

of Sweeping Cliff villagers cannot be reduced to the totalising domicile experienced elsewhere in China, Bruckermann offers a compelling account of how they face contradictory injunctions. Chapter Two addresses the rarely studied issue of housing redistribution in rural villages. Secret narratives of family histories and photomontages of family and socialist celebrations reveal the clash of ideological commitments to the family and the nation, and to inherited and acquired status of people and their belongings. On the spirit altar at the centre of the house, the God of Wealth has replaced Chairman Mao. Bruckermann eschews an interpretation in terms of a return to past traditionalism by stressing the similarities between both figures, which are seen by residents as sources of wealth and redistribution.

Part Two, "Gender, Generation, Kinship," explores the reproduction of homes through claims staked on kin. Chapters Three and Four offer careful descriptions and analyses of children's birthdays and bridal farewells, whose surface tensions between ancient and modern ritual components reveal deeper social dramas. Bruckermann's ethnographic analysis makes a significant contribution to anthropological discussions of kinship and feminist theories by pointing out the extent to which the devaluation of labour and personhood is gendered *and* generational. The devaluation of (past) agricultural work and the limitation of grandparents' influence by market reforms and birth control policies is contested by women who encourage the birth of offspring from their children and negotiate keeping grandchildren close to home. Their practices offer a continuum with state policies of population control that have increased the importance of uterine kinship, and with mobility restrictions that encourage migrant workers to leave their children with grandparents. However, Bruckermann daringly suggests, these women's requests for offspring, and for keeping them under their care, make up for reproductive and care losses in the past, rather than constituting a gift that might be reciprocated in the future. Chapter Four further discusses value claims staked in marriage negotiations, of which the house is a centrepiece. It shows how both young men and women, in the context of increased labour migration to the cities, struggle to safeguard their futures.

Part Three, "Labor, Location, Precarity," focuses on how people locate themselves within dispossession. Chapter Five examines the shifting role of agriculture in rural life. While under Mao women's work in the fields and food allocation had become public, the market reforms increasingly tend to include unremunerated agricultural work and the allocation of food in the domain of the "inside," domestic sphere. Describing the labour of harvesting millet and its transformation into food, Bruckermann shows how belonging to the rural village is shaped through the connection between land, labour, and bodies. By extolling the virtues of hard physical labour and a frugal diet, participation in mutual aid and care work, and the growing of domestic crops without pesticide, villagers create a division between their inside non-commodified sociality and the outside realm of the market. A new generational inversion is taking place, now that young people originating from the village who find employment as tour guides and network marketers romanticised and commodified their ruralness. Chapter Six widens the lens to the rural citizens increasingly dispersed across the urbanising valley. One event, the earthquake scare that spread one night across the region, and the way people took refuge in rural villages, revealed the suspicion toward the city and distrust of the state. Bruckermann's shrewd contrastive analysis of their moral economy of person-to-person action (*minjian* 民間) with Thompson's moral economy of the English crowd (1971) offers an understanding of Shanxi's rural households' anxieties and possibilities for counteraction. As further stated in the book's postscript, Sweeping Cliff villagers have retained a strong sense of being countryside people, and they

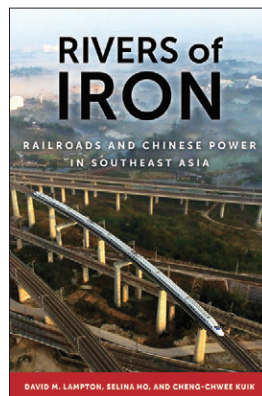
subvert the devaluations of peasant status that come along with rural-urban inequalities and exclusions.

In the conclusion, Bruckermann discusses the contradictions of Chinese red capitalism, and argues for a relational approach to class and location. Her book's convincing contention is that the residents of Sweeping Cliff have managed to "domesticate" capitalism, that is, neutralising some of its destructive effects while also actively participating in its development. They have done this by striking compromises between generations on the basis of their "homegrown labour theory of value," which is suffused with Marxist logic and kinship ethics. In this case, and probably in many others, making claims to the home is not so much a matter of individual property rights as it is a matter of rights to the product of one's labour. Contradictions between the forces of the capitalist market and socialist redistribution play out in struggles over value, the value of past and present labour, and of productive and reproductive labour, which are collapsed. This book offers a rare outlook on the home as a workplace, and a place created by work. I recommend it to all those interested in China's transformations and in theories of social reproduction.

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LAMPTON, David M., Selina HO, and Cheng-chwee KUIK. 2020. *Rivers of Iron: Railroads and Chinese Power in Southeast Asia*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

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Rivers of Iron examines China's role in the development of railroad connectivity between China and Southeast Asia (SEA) via the Pan-Asia Railway Network (PARN). The authors investigate the ideational and policy sources of regional interconnectivity in both China and SEA, China's political economy that drove it into taking a leading

role in realising the long-existing vision for regional rail network, the negotiation and implementation aspects of the related railway projects, and their geopolitical and geoeconomic context. The authors do an admirable job of linking the ideational and empirical aspects of China's "railway diplomacy" to a host of wider issues and debates, including those concerned with the objectives and modalities of China's foreign policy, its power projection, the importance of infrastructural development in Southeast Asia and beyond, and regional politics and security.

In the process, the authors draw on a number of useful analytical tools and perspectives to explain and evaluate the mechanics of policy-making in China (such as multi-actorness and fragmentation, implementation bias, complexity of joint action, etc.) and the varying responses from across SEA (such as modalities of asymmetric power relations and the strategies of small- and medium-sized powers in that context, or the differences in elite legitimisation strategies and degree of power pluralisation in SEA countries). Their reading of the general context of China's railway exports as well as the PARN is well informed thanks to an impressive amount of interviews across Asia. It is further helped by a context-setting based in careful historicising of regional politics in SEA as well as railway-related developments in China, SEA, and globally. Together with several journal articles on China's railway exports that have appeared recently, the book reorients this research area by giving more consideration to the role of others and their agendas, objectives, negotiation strategies, and commonly underappreciated bargaining power – in sum, their agency – play in shaping China's evolving relationships with the world. The result is a nuanced and convincing analysis of the drivers, processes, and outcomes relevant to the subject.

In contrast to the simplified and tired "rails for influence" paradigm that defines most media and analytical reporting on the issue, the authors refreshingly posit China's railway exports as being primarily a developmental and profit-driven enterprise, although strategic on both sectoral and national levels, as well as having multidirectional and substantial secondary implications. In addition, contrary to the common wisdom as articulated in many media and research reports, the authors resist reading the lengthy delays and significant challenges of various types affecting some of the related projects as spelling the end for PARN, China's railway exports, or the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Theirs is an argument that a variety of structural factors are bound to combine to result in the greater connectivity and deepening of ties between SEA and China, and that given the complexity of the undertaking, improving railway connectivity inevitably proceeds in a non-linear fashion and at an often-disrupted pace.

A basic premise of the book is that railways are never about railways alone, as the authors convincingly argue the relevance of railway connectivity between China and SEA on multiple levels in both domestic and international contexts. Yet, what remains unexplored to an extent is that this is so not only in terms of their potential impact on the (geo) economic and (geo)political trajectories of those involved, but that their performance and impact are substantially dependent on whether they are integrated within broader development plans. That China often pitches and negotiates railway projects as part of larger packages within which they are combined with a multitude of accompanying projects and proposals (ranging from industrial parks and ports to "soft" connectivity aspects such as policy synchronisation in various domains) is not a coincidence. In China's own experience, infrastructure, including railways, is a departing point for, and enabler of, broader economic development

guided by a proactive state. Such development takes place only once various additional functions – for example, commercial, industrial, residential –, incentivised and enabled by a favourable policy context, are developed in conjunction with infrastructure. These then feed off each other to generate new geographical and often sectorial areas of economic activity and spur on broader economic development and growth.

Whether such a holistic approach to infrastructure development travels together with China's finances, technology, and expertise is of crucial importance to assess the prospects of railway projects. The Chinese actors often have misguided expectations that the *modus operandi* in the host countries is the same as in China. Yet, the question is in fact whether China effectively communicates its own developmental experience and the role of infrastructure within it. For governments in SEA and along the BRI, to have a comparable understanding of their own role in guiding development and the corresponding agenda and capacity is crucial for maximising the value of infrastructure projects and successfully leveraging them for broader development.

The evidence offered in the book paints a picture of decision-makers and experts who do not see much beyond the general notion of "infrastructure brings development," and do not recognise the importance of a developmental state working to a strategic, long-term developmental agenda, within which railways and infrastructure are only one – although important – component. In other words, SEA countries might exercise agency when it comes to negotiating with China, but seem insufficiently attuned to the need for the state to play a decisive role in making the most out of the potential of the infrastructure development. Yet, without such a mindset and approach, railways are unlikely to perform according to the high expectations placed on them.

Such a predicament reveals not only the limits of China's normative power internationally, but also the substantial constraints placed on the capacity of railways to serve as catalysers of broader economic and political integration between China and SEA countries. In such a context, problems in the preparation and construction phase of railways, and more broadly infrastructure projects, and eventually their suboptimal performance in generating economic benefits, are to be expected. This will likely result in more questions being asked about the end-goals of China-backed projects and in further critical assessments of their value for the host countries for years to come.

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