

that the book attempts to bring concepts of political economy (among other interdisciplinary approaches) to bear on understanding the geohistory of the Straits, the interlinking of contemporary trade and politics with historical imperialism, colonialism, and what is considered by many to be a neoimperialist impulse within globalization need deeper consideration.

Overall, the interdisciplinary perspective of this book and its geohistorical breadth are positives. They offer readers the opportunity to consider the Straits as a key zone through which the long geohistories of trade between cultures of "East" and "West" have flowed. In Freeman's hands, Earth systems processes and technology combine interactively with the vagaries of contests for political and economic control of territory and trade in a dynamic geohistory of place in which the Straits of Malacca are both gateway and gauntlet. **Key Words:** *Southeast Asia, Straits of Malacca, sea trade.*

China's Past, China's Future: Energy, Food, Environment. Vaclav Smil. New York: Routledge/Curzon, 2004. xvi and 232, maps, diags., bibliography, and index. \$36.95 paper (ISBN 0-415-31499-2).

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The series in which Vaclav Smil's volume appears, *Critical Asian Scholarship*, is based on a unique and intriguing premise: it would be of interest and value for senior scholars in subfields of Chinese Studies to revisit their corpus and critically review how well their evaluations and predictions about events and policies in China have stood the test of time. Having written some five books as well as forty articles and papers devoted to China over a twenty-eight-year period, Smil is well qualified to contribute a volume to this series.

The book consists of five chapters. In the first, Smil describes the origins of his interests in China and the four methodological underpinnings of his research. First and foremost, Smil is a skeptic when it comes to official statistics published by China. In his view, these data can only be used after they have been subjected to rigorous comparisons and tested for internal consistency. Second, any evaluation of data must be done within the framework of well-

grounded, established theory. Given his background in the natural-environmental sciences, Smil prefers theories from the hard sciences but is not averse to using theories from the behavioral or social sciences as well. Third, any conclusions derived from the data must be viewed in proper international context. For Smil, the natural comparisons for China are with Japan, Russia, South Korea, Taiwan, the U.S., and Western Europe. Finally, Smil demands that when Chinese problems are evaluated, the natural and socioeconomic regional disparities found in China must be an integral part of any analysis. In addition to insisting on this fourfold methodological framework, in the opening chapter, Smil admits to two important biases. First, he has never been enthralled by the supposed efficiencies (what he terms "naive exaltations") of traditional Chinese farming practices based on renewable resources. And, second, he has no patience for three groups: those who accept Chinese data at face value; those who rush to accept, defend, and justify any and all twists and turns in Chinese policies and practices no matter how contradictory, counterproductive, destructive, or outlandish these may be; and those who succumb to fashionable negative conclusions regarding apparent Chinese energy, food, or environmental crises.

In the second chapter, Smil traces the history of Chinese energy policy from 1949 through the start of the twenty-first century as it applies to the use and development of coal, petroleum, nuclear, and hydropower sources. He highlights rural-urban disparities in the availability and use of energy and notes the failure of small-scale projects in coal mining, hydroelectric generation, and biogas stoves, concluding that small is not always beautiful. He documents the unfulfilled expectations of early Chinese petroleum finds and the consequent Chinese participation in foreign exploration in order to secure future sources of petroleum. He warns that as Chinese incomes rise, it will be necessary to rationalize consumption so as to minimize damage done to the environment, to avoid friction with the West, and to dampen the effects of any worldwide oil supply crisis.

The third chapter, focusing on food, is a study in contrasts. In 1949, there was hope that peace and a new government would result in slowly improving food supplies. No sooner had this hope been realized than Mao's policies created a

massive artificial famine between 1958 and 1961, during which the world was unaware that some 30 million people perished. Later, when Deng Xiao-ping introduced his reforms in the 1970s that, in effect, privatized farms, food output increased and led to the creation of new Chinese dietary patterns with greater emphasis on meat, oils, and sugar. Smil expects that China will be able to feed itself without either disrupting or draining world grain markets but notes that Chinese agriculture is now dependent on access to supplies of high quality, effective, artificial nitrogen fertilizers and that future yields will be hard to predict because China has historically underreported its arable acreage—thereby exaggerating past yields.

The fourth chapter focuses on the environment. After initially contrasting traditional and Maoist attitudes toward the human–environment nexus, Smil describes the potential environmental impacts of having to feed an estimated additional 200 million citizens by 2025. Water is described as a particularly difficult resource to manage, and the Chinese affinity for megaprojects, such as the San-Men Gorge Dam, does not meet with Smil’s approval, not because there is anything inherently wrong with such projects but rather because more modestly scaled water projects would have fewer human and environmental repercussions. Smil urges the Chinese to pursue more sensible environmental policies and to avoid further ecosystem degradation by at least trying to estimate a range for the monetization of degraded or lost environmental services.

The final chapter, entitled “Looking Ahead by Looking Back,” deals with the art and science of evaluating the results of Chinese policy initiatives. Although Smil has repeatedly been correct in his evaluations and estimates of Chinese actions, he takes no pride in his accomplishments. He points out that his projections were often but the best of a set of wild guesses and frequently off the mark. He notes that he, too, was not able to correctly identify underlying causes for change in Chinese policy or economic performance. He argues that any attempt at prognosis is bound to be of limited value because, since 1949, the leaders of China have implemented successive policies that completely contradicted earlier ones. Mao Tse-tung was a prime example: he displayed both a contempt for Stalin and an admiration for his methods and

attitudes. Smil advises us to avoid constructing extreme scenarios when studying China. Similarly, he urges the Chinese to realize that the country’s fate will be determined not by its ancient heritage, its natural endowments, or the demands of its challenging environment, but by choices made by its people.

Properly speaking, this book is neither a research monograph nor a textbook. Reprints from twenty-five of Smil’s publications make up some 60 percent of the book. The remainder of the text consists of either new material or bridge statements linking the reprinted material. On the one hand, this leads to a book rich in variant textures, facts, and styles. There are passages where Smil’s writing verges on the poetic, as when he describes traditional Chinese attitudes and values regarding the natural world. There are also sections in which the writing is quite technical and demanding. On the other hand, there is much repetition. For example, the fact that Chinese statistics on coal production are inflated because they do not refer to cleaned and sorted coal but to raw fuel that contains large and varied shares of incombustible rocks and clay is found in both the chapter on energy and the one on environment; likewise, the negative impacts of deforestation are found in the two separate chapters dealing with food and environment. Occasionally, contradictions occur, such as when Smil criticizes Julian Simon for his cornucopian view of China’s population–food nexus, but then uses Simon’s valuation of human imagination in seeking solutions to environmental and development problems. In the end, however, Smil’s book must be considered a valuable addition to the literature on the geography of China, although not one that should necessarily be read from cover to cover. For novices in Chinese geography, the book is an excellent overview of the challenges and complexities involved in any study they may undertake; for senior scholars, it will serve as a valuable sourcebook to be used with pride to demonstrate the accomplishments, potential, and strengths of their field. *Key Words:* *China, environmental stress, development policies, energy, famines, food, megaprojects.*

Lots of Parking: Land Use in a Car Culture.

John A. Jakle and Keith A. Sculle. Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2004. xiii and 293 pp., preface, introduction,