the Hakka minority and the aborigines. The rest of the book reflects on the authors’ field research in the 1990s and early 2000s, which was motivated by his attempt to explain the meaning of place in the production of community in democratic Taiwan, and the role that the politicisation of the neighbourhood (*shequ*) has played in this process. In Chapters Five and Six, he reports on neighbourhood mobilisation in Taipei’s Yongkang Street over a time span of some ten years in which he participated as both an activist and researcher. The epilogue engages the question of what the book’s findings can tell about the contribution of Taiwan’s young democracy “to a possible notion of Chinese democracy in the PRC.” This late question comes somewhat

unexpected in light of the author’s intention, spelled out early in the book, to critically discuss the nexus of democracy and social movements in Taiwan proper. However, Foucault’s spectre, as Chuang poses it, justifies such a reflection, as China “has transformed into an internal and political issue deeply integrated in fierce local, and necessarily regional and global, power struggles.” China is conquering the brains of the Taiwanese, one could say, and the author insinuates in the final passages of his book that Taiwan’s political and economic establishment is far from ready to defend Taiwan’s democracy under this kind of manipulative pressure. It is only “qi-powered collective action” by a lively civil society that ensures the critical potential within a community necessary to defend democratic dreams, political alternatives, and multicultural ideas – a potential that will, at some point, cross the Taiwan Strait to initiate a similar grassroots or bottom-up politicisation on the Chinese mainland as well.

This book targets (and needs) a reader who is rather well informed about Taiwan’s post-authoritarian political and cultural transformation. It is, at least in some parts, no easy read: the author often employs the “postmodern speak” of his discipline, which for a political scientist, at least, often sounds artificially, and unnecessarily, evasive. However, I read through this anthology with much pleasure, as it reminded me of a time in which Taiwan’s democracy was still pretty much a project to be shaped by concerned and idealistic citizens. Ya-Chung Chuang was part of this project, and one can easily feel by his writing how much he still is fascinated by those days, even though he always keeps a distance between himself as an observer and the social movement world that he describes. His book is certainly enriching for the study of Taiwan’s social movements and their significance for democratic change and cultural transformation in the postauthoritarian era. Although it does not produce many new insights, the specific theoretical perspective and the empirical data of the third part make it a valuable study for Taiwan scholars, especially from the fields of anthropology, sociology, and political science.

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John Osburg,
Anxious Wealth: Money and
Morality Among China's New
Rich, Stanford, Stanford University
Press, 2013, 248 pp.

ÉMILIE TRAN

John Osburg’s work was published at a time when China was engaging in an unprecedented anti-corruption campaign targeting “tigers and flies.” A far cry from the media headlines trumpeting the fall of the latest tiger, *Anxious Wealth* is an ethnography of the world of the “flies,”

and in particular entrepreneurs, in China. Based on a field study he carried out in Chengdu, the author sheds light on the *habitus* of the entrepreneurs with whom he spent time in the capital of Sichuan.

The introductory chapter duly defines the subject of the research and sets out the inherent theoretical framework. Taking the concepts of networks and *guanxi* as the starting point, the author proposes a closer examination of human relations, whether based on shared interests or defined by the roles assumed by men and women, finally exploring corruption and the state. Each of the four subsequent chapters looks at specific aspects of these relations, thus helping to define, over the course of the book, the *habitus* of Chinese entrepreneurs with regard to money and morality.

The second Chapter, "Entertaining is My Job': Masculinity, Sexuality, and Alliances Among Chengdu's Entrepreneurs," immerses the reader in the environment of codified pleasures of massage parlours, saunas, and karaoke bars in post-Mao China, and explains how business relations are built up and maintained, literally based on women's bodies.

Chapter 3, "Relationships Are the Law': Elite Networks and Corruption in Contemporary China," tangibly illustrates two ways in which the power of elites is exercised, on the one hand via privatisation of the state or, in other words, the appropriation of public property by elites who do not operate in the public sphere, and on the other, via penetration by cooptation by members of the mafia, with whom the author had the opportunity to rub shoulders. Osburg thus aims to demonstrate that the formation of networks and the extension of power do not take place directly in exchange for money, but involve multiple ways of exercising power and values expressed in many forms.

Chapter 4, "From Fruit Plates to License Plates: Consumption, Status, and Recognition Among Chengdu's Elite," examines the way of life led by entrepreneurs who have succeeded, and the distinction that exists between the "bling-bling" new rich and more educated and cultured individuals who seek to set themselves apart. Although the latter criticise the diktat of the flaunting of luxury products and the ways in which they are consumed, they cannot escape it, because it is precisely these social practices that allow their peers to recognise them, and therefore their status, in the successful entrepreneurs' club.

The final chapter, "Women Entrepreneurs and the 'Beauty Economy': Sexuality, Morality and Wealth," looks at the role of women, and in particular those described by He Qinglian as "grey women" (*huise nǚxing*) in an essay written in 1997.⁽¹⁾ These women are considered to be neither totally "white" and pure, like married women and legitimate future wives, nor completely "black," like the prostitutes associated with the shady world of the sex industry. Grey women are the mistresses and second wives (*ernai*) of rich and powerful men, and the hostesses and escorts in certain bars, restaurants, and massage parlours. Using the most basic capital, constituted by their own body, they try to gain the maximum profit they can while still in possession of their youth and beauty. In this regard, they too are entrepreneurs, in the "beauty economy" (*meinü jingjì*).

The immoral behaviour of grey women, the excesses of officials, and the dishonesty of businessmen are all factors that contribute to the inevitable depreciation and decline in moral values in present-day China. Yet no society can survive in a complete absence of morality, and rather than lamenting the plain and simple loss of these values, the author maintains that they have been redefined under the effect of the profound changes that have shaped post-Mao Chinese society. In his concluding chapter, Osburg advances the notion of *suzhi* (personal quality) to measure the degree of

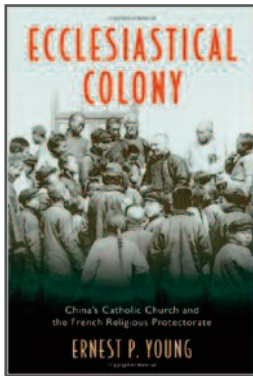
morality and responsibility demonstrated by the players with respect to the public. Osburg therefore proposes that, rather than judging a certain businessman, political leader, or grey woman for his or her private actions, they should rather be considered according to how their wrongdoings or good deeds affect the public. While there is no evil in displaying one's social status with a luxury car, driving too fast, knocking over pedestrians, and fleeing the scene would show a lack of *suzhi*. Keeping a mistress or being a grey woman does not mean that the man or woman in question leads a depraved life. On the other hand, the same entrepreneurial new rich man or woman can demonstrate their high degree of *suzhi* by sponsoring charitable organisations. As defined, *suzhi*, argues the author, is very similar to the notion of "producer of life" (*yangsheng*) present in several philosophical Chinese traditions, or indeed the ideal of the Confucian businessman (*rushang*).

For anyone with close or distant links with Chinese society today, *Anxious Wealth* does not contain, in itself, any revelations: the practices and lifestyles of some of these leaders, entrepreneurs, and grey women can be seen at first hand by the attentive observer, and the media are full of news stories relating to this field. Similarly, the cinema and television content of mainland China is, like anywhere else, a reflection of its times and of the morals that hold sway. It necessarily deals with these questions, often implicitly, but also more openly, as in the four-part documentary on the current anti-corruption campaign, entitled *Zuofeng jianshi yongyuan zai lushang* (Relentlessly ensuring the integrity of the state). Produced by the Party's Central Commission for Discipline Inspection and broadcast on CCTV in late 2014, this documentary recounts all kinds of setbacks and the debauchery of officials who have already been sentenced for corruption offences or are currently awaiting sentencing. However, for anyone from another geographical area of study, Osburg's work offers a good introduction to the ways of life, value system, and power games of a certain category of Chinese entrepreneur and new rich.

■ Translated by Will Thornely.

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1. He Qinglian, "Huise nǚxing jì qita: yuanshi jilei shiqi de zhong shengxiang" (Grey women and others: The social creatures emerging from the period of primitive accumulation), *Zhongguo Baogao Zhoukan* (China Report Weekly), 8 January 2005 [1st publication, 1997], www.china-week.com/html/2358.htm (accessed on 15 April 2015).



Ernest P. Young,
Ecclesiastical Colony: China's
Catholic Church and the French
Religious Protectorate,
 Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2013,
 383 pp.

PIERRE VENDASSI

Ernest P. Young's book considers "the conjuncture of the catholic immersion in imperialism as it developed in the nineteenth century in China and the struggle within the church against that linkage in the first decades of the twentieth century" (p. 1). It seeks to explain how, following a growth period in the first half of the nineteenth century, the Catholic Church faced growing hostility in the subsequent decades, the most emblematic manifestation of it being the Boxer Rebellion in 1900. Rejecting cultural explanations of a clash of civilisations, the author admits, as other scholars have done, that "the dependency of the Christian missions on the unequal treaties" (p. 8), leading to an assimilation of the religious project into an imperialist political one, was an essential part of the problem. He also offers an institutional dimension to the explanation: the installation, in the framework of unequal treaties, of a French religious protectorate, through which France acted as the guardian of China's Catholics, helped the latter benefit from a regime of extraterritoriality, irrespective of nationality.

In a 259-page exposition (followed by 82 pages of notes, a four-page glossary of Chinese terms, a 30-page bibliography and about ten pages of index), the book explores the history of the French protectorate, examining how such an institutional arrangement took shape and lasted for several decades despite the opposition its conception and application inevitably generated.

The book's initial chapters (1 to 3) shed light on the contextual and strategic causes explaining the formation of the protectorate, beginning with a convergence of interests between Chinese authorities trying to divide colonial powers by granting them unequal privileges, French authorities wishing to use Catholicism for political and economic ends, and Catholic missionaries seeing in the protectorate a means of striking deeper roots in China.

While detailing the conditions under which this institutional arrangement emerged, the author also describes the immediate perverse effects it had, such as the assimilation of the Catholic religious project into the imperialist one and the conceding of immunity – impunity, even – to foreign missionaries that many accounts depict as generally ambitious, iniquitous, little concerned with evangelisation and distrusting – often to an extreme – the local populations, thus largely obstructing the process of indigenisation of the Church.

Young devotes much space (Chapters 2, 4, and 5) to a crucial aspect of the protectorate, namely the settling of *jiao'an*, or often violent incidents pitting Catholics against non-Catholics, leading quasi-systematically to demands for reparation on the part of French missionaries and authorities. These *jiao'an* most often concluded with financial compensations and severe condemnation of those opposed to the Church, which needless to say

met with strong feelings of injustice among the gentry and local populations, resulting in further hostility towards Catholics in a backdrop of growing nationalism.

The largest and best known instance of opposition, the Boxer Rebellion, is revelatory as regards the vicious circle the protectorate initiated: French authorities ask for higher indemnities to compensate the losses of missionaries and Catholic laity killed during the rebellion; the Chinese government, in order to forestall the latent threat of a military retaliation, submits to foreign pressures, which only entrenches foreign presence in China; the indemnities obtained are handed over to the missions, although they are not used for the benefit of local communities; foreign missionaries continue with their allegiance to the protectorate, while the local populations have to fund the foreign missionaries through these indemnities. Hostility could only rise, whereas the reputation of the Church and its agents shrank.

The book's second part (Chapters 6 to 10) dwells on the rising calls for dismantling the protectorate and for the Church's indigenisation launched by Chinese Catholics and some rare emblematic missionaries, especially after 1916, and attempts to expand the French concession in Tianjin. The author notes the opposition to these reformists from the protectorate's partisans, prominent among them a majority of foreign missionaries, whose prejudices as well as ambitions seemed to have made them resistant to the very idea of ordaining Chinese bishops. He also notes the Vatican's conversion to the idea of a need for change. Previously dissuaded by France from retaking control of the Church in China, the Catholic authorities in Rome ended up seeing the indigenisation strategy as necessary for ending the impasse into which the protectorate had plunged the Church. Braving French opposition as well as its own missionaries' inertia, the Catholic authorities encouraged a movement towards indigenisation starting from the 1920s, which led to the protectorate's weakening to a large extent.

In the final chapter, the author shows that it was in fact the mutations in the French colonial strategy adopted during the Second World War, combined with the Japanese invasion and the arrival of Mao's regime, that finally dented the protectorate.

One of the book's strengths clearly lies in the author's ability to shed light on this history with the help of carefully set out facts and rigorous analyses. Through related events and a small number of archetypal personages who hold up the narrative (they are described in an introduction akin to a film synopsis), the logic of social change becomes clear: ideological conflicts, collective or individual strategies still limited rationally, resistance to change, the power of minorities, and the weight of contingencies. A question arises as to whether the author's talent for introducing grand history in a coherent narrative thread, a drama depicting a relatively restricted number of iconic personages, might not at times have risked inducing hero worship into the account.

The book's contribution resides in its inclusion of significant elucidations of empirical events, which when interpreted in light of nationalist or Maoist ideological postures helped to legitimise the installation of an anti-imperialist religious policy in China, the effects of which are felt even now – and especially by Catholics.

Moreover, while it deals with a very specific period and place, the book would be useful in sparking reflection and debates of great currency, furnishing as it does a perfect illustration of the way in which the religious domain is ceaselessly used for political ends, without ever being reduced to only this instrumentalisation. Young thus brings out the plural, ambiguous, and unpredictable character of religious enterprises, which flaunt apparent

unity but are nevertheless the work of actors whose values and aims remain extremely varied. From this viewpoint, the perspective given of the Catholic Church in the early twentieth century has an altogether Gramscian touch.

Finally, although the author has sought to deflect this criticism right at the book's outset, it is a pity that there is little discussion of "indigenous" Catholics, who seem to take a secondary place in the book despite the presence of some salient figures. Of course, the author's stance in favour of an institutional approach, the fact that the institution in question mostly dis-trusted the local populations in the period covered, and the repercussions this could have eventually in terms of presence and representation in avail-

able sources no doubt suffice to justify this lacuna. This in any case in no way diminishes the value of this book, which may be recommended to anyone interested in China's political and religious history, as well as to specialists in contemporary religion, or even to anyone seeking to benefit, through empirical facts, from a relative reflection on the logic of globalisation.

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