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Climate change: the China Challenge

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- 1 This very useful survey outlines how analysts in Europe, Japan and America cover China's economy, its politics, and its foreign policy. Much of the book, such as Robert Ash's chapter on "Studies of China's Economy in Europe" offers a tour d'horizon of who is doing what and where. This review, however, will focus on the substance.
- 2 Ash highlights Chris Bramall's "argument that the weakening of private and CCP-based interest groups was a significant factor facilitating the post-1978 reallocation of resources from inefficient heavy industries to more efficient sectors," that a "state-led development strategy may achieve more than one based on capitalist mechanisms," and that "China's success derived from favorable political and institutional conditions not necessarily replicable...."
- 3 To me, the PRC government was crucial in building infrastructure, in managing the currency, in defeating opponents of openness, and in welcoming the dynamics of globalisation. China's success, as depicted in the books of business correspondents such as James Kynge (*China Shakes the World*) and James McGregor (*One Billion Customers*) grew from an entrepreneurial frenzy in which many thousands of money-hungry entrepreneurs went, say, into motorcycle production, not selling one-third of what was produced, leading to huge numbers of bankruptcies and much pain, but also a fostering of the globally competitive China price.
- 4 Hideo Ohashi's chapter on "Studies of China's Economy in Japan" focuses on what is known about the extraordinary post-Mao economic rise and its global impact. Ohashi finds that Japan's "recovery from prolonged recession in the 1990s" was so much aided

by taking advantage “of the opportunities offered by China’s economic growth” that the study of China’s economy is also the study of Japan’s. He points out that Japanese are fixated on the frailties of the Chinese economy and worry about potential destabilisation effects.

- 5 But is it useful to treat China as “in transition to a market economy”? Comparative studies of wealthier industrialised societies reveal that nations can rise with quite different mixtures of state and market. Why not hypothesise that the Chinese mixture is but another possible successful amalgam rather than assuming a necessary evolution towards a free market, which actually exists nowhere? Treating the post-Mao system as stable and successful is more in line with Ohashi’s conclusion that “China has become an ‘ordinary country’.”
- 6 Penelope Prime’s essay on “Studies of China’s Economy in the United States” echoes Ohashi’s finding that “Scholars with no previous training in Chinese” studies increasingly do important work on China. She also notes that analysts treat China as “...‘in transition’ from planning to markets,” a case of gradual privatisation and inefficient but politically necessary SOEs, rather than as one of many possible combinations of state and market. Prime’s chapter importantly highlights the insightful debate on sources of growth.
- 7 Jean-Pierre Cabestan’s chapter on “Studies of Chinese Politics in Europe” points out that analysts in the EU, a grouping of democracies, have been more focused than others on human rights and the prospects for democracy, working on China’s gulag, democratic Taiwan, oppressed Uighurs, the environment, inequality, good governance and liberalisation. The big question is whether overall modernisation wins out or whether “the regime cannot change and will eventually collapse.” If China does not democratise, it will become unstable. But why not conclude that the CCP regime has already successfully transited from Mao’s version of Stalinism to a stable right populist authoritarianism that can win performance and nationalist legitimacy as standards of living continue to rise and as China rises in global stature?
- 8 Tomoyuki Kojima’s introduction to “Studies of Chinese Politics in Japan” worries that analysts lack an independent analytical framework and therefore are “too deeply influenced by [an understanding of] Chinese politics” as explained by the ruling CCP itself. Instead, similarities to South-east Asian development systems should be highlighted. This means focusing on “the contradiction between one-party rule” and the societal changes that stem from marketisation and globalisation (e.g., a rising middle stratum and money elites tied to power elites) in a society with strong traditional continuities. Given “institutional immaturity,” a misfit between Leninist institutions and the dynamics of market-oriented growth, Kojima worries that individual leaders will appeal ever more to “nationalism to maintain (...) cohesiveness” because assertive societal groups are growing in importance while Party mechanisms of control are weakening. There are more possible futures than either inevitable, gradual democratisation or instability.
- 9 Richard Baum’s chapter on “Studies of Chinese Politics in the United States” praises centrist scholars in the 1960s and 1970s who understood CCP politics in terms of “bureaucratic politics and interest groups,” as in Brezhnev’s Soviet Union, rather than leftists who saw Maoism as a model for poor countries. But why did China and Russia develop so differently despite similar interests and bureaucratic politics?

- 10 Using a generational analysis, Baum sees political scientists as ever more rigorously trained, focused first, in the early reform era, on a weakened CCP and a strengthened civil society, and then, after the 4 June 1989 Beijing massacre, on Latin American-type corporatism co-opting societal groups. By the end of the 1990s, analysts moved on to study state capacity, on the one hand, and a resurgence of pre-CCP societal forms, on the other. Baum worries that the recent rise of rational choice and econometric models privileges analysts who plug in a method which is “so narrowly focused” that it throws little light on what is actually shaping state-society tensions.
- 11 Since none of these models or formal approaches foresaw the post-Mao rise of China or the 1989 democracy movement, why not highlight insightful empirical, descriptive and ethnographic work, whatever the scholar’s approach? Why not be disenchanted by the overly rapid rise and fall of paradigms and approaches as Chinese policy changed? Perhaps the complex and unpredictable political reality of a very contingent realm of human endeavour, politics, cannot be reduced to any one of these ceaselessly changing American political science paradigms.
- 12 Kay Möller’s chapter on “Studies of China’s Foreign and Security Policies in Europe” finds that much analytical work has been mis-shaped by domestic European political imperatives. In the era of China’s rise towards superpower status, there is a split between democratic publics worried about both human rights abuses in China and also threats to Europe from China and national governments promoting commercial interests and therefore arguing that engagement will transform the PRC’s political system, a most soothing perspective, deconstructed for America in Jim Mann’s *The China Fantasy*.
- 13 European passivity is legitimated by the notion of the CCP government as a responsible regime. “[S]haring the PRC’s unhappiness with the unipolar world,” Europe slighted China’s “lack of sensitivity vis-à-vis smaller neighbors, not to mention Taiwan.” Still, twenty-first century PRC policies in former European colonies in Africa (Sudan, Zimbabwe and Angola) have made an impact on European views. Möller sees China’s rise to superpower status as “a bluff,” contending that Europe should not accept the Bush-Hu consensus on “the relative unimportance of social justice and protection of the global environment.”
- 14 “Studies of China’s Foreign and Security Policies in Japan” by Seiichiro Takagi shows Japanese analysts portraying Mao as defensive and not as seeking to challenge the Soviet Union for leadership of the anti-imperialist movement, as instead is depicted by critical analysts in the PRC. In the post-Mao era, analysts are more concerned with an assertive Chinese nationalism, with some seeing a hard-line hegemonistic agenda. Takagi alone highlights rising concern about how the CCP is dealing with “energy security,” including the building of a blue water navy, imposing control of the South China Sea, and challenging Japan in the East China Sea, all as part of “establishing a ‘Sinocentric world’.” As one analyst put it, “China’s perception of its own conduct diverges seriously from others’ perception of it....China’s powerful memory of national humiliation...is responsible for the misjudgment.”
- 15 In the final substantive essay, David Shambaugh’s chapter on “Studies of China’s Foreign and Security Policies in the United States, the author highlights how, despite tactical flexibility, the CCP leaders view of China’s rightful role in the world makes likely assertiveness against an America seen as an obstacle to China’s rise. And yet “the Chinese internal discourse” assumes a declining America and Russia, a rising India, and

a threatening Japan. Shambaugh's focus is security studies, issues that are openly debated, and gaps in knowledge.

- 16 These well-informed and critical overviews allow readers to judge how well analysts of China have done and what could produce yet better work.