control, and that his book thus makes a theoretical contribution to the economic statecraft literature. Perhaps more importantly, I believe that this book represents the most thorough empirical investigation of Chinese economic statecraft on the market today. Norris’s cases are well crafted and include some of the most prominent recent instances where the PRC has tried to advance its strategic interests using its burgeoning economic power. The book will certainly be of great interest to those studying Chinese foreign policy, and I believe that it will also find an audience among scholars interested in economic statecraft more broadly.

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HOW CHINA ESCAPED THE POVERTY TRAP
Yuen Yuen Ang

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The scale of China’s development success over the last four decades is hard to overstate. Economic growth rates of around 9%—more than three times the historical norm for today’s OECD countries—sustained for an unprecedented 45 years have lifted hundreds of millions of people from grinding poverty, and in the process made China the world’s second-largest economy. With this rising wealth has come formidable geo-political influence, globally but especially in Asia, leading many to wonder how this influence will be wielded once China becomes the world’s dominant economic actor, and whether heightened domestic pressures for democratic reforms will follow in its wake. How has a communist regime engineered such a capitalist triumph? How much longer can China seemingly defy economic and political gravity?

If China’s economic rise is impressive by any metric, one would expect a correspondingly large literature explaining how all this was achieved. There is indeed a significant literature on modern China, but such is China’s stature that it has become a veritable “case” unto itself, with every major theoretical perspective claiming not only that it can account for China’s rise, but that this rise itself vindicates the theory. In addition, the vast majority of the leading “structural” accounts begin and end at the bureaucratic apex, marveling at how Beijing’s technocratic elite has overseen sweeping administrative reforms (e.g., to the legal status of private property) and promoted widespread foreign investment in targeted industries while undertaking massive urban infrastructure projects and ensuring domestic “harmony” via a carefully crafted narrative stressing social inclusion and the importance of doing one’s part to promote national greatness. (A smaller literature frets that China’s success has been attained at the price of indifference to environmental, cultural, and human rights concerns.)

Enter Yuen Yuen Ang, who begins not with theory per se or a political agenda but a core social scientific question: How has China combined both structure and agency to overcome the massive collective action problems that sustained large-scale development requires? Beyond broad edicts from Beijing, how have the hundreds of thousands of local level officials across all of China—many of them acting beyond the everyday oversight of their superiors—interpreted these mandates and solved the myriad implementation problems that realizing them inevitably entails? For development specialists, Ang poses a more direct question: In China, has the policy emphasis been on “getting institutions right” as a prelude to economic growth, or has the fiscal space created by technocratic reforms promoting economic growth both enabled and required the emergence of a more professionalized bureaucratic class?
Ang’s encompassing answer to these questions is both/and. China adopted a “co-evolutionary” development strategy in which states and markets worked synergistically in response to the specific challenges confronting them in particular places and at different points in the growth process. What “worked” for coastal China in the 1980s and 1990s—attracting foreign investors to labor-intensive export industries—was not a viable strategy at that time for the rural hinterland provinces. But now that the coastal areas have more mature economies (and corresponding growth strategies), domestic investors are encouraged to explore new opportunities in rural districts. As such, the scholarly quest should not be for a grand linear theory of Chinese (or any other country’s) development, but a more granular inquiry into how pro-growth policy improvisation was required and rewarded in specific times, places, and ways, and how this process was sustained as success itself created new circumstances and sources of power. As Ang concludes, “particular solutions work only when they fit the particular demands of their environments. Therefore, it is futile and even self-defeating to search for one replicable model believed to work always and everywhere” (p. 223). Combining wide-reading and extensive field work across China, Ang provides specialists and nonspecialists alike with a fresh inside-the-black-box account of how the Chinese state—from the center to the periphery, across time and space—has actually practiced (not merely preached) innovation, problem solving, and effective implementation. Future studies of bureaucratic life in China and elsewhere must reckon seriously with Ang’s account; she has set an admirably high bar and capably filled a conspicuous scholarly vacuum.

It is encouraging that the development policy community is also taking note. For a brave and insightful book already taking on a huge, complex, and contentious topic, it may seem picky to quibble with topics that seem to have been given inadequate attention (at least from this reviewer’s perspective). Even so, one such topic is the manner in which Chinese society has both embraced and resisted change wrought by its government. Ang is a political scientist, so one cannot fault her for focusing on the state, but it was strange to see no reference to the work of a contemporary, Lily Tsai, who also explores a similar line of inquiry regarding how distant officials are held accountable—for Tsai, less by the state apparatus employing them than by the communities in which they reside. It would be good to know more about how this dynamic plays out in more transient urban and coastal settings. And we know from the classic work of Barrington Moore (also not cited) that successful states and social revolutions often go hand in hand—so if China has come this far this fast without a widespread social revolution, is that so because of or despite the highly productive compact between states and firms? Is economic success in China generating—as it has everywhere else—its own form of creative destruction? What if economic gravity eventually takes hold, and growth is no longer so vibrant or inclusive—as three generations of Chinese citizens have now come to regard as normal and normative? How robust is the present co-evolutionary growth process to crises that expose and exacerbate societal fault lines, and that thereby compromise the very foundation of the Chinese social contract? Answers to these pressing questions are surely lurking somewhere.

But these are details, and Ang has a long and (hopefully) vibrant career ahead of her in which to address such concerns. As an opening statement, her book is compelling, important, and deserving of a wide audience; we can only wait with keen anticipation for the next installment.

Michael Woolcock

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