

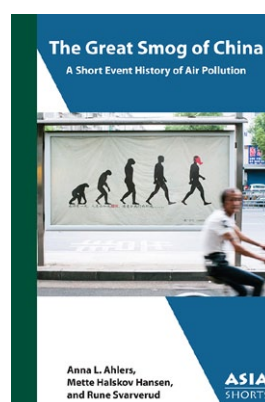
While Taiwanese ageing migrants in the US tend to reinforce their connections to their co-ethnics after retirement, they also have an “intimate understanding” (p. 137) of the place they occupy within Taiwanese-American networks: homeland politics, ethnic identities, and class divisions play an important role in the social and support networks ageing migrants choose to forge. Unlike their US-based peers, returnees in Taiwan have to “[relearn] their place” (p. 148) in a modernised homeland they no longer recognise and where they lack connections. Struggling with sociocultural gaps separating them from their co-nationals, returnees hence tend to favour selective relationships with relatives, old friends, or other like-minded returnees. The last chapter finally analyses long-term migrants’ perceptions of available social rights and welfare resources in their home and host countries. The creation of a National Health Insurance in 1995 in Taiwan indeed contributes to making returning desirable for many migrants. However, the fact that most of them perceive themselves as deserving individuals, having “won [their] social rights” (p. 167) in the US through long and hard work, affects long-term migrants’ evaluation of their “(un)deservingness” to social rights in Taiwan (return migrants being also often stigmatised for their burdening of social security) and pushes them to highlight their lifelong or present contributions to their homelands.

This book will be of great interest to sociologists of ageing and migration as well as to Asian and Taiwan studies. That being said, two frustrations might arise from its reading. While Sun explains having conducted “ethnographic observations of the intimate life of both groups over two years” (p. 6), little actually remains of them in the book. Four short isolated ethnographic scenes appear through different chapters, but they occupy a very secondary position compared to interviews. The fact that Sun’s research process and positionality in the field is pushed away in the appendix speaks for the lack of importance given to ethnographic material. Finally, one could be surprised by the author’s lack of engagement with the sociology of generations: as young Taiwanese (sometimes university students) living in the US in the 1960s and 1970s, just when Taiwan’s economy was about to take off, the individuals studied here at least witnessed the nascent Baodiao Movement (*baodiao yundong* 保釣運動),² Taiwan’s exclusion from the UN, or the US severance of diplomatic ties with Taiwan. Whether or not this common location in historical time then held by US-based Taiwanese migrants potentially led them to develop forms of generational consciousness or affected their views of ageing today might have been useful to question, especially given the increased importance ageing studies put on generational factors.

References

DEJONG NEWENDORP, Nicole. 2020. *Chinese Senior Migrants and the Globalization of Retirement*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

2. The “Protect the Diaoyu Islands Movement” is a social movement which originated in the early 1970s among Republic of China students in the United States, in response to the territorial dispute over the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands between China, Taiwan, Japan and the United States.



AHLERS, Anna L., Mette HALSKOV HANSEN, and Rune SVARVERUD. 2020.
The Great Smog of China: A Short Event History of Air Pollution.
 New York: Columbia University Press.

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The *Great Smog of China: A Short Event History of Air Pollution* is a concise summary of more than 2,000 years in the history of air pollution in China. For each of the five main periods identified, Anna Lisa Ahlers, Mette Halskov Hansen, and Rune Svarverud evaluate the levels and sources of air pollution and analyse the perception of this pollution. Though the term “pollution” did not appear until the early twentieth century in China, people long before then identified the risks or nuisances of polluted air. Thus, the authors use their own definition to trace back air pollution events: “Something that refers to both popularly perceived and scientifically recognized conditions of foul or poor quality air” (p. 123).

This book is a clear digest of the general evolution of air pollution, based on the authors’ own research and previous scholarly work. For each period, the authors present the global situation of air pollution in China, the primary and secondary sources they rely on, and some selected air pollution incidents. They give the contextual information necessary for those unfamiliar with Chinese history. The political, economic, and social background of each period is then depicted briefly in order to explain the underlying reasons for the evolution of air pollution. But China is never considered in isolation. The Chinese situation is linked to global tendencies and sometimes compared to other countries. The analysis therefore includes local, regional, and global scales. The discrepancy between urban and rural areas is one important focus of the book that gives some interesting insights into a too often overlooked question.

The first chapter recounts the situation in ancient China. Despite the scarcity of data, the authors draw an interesting picture of some situations where poor air quality was identified and perceived as such by contemporary society. According to the authors, the small amount of attention paid to air pollution at that time is probably related to ancient Chinese cosmology and epistemological tradition. The second chapter focuses on the early twentieth century, before the Chinese Communist Party came to power. The scholars depict both the increase in air pollution due to industrialisation and the growth of transportation, and the rise of concern within society. The

air quality problem was put on the national agenda and entered public discourse but almost exclusively through the lens of indoor pollution. The importance of this issue was strongly related to the idea that pollution can harm the health of individuals and then weaken the nation in a period when building a strong nation was one of the main concerns.

The third chapter, titled “The Ideologization of Smoke,” covers the period 1949-1978. The willingness of the Party to develop China as rapidly as possible and more generally the overall ideological background laid the groundwork for a harsh degradation of the urban and the rural environment. Pollution has long been depicted as a problem of capitalist countries, while conversely, in socialist countries, smoke has been seen as a sign of progress. Though the leadership was well aware that pollution could damage health, it was considered a secondary concern and suppressed in public debate. Participation in the Stockholm Summit in 1972 is therefore described as a milestone in the environmental history of China. China recognised the need to be concerned with environmental problems, but pollution was perceived as an unavoidable side effect of necessary industrial development. Though some regulations were issued, there were no immediate consequences in the regulation of air pollution.

The period 1978-2008 described in the fourth chapter is associated with “an emerging scientific, political, and popular concern with air pollution” (p. 100). China’s reform and opening up period led to a dramatic increase in air pollution but also to a more scientific approach toward the issue and changes in the way the government perceived it. State media increasingly covered environmental problems, though often in vague terms, relying more on sensation than on scientific data. Petitions and protests emerged in the 1980s and increased significantly in the 1990s and 2000s. Several quite good laws were drafted to regulate air pollution and more general environmental degradation. More exchanges existed with foreign experts and policymakers. However, other economic and political factors often remained prioritised: the regulation of pollution should not hinder economic development. That’s why a big gap existed between laws and implementation. Some changes were nonetheless visible in the mid-2000s, for example, more importance being given to environmental protection in the evaluation of local cadres, and more resources allocated to air pollution control.

The last chapter, “The Popularization of Air Pollution” (2008-2017), is characterised as an “air pollution shift” (p. 126). The Chinese population, and not only the urban middle class, became highly preoccupied by air pollution. In the three villages where the authors carried out their fieldwork in Zhejiang, residents worry about the health consequences of air pollution and protests have occurred against local polluters. This wide awareness has been fostered by the extensive disclosure of air quality data measured in urban areas and by the broad coverage of this issue in traditional media and social media. Four events have been selected for the role they have played in this process: the Beijing Olympics, the “airpocalypse,” the documentary *Under the Dome*, and “APEC Blue.”¹ During this

period, air pollution has been put on the top of the political agenda, and stricter policies have been implemented at both the national and local levels. Although the beginning of the period was characterised by a high level of openness in the release of information and in social media, air pollution became more and more sensitive after 2013 under the Xi administration. After the release of *Under the Dome*, coverage of environmental issues became more positive and government-orientated.

The ability of the authors to put all this information in one small book is quite impressive. The counterpart is that the analysis devoted to the authors’ own fieldwork and new data is rather limited. Theoretical development is also scarce. For those already familiar with this topic, it could be a little disappointing in this regard. However, it is a perfect introduction for those interested in air pollution or in environmental issues more generally, and it is definitely meaningful reading for understanding the challenges that China is facing nowadays.



McGRATH, Jason. 2022.
Chinese Film: Realism and Convention from the Silent Era to the Digital Age.
 Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

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With *Chinese Film: Realism and Convention from the Silent Era to the Digital Age*, Jason McGrath continues his exploration of the cinema of mainland China. After *Postsocialist Modernity: Chinese Cinema, Literature, and Criticism in the Market Age* (2008), McGrath gives us seven chapters that create a dense, transversal panorama of the history of Chinese cinema through various conceptions of realism intrinsically linked to the context of creation and implicated in the dialogue between East and West. Returning to the theoretical debates in various areas of knowledge that have informed his approach, he reminds us that realism is indissociable from the narrative and cinematic

1. “APEC Blue” refers to the emission reduction campaign directed in 2014 by the Chinese government during the APEC China summit, leading to a rare blue sky.