

Robert Benewick and Stephanie Hemelryk Donald, *The State of China Atlas: Mapping the World's Fastest-Growing Economy*, Berkeley, Los Angeles, University of California Press, 2009, 128 pp.

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This is a 2nd edition of *The State of China Atlas*, which was first published by the University of California Press in 2005. This new edition, still as attractive as the first, has been revised and updated by R. Benewick and Stephanie Donald with the collaboration of a group of researchers mentioned in the Introduction. But the authors have been updating their data on China, as the country steadily continues its amazing rise to superpower status, since November 1999, when the China Atlas was first published in a paperback edition as a Penguin Reference book. The authors themselves have seen their fortunes rise, with R. Benewick currently a Professor Emeritus in the Department of Politics at the University of Essex, and Stephanie Donald now a Professor of Chinese Media Studies at the University of Sydney. The reference in the opening lines of the Introduction to the 2008 Beijing Olympics as already a past event is a good example of the rapid changes they have had to keep up with.

In spite of the title, this is not your traditional geographical map or atlas. Instead, using a more conventional book format, publishers provide readers in clear prose and colourful graphics a bird's-eye view of relevant data about today's China. To accomplish this, the authors have divided their text into seven main parts, described in the table of contents as "China in the World", "People in China", "The Economy", "The Environment", "Governance and Rights" and "Living in China", all illustrated with maps, with a final chapter providing further "Dates and Data". There is also a commentary of some 20 pages at the end of the text that offers readers a longer explanation for each of the maps previously discussed. The left margins of the many pages that make up six of these parts are crammed with facts and figures. They are complemented by coloured maps, graphs and charts spread on two pages, as well as by large photographs.

These parts, or chapters, cover different aspects of the People's Republic of China and illustrate facts that go from Chinese investments in the world, to population, gender gap, military power, media and religion. Some may find certain map illustrations, such as those of the Chinese Communist Party, The People's Liberation Army, the Rule of Law or Education, not only extremely useful, but also an attractive way to get a quick and practical understanding of the country today. Some, however, will argue that much of the data presented here may be gathered from the China Statistical Yearbook of 2007. Moreover, because of the rate of China's growth at least part of the leading data, such as that on the demographics of the country, could become obsolete sooner than expected. On this last point the sixth national population census to be carried out this year will soon decide whether such misgivings are exaggerated.

Apart from the above criticism it could also be argued that this kind of Atlas has already strong competition from similar virtual pages that may be found online in both English and Chinese. But that hardly detracts from the curiosity that such a publication can attract and the delight that the open "real" pages of more traditional books can provide to readers in a home or library.