



# ASIA MAIOR

Vol. XXX / 2019

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## **Asia in 2019: Escalating international tensions and authoritarian involution**

Edited by  
**Michelguglielmo Torri**  
**Nicola Mocci**  
**Filippo Boni**

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A large, intricate golden mandala pattern is positioned on the right side of the cover, partially overlapping the dark blue background. It features complex geometric and floral motifs.



CENTRO STUDI PER I POPOLI EXTRA-EUROPEI “CESARE BONACOSSA” - UNIVERSITÀ DI PAVIA

# ASIA MAIOR

The Journal of the Italian think tank on Asia founded by Giorgio Borsa in 1989

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## CONTENTS

- 9 MICHELGIUGLIELMO TORRI, NICOLA MOCCHI & FILIPPO BONI, *Foreword. Asia in 2019: The escalation of the US-China contraposition, and the authoritarian involution of Asian societies*
- 25 SILVIA MENEGAZZI, *China 2019: Xi Jinping's new era and the CPC's agenda*
- 47 BARBARA ONNIS, *China's 2019: Xi Jinping's tireless summit diplomacy amid growing challenges*
- 73 AXEL BERKOFSKY, *Mongolia 2019: Crisis, obstacles & achievements on the domestic, economic and foreign policy fronts*
- 93 MARCO MILANI, *Korean peninsula 2019: The year of missed opportunities*
- 125 GIULIO PUGLIESE & SEBASTIAN MASLOW, *Japan 2019: Inaugurating a new era?*
- 163 ANGELA TRITTO & ALKAN ABDULKADIR, *Hong Kong 2019: Anatomy of a social mobilisation through the lenses of identity and values*
- 185 AURELIO INSISA, *Taiwan 2019 and the 2020 elections: Tsai Ing-Wen's Triumph*
- 215 SOL IGLESIAS & LALA ORDENES, *The Philippines 2018-2019: Authoritarian consolidation under Duterte*
- 241 RUI GRAÇA FEIJÓ, *Timor-Leste 1945-2019: From an almost forgotten colony to the first democratic nation of the 21<sup>st</sup> century*
- 267 SALEENA SALEEM, *Malaysia 2019: The politics of fear and UMNO's renewed relevance*
- 287 NICOLA MOCCHI, *Vietnam 2019: Pursuing harmonious labour relations and consolidating its reliable international role*
- 311 MATTEO FUMAGALLI, *Myanmar 2019: «The Lady and the generals» redux?*
- 327 DIEGO MAIORANO, *India 2019: The general election and the new Modi wave*
- 345 MICHELGIUGLIELMO TORRI, *India 2019: Assaulting the world's largest democracy: building a kingdom of cruelty and fear*
- 397 YOGESH JOSHI, *India 2019: Foreign policy dilemmas and their domestic roots*
- 419 MATTEO MIELE, *Nepal 2019: Attempts at mediation in domestic and foreign policies*
- 435 FILIPPO BONI, *Afghanistan 2019: Between peace talks and presidential elections, another year of uncertainty*
- 451 MARCO CORSI, *Pakistan 2019: The challenges of the first PTI government*
- 473 PAOLO SORBELLO, *Kazakhstan 2018-2019: Change and continuity amid economic stagnation*
- 491 *Reviews*
- 523 *Appendix*

*When this Asia Maior issue was finalized and the Covid-19 pandemic raged throughout the world, Kian Zaccara, Greta Maiorano and Giulio Santi, all children of Asia Maior authors (Luciano Zaccara, Diego Maiorano and Silvia Menegazzi), were born. We (the Asia Maior editors) have seen that as a manifestation of Life, reasserting itself in front of Thanatos. It is for this reason that we dedicate this issue to Kian, Greta and Giulio, with the fond hope that they will live in a better world than the one devastated by the Covid-19 pandemic.*



## REVIEWS

EXPLORING THE «UNDERGROUND» OF CHINA'S MODERNITY:  
COAL, SCIENCE, IMPERIALISM AND STATE-MAKING  
BETWEEN THE END OF THE QING DYNASTY AND THE EARLY REPUBLIC

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Shellen Xiao Wu, *Empires of Coal: Fueling China's Entry into the Modern World Order, 1860-1920*, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2015. xii + 266 pp. (paperback) (ISBN: 978-0-8047-9284-4).

The history of coal has seldom received the attention it deserves beyond the scholarly circle focused on the economic and industrial history of China. Certainly, some studies have looked at the role of coal in the context of the differences between European and Chinese paths towards the industrial age, as Kenneth Pomeranz's insightful *The Great Divergence* has shown.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, thinking of coal as the subject of a cultural history of global modernity in China is something altogether different and a very welcome addition to our understanding of modern China.

This is what Shellen Xiao Wu does in her book. She makes the reader aware that coal has a lot to tell us about the making of modern China. As the book's title says, from the second half of the Nineteenth century, coal was in fact an important engine of China's entry in the international order, as its extraction and deployment were increasingly being conceived of as criteria to measure the country's status in terms of wealth and status. Wu brings to light the «underground» world of coal mines and mineral resources with its «multiplicity of meanings and connotations» (p. 189). She illuminates the complex interweaving of science, imperialism, industrialization and State-building which was hidden deep under the surface of the Earth. In this way, Wu offers a narrative of the changing worldview of the elites from the last decade of the Qing dynasty until the

1. Kenneth Pomeranz, *The Great Divergence: China, Europe and the Making of the Modern World Economy*, Princeton, NJ and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2000 (Italian translation Il Mulino, 2012).

early Republic with particular reference to the significance they attributed to natural resources in the process of industrialization, and the station of China in the global order.

Wu's postulation is that, from the second part of the Nineteenth Century there was a convergence between Western and Chinese attitudes towards mineral resources as an effect of the global world created by imperialism. In this perspective, the book aims explicitly at illustrating the interplay between local and global factors in the making of Chinese modernity. She explores several actors who produced a new discourse about coal – and mineral resources in general –, from the beginnings of geological exploration to the acknowledgement of geology as a modern science and the introduction of modern extractive technology under the Qing in the context of new legal and administrative structure affirming Chinese sovereignty on underground wealth against imperialist pressures.

The book tells this story in six chapters, developing a narrative from a chronological perspective and unfolding the multiple layers of this process in a global framework. As a premise, Wu describes how mining had been long an interest of Chinese officials and literati, as mineral extraction, usually privately pursued, was an important source of revenue for the imperial State since ancient times. The most well known examples were iron and salt, not to mention the relevance of copper and silver for market transactions and tax payment in late imperial times. Coal was used for heating in North China. Its price was monitored since it was basically considered a necessity for daily life even if it was regarded as an inexhaustible resource.

This view began to change following the work of the German geographer Ferdinand von Richthofen, whose current fame is due to his being the «inventor» of the «Silk Road». Von Richthofen gave a fundamental impulse to the development of modern geology in China. He explored inland regions during several journeys to China from 1868 to 1872. His work was to map China from a geological point of view – a task whose outcome was a two volumes treatise in German published after his return. Its impact on Chinese public opinion was especially due to his comments in the English language Press about the wealth of mineral resources of the Qing Empire, and especially of coal in Shanxi province. Von Richthofen's experience must be considered as a sign of «the importance of energy concerns to both colonizers and the colonized as the world industrialized» (p. 35). He carefully built an image of China as a country rich of primary resources of strategic relevance for foreign investors and Qing officials alike.

The book's narrative then shifts to an investigation of the origins of modern geology, studying Western missionaries' translation enterprise in introducing a modern knowledge of rocks and minerals within a broader discourse of the scientific approach to nature as a modern State's concern.

Enriching her work of a new perspective, in chapter 4 Wu discusses the role played by German mining engineers hired by the Qing provincial

leaders Zhang Zhidong and Li Hongzhang, who were the main supporters of the process of industrialization. These experts were, at one and the same time, considered a strategic resource to advance their homeland's interests in China by the German Government, and a fundamental aid to build a modern energy industry by Qing officials. Wu offers a balanced and detailed portrait of these cultural intermediaries, showing how, from 1880s to the end of the century, they supported the making of the German colonial empire in China but also promoted the technical modernization of Chinese mines. Actually, in this period, within the framework of Sino-German relations, an «underground empire» (p. 115) centred on the famous Hanyeping mines emerged from the global elites' shared faith in the pivotal role of science and industry as the pillars of modernity, in spite of competing foreign imperialisms and the practical limitations imposed by cultural and financial circumstances.

The core of the book is constituted by this chapter and chapter 5 that deals with the scramble for mining concessions in the high age of foreign imperialism in China – from the late Nineteenth Century to the First World War – and the Chinese national and provincial governments' struggle to affirm its sovereignty on mines on legal terms. Alongside railways rights, the fight for a recovery of national rights of exploitation of mineral resources was an important feature of the Chinese nationalist movement in the first decade of the last century. Wu argues that it is necessary to consider Chinese activism in this field as a consequence of «the global aspects of changes in the theory and exploitation of mineral resources in the nineteenth century» (p. 159), which had emphasized the role of the State in their management.

In the two final chapters, Wu looks at the connections between the emergence of modern geology as a scientific discipline and nationalist concerns generated by this global trend. Geology in China was not born out of intellectual interests, but as a form of knowledge practically tied to the needs of mining technology, and consequently subordinated to the goal of making China wealthy and strong. This feature did not fade in the course of time, but its legacy continues in the Twentieth-Century. It is one face of the significance assumed by science in the Chinese experience of modernity and of the role attributed to systematic knowledge and exploitation of nature as an expression of State power.

Wu's analysis is detailed, and based on a wide use of archival and other primary sources. Though not all the chapters are comparable in analytical depth and there are occasional redundancies, the author succeeds in putting together global and local perspectives on her chosen topic. She moves effectively between different layers of analysis. On the whole, the book is an interesting contribution to the reassessment of Qing China's capacity to be positively engaged with technological innovation. Focusing on the specific role played by German scientists and engineers, it also enriches our understanding of the complexity of the cooperative and competing

relations between China and the Western nations in the age of European imperialism. Finally, as the author herself suggests, it gives the reader the opportunity to reflect on the cultural roots of an attitude towards nature that still makes the intensive extraction and use of coal dramatically affect Chinese and world environment to this day.

«CHILDREN OF A LESSER GOD»:  
A NARRATION OF SOUTHERN CHINESE MINORITY NATIONALITIES

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Guo Wu, *Narrating Southern Chinese Minority Nationalities. Politics, Disciplines, and Public History*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2019, 229 pp. (ISBN 978-981-13-6021-3).

The issue of national minorities – their classification, their recognition and the definition of their relationship with the central government – is one of the crucial issues of 20th-century Chinese history, being an integral part of the discourse of the national construction and a founding element of contemporary Chinese nationalism. Zhao Suisheng identifies «ethnic nationalism» as one of the earliest forms of nationalism in the XX century. According to Zhao, Chinese nationalism started, in fact, as an ethnic state-seeking movement led by the *Han* majority to overthrow the minority Manchu dynasty. After the fall of the Qing dynasty in 1911, both the *Guomindang* (GMD) and the Communist Party of China (CPC) defined the Chinese nation as «a multi-ethnic political community and endorsed only 'state nationalism'». As a result, ethnic nationalism has remained alive only among ethnic minorities along China's frontiers, such as Tibetans and Mongols, who were denied the right to establish separate states, and therefore posed a serious threat to the unity of the multi-ethnic Chinese state.<sup>1</sup>

To a large extent, ethnic groups are the product of the PRC's Ethnic Classification Project undertaken in the first years of the Fifties with the assumption that «backward» (*luohou* 落后) non-Han peoples required the CCP's leadership and «advanced» (*xianjin* 先进) Han socialist culture. As a result of the Project, a total of 38 ethnic groups were recognized in 1954 (even if the names reported were more than 400). The number increased to 53 after the second PRC census in 1964. Finally, two more groups were recognized in the following years.<sup>2</sup> In 1990, it was officially declared that PRC had 56 nationalities (*minzu* 民族), the majority *Han* (*hanzu* 汉族) and 55 minority nationalities (*shaoshu minzu* 少数民族). In the 2010 census the minority na-

1. Zhao Suisheng, *Chinese Pragmatic Nationalism and Its Foreign Policy Implications*, paper prepared for delivery at the 2008 Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, August 28-31, 2008, p. 6, available at <https://sites01.lsu.edu/faculty/voegelin/wp-content/uploads/sites/80/2015/09/Suisheng-Zhao.pdf> (last access: 21 November 2019).

2. Lhoba and Jino in Yunnan were recognized as the 54<sup>th</sup> and the 55<sup>th</sup> ethnic group in 1965 and 1979 respectively. See Zang Xiaowei (ed.), *Handbook of Ethnic minorities in China*, Cheltenham (UK): Edward Elgar Pub, 2016, p. 3.

nationalities accounted for 8.5% of the population but were distributed in vast areas, covering some 60% of the national territory, much of which in China's border regions, and strategically important for Beijing's relations with its neighbors. Of all China's province-level administrative units, Yunnan province has the highest number of state-recognized minorities (25). Another relevant aspect is that among the 55 minorities surveyed, there were some *primi inter pares*, due to historical and political factors. It is no coincidence that in the 1950s and 1960s the Chinese Communist government established five autonomous regions – Inner Mongolia, Xinjiang Uyghur, Guangxi Zhuang, Ningxia Hui, and Tibet – home to Mongols (*mengzu* 蒙族), Hui (*huizu* 回族), Zhuang (*zhuangzu* 壮族), Uyghur (*weiwuerzu* 维吾尔族), and Tibetan (*zangzu* 藏族) ethnic minorities respectively. Actually, even if the Chinese constitution defines China «as a unitary multi-ethnic State created jointly by the people of all its ethnicities» and promotes the values of equality, unity and harmony, in practice some of them, such as the Hui Muslims, but especially the Uyghurs in Xinjiang and the Tibetans in Tibet, are subject to discriminatory and repressive policies by the central government. Despite the long process of sinicization (*zhongguohua* 中国化), in fact they continue to represent a thorn in PRC's central government side.<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, there are some «Children of a lesser God», away from the spotlight and mainly unknown, except for their colorful festivals, clothing and handicraft, being increasingly inserted in the state-sponsored ethnic tourism circuit.

One of the biggest contributions of *Narrating Southern Chinese Minority Nationalities. Politics, Disciplines, and Public History* is its specific focus on some of these «Children of a lesser God», namely non-Han Southwestern minorities, which had been for a long time unrecognized and unclassified. The late Qing and early Republican Chinese governments recognized in fact only five nationalities: the Han, Manchu (*manzu* 满族), Mongols, Muslims, and Tibetans.<sup>4</sup> Another important contribution of Guo Wu's monograph is related to the fact that it introduces readers to some key, but mostly unknown, aspects of the history of contemporary China.<sup>5</sup>

Guo Wu's monograph offers a critic examination of «the building of modern Chinese discourse on a unified yet diverse Chinese nation on various sites of knowledge production». It deals with the complex relationship between the State and modern Chinese knowledge elites (from political

3. In particular, Uyghurs have always been animated by independence impulses and, in the 1930s and 1940s declared twice independence from the central government, establishing the First and the Second East Turkistan Republic.

4. With few exceptions, these nationalities coincide with the ones that deserved an autonomous region in the 1950s and 1960s and, in recent times, have asserted their cultural and political differences and started to rewrite their history more vigorously (p. 2).

5. In the last few decades there has been an overabundance of publications on China, mostly focused on the economic and geopolitical dimension of China's rise.

scientists, to national-level scientists, to grass-roots level leaders) in collaborating to build authority and determine the correct approaches to the minority issue (p. 2). According to the author, Chinese ideology in minorities nationalities is rooted in modern China's quest for national integration and political authority, being political order a recurring theme of modern China after the disintegration of the traditional imperial Confucian political order (*ibidem*).

As emerges clearly in the author's analysis, the process of conceptualizing, investigating, classifying, and writing minority history is a very complex one, characterized by disputes and contradictions (one for all the tensions between the scholars' non-Han Chinese identity and the Han-dominated mainstream nationalist discourse). This complexity is epitomized by the purges suffered by the scholars with more or less dissenting tendencies (Fei Xiaotong, Wu Zelin, Cen Jianwu, and Huang Xianfan) during the Anti-Rightist campaign in 1957.

The monograph is articulated in seven chapters (followed by a conclusion, a substantial epilogue and an extensive bibliography) which examine the construction of the nationalist ideology in modern China, the research and investigation of southern Chinese minority nationalities, the debates among concerned intellectuals and the resulting political tensions, and, finally, the public representation of minority culture, in the form of public museums.

The first chapter defines the scopes of the analysis; the sources, methodology and producers of modern Chinese knowledge of nationalities; the geographical realm of the investigation; and the main layers of the Chinese knowledge production mechanisms.

The second chapter analyses the different approaches of the Nationalist and Communist governments in dealing with the national issue, with a special reference to the CPC's national discourse, which was influenced by both the Marxist ideology and the Confucian tradition of Great Unity. In particular, the chapter underlines how the Communist's approach changed over time, eventually distancing itself from the Soviet experience, which had initially influenced it.

The third chapter deals with the diffusion of social sciences in China, from sociology (*shehui xue* 社会学), to anthropology (*renlei xue* 人类学) and ethnology (*minzu xue* 民族学). The chapter highlights the contribution of Chinese social scientists to the state-building and nation-building processes, stressing the fact that «what was at work was 'an inexperienced Chinese state that was able to orient itself only by observing the world through the eyes of its social scientific advisors'» (p. 43). The author focuses on the rise of modern Chinese anthropology and ethnology as autonomous disciplines and shows Chinese social scientists' search for indigenization, i.e. their attempts to reconcile their Euro-American training with Marxist theories and their Chinese identity.

The fourth chapter investigates the collaboration between historians and anthropologists in inventing «primitive society» in classical Marxist sense in Chinese history. According to Cen Jiawu (a renowned ethnologist and historian of primitive society), this served a dual agenda: a Marxist one, that tried to incorporate China into the grand narrative of historical materialism; and a highly nationalistic one, that insisted on the historicity of China High Antiquity and the presumed long and glorious history of the Chinese civilization (p. 87).

Chapter five scrutinizes minority nationalities' society and history before and after 1949, as an important practice of social engagement and disciplinary knowledge in the PRC.

Chapter six sheds light on the disputes and contradictions that characterized the complex process of conceptualizing, investigating, classifying, and writing minority history, exemplified by the experience of the Guilin-based Zhuang nationality scholar Huang Xianfan (p. 139). Author of the first general history of the Zhuang nationality, Huang was a tenacious critic of the Nationalist government's assimilationist policy and an advocate for the subjectivity of the Zhuang nationality, and its equal recognition under the PRC government. (p. 140). He was also a staunch advocate of the theory that there were no slave society as a stage of social development in Chinese history, strongly opposing leading Marxist scholars, such as Guo Muoruo, and the entire Chinese Marxist academic discourse after 1949.

The last chapter deals with the instruments through which knowledge about minority nationalities' history, culture and lifestyle are transmitted to the public, i.e. mainly by museums of nationalities (p. 161). Their narratives, according to the author, «still show certain traits of instrumentalization when promoting multiculturalism and a tendency of Han-centric primitivizing of non-Han cultures» (p. 180). The chapter includes the result of the author's fieldwork in 2017 in four Chinese provinces and five museums with nationality and ethnology as their main themes, as well as his visit to Taiwan's museum of aborigines in 2018. The chapter also reports the results of the Sino-Norwegian collaboration for the realization of the Buyi Ecomuseum, inaugurated in 2000 in the mountainous Zhenshan village, in Guiyang, that the author considers as a half failure. «Due to the lack of substantial collection of artifacts and the vagueness of the idea of ecomuseum, e.g., there is virtually no way to demonstrate “heritage” and “cultural memory” as the museum promised» (p. 173).

In the epilogue, the author shifts his focus to the village-level minority communal life and power relations to illustrate the persistence of Shamanism in the context of Chinese cultural tradition and the limits of the Chinese central state in actual life.

Aside from the complexity of the topic, the book is clearly written, well researched and documented (based on fieldwork, archival research and interviews). This makes Guo Wu's study a fundamental contribution



to historiography on its subject and an enriching reading for both scholars and advanced students of Asian Politics, China Politics and International Relations, in general. Although it presents a historical study with a specific focus on Southern Chinese minority nationalities, the work is timely in light of some recent events. Here it suffices to refer to the so-called *Xinjiang Papers*, a 400-page report, possibly leaked from a high level source within the Chinese Communist Party, which became public in November 2019. The *Xinjiang Papers* contributed to confirm the persisting tensions in the relations between the Han-dominated central State and the national minorities, and the topicality of the themes of political order and political authority in today's China.<sup>6</sup>

6. Austin Ramzy & Chris Buckley, 'The Xinjiang Papers. «Absolutely No Mercy»: Leaked Files Expose How China Organized Mass Detentions of Muslims', *The New York Times*, 16 November 2019.

RETHINKING THINK TANKS IN CONTEMPORARY CHINA

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Silvia Menegazzi, *Rethinking Think Tanks in Contemporary China*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018, 207 pages (ISBN 978-3-319-57299-4).

If you study the Chinese political system, whichever methodological perspective you adopt, you will inevitably come across two long-term crucial issues: one is the complex relation between the State, the Chinese Communist Party and civil society; the other is the debate on the contribution given by experts to improve government quality and effectiveness. In both cases the situation has experienced profound changes in the last forty years, as a direct consequence of an ongoing ambitious reform process.

The study of think tanks in the Chinese context places itself in an ideal intersection between these two substantial issues.

On the one hand, these knowledge producing organisations are traditionally conceived as an expression of the civil society's will and as instruments for its participation in the policy making process. Examining their role could shed light on previously unsuspected involvements of social actors in the decision-making practices.

On the other hand, think tank's contribution in constructing meaning and shared understanding of policy issues, and in problem formulation and agenda-setting, primarily depends on the intellectual resources of experts. Selected data on the think tanks personnel could better define the profile of the experts and widen our understanding of who is entitled to a consultative role in the People's Republic of China apparatus.

Due to China's national political context, where decision making is deeply controlled and highly centralised, think tanks have often raised scholarship interest, mainly with the aim of tracking similarities and differences with their international counterparts in terms of organisation features, research activities, political participation strategies and social roles.

The purpose of this volume, as stated by its author, is to analyse think tanks in contemporary China (2007-17) and their contribution to policy making processes, especially in the field of foreign policy. The book consists of six chapters, but it can roughly be divided into two thematic sections: a first section establishes the theoretical framework adopted for the study (chapter 2) and reviews the international studies on think tanks in China (chapter 3); the second section presents two case studies concretely defining the role, functions and scope of activity of a range of Chinese think tanks (chapter 4 and 5).

Applying the theoretical narrative of knowledge regimes – thus considering think tanks as knowledge producing organisations established in a specific national context – is deemed useful by the author to emancipate her analysis from the independence dilemma issue. The question of think tanks independence from governmental bodies has been a key concern in previous literature on think tanks in China. In it, the analysis revolved around the degree of autonomy claimed by think tanks not fully separated from the government sector, in performing policy research.

The monograph under review focusses on the political environment characterized by the above-mentioned constraints. By applying the category of knowledge regimes as an analytical framework, the author considers think tanks as institutional and organisational tools by which ideas are generated in a process highly influenced by the national context. This method takes into account local peculiarities as an important factor in shaping the phenomenon under examination, but at the same time it frees the author's analysis on think tanks' functions and roles from the tight boundaries often associated with an alleged Chinese political uniqueness.

The most innovative contribution of this book lays in the two case studies, namely the discussion of the role of Chinese think tanks in the realms of economic diplomacy and environmental diplomacy at home and abroad. The two case studies are based on a number of selected examples.

Given China's growing commitment to global governance and multilateral talks, in the last decades the country think tanks have often been involved in worldwide activities pertaining to negotiations and policy making, thus developing a new profile. Hence the book concentrates on the «new generation think tanks», founded after 2007, characterised by their participation in international networks and forums, by personnel stemming from different professional backgrounds and by the common attention to international themes. The members of these think tanks are either Chinese with a national academic research background or previous roles as government or party officials, or Chinese Western returnees.

The author speculates on the effects that the long-term exposure of the Chinese think tank personnel to international networks cooperation might have in the future. Possibly, it could result in changes in Chinese think tank working modes, research practices, theories, strategies and social roles.

The first case study draws from the field of economic diplomacy, defined as the arena where non-state actors contribute (at the local and global level) to the decision making and negotiation processes in connection to international economic relations. This is a very important field of political action as China, in its continuing efforts aimed at the realisation of economic goals, now stands in favour of free-trade liberalisation, both in the internal and international markets. This strategy is associated with the promotion in multilateral contexts of a different understanding of the liberal world order (p.110). The author presents a general overview of some outstanding

Chinese think tanks working on economic issues and discusses their role in China's economic diplomacy.

The second case study is centred on environmental diplomacy, defined as the instrument to promote the building of an international climate change regime, encompassing national standards and interests. The peculiarity of China's position with respect to this issue, affirms the author, is that at present the country is not considered a responsible actor by its international counterparts yet, despite China's efforts to lower emissions and reduce pollution (p.131). The chapter highlights that the role of think tanks in the existing knowledge regime will probably develop in parallel to the historical changes in this field and the political environment in which the decision mechanisms are rooted.

The analysis of the action of the Chinese think tanks in the field of environmental diplomacy is aimed at challenging the assumption depicting China as a country where sustainability is mainly enforced through top-down decisions and policies promoted by central government organs, leaving virtually no space for public participation. Nonetheless, the author acknowledges the existing obstacles to the actions and strategies of environmental policy research organisations, ranging from a complex and multi-layered context of action, to the fragmentation of governance and the selection of cooperation or confrontation attitudes by different actors. Based on these preliminary observations, the study depicts a quite composite and uneven panorama where the number of non-governmental think tanks is rising. The new actors in the analysis of the environmental challenges are quite independent from individual sponsorship and committed to research policy advocacy. Though they still lack any institutionalised role in policy making and a clear legal status.

To conclude, according to the author, nowadays think tanks working on economic or environmental policies are still subordinated to the government through bureaucratic organization, personal connections and funding mechanisms. Nonetheless, the relationship between the government and policy research organisations is now more balanced and mutually beneficial than in the past (p. 124).

The book, embedded in a rich international scholarly bibliographic background, offers an original contribution to the study of Chinese think tanks (2007-17) and leads the reader in the discovery of this realm, fostering her/his curiosity. The overall development of the text is consistent with the declared study's design and objectives.

Besides, the polyphony deployed in the exam of most of the main themes of the research testifies to the wide variety of sources examined. The book displays rich and up-to-date bibliographic references, partly in the Chinese language, which testifies to its origin, rooted in the author doctoral thesis, confirming its academic credentials.

The cited Chinese sources, – either in the English or Chinese languages – are examples of official discourse, academic discourse, media discourse

and practitioners' points of view. Often, they mention themes which are directly linked to broader trends or well-known narratives of the national past. In a few occasions, the author fails in highlighting these long-term mechanisms or representations, missing an occasion to locate her research work in dialectical relation to the literature of other fields in the social sciences, recontextualising it in a broader perspective. This is the case, for example, with regards to the process of internationalisation of think tanks or their mission to improve China's image at the international level.

Notwithstanding these minor flaws, one of the qualities of the book is the commitment to a critical representation of the Chinese political context in its complexity. This is accomplished by the author while preserving clarity in selecting the analytical framework, building her argumentation paths and illustrating the knowledge organisations' role in policy making. While the author manages to offer a clear vision of the intricacies characterizing the overall picture, she sometimes indulges in reporting too many details, particularly when she describes a given think tank's profile or activities.

The book could be a good read for different kinds of audiences as it can be read at different levels. Specialists would probably appreciate the variety of the sources, the consistency of the author's arguments and the constant ideal dialogue with previous international scholarly literature. Students in the field of social sciences would value the linear structure and the clarity of the text and could use it as a tool to explore a peculiar aspect of Chinese political context, discovering its complexity. Moreover, as the subject of think tanks attracts the attention of a wide variety of stakeholders, the book could also be of interest to practitioners or civil society activists, both as a source of knowledge and information and as food for thought.

CONTESTED LEGACIES OF CHINESE COMMUNISM:  
WORDS, CONCEPTS AND PRACTICES FROM MAO TO XI

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Christian Sorace, Ivan Franceschini, Nicholas Loubere (eds.), *Afterlives of Chinese Communism. Political Concepts from Mao to Xi*, Acton: ANU Press and Verso Books, 404 pages, (ISBN 9781788734769).

Well before the founding of the People's Republic of China, the communist leadership was aware of the great importance of propaganda as a tool for educating and mobilising the masses<sup>1</sup>. It considered language and rhetoric as fundamental assets to mould the people's thinking, and when it took power it initiated and consolidated a rewriting of public discourse which also quickly permeated the private discourse.

Michael Schoenals was one of the first few scholars to analyse how «things were done with words» in Chinese politics, and to stress the «remarkable consensus»<sup>2</sup> within the Chinese Communist Party about the central role played by perlocution in building, consolidating and maintaining state power. The simple, repetitive and formalised language that «help[s] constitute the structure of power within China's political system»<sup>3</sup> has later fascinated and attracted the attention of other scholars, who have focused particularly on the Mao era (1949-1976). At that time, and especially during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), keywords and slogans were ubiquitous and people were required to repeat them on the most varied occasions and contexts. Ji Fengyuan has written about the «extensive, systematic and bureaucratically controlled program of linguistic engineering» put into practice by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) to «make the population use those verbal formulas that seemed most suited to produce a correct thought»,<sup>4</sup> while Lu Xing has worked on the formalised language, charac-

1. In 1943, in his essay *Some questions concerning leadership methods*, Mao referred to the traditional belief that education and persuasion are more effective in maintaining social stability than the use of force and coercion, and that, once the «right» thinking conveyed by the models is absorbed, each person tends to put it into practice with appropriate behaviour. Mao Zedong, *Selected works of Mao Tse-tung*, Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1967; Stefan Landsberger, *Chinese propaganda posters. From revolution to modernization*, Amsterdam and Singapore: The Pepin Press, 1995.

2. Michael Schoenals, *Doing Things with Words in Chinese Politics: Five Studies*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992, p. 5.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 1.

4. Ji Fengyuan, *Linguistic Engineering. Language and Politics in Mao's China*, Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2004, p. 54.

terised by particularly acute rhetorical violence, and has argued that it was partially responsible for the violence of political action during the Cultural Revolution.<sup>5</sup> Finally, Perry Link has reconstructed the principles of musicality and rhythm that made the formulations beautiful and easy to remember, in a volume where he also emphasised how the language of the private sphere was substantially replaced by official political language, particularly in the years of the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976).<sup>6</sup>

Keywords and formulations that were relevant in the Mao era are also the core subject of *Afterlives of Chinese Communism*. Even if Raymond Williams' seminal work *Keywords* is not mentioned by the editors of the volume, it is an obvious reference that comes to mind when reading *Afterlives*.<sup>7</sup> In fact, Williams' definition of what is a keyword, his admission to the «difficult relations between words and concepts»<sup>8</sup> and his approach belonging to historical semantics are implicit to the book's project and to many contributions that are part of it. Readers should be familiar with Williams' ideas to fully grasp the ambition of the project of *Afterlives*.

The book, that the editors describe as a study of «concepts» and «practices» of the Mao period, is presented as the result of a collective endeavour to identify and engage with the «main concepts underpinning Chinese communist thought» (p. 7), each one explored in order to trace their «origins, lives, and afterlives» (p. 6). As detailed in the Introduction, the undertaking began as a special issue of *Made in China*, an open-access quarterly edited by the same editors of the book. With more and more authors from different disciplines and continents being involved, the project developed into the 404-pages volume that can be purchased in hard copy or retrieved online, in accordance with the open-access policy characterising the journal that started it off.

Each of the 53 chapters is dedicated to a concept or a practice in order to describe what it meant at the time and what it has become in present Chinese politics. In doing so, the book offers both a recognition of the use of those formulations in China's political discourse, as well as an evaluation of their meaningfulness and usefulness in a critical rediscovery of Maoism that «take[s] it seriously as a revolutionary project» (p. 3).

Concepts, however, can hardly be separated from the words used to express them – and that is especially true in the People's Republic of China.

5. Lu Xing, *Rhetoric of the Chinese Cultural Revolution*, Columbia: South Carolina University Press, 2004.

6. Perry Link, *An Anatomy of Chinese. Rhythm, Metaphor, Politics*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2013.

7. Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, Rev. ed. New York: Oxford University Press, 1985. See also Alan Durant, 'The Significance Is in the Selection: Identifying Contemporary Keywords', *Critical Quarterly*, 50, 2008, pp. 122-46.

8. Williams, p. 21.

The editors very briefly stress the relevance of language in the life of the Chinese Communist Party and in the construction and dissemination of the concepts studied in the book, showing that the volume does not aim to focus on linguistic phenomena. References to the so-called «Mao-speak»<sup>9</sup> and to the lexicon that composed Mao's language are mostly indirect across the contributions, however a few authors do dwell on the words they analyse. Thornton, for instance, traces the history of the term «Cultural Revolution» and its substitution by «Cultural construction»; Yang Long describes the trajectory of the term «Self-reliance» from its historical origins to its descent in the 1990s, to its resurgence (and adaptation of meaning) in Xi Jinping's speeches; and Yoshihiro Ishikawa and Craig A. Smith describe the genealogy and recent oblivion of «Line struggle». In a separate contribution, Smith also elaborates on the Confucian origin and the later development of two terms that retain great relevance in the present political discourse, *Datong* and *Xiaokang*.<sup>10</sup>

These studies, based on tracking the terms in classical, modern and contemporary texts from the philosophical and political realms, allow non-specialists to appreciate the cultural stratification and philosophical depth of the CCP language and the density of its political discourse. For specialists, they are an effective reminder about the complexity and richness of China in the ancient past as well as in modern times.

Other contributions do not elaborate on the very words they study, but only on the concepts that the formulations entail, investigating their often ancient origins and their appropriation by Maoism. In many cases they discuss their legacies, assessing their survival, evolution or disappearance in contemporary China. In doing so, they analyse how a concept has been implemented in practice, highlighting relevant connections between events, periods and disciplines. Christian Sorace's chapter on «Aesthetics» is one such example, where he appraises the legacy of the Maoist political and aesthetic criteria on Xi Jinping's guidelines on art. The criteria are also illustrated in the case of Michelangelo Antonioni's 1974 documentary *Chung Kuo*. In a similar fashion, Covel Meyskens looks at the photographic representations of «Labour» from the Mao era to postsocialist China; while Laura De Giorgi analyses the origins and development of «United front» and its use as a strategy to absorb potential opponents into the established structure of the state. Gloria Davies' reflection on the concept of «Immortality» underlines the fundamental betrayal of Mao's thought produced by the crystallisation of his own thought, suggesting an interesting perspective through which to look at the project of *Afterlives* itself.

9. Geremie R. Barmé, 'New China Newspeak', *China Heritage Quarterly*, No. 29, March 2012.

10. While not providing a conclusive definition for the two classical Chinese concepts, the author of the contribution refers to «grand unity» and to «moderate prosperity» as the most used translations for *Datong* and *Xiaokang* respectively.



An original aspect of the volume is the «political» approach and aim that the editors openly state. Far from trying to present their project as neutral, they propose their belief that the «revival of the communist perspective, freed from any dogmatism, is necessary» (p. 7) to transform and improve our world. In light of «the urgent need to reinvent egalitarian organisations of political and economic life» (p. 5), they seek to allow new interpretative possibilities on the Communist experience in China by offering a critical study of the concepts that were at the core of «one of the twentieth century's most radical, and fraught, undertakings to transform and emancipate humanity» (p. 7).

The publication's goal emerges clearly in contributions that aim to dismantle assumptions and misconceptions about key Maoist ideas or practices. A clear example of this is Gao Mobo's study on «Collectivism». It looks at the theoretical and factual application of collectivism in the Mao era, arguing that collective farming was a rational answer to China's problem and goals of the time, and that it should not be discredited on the basis of negative and extreme manifestations such as the Great Leap Forward. On a similar note, Dai Jinhua's chapter analyses the attempt to create a new culture in the Mao era and stresses the centrality of culture in the PCC-led process of creating a new «person», wondering if the legacies of the socialist cultural experiment of the time could be the basis of alternative society or alternative cultural practice in the future. William J. Hurst's contribution is also in line with this attitude when showing that a legal system did exist and function in the Mao era, unlike widespread misconceptions and the CCP's own narrative of China's past tell.

The book is a very valuable resource that can be read at different levels. Since the contributions are titled with the keyword or expression they analyse and are organised in alphabetical order, the book can be searched as a glossary, where the reader can seek for the individual concepts they are interested in. They will find a general understanding of each one of them, as well as their history as far as the authors were able to trace it. In covering this content, many contributions also analyse whether the term studied is part of the vocabulary of Xi Jinping's «New Era» (*xin shidai*) and how it is used at present, offering a critical reconstruction of the contemporary CCP language and of its consistency or transformation through the decades.

The plurality of authors with different backgrounds and varied standpoints generates a diversity of approaches and trajectories that enriches the volume. It also produces an indirect dialogue among a wide range of opinions on the success and future of China's communist project. At the same time, plenty are the inter-connections between contributions, and a number of key concepts clearly emerge from the body of the volume, standing out as independent threads that run throughout the book. Jodi Dean points at some of these relations in the Afterword, stressing concepts such as «revolution», «class struggle», «the people», and «mass line». Dean also

underlines the role of the language of communism, since «language is the weapon in the arsenal of struggle» (p. 336). Similarly, every reader should find, according to their own interests and needs, their own connections and paths to follow.

For these reasons, the volume is a useful reference for understanding contemporary Chinese society and politics. For sinologists, it is also a stimulus for more engaged ways to study contemporary China; and a general call for trying to look at Maoism with new, unbiased eyes.

THE ITALIAN EFFORT TO GAIN THE CHINESE MARKET:  
RECONSTRUCTING THE HISTORY OF ITALY-CHINA TRADE RELATIONS

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Donatella Strangio, *Italy-China Trade Relations: A Historical Perspective*, Cham: Springer, 2020, 131 pp. (ISBN: 978-3-030-39083-9).

The year 2020 marks an important landmark in relations between Italy and China. It's the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries, which aligns with the Italy-China Year of Culture and Tourism. An anniversary that comes at a particular moment in Sino-Italian relations, marked by crucial events such as the visit of President Xi Jinping in Rome and Palermo in May 2019. In particular the event that changed the course of relations between Rome and Beijing saw Italy become the first G7 country to officially endorse the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) through the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding that stipulates the Italian-Chinese partnership for the Economic and Maritime Silk Road of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The signing of the Memorandum put Italy in the spotlight and world public opinion analysed Sino-Italian relations. Donatella Strangio *Italy-China Trade Relations: A Historical Perspective* is a comprehensive scholarly account of the political penetration and trade relations that Italy established with China, with particular reference to the period from the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century to the birth of the Fascist empire. It is published at a turning point in Sino-Italian relations, analysing the subject from an economic history and international economics perspective.

The author has used sources of the Historical Diplomatic Archives of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as well as from other archives such as the Bank of Italy's Historical Archive and the Italian National Library. In particular, the Political Affairs Series Inventory was consulted in the Historical Diplomatic Archives, and the commercial exchanges between Italy and China are reconstructed starting from the various politically-oriented inventories' documents.

Donatella Strangio analyses the economic context of both China and Italy, and the various commercial agreements between Italy and China are exhaustively reconstructed. The nature of archival sources limits the research to the only Italian projection towards China. Several studies have been completed on relations between Italy and China and many of these are based on the same archival sources of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The book *La Memoria della Cina. Fonti archivistiche italiane sulla Storia della Cina*

(The Memory of China. Italian archival sources on the history of China) edited by Alessandro Vagnini and Sung Gyun Cho, accurately describes the contents of the same archive.

Until the early 20<sup>th</sup> century – Strangio reports – in Italian institutions there were no adequate analyses of the complexity of China and the balance of power that the European powers had initiated. The hope of the then-Minister of Agriculture and Commerce of the Kingdom of Sardinia, Luigi Torelli, convinced that the opening of the Suez Canal would guarantee the access of Italian goods to the Chinese market, is exemplary of this approach.

Given the purely political nature of archival sources, a substantial part of the volume focuses mainly on the administration of the concession of Tientsin. The documents available in the archives for the period from 1919 to 1930 are significantly more ample and the author manages to draw an exhaustive picture of the commercial relations between the two countries. These are based on the sale of arms, establishing national banks, possible mining authorisations, conferences and the reforms of treaties and customs tariffs. All practices describe the colonial approach of foreign powers present in China which was to exploit the territory even further and to increase their influence there.

However, even in the maximum period of Italian projection towards China, the efforts of the institutions seemed not to be sufficient. They failed to set up trade organisations which all other European nations, including small powers, had initiated. According to the author, the essential categories in which to be incisive and make commercial headway in China were: banks, shipping lines and trade organisations. The Italo-Chinese Bank was founded in 1919 and, in the same year, an intense trade between Italy and China began. Strangio lists in detail the reasons for the Italian commercial failure in China, elements which characterised the projection of Italy in the Asian country until recent times. These ranged from poor knowledge of both culture and customs and the commercial dynamics of the Chinese merchants, to the lack of institutional support in the form of advertising and communication. Furthermore, there was no connection between commercial agents and Italian banks and no setting up of consortiums and trusts.

The author stresses how the Italian presence in China always had to contend with a chronic lack of capital, with the reluctance of Italian entrepreneurs to finance risky activities, and in particular, disorganisation at both diplomatic and commercial level. The author underlines how Italian institutions have always tried to distinguish themselves from other western powers, trying to maintain an approach away from the colonial imprint. A dynamic which did not generate empathy in Chinese institutions.

The book closes with a description of commercial relations in the 70s and 80s with the kind of ideal landing place for commercial relations between Italy and the People's Republic of China: the Agreement with

Jiangsu Province and the Agreement with the Guangdong Province, both in the 2000s.

Overall Donatella Strangio's reconstruction represents a relevant addition to the discipline of Economic History. The book is essentially aimed at scholars and advanced students of International Economics and Economic History who wish to approach the study of Sino-Italian relations. At the same time, it is an excellent compendium for Chinese scholars who seek a reconstruction of the economic exchange between China and a medium power of the time like Italy.

THE EU–JAPAN PARTNERSHIP IN THE SHADOW OF CHINA:  
NATURAL ALLIES OR UNTAPPED POTENTIAL?

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Axel Berkofsky, Christopher W. Hughes, Paul Midford & Marie Söderberg, *The EU–Japan Partnership in the Shadow of China. The Crisis of Liberalism*, Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2019, 266 pp. (ISBN 9780367895013).

*The EU–Japan Partnership in the Shadow of China* represents a very timely and very significant contribution to the literature on EU–Japan cooperation. The volume is one of the most relevant research outputs of a the EJARN (The European Japan Advanced Research Network), a network of scholars that since 2007 has promoted policy relevant research on Japanese politics, economics and security as well as explored possible avenues for cooperation between the European Union and Japan.

This edited volume is a detailed and informative yet accessible collection of essays analysing the current state of EU–Japan cooperation. Moreover, the volume explores policies promoted by Tokyo and Brussels to face the current crisis of the liberal international order and the key challenges stemming from it, from the rise of China, to the Trump presidency, to Brexit.

The volume adopts a multidisciplinary approach, looking at political, strategic and economic issues, gathering an impressive group of senior European experts of Japan foreign, security and economic policies as well as several Japanese experts on European affairs.

The central argument of the volume is that despite the EU and Japan present themselves as natural allies, the real potential for bilateral cooperation still has to be unlocked. The volume underlines Tokyo's and Brussels' role as normative powers and as key supporters of the liberal international order, as well as the last barriers against the mounting illiberal challenge. In the face of Trump's «America First» policies and the Chinese challenge, they have continued to voice their support for the key pillars of the liberal rules-based order, such as the centrality of human rights, integrity of borders, freedom of navigation, free trade and free market capitalism.

As underlined by Berkofsky (ch.2), the Economic Partnership Agreement and the Strategic Partnership Agreement signed in 2018 and entered into force on 1 February 2019 signal that Tokyo and Brussels intend to foster their cooperation to consolidate the current international order and to exercise their normative power.

Substantially every contribution underline that, despite the good intentions, the road towards a more mature and more consequential EU-Japan partnership is still obstructed by several stumbling blocks.

The first problem is represented by what we can define as «China gap». As underlined by Okano- Heijmans, Lilei Song and Liang Cai, while for Japan China represents the most fundamental challenge to the current order, many EU member states have responded with enthusiasm to recent Chinese initiatives such as the Asia Infrastructure and Investment Bank (AIIB) and the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

Moreover, as stressed by Berkofsky, many European capitals don't see developing a deeper economic relationship with Beijing as contradicting the antithetical to the rhetoric of seeing in Tokyo a natural ally for the consolidation of the rules-based international order.

The diverging perception of the challenge posed by China leads to a second significant problem, that we can define as «Trump gap». Several contributors underlined the stark difference in terms of relationship with President Trump and its administration. While several European leaders have not made efforts to hide their differences of style and substance with the 45<sup>th</sup> US President, Abe has tried to develop a personal and political relationship with Trump. The urgency of the Chinese challenge, and the consequent perception of indispensability of the alliance with the US, has led Abe to ignore significant setbacks in the economic realm to preserve the bilateral relation with Washington.

The fact that bilateral cooperation between Japan and EU is still very conditioned by the American role emerges in different contributions to this volume. In the realm of the defence industry for instance, as stated by Christopher W. Hughes, it appears clear that the possibilities for bilateral cooperation between Tokyo and its European counterparts are somehow limited by the enduring American will to maintain its own central role as well as by the need to promote interoperability. While the reform of the three principles of arms export had raised high expectations, both Tokyo and key EU capitals ended up choosing platforms and systems produced by US-led consortia rather than other alternatives. The examples of the Japanese choice to procure the F-35 over the Euro-fighter, that could possibly represent a more cost-effective solution for the needs of the ASDF. Moreover, Japanese and European firms increasingly find themselves to compete against each other, rather than cooperate, as testified by the case of the Australian procurement of French attack submarines, selected over the Japanese *Soryu*-class.

The third problem is the lack of capabilities in terms of hard power. Neither Japan nor the EU or any member state can present itself as substitute, even momentarily, of the US in terms of provision of security and deterrence. The proposals of a French or British naval presence in the South China Sea appear more a manifestation of *nostalgia* for a long-gone imperial

past, rather than viable security policy proposals. As a matter of fact, the EU is still far away from having any role in the South China Sea. Currently it maintains a position of neutrality on the maritime and territorial disputes, while it has called for a peaceful resolution of the controversies based on the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS).

A third significant gap is represented by the perception of the threat posed by Russia. As reminded by Midford, the EU considers Russia as the main security threat at the horizon and was keen to promote and implement economic sanctions after the annexation of Crimea in 2014. Japan, particularly under Abe, has a very different position. Seen from Tokyo, the sanctions risk pushing Moscow closer to Beijing, accelerating the formation of a partnership that would not just promote an alternative to the current normative foundations of the international order, but an existential threat to the Japanese.

The volume rightly underlines that the emphasis that both EU and Japan have put in the recent past on values and norms is both the product of their own identity as well as a process of othering, namely shaping an identity building on differences with a significant rival or enemy. When it comes to Japan, the process of «othering of China», is surely a key factor that led the Abe government to underline the necessity to overcome many of the self-binding limits of the post war period, to embrace concept of «pro-active contribution to peace», as well as Security Diamond, or Free and Open Indo-Pacific.

The opinions of the contributors tend to diverge on this issue. On the one hand Midford and Asplund tend to consider Abe's policies not as a genuine effort to consolidate the international liberal order, but rather an effort to justify a more «realist» approach to foreign affairs, with the twin objective of overcoming the post-war pacifism and balancing China. On the other hand, Bacon and Nakamura invite Japan not to follow the path of the European Union, somehow unfairly judged as «hybristic», self-righteous and «messianic». They invite Tokyo to balance the ordinary and the normative elements of its security identity, finding a fine turning between the will to promote liberal values and the need to have maintain a working relationship with non-liberal actors such as China and Russia.

The volume underlines the centrality of trade and economics both for the EU-Japan relationship and for their effort to face the threats faced by the international order. Both EU and Japan face similar structural economic problems. They are both mature economies, with harsh demographic problems, lack of growth, fiscal imbalances. As underlined by Okano-Heijmas and Terada, Nelson and Heckel this has prompted them to enact a number of similar policy responses. EU and Japan appear to be the last bastion of free market capitalism and multilateralism. They have opposed protectionism working to promote new generation trade agreements as the



EPA, but also the TPP-11 spearheaded by Japan<sup>1</sup> or the EU-Australia and EU-Canada, currently under negotiation. Both the EU and Japan have promoted also very expansionary monetary policies, while they embraced very different approaches to fiscal policies. Tokyo under the rubric of the Abenomics, promoted also a protracted fiscal expansion, while the EU, under the German leadership adopted a much more conservative fiscal approach.

Finally, *The EU–Japan Partnership in the Shadow of China* is highly recommended to those scholars, analysts, practitioners, and graduate students who want to grasp the fundamental features of the EU–Japan relationship as well as the complexity the challenges the two currently face.

1. The Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP), also known as TPP-11, has been signed by the original signatories of the TPP, with the exception of the US.

FEDERALISM IN INDIA:  
QUESTIONS ABOUT STATE CAPACITY AND NATIONAL POLICY

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Louise Tillin, *Indian Federalism*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2019, 184 pp. (ISBN 978-0-19-949561-0).

This is an indispensable introduction to the phenomenon of Indian federalism. The drafters of the constitution made no mention of federalism; in the tragic circumstances of partition they preferred an explicitly strong Union. But trends in subsequent practice have been visibly federal. As the author makes clear, they have also been anything but linear. A description in the book from a serving Union minister is apt: «Comprehensive, Cooperative, Collaborative, Competitive, Consensual and Compassionate Federalism». Readers will find that even such a wide ranging characterisation is by no means exhaustive.

The book has four main strands: India's federal model and constitutional design; federalism and diversity; centre-state relations; and federalism and the economy. Examination of these strands raises significant questions about state capacity and approaches to the development and implementation of authoritative national policy.

The book starts with an insightful account of the impacts of the extensive concurrent central and state responsibilities set out in the constitution. The sharing of responsibilities was intended to encourage both levels to work together. Measures such as the design of the all India civil service cadres, in which officials are allocated to particular states but also available to be called to the centre, were intended to reinforce links between levels of government.

The approach is described as «cooperative federalism». But as other federations have also found, cooperation depends on more than constitutional design. A second dimension of «cooperative federalism» includes measures to complement constitutional design by regulating vertical and horizontal interaction between units of government. The book's exploration of this dimension includes the roles of the former Planning Commission in setting national goals, approaches of the periodic Finance Commissions in managing fiscal federalism, and the management of linguistic and other diversity by adjusting state borders.

However, readers familiar with intergovernmental relations in other federations will notice an absence. The Inter-State Council, GST Council and NITI Aayog, each with heavy-weight representatives from both levels of government, flit through the narrative like wraiths. The reason is that

the latter two are still feeling their way and the Inter-State Council, set up pursuant to the constitution by a short lived non-Congress government, has rarely had sustained political support.

It is argued persuasively that for much of the time the most influential agent of coordination has been the party system. When the governing party in the centre holds sway also in many of the states, as Congress did for many years, intergovernmental relations has tended to be handled as an internal party matter. But as the book shows, too firm a hand at the centre can promote defection in the regions. This was a factor in the decline of the Congress Party. The prominence of central control in the BJP together with its patchy performance in recent state elections make questions about the efficacy of the party system in federal coordination of continuing relevance. In these circumstances a trend to watch out for will be the emergence of one or more of the bodies mentioned above as authoritative forums for inter-governmental negotiation.

The chapter on federalism and the economy brings into sharp relief the sheer variety of trends and tensions in federal practice. In contrast to the rest of the book it is unruly. However this reflects no discredit on the author. The subject matter is hard to pin down. Instances of centralisation, devolution, liberalisation, bureaucratic regulation, incentives, standard setting, evaluation, rankings, coercion, competition, negotiation, rent seeking, bypassing, backflips and recourse to the courts are prominent in patterns that do not stand still.

Liberalisation of industrial licensing by the centre in the 1990s has not been followed by policy directions in which both levels of government have a stake. Nor have experiments in which states go their own way proved sustainable. Although the states have responsibilities for topics critical for social and economic development, the centre continues to promulgate schemes which the states are supposed to implement. However, as the author tellingly demonstrates, while states have limited opportunities and capability to influence central schemes they retain the ability to «interpret» how they go about implementation. Issues of diversity and asymmetry elided in New Delhi tend to re-emerge in how officials apply and citizens experience centrally mandated policy in the regions.

Two approaches to the gap between formulation and implementation stand out. One, is to redouble efforts to specify, control and evaluate what state administrations do. This is often visible in the initiatives of central ministries and authorities. Another is to bypass state administrations by using digital technology to deliver benefits direct to citizens. The Modi government has made extensive use of this approach. However other conclusions are also possible. They include rethinking policy making so that the people in the states who have to implement decisions have a say in expected results and how they are to be achieved. They include also providing opportunities for citizens and stakeholders to contribute to how policy is made.

The analysis in the book suggests that for such conclusions to be drawn there would have to be radical departures from existing federal practice. However the book's probing of questions of state capacity and approaches to national policy suggests also that the case for such departures cannot be ignored.

A COLONIAL MONUMENT DE-CONSTRUCTED:  
MAJEED ON GRIERSON'S LINGUISTIC SURVEY OF INDIA

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Javed Majeed, *Nation and Region in Grierson's Linguistic Survey of India*, London: Routledge, 2018, 230 pp., (ISBN 9780429439223).

Javed Majeed, *Colonialism and Knowledge in Grierson's Linguistic Survey of India*, London: Routledge, 2018, 266 pp., (ISBN 9780429439230).

Dubbed by its contemporaries «monumental», G.A. Grierson's *Linguistic Survey of India* (LSI) was published between 1903 and 1928. It soon became one of the symbols of British colonialism in India, of its knowledge production endeavour, and of its supposed scientific modernity. It possibly remains the most comprehensive study of India's linguistic landscape ever undertaken till date. In the two volumes under review – *Nation and Region in Grierson's Linguistic Survey of India* and *Colonialism and Knowledge in Grierson's Linguistic Survey of India* – Javed Majeed proposes an analysis of the LSI with a view to unpack its underlying historical, epistemological and philosophical underpinnings.

Majeed analyses the content of the LSI, the methods and processes that brought it to light, and the aim his author(s), commissioning authorities, and myriad recipients attached to it. In this way, the LSI unravels and turns into a historical archive; a linguistics manifesto; a field where power relations between its British author, his Indians interlocutors, and the government are negotiated; and the portrait of a man – G.A. Grierson – and his multiple identities. Through his analysis of Grierson's *opus magnum* Majeed lies in front of the reader a LSI deconstructed according to the categories of «region», «nation», and «power», thus highlighting the frictions, contradictions and self-aware limitations concealed under its «monumentality».

*Colonialism and Knowledge* demonstrates that, as the master of a colonial project of knowledge production, Grierson was highly indebted to the contributions of his Indian collaborators. His deep engagement with Indians and India's languages brought him to believe in his ability to see things through Indian eyes. To understand the ways Grierson related to India and Indians, Majeed integrates the data provided by the Survey and the wide mail correspondence attached to it with a fine analysis of Grierson's «triply hyphenated identity»<sup>1</sup> that intersected his profession of linguist and his experience of physical illness. He demonstrates that Grierson came to oc-

1. *Colonialism and Knowledge*, p. 94.

cupy an in-between space, where his *Britishness* and *Indianness* contradicted and integrated each other and challenged colonial clear-cut notions of race, privilege, and power relations. Majeed also reveals Grierson's awareness of the existence of ambiguities and limitations in his Survey, thus complicating the LSI's positioning vis-à-vis colonial stereotypes of scientific certainty.

In *Nation and Region* we find Grierson engaged in a network of connections with the advocates of various linguistic groups, thus playing an important role in influencing the regionalization of many of India's linguistic identities. At the same time, Majeed points out that this «regionalising strand»<sup>2</sup> of the LSI appears to be clashing with Grierson's rejection of neat linguistic boundaries as envisioned by colonial and Indian nationalist mappings. In fact, Grierson believed that «Indian languages gradually merge into each other».<sup>3</sup> Against other European linguists, he also resisted the imperative to force Indian languages into Western paradigms which had been moulded based on European languages alone.

Majeed's discussion of Grierson's ideas of Aryanism and Semitism as they surface through the LSI provides a compelling section of the book. Grierson, who as a linguist focused on Indo-European languages, identified «Aryan» India with the zenith of Indian civilization; this, Majeed argues, brought him to conceive «Hindu», «Aryan», and «Indian» as almost synonyms, and to conceptualize Islam as a degenerative graft onto India's authentic essence. In this way, Majeed uncovers remarkable similarities between Grierson's language and that of Hindu nationalism. At the same time, he highlights that in Grierson's discourse Christianity aligns with Aryanism, while Hindutva conceives Christianity and Islam as equally foreign and polluting.

Throughout the volume, Majeed exposes these and more frictions internal to the LSI, inviting the reader «to think of the LSI as a project with many different strands and narratives, some of which were in tension with each other».<sup>4</sup>

Because the LSI soon established itself as a landmark study of India's languages, and because language has been a critical category in the politics of the subcontinent till date, the relevance and influence of the LSI extends well beyond the colonial period.

For example, Majeed demonstrates that the Census provided a major *trait d'union* between the LSI and post-coloniality. Grierson's study had considerable influence on the Census's understanding of India as a sum of linguistic regions. And, in turn, the institution of the Census cast a long shadow on Indian domestic politics: the internal reorganization of India on linguistic basis, and contemporary electoral and caste politics provide clear examples.

2. *Nation and Region*, p. 45.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 56.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 6.

Even in contemporary South Asia, Grierson's colonial exploration has remained a source of authority linguistic movements kept having recourse to, with a view to support their linguistic pleas and political goals. This is, for example, the case of Siraiki. Majeed reconstructs how Grierson single-mindedly sought to establish Siraiki's differentiation from Punjabi as «a separate and distinct language»,<sup>5</sup> consequently influencing the census authority's approach to the two languages. As a result, in contemporary Pakistan, the Saraiki movement has invoked Grierson's LSI to back its claim of Siraiki's separateness from Punjabi language, a claim instrumental to the achievement of political and economic separation of Siraikistan from the province of Punjab, based on allegations of internal colonialism. Thus, the LSI and Majeed's study of the same are important references for understanding not only colonial but also contemporary South Asian affairs.

As Majeed's analysis unfolds, the LSI gets contextualised within British and Indian events of its time, the then ongoing trends in colonial administration and linguistics research, as well as Grierson's personality and life. In this way, from the monolithic monument that it initially appeared to be, the LSI progressively acquires in the eyes of the reader the semblance of a labyrinth; but Majeed unpacks its complexity, making even the hardest passages accessible to the reader through a consistently structured and clear prose.

Because of the myriad angles through which they approach the LSI and Grierson's scholarship, *Nation and Region* and *Colonialism and Knowledge* are recommended readings for advanced students and researchers across disciplines. In particular, the two volumes are a must-read for those focusing on the history and politics of language and of the British Empire in South Asia, and their connected notions of race, civilization, and nationalism. Those studying and researching the institution of the Census and the role of language in the post-colonial politics of the subcontinent will find Majeed's multi-layered analysis of Grierson's «monumental» LSI equally beneficial and fascinating.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 22.

