THOMAS P. BERNSTEIN

This collection of archival documents is a welcome addition to the burgeoning literature on the Great Leap Forward famine that has appeared in the last few years. Professor Zhou Xun spent four years collecting a thousand archival documents. She chose 121 for this book. They came from six provincial Party archives and five city or county archives. They are listed in an Index of Documents together with dates and identification numbers. Some are presented in full; most are excerpted. Quite a few documents came from other provinces, distributed horizontally presumably on the initiative of the central authorities, from whom seven documents emanated directly. Each of the eight chapters plus an Epilogue is accompanied by several pages of helpful explanations.


Zhou’s choice of the 121 documents reflects her intention to show how bad the Leap was. She wants “to help the reader understand how and why the catastrophe unfolded, as well as the enormity and sheer horror of what took place” (p. xiv). She justifies repetitiousness because it establishes “that the tragedy and devastation did not occur on a single occasion in one particular place but took place over and over again throughout China between 1958–1962” (p. xiv). Her approach raises the question of balance. It would have been helpful had she provided some information about the 879 documents that she did not include.

The provincial distribution of the documents is extremely skewed: 56 pertain to Sichuan, 15 to Hunan, and 12 to Guizhou. Four came from Guangdong and Shandong respectively. Gansu, Jiangsu, Henan, and Yunnan supplied three each, and one each came from seven other provinces. Here, too, the question of balance arises. In 1957, the national mortality rate was 10.8 per 1,000. It peaked at 25.4 per 1,000 in 1960, the worst of the famine years. The mortality rates in 1960 in Sichuan and Guizhou were far above the average at 54 and 52.3 per 1,000, respectively. Only Anhui ranked higher with 68.6. One of the challenges of GLF famine research is to explain such variations. Why was the death rate in Shaanxi only 12.3 per 1,000? On this point the book is of little help. (4)

The documents are also not equally distributed among the years of the GLF. Around two thirds originated in 1961 and 1962. They were the product of Mao Zedong’s call in late 1960 to investigate what had actually occurred. Mao had received a report in October 1960 about the “Xinyang Incident” in a Henan prefecture where deaths from hunger and violence totalled 1.05 million or 14% of the population, deeply shocking the Chairman. (5) Mao responded by blaming lower-level officials, not higher ones. He used the class enemy trope to label offenders. He ordered investigations prompting central, provincial, and county Party committees as well as specialised agencies such as civil affairs and health departments to find out what officials from counties to villages had done. Their reports do not shed light on the role played by extreme Leftist provincial Party secretaries in promoting anti-Rightist terror. Still, the reports contain rich, often gruesome detail on events in the preceding period. What can one learn from the documents?

1. Famine in 1957–58. It is often assumed that famine started only in the late fall of 1958. But a “summary” of telephone reports distributed by the General Office of the Central Committee and dated 25 April 1958 documents widespread, acute food shortages and starvation in 16 provinces and autonomous regions. As is well known, food shortages occur regularly in rural China during the spring when the old harvest is more or less used up but the new one is still green (qínghuáng bùjié 青黄不接). But these reports go well beyond such normal occurrences.

In Anhui, 1.3 million people “are without food supplies.” In Shandong, 670,000 people lack food, and 150,000 have fled their home villages. In Guangdong’s spring famine, almost a million people lack food and “seven people have died of starvation.” In Gansu, “degrees of food shortage have occurred in 21 counties… In Hui County… (S)evere famine has become prevalent, and people have been eating tree bark and grass roots… Since December 1957, 2,031 people have suffered from oedema and 795 have died… In a number of places it is no longer possible to carry out any productive labor owing to severe malnutrition.”

The document blamed local cadres for not uncovering food problems and providing for timely resale of grain. It mentioned fear of the Rightist label as another cause. It is now clear that many officials were afraid of having their worlds turn upside down, not fearing the label. (5)

The document blamed local cadres for not uncovering food problems and providing for timely resale of grain. It mentioned fear of the Rightist label but did not put its finger directly on the obvious cause, which was that the...
1957-58 procurements were conducted during a harsh anti-Rightist and socialist education campaign that pushed officials to achieve extreme results (Document-2, henceforth cited as D-plus the number).

2. **Mao’s responsibility.** A “top secret” document sheds light on this contentious issue. It consists of Mao’s interjections on a report on grain procurement by Li Xiannian, a Politburo member in charge of trade, at the Shanghai Party conference on 25 March 1959. Mao labelled shortfalls in grain procurement as not just “disappointing” but “in some aspects terrible.” He called for a relentless effort but “it can’t be seen as vicious.” He added: “As long as the amount of grain being procured does not go above a third [of the grain produced], peasants will not rebel....Every province must adopt Henan’s method: ‘He who strikes first prevails; he who strikes last fails.’ This is a real lesson.”

Just what Mao meant by one third is confusing, since he didn’t distinguish between gross and net procurement, the latter meaning resale to rural areas struck by disaster and those that specialised in non-grain crops. But his choice of words undoubtedly helped inspire the extremely harsh collection tactics of the 1959-60 procurement season, in which an unprecedented 39.7% of the grain crop was seized while net procurement reached a record 28% at a time when grain output had declined sharply. This extraction was the major source of the 1959-1960 famine.

Mao’s most damning statement was on starvation:

To distribute resources evenly will only ruin the Great Leap Forward.
When there is not enough to eat, people starve to death. It is better to let half the people die so that the other half can eat their fill (D-5).

Some scholars believe that this shows Mao’s readiness to accept mass death on an immense scale. My own view is that this is an instance of Mao’s use of hyperbole, another being his casual acceptance of death of half the population during a nuclear war. In other contexts, Mao did not in fact accept mass death. Zhou’s Chronology shows that in October 1958, Mao expressed real concern that 40,000 people in Yunnan had starved to death (p. 173). Shortly after the March 25 meeting, he worried about 25.2 million people who were at risk of starvation. (D-8) But from late summer on, Mao essentially forgot about this issue, until, as noted, the “Xinyang Incident” came to light in October 1960.

But Mao’s hyperbole may well have inspired many subordinates to press procurements to the point of condemning people to death. Shortly after his remarks, a “counterrevolutionary” poster appeared in Jining Prefecture, Shandong, with the message that, “In the Soviet Union, 70% of the population starved to death in order to build communism....And Chairman Mao has given orders to let half the population starve to death....” (D-118). In 1961, the Party committee of Wuxian Prefecture, Sichuan, quoted a “former” Party secretary of a commune in which 14.5% of members had died as saying, “A few dead is nothing....Our socialist system determined that death is inevitable. In the Soviet Union, in order to build the socialist system, about 30% of the people died” (D-3).

3. **Information flow.** How well were the central authorities informed of the 1959-60 famine? Intense anti-Rightist pressures had led to gross exaggerations about output but also motivated officials to intercept upward communications that contained truthful reports. The book contains six cases in which investigators found that local authorities intercepted, opened, and withheld letters sent to Mao, the Central Committee, and the provincial committees.

A Guizhou county Party secretary ordered public security to withhold 100 letters, labelling anonymous ones as “anti-socialist” and “counterrevolutionary.” One intercepted letter to Mao was sent by a cadre in the propaganda department and reported exaggeration of output and mass starvation. He became a target of “struggle,” public humiliation, and reassignment to hard labour (D-103).

In Sichuan, a villager pleaded with “higher authorities” to “save our lives.” His brigade Party secretary had confiscated all the peasants’ rations, reducing them to eating grass and bark. This official uncovered the identity of the author, forged evidence against him, and had village bullies savagely beat him. By April 1960, 128 peasants in this brigade had died of hunger (D-104).

A third is from Shizhu County, Sichuan, where a “former” county Party secretary and others sought to conceal their errors and crimes, which included beating “a number of people to death” during the anti-Rightist campaign. They blocked villagers’ letters of complaint, prompting some to walk to other counties to mail their letters (D-105).

4. **The search for hidden grain.** This was part of the anti-Rightist campaign of 1959-60. Since officials had lied about output, they were desperate to find grain to meet the procurement quotas. This led to a sequence in which top county officials maltreated their subordinates, who in turn abused those below them. In the just-mentioned Shizhu County, in order to force cadres to find hidden grain by any and all means, beatings and other forms of torture were inflicted on “Party secretaries, brigade leaders and accountants... After they returned to their local areas, grass-roots cadres also held denunciation meetings and physically tortured villagers....” Some were “starved to death.” A commune Party secretary announced that “any cadre who does not take part in beating is a rightist.” The commune’s death rates ranged from 20% to 50%. The investigators noted that letters sent by ordinary people about these events were “fairly accurate” (D-9).

In June 1960, the Hunan Provincial Party Committee received a report about a “reign of terror” against cadres in Liling County. Since October 1959, “several county-level conferences... set an example for inflicting physical violence on cadres which then became prevalent in the communes, becoming worse at each level down.” In 11 communes, 235 people were denounced at a Party conference and 120 people were beaten up, “causing three deaths” and 17 serious injuries. “More than 20 types of torture were employed, most of them extremely dangerous.” “In some communes, ‘beating frenzy’ is like an evil wind sweeping through society from the top down” (D-8). During 1959-1960 the “wind of communism” was revived. One cannot but wonder whether this “frenzy” was induced not only by fear of punishment but also by apocalyptic visions of instant entry into the communist paradise.

Such horrific documents raise the question of balance. How many lower-level officials did not join in the repressions? One clue is that in May 1961 it was revealed that 70% of a stupendous 3.65 million cadres had been wrongly labelled as Rightists in 1959-60. (The clear implication is that there must have been many officials who in some way or other either refused to participate in the violence or opposed it in some other way. The book gives

instances of upward reporting by cadres during the height of the terror, but not many.

5. Peasant survival methods. Some ate tree bark and grass; other consumed “immortal earth” (D-88). Still others sold children. Quite a few fled; some young women turned to prostitution. Others turned to spirit mediums and faith healers: “If you want food to eat, you should follow spirits, not cadres” (D-68). Cannibalism was the most extreme survival tactic. The book contains cases from Gansu, Sichuan, and Guizhou. In one Gansu municipality, 41 such cases were found as of March 1961. The list of culprits, stratified by class, reports “survival” as the reason for eating human flesh (D-26).

Collective actions included widespread food riots. A striking and perhaps politically motivated incident took place in 1961, when 20-30 peasants invaded a county Party compound in Changshou, Sichuan, “peeled the bark off all the trees and consumed it” (D-88). Between September 1960 and late January 1961, 30,000 incidents of train robberies by “groups” in 23 provinces were reported to the Ministry of Public Security (D-83). There were acts of resistance to the levelling of graves and careless exposure of bodies, part of a “war on the dead” (D-47). Revolts of unspecified size were reported from Hunan, Guangxi, and Jiangxi involving secret societies and clustering around December 1958 (D-62). Bitter satires about life in the communes were posted in a variety of places.

In early 1959, some villagers in a Shandong commune wanted to go to Beijing. “They want Chairman Mao and the Party to seek revenge for them” (D-108). Conversely, in 1961, “Down with Mao” posters were found in a commune in Ningxiang County, Hunan. But rumours also circulated that Mao had appointed Peng Dehuai, purged in 1959 for criticising the Leap, to the governorship of Hunan (D-113).

Harsh denunciations of Mao came from Xinchang, a Tibetan prefecture in Sichuan in early 1959. In one township it was said that “Chairman Mao is more brutal than Deng Xiufang,” a former-warlord. “We are treated worse than slaves.” Ethnic groups can organise “to wreck this so-called people’s government.” Han cadres are worse than indigenous ones. “When it comes to grain procurement, the people’s government is much more brutal than former slave owners.” But only “very small” counterrevolutionary organisations were formed (D-111).

A truly subversive act was a letter written by two Youth League members from Nanjing and mailed to various Party committees in early 1962. It was a wholesale indictment of the disasters caused by communitisation. The letter appealed to the Centre to “discard dogma” and abandon the whole enterprise. Rather naively, the authors suggested that China advise other communist countries to avoid this kind of disaster. Recipient officials were ordered to destroy the letter (D-110).

Finally, the chapter on “Devastation in the countryside” sheds further light on the immense damage done during the Leap to agriculture, forests, water resources, and peasant housing, etc. Hu Yaobang, then head of the Youth League, spent 25 days travelling through Hunan and Anhui in the fall of 1961. He commented: “Unless one sees the situation with one’s own eyes, it’s impossible to believe how awful it is” (D-42).

In sum, while this book raises questions of balance, it is nonetheless a highly informative collection of original documents.

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as well as the possible ancestor of some African-Chinese (Shinn and Eisenman, p. 17). [1]

Later on, China-Africa relations were limited to some movement of labourers and merchants to Mauritius, Madagascar, or South Africa, and one had to wait for the Republican era and, more importantly, the Chinese Communist revolution, to observe the birth and development of a new type of engagement, that of a non-aligned People’s Republic of China promoting peaceful cooperation while deconstructing Taiwan’s ties with the continent. According to David H. Shinn and Joshua Eisenman, from the early 1950s to mid-1970s, “China’s Africa policy had three primary objectives: breaking out of international isolation, battling the former Soviet Union for primacy in the world communist movement, and displacing Taiwan as the internationally recognized government of China” (Shinn and Eisenman, p. xi). To reach these goals, China strategically cooperated with national liberation movements in seeking newly independent African countries to support its resumption of membership in the United Nations. From 1964 onward, Beijing developed its now famous “Eight Principles on Economic and Technical Aid” to which no condition of reciprocity or conditionalities was attached: “The Chinese Government never asks for any privilege or attaches any condition” (Ibid., p. xi). The flagship project of this post-colonial period was of course the now quasi-mythical Tanzania-Zambia railway inaugurated in 1975 between two countries that sympathised with the socialist revolutionary objectives and rhetoric.

From the 1980s, with the opening-up and the transformation of China’s economy, Sino-African relations took a new turn towards a business-oriented partnership, with Africa offering both a market for China’s manufactured products and a strategic target for investment in resources. During the same period, Chinese military assistance to Africa grew and diversified into a significant participation in UN peacekeeping missions or more direct supply operations with military equipment and training. From the early 2000s, the establishment of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) concretised these new relations by offering a diplomatic window to a fast-evolving partnership culminating in the newly adopted “Beijing consensus,” popularised by Joshua Cooper Ramo, and bringing growth on the basis of the Chinese development model. [2] This critical enterprise based on the deconstruction of presumably false assumptions with systematic fact-finding is somehow shared – although in a less provocative and much more rigorous manner – by Deborah Brautigam, who in her well-advertised and reviewed Dragon’s Gift aims to reveal the real story of China in Africa. [3] As a long-time observer of the Sino-African relationship, and now Professor and Director of the International Development Program of the Johns Hopkins University, Deborah Brautigam has carried out extensive fieldwork in Africa and gained access to first-hand materials in many countries. She is absolutely right to try to demystify a number of expressly sensationalist and unverified news items published worldwide, including by influential media such as The Economist or The Atlantic or academics quoting the same news, on how China is grabbing land, polluting territories, or exploiting African workers. This courageous and much-needed attempt is exemplified by her fascinating piece on “Chinese Engagement in African Agriculture: Fiction and Fact,” in which she takes a number of examples of poor media investigation and scholarship that mix rumour with fact and confuse currencies and countries to systematically raise feelings of anxiety over how and where China is now operating to “grab” land. [4] And yes, fears

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about China are “misinformed” and used by other powers with the indirect complicity of non-vigilant media looking for more China bashing. But regardless of its international success and defendable objectives, the Dragon’s Gift does not bring as much clarity as it could to the China-Africa “real story.” Filled with hundreds of loosely-structured anecdotes and many interesting facts, the book is a sort of patchwork of 11 chapters with a multitude of catchy titles in which the “crouching tiger” competes with the “orient express”! Nevertheless, timely and the first of its kind, the Dragon’s Gift reaches some of its objectives in publicising the debate beyond specialised academic and media circles. Deborah Brautigam’s blog and publications are useful reads for all those who are interested not only in learning more about China in Africa, but also in understanding China as a global actor as well as related pressing contemporary issues in international relations.

Trade and investment flows are of course at the centre of these new concerns. In 2009, China became Africa’s top trading partner. In 2010, outward foreign direct investment (FDI) from emerging economies accounted for 29% of global FDI outflows. Six developing and transitional economies were among the 20 top world investors. In this group, China occupied the second position globally, and for the first time surpassed Japan in outward FDI (OFDI) and accounted for 30% of the total number of cross-border mergers and acquisitions. 6 A number of these new FDIs have been made in Africa. How much and how? This is difficult to say, as China, despite recent efforts from the Chinese Ministry of Commerce (MOFCOM), does not publish clear and systemic statistics on the topic – but then, neither do other main players such as the US who are very much involved in sensitive businesses throughout the continent. In 2007, Africa Silk Road, a report edited by Harry G. Broadman for the World Bank, was already highlighting China’s and India’s new economic frontier in presenting the performances and patterns of Chinese and Indian trade and investment flows with Africa at an original micro (firm) level. China into Africa: Trade, Aid and Influence, edited by Robert I. Rotberg in 2008, follows this path from a more general angle and provides us with 14 insightful chapters, including a number of specialised contributions on “Chinese concessional loans” (Paul Hubbard), “Trade and investment” (Harry G. Broadman), and “Aid” (Deborah Brautigam). The chapter by Harry Broadman (author of the Africa Silk Road) is particularly interesting as it insists on what is probably the most crucial transformation of today’s international economic relations: the surge and possible future dominance of south-south trade and investment flows, which not only challenge the current balance of powers, but also the principles and rules on which these exchanges are based. In this regard, it will be fascinating to observe the next evolution of China’s participation in the World Trade Organisation (WTO) and its further engagement with the Dispute Settlement System (DSB) in relation not only to developed countries but also to other developing countries in Africa and Latin America that now represent a large share in Chinese trade.

What about aid, then? Is China the unconditional friend portrayed by African Sinophiles? And what about debt sustainability, governance, and environmental issues while money is supposedly massively injected in non-democratic regimes such as Zimbabwe that are portrayed as enemies of the West? Contrary to the proliferating clichés and media stories, Chinese aid can take a multitude of forms, from the preferential loans offered by China Eximbank to infrastructure building projects, and takes place throughout Africa, even in countries that are less rich in resources. The 2006 and 2010 White Papers were already quite clear about the explicit and implicit objectives of this aid policy. Sceptics will be convinced by the latest publications of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) and recent news on the possibly imminent establishment of a BRICS development bank, which could provide an unprecedented alternative to the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

In this peaceful yet planned conquest of African territory, another aspect of Chinese engagement plays a major role: the penetration and diffusion of Chinese culture through media coverage and the development of educational ties. China is setting up dozens of Confucius Institutes, and in July 2012, the Chinese government announced a three-year “African Talents Plan” aimed at training around 30,000 Africans and giving out 18,000 scholarships. Any traveller to Africa will notice the presence of these Confucius Institutes, which are now often bigger and better funded than many of the cultural institutes of former colonisers.

Very importantly as well, China has been making significant strides in expanding its media presence on the continent. In January 2012, CCTV chose Nairobi, the capital of Kenya, to set up a broadcast hub, and Xinhua now has 20 bureaus on the continent.7 Knowing the ability of China to use and transform its propaganda apparatus, this carefully thought-out media campaign will certainly have an impact on the African narrative and the role China plays in the scenarios to come. In this regard, one can only agree with Yu Shan Wu’s observations in his 2012 Report for the South African Institute of International Affairs: “China has sent its state media on a global mission to advance its influence in the world, signalling an addition to China’s outward movement project, which previously focused on trade, investment and diplomatic activities. In particular, China’s state media in Africa provide insight into China’s larger soft power strategy. At this particular juncture, China is giving Africa something that other media infrastructure sources are not: the capacity to create its own content and an alternative platform to tell Africa’s own story and to view China’s story” (Yu, p. 24).

Sinology is dead, long live Sinology! This surprising remark intentionally formulated in a dedicated first-class China academic journal is not only provocative, but also aims at reconsidering the evolution of Chinese power and with it the necessary transformation of social sciences studies on China. While many books have recently been published on China-Africa relations, these have often been released by media correspondents or diplomats with long-time experience in Africa and/or China. Specialised academic books are harder to find. This not only calls for a “going out” scholarship on China, but also for a more precise thematic approach (economic, legal, political, etc.) toward socio-economic realities that are not China-specific, but rather global. This “careful scholarship”8 based on original fieldwork and – but not only – a genuine knowledge of China could bring an immense contribution to many Chinese and social sciences studies in building bridges between “Sinology” and other disciplines in which interest in China is immense but not always filled with adequate knowledge.
These two works are useful additions to the growing literature on China-Africa relations and on the emergence of South-South linkages in general.

Two very different books, to be sure: one is a special issue of the journal Outre-Terre that ambitiously sets out to draw up a multidimensional account of this new “Chinafrican connexion.” The other is an essay seeking to chart the course of Sino-Indian-African Relations until 2030, its subtitle somewhat at odds with its main conclusion. While these two studies, or rather collections of studies, complement each other, neither seeks to cover the subject exhaustively. With 54 states (55 if Western Sahara is included), Africa is obviously diverse and fragmented. Moreover, works on relations between Africa and China (and Asia) tend to avoid North Africa, for whom understandably reasons – its close links to the Middle East. While Outre-terre has chosen to omit North Africa, Chindiafricque has opted to include it, but rather vaguely, the kernel of its argumentation and examples being focused on Sub-Saharan Africa.

Those unfamiliar with the journal Outre-terre might be surprised by the structure and style of the special issue. The volume, divided into seven distinct parts and 47 articles, is a long collection of research analyses and many brief reports on a number of facets of Chinafrica. It is no doubt informative. The volume’s first part, entitled “Chinafrican Myth,” includes two contributions by Thierry Pairault showing how limited Chinese direct investment has remained ($9 billion in 2009), whereas trade topped $200 billion in 2012. A good article by Laurent Hou, also a PhD candidate at Paris IV, sets the record straight on the so-called Chinese land grab in Africa: the real picture of so-called “land acquisitions” (mostly rented or leased) by outside operators (Chinese, Indians, or others) highlights among other things the extent of uncultivated arable land on the continent (31% of the world total, according to the FAQ, and as cited by Boillot and Dembinski, p. 285): while such transfers pose several problems and must be dissected with care, the stand of African states and experts on this issue is more nuanced than is often surmised. The second part – “African Polygon” – notably includes an article on Chinese investments in central Africa by the Brazzaville-based academic Théophile Dzaka-Kikouta, and another by Lucy Corkin of the School of Oriental and African Studies on the role of the Exim Bank and what is known as the “Angolan Model” (oil for concessional loans). The third part – “Resistible Rise” – introduces other actors, especially European and including French, and tries to pinpoint sources of competition as well as factors of cooperation. The most original contribution is no doubt the one authored by Arnaud Chaumasse on what I would call the “competitive coexistence” between “Francafrique” – or what remains of it – and Chinafrica. The last four parts are much shorter, containing rushed images rather than articles on, for instance, cultural frictions between Africans and Chinese, the now marginal competition between Beijing and Taipei on the continent, and the state of research on Africa in the People’s Republic or on Africans in China.

All of these make up a kaleidoscope that provides the reader with a host of information on some of the multiple facets of the Chinafrica relationship.

Chindiafricque presents other problems: like all other prospective works it is both stimulating and frustrating. Armed with statistics and citing authors and theories, notably Albert Hirschman and Amartya Sen (which is welcome), Indian economy expert Jean-Joseph Boillot and financial journalist Stanislas Dembinski raise useful questions, but the answers are a range of possibilities and potentially contradictory paths that may contribute to weakening and even undermining their thesis, or at least the one flagged in the title and introduction. What is it?

Chindiafricque’s main thesis is that of a “global rebalancing” benefiting not only China but also India and Africa, which unlike Brazil, Russia, or Japan constitute

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“incomparable continental and human masses” and whose “trilateral relations are poised to play a role in structuring tomorrow’s world” (p. 9). Europe rejects this rebalancing, which will determine the future of developed countries and fundamentally reduce their relative political influence and economic might.

In terms of changes in human resources (Part 1), Chindiafrica will account for half the world’s population in 2030. And in 2050 it will also have half the world’s human capital. In economic terms (Part 2), the grouping’s total GDP (in purchasing power parity) will rise from a fourth to almost half of the world’s in 2030 (China: 25%, India: 10%, and Africa: 11%) and 60% in 2050, the authors say, although they are careful enough not to come up with precise estimates. Of course, in 2030, the West will retain technological supremacy in terms of innovation (Part 3), but “Chindia” and then Africa will be able to adopt “low cost and frugal processes and business models” that are innovative and better suited to their needs. The authors cite the success of Huawei or the Indian “little cool” refrigerator in Africa as promising illustrations.

All these changes could lead to industrialisation and agricultural modernisation in Africa and as a result reduce pressure on natural and agricultural resources (Part 4). Here, Boillot and Dembinski sound more cautious but on the whole optimistic: oil-rich African countries could overcome the “curse of black gold,” or the so-called “Dutch Disease,” China and India have the capacity to become less voracious for hydrocarbons and other raw materials, and Chindiafrica has the potential to become self-sufficient in food. The authors also sound upbeat when it comes to the political consequences of the shakeup (Part 5), while noting the weaknesses and contestations of the “Chinese Model,” India’s soft state, the insurmountable fractures of the African continent, and the US capacity for rebound, as well as the attractiveness of the European Union’s institutional norms.

What conclusion does this prospective analysis indicate? Many questions and propositions, but no real conclusion. Actually, that is what the authors have done. How will the main actors in this new grouping and other countries or groups of states, such as Europe, react and adapt to these changes? No one knows. What Boillot and Dembinski seek to promote is a “moderated globalisation” rightly inspired by the economist Dany Rodrik. (2) It is difficult to disagree with this, seeing how China and India have sought to protect themselves selectively against what they see as the destabilising currents of “hyper-globalisation,” strongly suggesting that African countries strengthen their states and do likewise, including vis-à-vis China and India. That is precisely what Nigerian central bank governor Lamido Sanusi proposed recently in a well-publicised op-ed highly critical of China. (3)

The main weakness of this work, it should be clear, lies not in observing the unprecedented emergence of South-South economic, political, and human linkages, especially among the three entities chosen, but rather in the nature, coherence, and density of the trilateral relationship that forms the basis of the authors’ approach. It is questionable whether China, India, and Africa constitute a relevant grouping. The expanding relations and complementarities among these economies are known, but what is their future weight relative to US/EU relations, China/developed countries, and even Brazil/Africa or the famous BRICS? What this book lacks is a comparative and prospective analysis of the economic flows and diplomatic-strategic relations among China, India, and Africa as well as among the current and future main partners of these three entities. Thus, Sino-Indian economic and political relations would most probably remain a complex mix of relatively limited cooperation and lasting strategic competition. China’s weight in Africa is heavy, India’s lighter, but tomorrow the two powers will have to continue to face other major actors, such as the aforementioned Brazil, the United States, EU, Japan... and South Africa. Moreover, the persistent tensions among Chindiafrica — and within Africa — are not really addressed in the book’s prospective construction. For instance, while the new Chinese diaspora in Africa (one to five million people) represents a small share of the emigration from the People’s Republic, it greatly influences local economies (or at least some of them) and constitutes a source of real inter-community tension.

All in all, it is clear that the weight of Chindiafrica or of the South in general will keep growing, but neither constitutes a coherent grouping. Even less than the BRICS, in fact. One is a statistical aggregate with no real projects or common objectives, the other a convenient concept that includes not only political regimes and cultures that are bound to remain very different but also economies that, given the intrinsically unequal nature of development, have increasingly less in common. Rebalancing, yes, but Chindiafrica will not by itself make up tomorrow’s world. China, India, and Africa will contribute to it no doubt by cooperating and also by squabbling occasionally.

Translated by N. Jayaram.

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A good deal of the country’s political life that the top leaders had tried to keep from their compatriots’ gaze was revealed through this affair; Bo Xilai indirectly exposed the actual and potential leaders to the wrath of a population exasperated with the impunity enjoyed by the high and mighty, whose interests were too closely linked to those of economic actors (Chapter 2).

The real or imagined wealth amassed by leaders while in office began to exercise the minds of millions of disadvantaged Chinese, and the elites faced the immense challenge of reducing inequalities while safeguarding their privileges and prerogatives (Chapter 3). The question has arisen whether the one-party regime gradually losing steam, and with its socialist ideology proving insufficient to satisfy people’s aspirations for a good life (pp. 57-70). The author stresses that China no longer enjoys as much elbow room in its bid for modernisation and international recognition as is assumed. While there is hardly any doubt that China will emerge as the world’s leading economy by 2020, there is need to observe what new development imperatives will be favoured by the new leadership (p. 69-70), as there is little doubt that the international context will demand a modicum of transparency (economic and diplomatic) on the part of Chinese leaders. Rapidly rising social inequalities, the expanding scale of discontent (mostly among the younger generation), and growing difficulties with various economic partners on the international front will compel China to overcome this challenging new stage (perhaps decisively):

That is to say, there are no easy answers to the question of whether China will adopt a global international vision based on universal norms and cooperation, or adopt one based on multilateral competition in a world that would have moved beyond post-1945 Western institutions (p. 231).

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Taking eight migrants’ stories as examples, the journalist Michelle Dammon Loyalka paints a vivid and detailed picture of everyday life in one of Xian’s urban villages (Ganjia Zhai) based on extended interviews she conducted in 2007. At the time of the interviews, the neighbourhood, which hosts an estimated 30,000 migrants, was about to be demolished for urban upgrading as part of Xian’s economic development program, which is a focal point in the Chinese government’s policy to further develop China’s western region (xi bu da ka fa).

As suggested by the book’s title, “Eating Bitterness: Stories from the Front Lines of China’s Great Urban Migration,” the author emphasises her astonishment at the migrants’ patience and willingness to endure financial hardship and difficult living conditions and their trust in a better future or even their acceptance of the lack of a predictable future. Throughout the book’s chapters, each of which is dedicated to one migrant’s personal story, she points out the various important contributions migrants have made to the urbanisation processes in the neighbourhood, e.g., as construction workers, in the general services industries (child care, repair, food, wellness, etc.), and as petty traders offering affordable groceries, goods, and small services to urban inhabitants. Her interviewees include an employee of a beauty salon, a vegetable vendor, a knife sharpener on a bicycle, a recycler, a female shopkeeper and hostel owner, a new landlord, and a proprietor of several convenience stores. By selecting different occupational backgrounds, different age groups, and representatives of both genders, she offers differentiated portraits of individuals rather than constructing a homogenous depiction of migrants in Xian.

With some of the migrants planning short-term survival over the coming days, weeks, and months, and others envisioning their long-term future in the city, she also describes the variations in their higher aims, values, and identities. For example, a male member of a family that received significant compensation for their land when urbanisation enclosed the former farming village of Ganjia Zhai constantly gambles due to boredom, since there is no need for him to work beyond collecting rent. The family kept one piece of land with their house in the urban village, to which they later added several floors to rent out to businesses and individual tenants. The man still holds a rural hukou and will only change to urban status upon moving to the new housing complex offered as compensation for the upcoming demolition of their current house. Moving to a newly-build and better-equipped apartment does not bring the anticipated life improvements, since the family will lose their rental income and social network. They have already moved beyond the level of survival and are seeking a life with social quality. In contrast, a couple selling fruits and vegetables on the streets every day of the year works extremely hard just for the education and future of their child, who accompanied them to the city, and the family endures living in a damp garage in hope of a better future. Another migrant husband and wife work as nanny and caretaker in two separate houses for an upper middle class family, while their own daughters stay with relatives in the countryside. The knife sharpener and recycler portrayed in the book just live day-to-day at their own pace. The young women working in a beauty parlour dream of a rapid self-made career in the beauty product business to bring about their own transformation in the context of globalised female worldliness and financial independence outside the social system of their home village.

By carefully analysing the migrants’ individual strategies for financial and occupational survival and further development, and their plans and hopes regarding settling down in the city, the author gives interesting insights into the direct impact of urban development and social transition on migrants living in an urban village. These processes produce challenges and barriers for the migrants, but also the economic niches that enable them to make a living in the urban space. Besides presenting the migrants’ perspectives on organisational and practical issues, she succeeds in catching glimpses of her interviewees’ state of mind, which reflect the country’s rapid social change and the search for a meaning in life beyond earning more money.

In her epilogue, the author predicts a change in the attitude of the younger generation of migrants, who might not be willing to “eat bitterness” (chi ku) endlessly without immediate reward in sight. She points out that even if migrant incomes have risen in recent years compared with, for example, university graduates, they still lack career development and social mobility, full access to the social security system, adequate housing, educational opportunities, health care, and labour rights. She mentions the increase in, but lack of implementation of, governmental policies to protect migrants’ rights and promote their integration into urban society. As an important structural issue, she names ongoing reform of the household registration system. Even if local test pilots provide more options for changing hukou status, many migrants hesitate to give up their household registration and accompanying land rights. She identifies the underlying reasons as the enormous difficulties migrants still face in the cities and improvements the government has made in the countryside, such as abolition of the agricultural tax and a subsidised rural health system. As an overall conclusion, she situates the migrants between “the nation’s traditional past and the modernized future,” as “a people in transition in a nation in transition,” as the “most brow-beaten” (p. 243), and as protagonists upon which urban and also left-behind rural communities strongly depend for progress and development.

This book, written for a more general professional audience, is extremely readable, with each portrait of a migrant’s life qualifying as a literary short story. With her background in journalism, the author might have included more aspects of the Chinese public media debate about city development, migrants of different generations, and social justice. Academic theoretical debates about migration and urbanisation are left out in favour of “the people’s stories,” which are edited and interpreted in a very convincing way.

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**How Wee Ng**

How does Cold War discourse continue to be articulated in the contemporary context of Asia? How does an ex-colony such as Taiwan become a neocoloniser in Southeast Asia, yet was implicated in a campaign pushing for the island to become the 51st state of the US? How can scholars continue to challenge the binaries of Asia-versus-West in post-colonial studies while remaining critical to nativism and Eurocentrism? In what ways can cultural studies more effectively challenge the cultural imaginary formed by capitalism, imperialism, and colonialism? These are just some of the questions posed in Kuan-hsing Chen’s work, which is partly inspired by Takeuchi Yoshimi’s “Asia as Method.” In part building upon the latter’s inter-referencing approach of comparing societies geographically closer or that share similar historical experiences, the book follows Chen’s continuing efforts of establishing an inter-Asian cultural studies that critically reviews Eurocentric frameworks while examining the inter-connectedness of the history, culture, and politics of Asian societies. Making an impassioned appeal for formulating new recourses to how Asia may be approached as an object of study, this volume in part responds to the discourse of Taiwanese nationalism under former President Lee Teng-hui’s regime, and in part to Taiwan’s increasing economic dependency on mainland China.

In the opening chapter, “The Imperialist Eye,” through analyses of several Taiwanese writers published in the *China Times* literary supplement “Human Space” (*Renjian*), Chen mounts a powerful critique of Taiwan’s southward-advance policy (*nanxiang*) of economic expansion into Southeast Asia in the 1990s. He describes the effort as a “subimperial desire,” driven by a nationalism positioning Taiwan as a neocolonial power, which reproduced the Japanese militarist discourse of the “Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere.” To resolve this issue caused by an absence of “critical reflection on de-colonization” (p. 63), he proposes “Third-world cultural studies,” drawing from the work of Memmi, Nandy, and Fanon in the following chapter, “De-colonization.” Attempting to rupture coloniser-colonised identification, Chen borrows the late Edward T. Ch’ien’s notion of syncretism, formulated as a critique of Neo-Confucianism in the late Ming dynasty. Refashioning Ch’ien’s approach as “critical syncretism,” he believes it can be applied to the contemporary context and “actively interiorize elements of others into the subjectivity of the self,” so as to transcend divisive positions historically constructed by colonial power relations through patriarchy, racism, heterosexism, or nationalistic xenophobia (p. 99). Chen postulates that critical syncretism can be a cultural strategy of identification for subaltern subject groups such as aboriginal, homosexual, and the working class. But to what extent and efficacy specific subalterns in Asia might deploy this strategy for their own purposes, the book does not elaborate in detail. There is an implication that agency is assumed for the subaltern subjects in question. Whether some subjects do indeed consider themselves subaltern is another question that begs asking. In other words, the book may want to consider the changing possibilities of a person who could be part agent, part instrument, in various relationships in different contexts.

“De-Cold War,” the third chapter, pushes the issue of de-colonisation further by tracing it to the devastating impact of the Cold War on ordinary people. Apart from analysing the work of the Taiwanese writer Chen Ying-chen, the author cites a deeply poignant account of his own mother, who while diagnosed with schizophrenia insisted on setting aside a full bowl of rice and pair of chopsticks for the invisible “Father Chiang” (Chiang Kai-shek) during mealtimes. She also swore not to return to her native Beijing while it was still “occupied” by the communists (p. 117-118). Offering a moving analysis of two Taiwanese films, *Dou-sang: A Borrowed Life* (多桑) and *Banana Paradise* (香蕉天堂), the book also examines how the Cold War resulted in an irreconcilable rift between the *benshengren* (Taiwanese natives) and *waishengren* (Mainlanders who arrived in Taiwan later) in which “two structures of sentiment” never intersect (p. 156). Chen suggests that truce efforts between Taiwan and China have to move beyond political or economic terms and instead be redirected toward the mutual understanding of “each other’s emotional and psychic terrain” (*ibid*). Associated with cross-Straits relations is the issue of regional reconciliation with Japanese colonialism, which Chen, following the Chinese studies scholar Mizoguchi Yuzo, asserts should be about “confront[ing] the violence implanted in the very structure and formation of [Meiji] modernity” (p. 158). In the fourth chapter, “Deimperialization,” Chen mounts a cutting critique of Club 51, formed by a group of Taiwanese intellectuals and entrepreneurs, some of whom were based in the United States. This group called for Taiwan to join the United States as its fifty-first state in the 1990s in order to “guarantee Taiwan’s security, stability, prosperity, liberty, and democracy” (p. 162). While he does not let up his attack on Taiwan’s dependency on the United States and American imperialism, Chen suggests that a new approach to the study of imperialism must avoid the pitfalls of the “old anticolonial nationalist and nativist positions” and “globalist position” through “rethinking the question of colonial subjectivity” (p. 165). This would involve different countries (including ex-colonies and ex-colonisers) actively collaborating on the rewriting of colonial histories (pp. 200-207).

The fifth chapter is possibly the finest in the volume. It is entitled “Asia as Method,” which Chen describes as “multiply[ing] frames of reference in our subjectivity and worldview” through the unique histories and cultures of Asian societies while acknowledging the West as constitutive of Asian subjectivity (p. 223). By comparing Partha Chatterjee’s “political society” with the notion of “minjian” in Taiwan, he sees this as recourse to the Western notion of state-civil society in order to address gaps in understanding the working-class in Asian societies. Mapping the three principles of the paternalistic state, namely *qing* (sentiment), *li* (reason), and *fa* (law) in ancient Chinese society, Chen demonstrates how these ideas continue to define contemporary governance through the example of the Taiwanese government’s rebuilding efforts during the 21 September 1999 earthquake. He persuasively argues how certain social conduct will be tolerated or even carried out if it is regarded as compassionate (*qing*) and reasonable (*li*), even if it is illegal or “extralegal” (p. 238). Chen points out how earthquake victims were in part helped by independent banks in Taiwan complying with the state’s request to absorb part of their unpaid mortgages, and in part supported by the relief efforts of nonstate mutual-aid systems, such as clans and religious organisations whose history may be traced to *minjian* spaces since the Ming Dynasty. Through the inter-referencing of multiple cultures, histories, and spaces of Asia,
the book suggests new possibilities of doing postcolonial studies and cultural studies.

Notably, the book does not clarify what is meant by "Asia," though the scope can be inferred from the many references made to East, South, and Southeast Asia more specifically. A definition and problematisation of the term "Asia" right in the beginning would be appreciated, especially when Chen's project assumes the ambitious task of decolonisation and deimperialisation; considering how the concept was first coined by the West and is continually evolving as a construct, this is all the more necessary. Loaded terms also deserve more scrutiny, such as the assertion that French civilisation represents "the pinnacle of the mysterious and romantic Western culture" in "the Chinese world" (p. 40). It is not clear which Chinese world is being addressed here, especially the issue of how Chinese people in different countries and regions variously imagine themselves and the French; these issues alone would already warrant further book-length analysis. Underlying other similar generalisations is the overarching anxiety of how the ideologies of neocolonisation and neoimperialisation are preventing East Asian subjects from fully realising the "true" nature of their being and psychological entrapment. The assumption that xenophobia and imperialism are found in the "unconscious" is itself an oxymoron. Who is then authorised to de-imperialise other subjects without being affected by the pervasive effects of imperialisation and racism? Concomitant with the notion of the "unconscious" is how rifts in cross-Straits relations are understood by discordant "structures of sentiment," which may be unable to address the contingency of how different subjects on both sides variously view each other in different contexts. An appreciation of the implication of increasing numbers of Taiwanese people working or even settling in the mainland in the last few decades, and their interaction with their mainland counterparts in different fields of Chinese society, would constitute an area worth exploring in the future.

Nonetheless, Chen has produced a significant work that raises many critical questions through effectively interweaving arguments with a wide range of theoretical threads. It is not very often one comes across academic writing that is so passionate and engaging, yet attains self-reflexivity. The book will also serve as a useful resource for scholars and undergraduates of cultural studies, East Asian studies, and the Cold War. Although bearing a 2010 imprint, the book was actually first published in Chinese in 2006. While much has transpired in the past few years, including the financial meltdown in the US and Europe, an even stronger Chinese economy and its growing presence in Africa, and more recently, the debate of the "Beijing Consensus" versus the "Washington Consensus," followed by rising cynicism toward the former’s sustainability, the ideas proposed still remain pertinent today. As Chen so sharply points out, “the severe competition for global power would bring China back to the old binary logic of China and the West, and Sinocentrism would once again cause China to ignore the rest of the world” (p. 13). Indeed, for those who wish to adopt "Asia as method," theoretical self-reflexivity and vigilance against neoimperialism are critical.

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