

Book reviews



Mylène Gaulard,
Karl Marx à Pékin – Les racines
de la crise en Chine capitaliste
(Karl Marx in Beijing: Roots of
crisis in Chinese capitalism),
 Paris, Demopolis, 2014, 270 pp.

DAVID BARTEL

Mylène Gaulard's book is as compelling as it is problematic. It is compelling because it offers new paths of reflection by challenging key concepts that a new globalised economic *doxa* wants to be taken at face value. In a world where economics seems to have become the very heart of political action, it is important to note that this discipline is not an exact science and that the grand certitudes of economism are quite often retrospective. As with history, economics is an account, which does not mean it is fiction but that some subjectivity is present in its structure. The lesson in political economy that the author offers with a rare polemical verve is thus a well-referenced package that reconsiders in light of Marxist theory – and over six chapters – the current situation in China to highlight profound contradictions in the Chinese capitalist mode of production (p. 12). Gaulard is a development expert and has written a thesis comparing the economies of Brazil and China. Her papers include "Les limites de la croissance chinoise" (Limits to China's growth) (*Revue Tiers-Monde* – Third World Review, No. 200, December 2009) and "Changes in the Chinese Property Market: An indicator of the difficulties faced by local authorities" (*China Perspectives*, 2013/2). Her presentation entitled "L'économie chinoise, les dangers de la suraccumulation: une analyse marxiste" (Chinese economy and dangers of over-accumulation: A Marxist analysis) is available via the Internet and offers a good introduction to her work.⁽¹⁾

The starting postulate encapsulated in the title alluding to the controversial book by Giovanni Arrighi, *Adam Smith à Pékin – Les promesses de la voie chinoise* (Adam Smith in Beijing: Promise of the Chinese path) (Max Milo, 2009), is itself provocative: what would Karl Marx make of China today? It is all the more interesting given that Marxism is still enshrined in the constitution as one of the Four Basic Principles on which the People's Republic rests. The book opens with this observation: solutions attempting to deal with crises of capitalism that have occurred at regular intervals since the 1970s are "all equally ineffective" (p. 9). Gaulard prefers to look beyond the stage of blaming a vague neo-liberalism, distinct from a cleaner capitalism that preceded it. She thus demolishes the first orthodoxy pitting bad financial capitalism against a good productive one. In her view, such an analysis completely misses a proper understanding of the very development

of capitalist-mode production, whose only aim is limitless accumulation of profit.

Reviewing in a highly pedagogical way the basic principles of Marxist socio-economic analysis, the author touches on subjects as fundamental as the role of the state and thus the nature – capitalist or otherwise – of the Chinese economy, the effectiveness of the fight against poverty and the emergence of a middle class, the qualities and limits of the production apparatus, and the reality of Chinese financial might. Implicit in this careful and efficient work of an economist, Gaulard buttresses quite a convincing contestation of two fashionable ideas that display a certain conformism. Questioning the history and reality of the highly uncertain concept of the "middle class," she casts doubt on the very idea of "emergence" favoured by the media and new globalised managerial discourse. In a review of the history of the two notions, she shows to what extent they are ill-suited to the Chinese situation and, moreover, how they have been ideologically constructed by the worlds of media and business. Without going into too much detail, the author most pertinently sets out that measurement of the middle class is entirely artificial and arbitrary, and often obscures the growing chasm between the dominators and the dominated. Massive revenue shortfalls, the growing share of value-added directed towards and exploited by capital, and moreover connivance between political and economic elites seem to exemplify another convenient idea, the widespread one of a "natural" linkage between the middle class and democratic culture. In fact, in emerging countries, the growth of a consumer elite with incomes much greater than the national average has no evident linkage with a desire for greater political representation or with subsequent demand for more democratic institutions (p. 103). This is even more the case in China, where this middle class shares well-understood interests with the evolution of capitalism and the state apparatus (p. 105).

At the book's heart is a Marxist analysis of the dip in the rate of profits reported in China now, showing that efficiency of capital is falling (p. 147) and that the solution envisaged by enterprises – national and transnational – to continue raising their profit margins seems to be to keep producing more to make up for the fall (p. 151) or to invest massively in speculative bubbles, real estate being the most striking example (p. 157). Gaulard sees a danger in abandoning the production apparatus for real estate investment, more lucrative in the short term (p. 160). A quarter of Chinese billionaires consist of major real estate promoters (p. 161). Thanks to the absence of a sufficiently sound and developed financial sector, capital is oriented towards real estate. A fine study of real estate speculation – and local authorities' indebtedness – is extended sufficiently in Chapter Six to radically challenge the "emergence" phenomenon. Generally speaking, the emergence presupposes the idea of a linear economic progression on a Euro-centred model (take off/maturity/golden age) whose main criteria would be economic and financial liberalisation. This schema remains largely impervious to the series of dramatic crises that gripped so-called emerging countries such as Mexico

1. www.youtube.com/watch?v=ezXfYRjAu-g, 12 April 2014 (accessed on 17 December 2014).

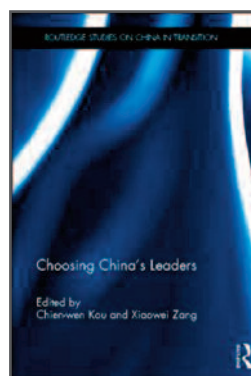
(1995), new industrialised countries (NICs) of East Asia (1997), Brazil (1999), Argentina (2001), and more recently southern European countries. It seems to confront several political and social weaknesses – above all economic – that affect all these countries at special but different levels, which underline again the extreme heterogeneity of national situations grouped under the convenient but nevertheless rather irrelevant acronym BRICS.

By separating China from Chinese studies, the author has contributed a salutary work. This is similar to other observers such as Arif Dirlik, who see the Chinese economic structure as an immense enterprise where about 20% of the population exploits the rest of the billion, most of whom are often condemned to surviving on the margins and often in great precariousness (migrants, the elderly, rural populations, and unemployed graduates).⁽²⁾ The absence in the otherwise impeccable bibliography of the works of Dirlik, as well as of other authors such as Maurice Meisner, who has also reflected on the future of socialism in China, is surprising and regrettable. Gaulard's book can be counted among economic literature on China that leans more towards the problems of the "Chinese model" than on developmentalist successes of forced productivism. However – and this is where the book becomes problematic – torn between political economy and intellectual history, it seems to divide people into "vulgar economists" and "uncouth Marxists," the author leaving herself little room for being heard by experts on Chinese economy and those engaged in Chinese studies in general. And the deliberately iconoclastic and polemical – even mocking – tone, which lends the book a freshness in the often arid domain of economics, could attract a knee-jerk, ideological reaction that would miss the point and prevent a thoughtful response to an otherwise fine and eloquent work that makes for fascinating reading and which, it is worth repeating, has great pedagogic and intellectual qualities.

■ Translated by N. Jayaram.

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2. Arif Dirlik (interviewed by Luciana Leitao), "Chinese Communist Party – World's Biggest Corporation," *Macau Business Daily*, 25 June 2013.



Chien-wen Kou and Xiaowei Zang (eds), *Choosing China's Leaders*, London, New York, Routledge, 2013, 166 pp.

JÉRÔME DOYON

This book emerged from a conference focusing on Chinese political elites held in November 2010 at National Chengchi University in Taipei. The book has the merit of, among others, rendering accessible in English the rich work on the Chinese party-state by Taiwanese scholars, who account for six of the nine contributions. While varied approaches have been adopted, the authors share a distancing from classical Pekingology, which sheds light on day-to-day goings on behind *Zhongnanhai* walls, and a preference for focusing on the issue of Chinese elites in a dynamic manner, concentrating on the mechanisms at work in the modes of promotion and exercise of power by the Chinese leadership. As the introduction by Chien-wen Kou and Xiaowei Zang shows, the book as a whole is concerned with current debates on factions and on the technocratisation and institutionalisation of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Its ambition is to go further than existing literature, mostly Anglo-Saxon, by detailing the interactions between informal networks and the Party's institutionalisation. According to Kou and Zang, two phenomena that are generally ill understood are: the causes and forces behind the Party's institutionalisation, understood as the development of rules governing the recruitment, promotion, and exit and retirement of cadres; and the interaction between this phenomenon of institutionalisation and the survival of factionalism and nepotism.

The first two contributions concern national political elites. Hsin-hao Huang studies the careers of members of the CCP Central Committee's Politburo from 1997 to 2007. He uses a method that stems from a qualitative-quantitative comparative analysis by applying statistical tests to a very limited sample of political careers. He sheds light on the persistence of "informal" political practices in the sense that they are not governed by organisational rules in the framework of a growing institutionalisation of promotion regulations in the Party. Adoption of rules concerning candidates' age, gradual promotion of cadres, and the practice of transferring them from one branch of the party-state to another have led to a standardisation of the careers of Politburo members. Following is the typical-ideal candidate for a Politburo seat: 63 years old, a Central Committee member, and with much experience in ministerial posts. The candidates' age limit pushes functional chiefs to promote their protégés as speedily as possible in order to ensure their succession. In Huang's view, getting promoted very young is thus a sign of a developed personal network. While the reasoning is interesting, it nevertheless seems difficult to analyse age at promotion purely in light of a cadre's personal relations when it could be due to many additional factors, including his or her personal competence.

Using a more qualitative approach, You Ji's contribution examines changes in the promotion of military officers in the context of the professionalisation of the army. He highlights the development of a meritocracy in the People's

Liberation Army. Selection methods have become increasingly competitive, consisting of written and oral examinations evaluated by cadres drawn from different departments in order to avoid personal collusion. "Informal" practices are resorted to at the candidates' pre-selection stage, when only three are considered for each post. Personal links become crucial, as candidates need to be recommended by an officer. According to You Ji, officers conveniently pick those in their own combat units or from the same province.

The next two contributions deal with provincial elites. Bo Zhiyue charts the careers of 31 provincial Party secretaries and governors as of November 2012, showing that the tendency is towards a relatively strict adherence to age limits as well as qualification levels for posts as heads of provinces. He notes the need for varied experience in different sectors in order to be named a provincial secretary. While Bo also describes the cadres' supposed factional attachments, he fails to explain what effect they could have in practice, or possible changes.

In the second chapter devoted to provincial elites, S. Philip Hsu and Jihwei Shao evaluate the level of meritocracy in the cadre promotion system. Their analysis relies on dates, including all provincial Party secretaries and governors between 1993 and 2010. Contrary to previous studies, they show that work experience at the central level is generally not a good indicator for promotion to the top rung in a province, but rather is a sign of approaching retirement. At the same time, the authors show that provincial chiefs are evaluated via a complex system taking into account their short-term economic performance in deciding whether they can keep their post, but also their cumulative results over the long term, compared with their predecessors, in considering them for promotion.

The book's last two chapters are devoted to specific elite types: state enterprise managers and cadres rising through the CCP Youth League. In each case, the authors seek to measure the effect of this experience on their future careers. Chih-shian Liou and Chung-min Tsai describe the CCP's control over major state enterprises via the selection and promotion of their managers and find that those who are aligned with the Party-state's agenda are promoted. In their view, the effects on future careers vary according to industrial sectors. Liou and Tsai, for instance, show that in electrical industry, promotions take place mainly within the sector, but that in the more strategic oil sector, managers can hope for political posts with great responsibility following their industrial careers.

In the last chapter, Chien-wen Kou deals with the careers of cadres who worked in the Communist Youth League after 1978. Charting the careers of 293 individuals, he notes the importance of this promotion channel, pointing out its two main features. First, few former Youth League cadres hold technical or economic ministerial posts, indicating that the League consists of generalists. Then again, League experience gives them an age advantage, helping them get important posts while still young compared to other cadres – a major career advantage. Apart from these two factors, Kou notes that the rapid and numerous promotions of former League cadres is also due to the organisation's strong links with key Party figures such as Hu Yaobang in the 1980s, then with Hu Jintao and later Li Keqiang. While the argumentation seems sound, might Kou not have overplayed the role of the organisation's internal network and by extension the unity of the faction at issue? As he has himself notes, the selection of the League's cadres at all levels rests with CCP organs and not with the organisation itself, calling into question the homogeneity of its recruitment.

To conclude, *Choosing China's Leaders* should interest all readers curious about the process of selecting Chinese political elites. It has the classical

lacuna of collective works in that issues raised in the introduction are only partially addressed in the chapters that make up the book. More generally, while the book has on the whole focused on the interaction between the Party's growing institutionalisation and the persistence of entrenched factions, this separation between policies seen as "formal" or "informal" has not been addressed. The question might well arise whether their constant interaction does not challenge this dichotomy. Personal relations also tend to be treated as a given, without proper questioning of the mechanisms explaining their development and persistence. A more dynamic approach to these networks would thus be welcome for a clearer understanding of promotion mechanisms in the Chinese Party-state.

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Nancy Bernkopf Tucker,
The China Threat: Memories,
Myths, and Realities in the
1950s, Columbia University Press,
2012, 295 pp.

EDWARD FRIEDMAN

Completed during her final battle with cancer, this book by the pre-eminent American diplomatic historian of PRC era USA-PRC relations, Nancy Bernkopf Tucker, is a superb study of Eisenhower era Washington-Beijing relations. She finds that President Eisenhower, Ike, erred when he concluded that political forces in his Republican Party, the U.S. Congress and American public opinion made it impossible for him to act on his personal views that a constructive approach to Mao's China was preferable to an unsustainable policy of trying to isolate a stable CCP regime from international organisations and trade.

For Tucker, Ike should have educated the American public to understand that a powerful PRC was here to stay and also should have made overtures to Mao toward normalising relations. Tucker will not accept what her data establishes, that American politics blocked such policies.

Tucker challenges myths about Eisenhower's policy on the PRC. Her archival digging and interviews with key American actors undermine the story that Ike's successor, John Kennedy, could not open to China because Ike had threatened to rally the people against Kennedy attempting such an opening. Tucker shows that Eisenhower actually wished to end the doomed policy of trying to isolate the PRC.

"The China Threat" also clarifies why the Eisenhower administration got so many things wrong about China. Tucker details why the U.S. administration would not believe the data showing a Moscow-Beijing split and how the administration wrongly saw Mao's economically irrational policies as

somehow making the PRC a successful industrial moderniser. Tucker also finds that Washington was blinded both by Eurocentric presuppositions and an inability to appreciate "the force of decolonization or third world nationalism" (p. 27).

Tucker reveals that Ike was more worried about war prone forces in the Chiang Kai-shek government on Taiwan than by such forces in the PRC. Eisenhower "worried about Chiang Kai-shek's ability to plunge the United States into an unwanted war" (p. 15); "Dulles believed that Chiang would not hesitate to incite World War III..." (p. 29); Dulles "blunted Nationalist efforts to provoke Beijing" (p. 30). In contrast, Mao was "extremely cautious" (p. 21). Although Dulles "collaborated with Dean Rusk to drive the Generalissimo from power" in 1950 (p. 26), Tucker concludes that the Ike-Dulles administration did not try to topple Chiang. But part of the resolution to the 1958 crisis in the Taiwan Strait may have been Chiang Kai-shek pulling way back from provocative incursions into the PRC in return for the USA ending its efforts to replace Chiang.

Tucker finds that by 1953, the Mao leadership no longer saw the U.S. as a military threat (pp. 57-58). She dismisses Mao's language welcoming nuclear war as the "rhetoric" of "self-protection" (p. 59). Nehru experienced Mao's declarations as madness. In fact, Mao recklessly self-isolated China, alienating Russia, India, and numerous others.

Tucker offers rich data on the two 1950s crises in the Taiwan Strait. Her data persuades me that the CCP leaders, after a century of war and chaos, wanted to modernise China. They therefore had to push Chiang's forces off islands all the way north to Shanghai, islands that blockaded Chinese ports and prevented trade with the world. "China's southeast coast had been suffering the effects of a Nationalist Chinese blockade..." (p. 87). The PRC sought talks with the U.S. to "tackle trade" (p. 97). "China wanted to buy goods which were better made than the Russian variety and send students to the United States" (p. 98). The PRC wanted to end the U.S. "trade embargo" (p. 99).

In 1954-5, Chinese attacks were meant to end the Chiang blockade of the PRC. That is, CCP "goals were limited" (p. 97). China "was not... prepared to attack Taiwan" (pp. 75-77). "Mao stressed that PLA forces should at no point engage the Americans directly" (p. 77). Because Eisenhower responded by getting Chiang off the islands used for the blockade, "Mao concluded that Washington wanted so desperately to avoid war..." (p. 79). In like manner, "Eisenhower doubted that the Chinese Communists wanted to risk war" (p. 82).

When Mao instigated another crisis in 1958 by ordering the shelling of the offshore islands of Jinmen and Mazu, once again Eisenhower and Mao "both sought to avoid a military collision" (p. 139). Mao sought to create a crisis atmosphere to facilitate the mobilisation of villagers into gargantuan collectives euphemistically dubbed communes (p. 158) and to display his own ability to manage the Americans in the interest of wars of national liberation as Khrushchev's policy of peaceful coexistence and detente supposedly could not. Jinmen and Mazu "were of no military value" (p. 149).

Mao's irresponsible playing at war alienated Moscow (p. 169). Mao boasted that he was keeping Ike and Khrushchev "scurrying," something "wonderful" (p. 149). Mao's recklessness forced Ike to spend a lot of political capital beating back American hawks and Chiang, both of whom sought to use Mao's provocations to legitimate a war against the PRC. Once again, Mao saw that the American president sought peace (p. 148). The U.S. intensified pressure on Chiang to "cease commando raids... and efforts to blockade mainland ports" (p. 157).

But Tucker errs when she forgets Mao's domestic and international agenda and places the crises in an alleged context of "China's yearning for unification" (p. 157). There is no data on such "yearnings." In fact, Mao never fixated on Taiwan, an island that was not part of Chinese nationalist consciousness before 1942.

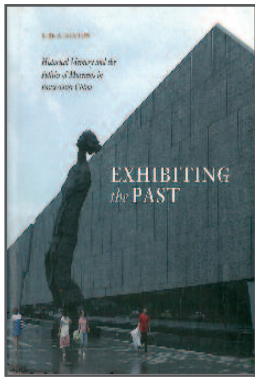
The author similarly errs in lending credence to the CCP narrative that "The Chinese understood the humiliation of exploitation by the West, having endured a century of semicolonialism and near national extinction" (p. 47). Actually, the last dynasty, the Qing, more than doubled the size of territory controlled by the Sinicized Ming, annexing huge swathes of non-Sinicized territories. Subsequently, the Han CCP has threatened national extinction for Manchu, Mongol, Tibetan, and Uyghur communities. The Han, through a policy known as "settler colonialism," now pervade the territories of these peoples. The post-Mao myth that the Mongol and Manchu invaders had somehow re-united China and that the Han who resisted the invaders were splitists is a rhetoric that legitimates Chinese revanchism, as does the narrative about a century of humiliation.

For Mao, the nation stealing the most land hitherto conquered by the militarily expansionist Qing was Tsarist Russia and their heirs, the New Tsars of Soviet Russia, not the West. The invader that killed the most Chinese was Hirohito's Showa era Imperium, not the West. Sun Yat-sen's nationalists took as the people who had long humiliated the Han to be the Manchus, not the West. It is the domestic political purposes of an anti-liberal CCP that leads to a historical myth that demonises "the West."

Tucker shows how important it is to comprehend what governments get wrong and why, such as missing early opportunities for the normalisation of Washington-Beijing relations. While Mao's China increasingly fixated on the Soviet Union as Enemy Number One, the Eisenhower administration, goaded by Chiang and the Republican Right, greatly "exaggerated the Chinese menace" (p. 177). In contrast, Mao, by 1961, the year Eisenhower left office, wanted to make overtures to Washington for an entente, according to the director of the CCP archive, Hu Hua.

Tucker's study brilliantly explores how American domestic politics shaped and delimited Eisenhower's foreign policy choices. She seeks similar data on China. She is wise to do so. To fill out the picture of USA-PRC relations, analysts need access to Chinese archives that would reveal the forces at work inside of CCP politics. Without that data, it is natural and misleading to underestimate how domestic Chinese politics were, and still are, central in shaping and informing CCP foreign policy choices.

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Kirk A. Denton,
Exhibiting the Past: Historical
Memory and the Politics of Mu-
seums in Postsocialist China,
 Honolulu, University of Hawaii Press,
 2014, 250 pp.

LÉO KLOECKNER

This book offers an original analysis of official accounts by Chinese authorities of the nation's past, with a special focus on museums. Kirk A. Denton, professor of Chinese literature at Ohio State University, seeks to understand and measure the state's implication in elaborating and framing official discourse, as relayed through museums. His analysis treats the museum as a political object, noting that "museums and memorial sites are implicated in a highly politicised process of memorisation and representation of the past, and are dealt with by multiple ideological forces including Maoism, liberalism and neoliberalism" (p. 3).

The analysis covers all places, institutions, and practices identifiable as memorial sites in Pierre Nora's sense. For instance, the author devotes an entire chapter to "Red Tourism," examining the production of figures and exemplary personages (revolutionary martyrs, popular heroes, and model leaders) that are featured in these touristic practices and that legitimise the regime. Denton thus offers a precise insight into China's memorial landscape marked by this "exhibition rhetoric" and composed of a great variety of sites. He makes a break with "new museology," which regards the museum as a place where visitors' subjectivities play out, thus turning it into a space for interpretation and collective construction of meaning. He sees the museum as a configuration serving the state's discourse, but without negating visitors' ability to criticise such official discourse.

Using a Foucauldian perspective, the author adopts a resolutely "statist" approach and distances himself from the recent trend in certain currents of social sciences toward stressing the role of individual agents in the social process. In his view, this tendency obscures the state's role in constructing the Chinese museal landscape. Although a vehicle of state ideology under the direct control of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), the museum is not reduced to a simple manifestation of monolithic propaganda or rigid institution. Museums, like the state itself, are pulled between "an old socialist discourse and a new market ideology" (p. 9). Retention of an official communist line and the strengthening of the CCP's hold over civil society since 1989 in a marked context of passage to a market economy has, in his view, led to the production of an "ideologically ambiguous space" (p. 9), which the museum reflects.

His analysis also rests as much on the study of the narrative, to put it plainly, presented to visitors, as on that of the discourse of actors producing this narrative. It rests on an examination of diverse materials (visual, textual, architectural) presented in the museums, as well as archival documents and records from different periods helping the author put in perspective the evolution of the rhetoric of historical exhibitions from the end of the empire until now. The discourses analysed are not only of actors who are part of

museum institutions but also of visitors, some of whom deflect or reinterpret the visual rhetorical displays set up by the authorities. Therein lies the book's finesse, succeeding as it does in going beyond a schematic and sterile juxtaposition of the points of view of the state and the individual.

Each chapter in the book corresponds to a museum type, helping cover the complexity and diversity of the "ambiguous ideological space" (p. 9) that constitutes the museum. Most museums studied mainly seek to commemorate episodes in the nation's past: history museums (Chapter 1); museums devoted to memory of the revolution (Chapters 2 and 3); those dedicated to the memory of national martyrs (Chapter 4); military museums (Chapter 5); and those dealing with the memory of the Japanese invasion (Chapter 6). To this list the author adds institutions, memorials, and museums devoted to popular heroes and model leaders (Chapter 7) and to literature and major literary figures (Chapter 8). Another set of exhibition sites is devoted to the narrative of Chinese nation-building, the ethnic diversity of which is showcased in ethnographic museums (Chapter 9) and the contours of which come through in red tourism routes (Chapter 10). The last chapter focuses on what the author calls "museums of the future," that is to say, exhibition spaces that some municipalities devote to the evocation of national and local urban areas (Chapter 11). In this regard, it is rather surprising that the author has not covered the 2010 Shanghai Expo in his analysis. Despite its ephemeral character, the Expo was nevertheless a developed form of the official visual rhetoric the author deals with in the book. The Expo was a space presenting the way in which China was positioning itself on the world scene and how Shanghai envisaged its role in the twenty-first century.

The main issue the book brings out is that of modalities of evolution in the official narrative conveyed by museums regarding the nation's past in the ambiguous and changing ideological context of China today. How are museums changing? How are they reacting to transformations in the world outside their walls? In attempting to tackle these questions, Denton avoids painting a monolithic portrait of institutions that remain marked by some permanent features since the end of the Maoist era, linked to the role of the state and the CCP in the formulating official narratives of the past.

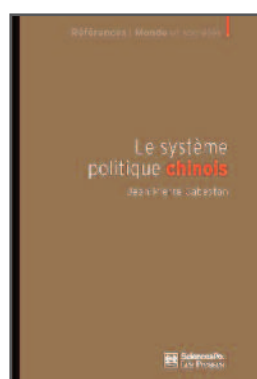
The main transformations examined in the book concern references to these narratives and to the forms of museal discourse. The analysis of history museums reveals swings in references to the pre-communist and revolutionary past. The author shows that the authorities seek to situate their legitimacy more in the evocation of a long period than in a revolutionary moment envisaged on the mode of historical rupture. The previously condemned imperial and republican past is partly rehabilitated, and the narrative of the CCP's revolutionary glories takes a larger place than that of humiliations suffered during the War of Resistance Against Japan. In the author's view, this new approach to the past reveals the CCP's wish to project an image of its history in consonance with the policies adopted since the state's conversion to neoliberal ideology.

In relation to each type of museum studied, Denton underlines that in this context of liberalisation of cultural industries, the forms of museal discourse are marked by strong commercialisation. Policies with regard to museums increasingly tend towards entertainment or rest on the construction of a brand image and heightened marketing. According to Denton, this tendency reflects the globalisation of the cultural landscape and an economic model in which museal institutions are evolving and will henceforth engage in international partnership and be open to the circulation of globalised museum models (pedagogic and architectural). According to Denton, even

if this commercialisation might seem to contradict the official narrative of Chinese history influenced by the CCP, it merely reflects the “ideologically ambiguous” nature of the contemporary “Chinese memorial landscape,” and at the same time reveals the fact that the state’s discourse is neither monolithic nor immutable.

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Jean-Pierre Cabestan,
Le système politique chinois.
Un nouvel équilibre autoritaire
(The Chinese political system:
A new authoritarian balance),
Paris, Presses de Sciences Po, 2014,
708 pp.

BENOÎT VERMANDER

In 1994, Jean-Pierre Cabestan published *Le système politique de la Chine populaire* (The political system of the People’s Republic of China – PUF). What he now offers 20 years later around the same theme is vastly enlarged and reworked. The difference between the titles of the first and second books is significant: apart from the strictly institutional aspect, it is the “Chinese” political system that is the issue, a system that combines and continues to integrate increasingly varying historical, cultural, and social aspects in a system in perpetual evolution and a “new and atypical” construction (p. 20). The new book explores a paradox: institutions set up just after 1949 still endure (albeit profoundly refurbished in their 1979 interpretation), even under the unprecedented economic, cultural, and social upheavals of the preceding three decades. What is presented is not a simple description of institutions but an attempt at comparative political science that grapples with the complexity, endurance, and transformation of relations between the authorities and society. The thesis may be summarised thus: it is not possible to understand the permanence of institutions amidst social upheavals they are supposed to govern without setting out the hypothesis of a “degrading continuum of the authorities, their forums, and influence on the one hand and society, structures, and social relations on the other” (pp. 20–21). By reasoning in terms of “continuum” rather than “opposition” it becomes possible to formalise the capacity for adaptation and consolidation in mainland China’s Party-state system.

The book’s introduction theorises these issues while offering a synthesis of work over the last 20 years pertaining to Chinese politics. It contrasts foreign approaches with those dominant in China itself (often concerned with “localisation” of problems), noting, however, the emergence of studies carried out by joint teams of Chinese and foreign academics. The main body of the book is divided into two parts. Part I, “Institutions,” contains 11 chap-

ters examining the way in which the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) understands and expresses its mission and its organisational principles, its leading organs, its apparatus, and its finances, before turning to the Constitution and state institutions, administration, judicial system, People’s Congresses, Chairmanship of the Central Military Commission, the consultative system, and finally the PLA. The result is a veritable schema of the regime and its institutions, from their starting axioms on into the details of their functions.

Part II considers the “degraded continuum” between “regime and society,” articulated around four issues: concentric circles of official political society; corruption; diversification of forms of political participation; and control of ethnic minority regions. The conclusion of Part II hesitates between two observations: on the one hand, “political authorities are still attempting to guide and channel the social corps but control it less and less” (p. 591); and on the other, “the emergence of new elites and – linked to that – new forms of political participation in a large sense, have helped the CCP retain its status while being in sync with all, or at least the majority, of the social corps” (p. 592).

A similar hesitation is to be found in the overall conclusion, perhaps overly focused on the issue of the possible duration of the regime’s survival and scenarios of democratisation. The prudence of formulations in the scenarios outlined does not, however, prevent the author from observing *in fine* that “in China, as elsewhere, freedom and democracy are not granted, they are fought for” (p. 613).

The section devoted to institutions is remarkably structured, documented, and argued. It is difficult to think of a better synthesis to offer students and foreign actors seeking to understand the politico-institutional system they are dealing with. Part II is briefer as well as more selective: it attempts to clarify the main factors that could explain how transformations of the regime and society are taking place even as institutions remain formally unchanged. The chapter on selection of elites helps understand and explain the resilience of the Party-state, the organisational and control capabilities of which remain sound. The overview on corruption is clear, but the problem’s complexity and speed of change render any approach to the phenomenon incomplete. The study of forms of political participation is strikingly detailed but would have benefited from deeper theoretical treatment, given that debate over the very notion of civil society and its implications for the country’s future remains robust among Chinese sociologists and political scientists. More generally, the book could have offered a more precise glimpse into the debate around issues of society and governance as pursued in China, a richer one and perhaps containing optimism only hinted at here. Finally, the chapter on minority nationalities raises the question of evolution (or non-evolution) of institutions with that of national security challenges as perceived by the regime.

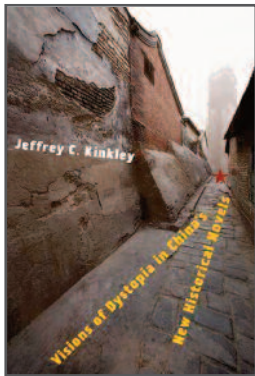
Other dimensions could have been added to the analysis, and the “continuum” issue could have gained from more precise theoretical explanation. However, at the end of Part II it is clear that by choosing the issues of elites, corruption, modes of participation, and “boundaries,” the author has rightly picked four sensitive points of articulation between the Party-state and society. On the whole, they explain both the formal resilience of institutions and the growing chasm between their spirit and what is driving Chinese society today.

The book’s length allows for easy perusal. It is a reference work that could be read at one go and also be used for checking some principle, practical aspect, political system, or other. The well-thought-out bibliography constitutes an excellent research tool. Despite the difficulty of the task, a happy

balance has been struck between the presentation of institutional and legal data and attention to day-to-day political and administrative functions. Further, the intensity of challenges facing the CCP are repeatedly stressed and explained. The book would therefore be useful for all those still concerned with the reasons behind the choices made by the Xi Jinping administration since it came to power: current developments indirectly confirm the wisdom of a number of the author's observations. Beyond or within the study of economic, cultural, and social change, renewed attention to the strictly political dimension of China's course is needed, and this book makes a remarkable contribution in setting out the nature and challenges of this course.

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**Jeffrey C. Kinkley,
Visions of Dystopia in China's
New Historical Novels,**

New York, Columbia University Press,
2014, 304 pp.

YINDE ZHANG

Recent years have seen an increase in the number of dystopian novels appearing in post-Tiananmen Square Chinese literature. In *Prosperous Age: China in the year 2013* (盛世: 中國, 2013) (2009), Chan Koon-chung (Chen Guanzhong) demystifies harmonious society and imperialist pretensions. Yan Lianke's *The Four Books* (Sishu 四書) (2010) is a fictional account of the re-education camps, written to expose a totalitarian and dehumanising world. Meanwhile *Death Fugue* (Siwang fuge 死亡賦格) (2013), by Sheng Keyi, revisits the events of 1989 in Tiananmen Square through the allegory of a "best of all possible worlds" in which young people escape one dictatorship only to fall into the clutches of another. Without turning a blind eye to science fiction, a genre that is growing rapidly in China, often fluctuating between anticipation and reality (as exemplified by Han Song in *Subway* (Ditie 地鐵) (2010), in which the author warns of imminent cataclysms concealed by flamboyant urban development), the abundance of this dystopian literature portrays a general disillusionment, while also revealing a critical space, more or less tolerated, against amnesia concerning violence in history, the triumph of liberalism, and the myth of the rebirth of the nation while ignoring the social and geopolitical tensions and ecological catastrophes that predictably result.

In his latest work, Jeffrey C. Kinkley carries out a large-scale study of this literature, but takes us back in time and examines the subject through the relationship between history and dystopia. He focuses on a collection of novels and films with historical themes, essentially produced in the 1990s by some of the most outstanding writers and directors of the period, such

as Yu Hua, Su Tong, Wang Anyi, Mo Yan, Han Shaogong, Ge Fei, Li Rui and Zhang Wei, Zhang Yimou, Chen Kaige, and Stanley Kwan. However, the main body of the work, which studies 17 "major novels," covers a longer period, since Zhang Wei's *The Ancient Ship* (Guchuan 古船) was written in 1986, and Ge Fei's *Jiangnan Trilogy* (Jiangnan sanbuqu 江南三部曲) was completed in 2011. The aim of the author is to show the ideological rupture caused by the tragedy of Tiananmen, which tipped the progressive utopia towards a vision of general dystopia. The perfect crisis, and its accompanying premonitory signs, has had lasting effects on creativity.

The term "new historical novels" (*xin lishi xiaoshuo* 新歷史小說 or *xin lishizhuyi xiaoshuo* 新歷史主義小說) that describes these works is only indirectly linked with the *new historicism* movement in Western literature. The author appears rather to be referring to Chinese criticism, which has frequently re-appropriated use of the term since the 1990s to describe altered accounts of official news stories. *Red Sorghum* (Hong gaoliang jiazu 紅高粱家族) by Mo Yan and *Wives and Concubines* (Qiqie chengqun 妻妾成群) by Su Tong, which were both made into films by Zhang Yimou, started this trend of irreverence towards established historiography, paying tribute to local cultures and traditional customs, which were in many cases reimagined and reinvented. Jeffrey C. Kinkley argues that the re-writing of history, which increased in the last decade of the twentieth century, goes beyond folkloric connotations to produce a vision that is not merely pessimistic, but powerfully dystopian, since the repeated violence and successive nature of disasters in contemporary history are clear signs of irreversible moral decline, directly challenging Mencius' theory about the innate goodness of man and therefore the future of humanity (pp. 20 and 27).

The main part of the work is divided into four chapters, which can be grouped into two large sections. In the first (Chapters 2 and 3), the author examines the intrinsic temporality of these novels, highlighting the harmful and repetitive cyclicality which, unlike traditional portrayals of time as a cyclical, alternating concept, shows the inexorable decline into which Chinese society is falling, as seen, for example, in Li Riu's *Silver City* (Jiuzhi 舊址) or Mo Yan's *Life and Death are Wearing Me Out* (Shengsi pilao 生死疲勞). The second (Chapters 4 and 5) concerns a more "spatial approach," and focuses on analysing the breakdown of the social structure. The individual appears to be caught between two inevitabilities: on the one hand, repression or imprisonment, for which the family is partly responsible, and, on the other, anarchy, which sees the triumph of chaos and mankind's animal cruelty. Jeffrey C. Kinkley owes his approach to his reasoning as a historian, because he refuses to apply a psychological analysis to the trauma, considering these thematic-structural configurations to originate from observable "external" events and facts. In the same way, following in the footsteps of Hayden White and Paul Ricœur, he opts for a hermeneutical approach, identifying these texts as accounts written from memory and representations, carrying intent and seen through a prism, hence the author's scrutiny on the literary reconfiguration of history. A painstaking effort has therefore been made to dismantle the sophisticated mechanism of time and space in these writings characterised by formal elaborations that could qualify as avant-garde, shedding light on the specific way in which literary discourse presents the destructive effects of history. Comparative and contrastive analyses enrich the author's reflections when he makes heuristic comparisons between Chinese novels and the "magical realism" of Latin American literature, or the views of the time, such as educational textbooks, in which the official historiography and *doxa* are crystallised. The issue set down at the start, which purports that fiction constitutes a massive antithesis to the triumphant

Darwinism (pp. 180-181) that has dominated China for more than a century, is investigated by means of these multiple approaches, and the pattern that emerges is the reverse, revealing a damaging continuum that links wars, revolutions, socialist dictatorship, and the fundamentalism of prosperity, (in)variably imposed by the perverted ideology of progress and by the power of might. The dystopian borders on the apocalyptic, but the author avoids using this word, considering it unsuitable for describing what is a never-ending vicious circle without revelation. Jeffrey C. Kinkley brings to light the standpoint of this group of writers and film-makers who denounce the lack of reflection in contemporary Chinese history and refuse to simply forget and give in to the cynicism that characterises the postmodern game. At the same time, a line of reasoning that tends towards viewing the lack of change as an absolute fact, bearing out systematic images of stagnation, cyclicity, or recurrence, also raises the question as to whether such an interpretation is safe from the temptation of culturalism, which can be seen in the theory of the "ultra-stability" of Chinese society, as formulated in the recent past by Jin Guantao. One also wonders if the emphasis placed on atavism lessens the dialectic of memory and desire, which is virtually absent from the exposition, but is clearly at work in certain texts, such as Ge Fei's *Jiangnan Trilogy*. Finally, the modernist aesthetic, which holds the author's attention, would have favoured more subtle reflection, so as to better determine whether the stories feeding from it merely rebuild the ruins or if they differentiate between historical mourning, which looks to a past that has never been, and "poetic" mourning, the aspiration to an ideal without which we would not know how to live, in the terms of Karl-Heinz Bohrer. Indeed, a major issue is at stake. To what extent can it be justifiably claimed that these novels are driven only by a "cultural mission" (p. 201), and are not intended to put politics to the test? Instead of being a behavioural motif whereby hope rests on vague escapist impulses, does "friendship" (pp. 152-156) not prove rather to be a genuine source of social resistance to the single-party state? Hence the final question of knowing whether the fall from utopia to dystopia constitutes a vector that functions alone, or if it is coupled with an underground movement that makes utopia the "other" of history (H. White), i.e., a denial and a transcendence of determinism, whether historical or not.

■ Translated by W. Thornely.

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