



Michael Tai, *US-China Relations in the Twenty-First Century: A Question of Trust,*

Abingdon, Oxon & New York, Routledge, 2015, xviii, 206 pp.

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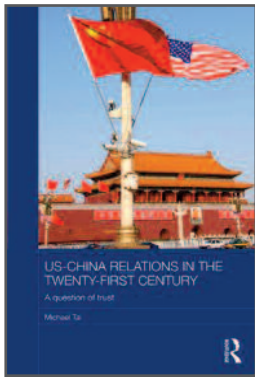
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Book reviews



Michael Tai,
US-China Relations in the
Twenty-First Century:
A Question of Trust,
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JEAN-PIERRE CABESTAN

This book is not just another analysis of Sino-American relations. It is rather an attempt to explain the difficulties in the relations between China and the United States by making trust, or rather the lack of it, the main or even the only cause of those difficulties. There are numerous studies on the importance of trust in international (and interstate) relations, and some of them may occasionally be pertinent, even though the writer of this review is inclined to think that interests carry far more weight than a quality that is rather more moral than political. Ronald Reagan's remark comes to mind: "Trust but verify." But the real fault of this work lies in its outrageously partisan character, and in the end, despite his wide coverage, Michael Tai has little to tell us about the present, and even less about the future, relations between Beijing and Washington, or between their respective societies.

Taking his inspiration from the social behaviourism of Alexander Wendt, Tai tells us in his introductory Chapter 1 that, in his view, the notion of trust consists of four key elements: history, interests, structures, and empathy. That may be so. But he offers us little explanation of how the state integrates these four conditions to transform them into policies. Then, in Chapter 2, he lays out how the Americans perceive themselves and how they perceive China, which he follows with a parallel consideration of China's perceptions. The main idea that emerges from this is that the United States is far less well-disposed towards the People's Republic than is the latter's government and society towards that dominant global power. The basic causes for this are the Americans' ideological, racial, and religious prejudices.

After this induction into the heart of the matter, the reader is invited to consider the opposition said to exist between the perspectives of Beijing and Washington in three areas: namely climate change, the global financial crisis, and international security.

With regard to the first of these, it quickly becomes clear that the writer sticks closely to the Chinese government's official pronouncements to the effect that China has the right to pollute as much as Western governments have been allowed to since the beginning of the Industrial Revolution. By contrast, his arguments in Chapter 4 are more diffi-

cult to follow when he stigmatises the Obama Administration's "cold war" spirit and makes it the main culprit in the failure of the 2009 Copenhagen climate conference (p. 90). In any case, subsequent events have brought new factors to light that contradict some of the author's views: in fact, the agreement reached in 2014 between the American president and his Chinese counterpart in Beijing throws considerable doubt on the approach adopted by the Chinese authorities five years earlier.

Michael Tai is more convincing in Chapter 4, when he deals with the global financial crisis of 2007-2008. This is probably the least uninteresting part of the book. In it he compares the Chinese and American views of the crisis. Despite his diatribes against the two lobbies identified as the "market fundamentalists" and the Washington Consensus, without any nuanced distinction between them, and despite his unmitigated praise of the PRC's "non-ideological pragmatism," he can do little but note their many points of agreement on the causes of the crisis, especially the excessive deregulation of the financial markets. Admittedly, among the American analysts he is able to pick out certain conservatives who exaggerate China's role in the rapid development of the crisis. But on the whole, what his analysis reveals is the frustration common to many Chinese at their own credulity with regard to the banking know-how of their Nemesis (p. 123).

The third case study is without doubt the weakest. The US is said to be intrinsically hegemonic, while China is traditionally defensive, as the Great Wall bears witness. But Chapter 5 ends nonetheless with the following admonition: "The full significance of the changing hegemonies in modern times lies not just in the end of the 'American century' but in the close of five centuries of Western and Caucasian domination. It marks the conclusion of white supremacy" (p. 164). Does this suggest that a new hegemon, perhaps more "benevolent" but nonetheless powerful and possibly just as racist, is destined to replace the other one?

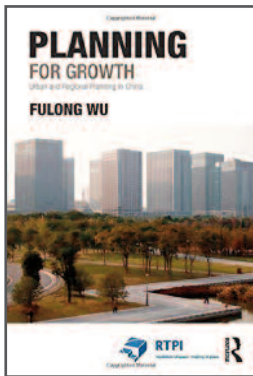
To conclude, Tai serves up a well-known dish from Beijing's propaganda menu: we know you far better than you know us! (pp. 187-188). That explains the lack of mutual trust. Moving swiftly over the opacity of the Chinese political system and more slowly over the attractions of the American way of life, the writer concludes that the Chinese government ought to strengthen its soft power and tell its own "success story" better; in short, Sino-American misunderstandings boil down to a vast communication problem.

What do we learn from this book? As we have seen, very little that we did not know already. Yet it is useful, because it shows the continuing wide gap between Chinese and American perceptions of the relations between Beijing and Washington, and to a certain extent those of the West as a whole. Moreover, being obsessed by the US like many mainland Chinese, Tai makes scant reference to Europe in his reflections. He is content to throw light on the diversity of American opinions on China, but he tells us nothing about the debates or differences of opinion between the Chinese themselves. In short, Michael Tai's book is quite representative

of the rising power of China and its strengthening sense of destiny, presided over by Xi Jinping since 2012.

■ Translated by Jonathan Hall.

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Fulong Wu,
Planning for Growth: Urban and
Regional Planning in China,
 New York & London, Routledge,
 RTPI Library Series, 2015, 248 pp.

NICOLAS DOUAY

Fulong Wu, professor at the Bartlett School of Planning at University College London, is one of the foremost experts on China's urban development and spatial planning. His latest work is bound to become a reference text offering a large panorama of transformations in urban and regional planning in China since the twentieth century. Taking a deep historical perspective, the book examines the evolution of institutional frameworks and actors as well as the content of spatial planning policies. The book's main focus is on changes in urban and regional planning practices. At first gradually marginalised and discredited with the advent of the communist regime, these practices resumed from the late 1970s as the country opened up. The book's main thesis is the idea that spatial planning has become a key element in the process of urbanisation and economic growth. Thus, whereas in the West, spatial planning has often been seen as an enemy of economic development by proponents of neo-liberalism, in China, it is their greatest ally.

The book is divided into seven chapters dealing with the main historical periods as well as thematic issues. Numerous examples and case studies illustrate the arguments and help better understand contemporary spatial planning practices.

Chapter 1 underlines the existence of ancient practices of urban planning in China. Traditionally enclosed by walls, the cities were founded according to rules inspired by geomancy and *fengshui*. The Republic's establishment in 1911 opened up a propitious period for the development of urban planning in the largest agglomerations such as Shanghai or the then capital, Nanjing. Western influence is evident in modernised architecture and the construction of satellite towns in the periphery of big cities.

Chapter 2 examines the socialist period from 1949 until 1984, the year when urban reforms and regulations on urban planning were adopted. In the 1950s, spatial planning policies were Soviet-influenced and led to monumental architecture and the adoption of five-year plans. Spatial planning's main mission was to encourage and assist industrial development. After the disastrous "Great Leap Forward," planning stood accused

of having adopted unrealistic projects before being totally side-lined during the Cultural Revolution. Plans were abandoned in both big cities and small towns. It was only after 1978 and China's opening that an urban planning practice gradually re-emerged.

This resumption is the subject of Chapter 3, which deals with the organisation of the planning system following the adoption of a law on urban planning in 1990, one of whose main features was the transfer of competence to local authorities. There are three parallel plans in the five-year period: an urban and rural plan, a land use plan, and a socio-economic development plan. Each of these plans is overseen by a separate commission or ministry, which no doubt poses problems in coordinating objectives and resources.

The new planning system of 1990 is discussed in detail in Chapter 4, which notes the entrepreneurial turn in spatial planning. The planning practice has become less formal and more conceptual, especially in its forms of representation of a territorial project. This shift from spatial planning centred on resource allocation towards a more strategic form renders spatial planning into a tool at the service of development. In this sense, spatial planning is situated at the interface between the state and the market. It becomes an essential support for growth by providing space that would become the basis for the country's economic expansion.

Chapter 5 deals with the organisation of the planning system, with particular attention to changes in the state's role and its articulation through different local levels. The Pearl River Delta and the Yangzi Delta, which are the most dynamic regions economically, receive special attention. The study of different examples shows how the practice of urban planning by local governments helps justify an expansionist approach over the central administration in order to overcome regulatory constraints and seize new growth opportunities.

This economic growth focus of urban planning is the subject of Chapter 6, which examines the pro-development orientation of Chinese planning by discussing urban planning in new cities and eco-cities. Building new cities is a classic feature of Chinese spatial planning. As far back as 1948, Shanghai's metropolitan plan envisaged the construction of satellite towns. These urbanisation projects symbolise the pro-development orientation of Chinese planning and today take the form of mega projects. The construction of eco-cities, meanwhile, highlights the attempt to give effect to a sustainability accent in urban planning. However, the practical reality is that these projects are subject to contingencies of local power politics and investors' criteria of real estate profitability.

The final chapter analyses the impact of pro-market transition on spatial planning. The role of public authorities has been reduced, especially their ability to allocate resources, and has been partly replaced by market mechanisms. Since the 1990s, there has been a proliferation of plans lacking legal basis while aiming to promote development. This process cannot be attributed solely to the intensity of economic growth but is also due to the very nature of the Chinese practice of spatial planning. Wu offers three explanations for this practice. First, planning survived this transition period, as it was able to adapt to the new market context and became an instrument for territorial marketing. Second, the adoption of market mechanisms posed new social and environmental challenges necessitating the implementation of spatial planning and development policies. The third explanation is that market mechanisms were introduced in China in order to enlarge the scope of capital accumulation rather than to reduce the state's dominant role. Thus it is planning in favour of growth rather than of