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Industrial Eden: A Chinese Capitalist Vision. By Brett Sheehan. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2015. 327 pp. Bibliography, figures, photographs, glossary, illustrations, maps, notes, index. Cloth, \$46.50. ISBN: 978-0-674-96760-1.

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Reviewed by Christopher Leighton

Gospels of development have had great allure in modern China. From left and right, China's leaders have shared a state-centered dream of development, from the nineteenth-century self-strengtheners who sought to industrialize and arm the Qing Empire to resist the West, to the varied visions of socialism pursued in the People's Republic of China (PRC) since 1949. In *Industrial Eden*, Brett Sheehan shows us that businessmen, too, could dream. Through a fascinating case study of the Song family and their enterprises in the first half of the twentieth century, he recovers a distinctly capitalist vision for Chinese modernization in which their business would itself be, as his title telegraphs, an industrial Eden.

The family origin story follows an upward arc of virtue and success. The founding figure, Song Chuandian (1872–1929), was born in a small village that in the year 2000 was still full of mud-thatched homes. Though seemingly remote—half a day's walk from the county seat and a further three days on horse to the provincial capital—economic and cultural penetration by new domestic and foreign forces brought opportunities to the doorstep of strivers of little means. In this case, a fortuitous connection to British missionaries afforded Song new vistas. He studied and then taught at a local Christian school. Before long, the head missionaries were calling him their godson and had him take over the mission businesses.

The family empire would be built from here, founded on hairnets, laboriously knitted from real human hair to match that of the wearer, and with the thinnest of profit margins—perhaps 1 yuan per gross. Workers had Sundays off to attend church. The story takes off with Song Feiqing (1898–1956), son of the founder and the transformational figure Sheehan rightly emphasizes. Born in the same village but reared in the more urban and upwardly mobile milieu of his father's success, he

knew Henry Luce (future founder of *Time*) from school and was the sort of bicultural type to read both the Bible and *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*. His primary concern, the Dongya Company, blended private and state backing and Sino-foreign business orientations. Dongya located itself in the friendly territory of Tianjin's foreign concession that followed extraterritorial law, but worked Chinese relationships: on the quest for a tax exemption, the company provided every official up the hierarchy to the minister with a full set of Dongya woolen underwear.

Ever nimble, the company adapted to both the Nationalist government and Japanese occupation. For the former, it promoted its goods as national champions, with the artful and iconic "butting ram" brand—homophonous with "resisting the West"—while its "anti-aircraft gun" brand cheekily took aim at the airplane mark of a rival. Under the latter, it made gunnysacks mostly for military use, so any Eden it made would be built in part on war profits. Surprisingly, the postwar years proved more difficult than Japanese rule. Restive labor became the biggest problem, particularly among those living outside the factories or hailing from native places not the founder's own; the company's Eden remained confined to a narrow circle. Song Feiqing considered different tactics, from increased Christianization to hectoring workers from his hospital bed, but none quite convinced the aggrieved that labor and capital stood on the same side. Eventually, the company paper would reprint editorials larded with communist rhetoric, signaling preparation to survive under yet another new regime, the PRC.

What did Eden look like within the firm? Hygiene, "scientific" hiring, statistics, and measurement—each directed at disciplining and improving the worker—all played a role. Every action required a pass or a permission slip. None of this, including the indoctrination and patriotism alongside technical training, the 7:00 a.m. flag-raising ceremony, prohibitions on opposite-sex interaction, and even instructions on when and how to urinate, would have been out of place among the hierarchical and paternalistic political movements of the day, though at Dongya the structure came with more overtly Christian trappings. The utopia of Taylorism and Fordism that created paradise here, Sheehan suggests, might have been an Eden for managers alone. As in Wen-hsin Yeh's contemporary research on the Bank of China, we see here an early form of what would become the totalizing work-unit (*danwei*) arrangement under the PRC, a sealing off of members from the economic and social chaos outside.

Despite a confluence of inspirations, the early PRC would evolve away from a loose alliance with capitalists to a more state-centered command economy. Party officials themselves sent mixed messages: the new mayor of Tianjin refused to shake Song's hand; the leading

communist political figure Liu Shaoqi, however, visited the Dongya Company in a signal of approval. His famous talks in Tianjin, in which he stunningly suggested that some exploitation might be good and any amount of profit could be legal, offered hope for the company's future. In keeping with the times, the company issued its 1950 dividend in kind: yarn dyed red for the new era. Song was still reading *Das Kapital* (and threatening to test his workers on it) en route to Hong Kong, whence he would relocate again to Argentina, never giving up on his missionary impulse and the possibility of building a company as a perfectible community and model to all. The narrative of Song's life would be told by others and in the service of the shifting needs of the state, which recast him as everything from a decent to an evil to a good capitalist in six different versions (by Sheehan's count) through the 1970s.

Across the chapters and vicissitudes of Dongya's fortunes, Sheehan weaves arguments about the complicated effects of imperialism (which both benefited and hurt the Songs), the diversity of Chinese business practices, and intersected relations between the state and business—the Songs, after all, worked across five different political regimes. Eschewing monocausal explanation, Sheehan emphasizes the adaptability of the company, though its adaptations were always in response to the rapid changes in politics over which Dongya had no control. Among many interesting findings here—how the firm learned to operate in an “economy of things” during wartime, for example, or its hoarding of talent as a business strategy—what stands out is the independent moral vision. Song's Eden existed as the opposite of the chaotic world in which he lived. It fell not because of any snake in the garden or bite of an apple that brought new knowledge, but because the even grander state-backed utopian projects (built in part in its image) superseded it. Sheehan has recovered here a rare and special thing: a private, business-rooted voice for reform and development unafraid to articulate its own values. As China's present capitalists increasingly turn to company mission statements and public moral posturing, will they find the present a happy and profitable paradise or see their own more distant Edens?

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