Whilst some of this went to China, this was not exclusive and cannot be seen as any evidence of “locking in” African agriculture to the Chinese market.

The role of the central government in the whole question is of great interest, as often it is portrayed that China has some sort of “master plan” regarding Africa. Bräutigam shows that when the “going out” policy was announced, agriculture *was* included in the activities supported by government incentives and that in 2006 and 2008, China Exim Bank and China Development Bank, extended around US$8 billion in credit to Chinese agricultural initiatives globally. However, land purchases were explicitly excluded and the credit was more to do with promoting the export of Chinese agricultural machinery, patented seeds and supporting construction contracts. The role of Beijing in foreign agricultural investment needs to be situated within the broader context of the increase in trade and outward investment from China and not part of some sort of conspiracy.

The role of African agency, something which has often been overlooked by most media reports on the issues, is emphasized by the book. Active partnership between African and Chinese investors demonstrates a level of engagement and negotiation that can only take place with the approval of African governments. Equally, local communities and non-governmental organizations have often resisted foreign investment plans. This is something not uniquely directed against the Chinese but is a wider expression of agency against any proposals seen to potentially damage the livelihood and well-being of Africans.

Overall, the book provides a convincing overview of China’s role in Africa regarding agriculture and investment. This is both a strength and perhaps a weakness for some readers. It is a strength given the rich empirical material and the close engagement with the issue at hand; it is a weakness in that it is narrowly focused on but one element of the Chinese role in the continent. The possible weakness does not overshadow the strengths, however, and given the plethora of generalized overviews of broad Sino-African relations, its narrow focus is probably justified. If I was to critique the book it would probably be at the overall stance of the book, which seems aimed at clearing China’s name. Within the study of China–Africa relations, some scholars (including, remarkably, some non-Chinese) seem to have taken the attitude that their role in life is to defend China from all criticism. Deborah Bräutigam is not one of these, but at times the book does stray in this particular direction. Yet, given the myths around China’s role in Africa, the book is a very valuable addition to the field and empirically grounded research means that it cannot be discounted. It is a major contribution to our understanding of the dynamics in Sino-African relations.

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The Perfect Dictatorship: China in the 21st Century
STEIN RINGEN
Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2016
xiii + 191 pp. $25.00
ISBN 978-988-8208-94-4 doi:10.1017/S0305741017000704

Stein Ringen’s book *The Perfect Dictatorship* argues that conventional wisdom on China is misplaced, and that the dictatorship of the Chinese Communist Party is both more sophisticated and more brutal than analysts often credit. Ringen finds

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0305741017000704 Published online by Cambridge University Press

the term "autocracy" too benevolent, and "dictatorship" too crude; "controlocracy" is the term he coins to describe a system that relies mostly on self-policing but maintains its "hard reality of perfect control" underneath (p. 174).

The Perfect Dictatorship seems intended as an introductory volume that also makes a central argument about the nature of the Chinese regime. There, it successfully emphasizes several points that other introductory volumes can overlook, related to the identity of the regime as a party-state: for example, that the military serves the Party, and that law is subject to Party directives, not the other way around. For students who are mostly familiar with Western democratic systems, this is an important point to emphasize.

The sections on taxation and welfare politics are also helpful for readers who may mostly be familiar with the claim that the CCP has lifted half a billion people out of poverty. Ringen clarifies that it would be more accurate to say that the CCP contributed to – rather than created – this outcome, and that China still has a long road to walk to fully meet its own goals in this respect. One of the most rigorous parts of the book is his examination of whether China qualifies as a welfare state, where he argues that the PRC falls short due to both regressive taxation and a fragmented, incomplete social support structure. Here he invokes a useful comparison to the role that social welfare spending and programs played in another developing East Asian non-democracy, South Korea (prior, of course, to that country's democratization in 1987). According to Ringen, the early incorporation of welfare politics into South Korea's vision of "modernization" (even at a time when South Korea was as poor as China), and the current per-capita wealth of South Korea, challenge the contention that the CCP has "delivered economically" for the Chinese people; South Korea is a contrasting example of what true success in terms of economic provision would look like. For visitors who may think that the skyscrapers of Shanghai are representative of the country as a whole, this section is a useful and well-supported reminder of how far China has to go and how many of its citizens remain outside the bubble of prosperity created by state capitalism.

The heart of the book, however, is "a political analysis of the state" (p. 40), and here the book is both less clear and less convincing than it could and should be. Part of this is a puzzling absence of much of the work on Chinese politics that has been done in the past decade: the bibliography does not contain a single article from political science (though there are some books), or anything from the pages of this journal, where much of the social-scientific work on the Chinese party-state has appeared in the past decade. This omission is, quite simply, puzzling for a book that is, at its heart, a statement about the nature and effects of China's political system – and it means that the book does not deliver as much as it could in areas central to its argument.

For example, citizen use of lawsuits and petitions are dismissed in a paragraph as an ineffective "safety valve" (p. 78) that gives lie to the regime's stated aim of effective governance. That contention is imperfect, however, does not make it imaginary, and scholars of law and contentious politics have often found that these mechanisms represent a constrained but genuine process of contention that can advance citizens' interests. The book's description of "delicately sophisticated" internet censorship (p. 109) depicts the process as centralized inside the state and tasked primarily with suppressing the circulation of critical opinions – whereas a large volume of scholarship has shown the process to be decentralized, full of pro-CCP activism, and aimed more at suppressing collective action than censoring criticism.

Perhaps most importantly, ideology is central to Ringen's argument about the nature of the Chinese party-state. He excoriates "the strong body of China analysis

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that rejects the proposition that the Chinese state is still an ideological one" (p. 143) and reminds the reader that party-states require ideological justification – but perplexingly overlooks the wealth of studies on how the CCP has employed nationalism since 1989 to serve exactly that function. Ringen's conclusion that Xi Jinping's China Dream has the potential to be a particularly dangerous nationalist ideology (pp. 175–78) would be more convincing if there was some discussion of how the China Dream variant of nationalism differs from the nationalism promoted in the Patriotic Education Campaigns that the regime has employed for almost three decades.

As a result, the reader sometimes has difficulty nailing down just what it means to be a "perfect dictatorship," let alone whether China is one. Ringen argues on the one hand that "the threat of terror is omnipresent" (pp. 139–40), but elsewhere that society is "poorly policed" (p. 80). If rule by coercion is the hallmark of a "perfect dictatorship," it would be helpful to have more clarity on just how effective its security state is, and how those two descriptors can co-exist in the same political system.

Ringen also writes that China's "great weakness" lies in being "a state-dependent country with a state that rules without consent" and in which "the state depends on extreme levels of extraction… [and] is unable to maintain itself without dictatorship" (p. 167). This may well be true of China, but how does it make the PRC different from – and superior to – other non-democracies? Ringen argues strongly that the language of comparative authoritarianism cannot be applied to China, but the description above could in fact apply to almost any non-democracy.

The Perfect Dictatorship makes a forceful argument for the sophistication and brutality of the Chinese regime today. The book's argument would be stronger if it had more clarity and more engagement with existing evidence on its key claims. For these reasons, readers may disagree with the analysis and with the conclusions that Ringen draws. The debates that the book is likely to spark, however, make it a provocative, valuable and timely addition to discussion on the nature and future of the Chinese political system.

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Paper Tigers, Hidden Dragons: Firms and the Political Economy of China's Technological Development
DOUGLAS B. FULLER
Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2016
x + 279 pp. £55.00
ISBN 978-0-19-877720-5 doi:10.1017/S0305741017000716

In this well-researched book, Douglas Fuller engages in three debates. From the perspective of China studies, *Paper Tigers, Hidden Dragons* sets out to explain China's path of development in the face of weak domestic market institutions and the future prospects of China's direction. Theoretically, advancing beyond the state vs. market debate on the political economy of development and the literature on comparative institutions, Fuller contends that globalization could be an alternative, and he specifies the conditions under which foreign institutions could be conducive to China's technological development.

Fuller forcefully argues that post-socialist transformation could benefit from globalization in situations in which specific kinds of foreign entrepreneurship, namely,

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0305741017000704 Published online by Cambridge University Press