

China Perspectives and *Perspectives Chinoises*

JEAN-PIERRE CABESTAN

China Perspectives is somewhat a newcomer to the market of scholarly periodicals on contemporary China. It began publication in September 1995 as an outgrowth of its sister journal, *Perspectives chinoises*, a bi-monthly published since 1992 by the French Centre for Research on Contemporary China (Centre d'études français sur la Chine contemporaine, CEFC). Created in Hong Kong in 1991 and still today based in this metropolis, the CEFC's ambition has been not only to assist French and European China specialists to conduct in-depth field research in the Chinese world, but also to help establish a bridge between these scholars and their colleagues in China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan. For that purpose, in 1994 the CEFC set up an office in Taipei, which is today located at Academia Sinica (中央研究院). Since 2000, moreover, the Centre has sponsored research fellows based in mainland China (today in both Beijing 北京 and Chengdu 成都). Hosting five permanent researchers, the Centre can every year provide scholarships to two Ph.D. candidates. A number of associate research fellows, both doctoral candidates and postdoctoral researchers, are also attached to the CEFC—the Centre hosted five such fellows in 2003.

In its first years of existence, *China Perspectives* was mainly the medium through which CEFC researchers made their fieldwork or sections

JEAN-PIERRE CABESTAN is Senior Researcher at Centre national de la recherche scientifique, Director of Centre d'études français sur la Chine contemporaine (CEFC) in Hong Kong, and chief editor of *Perspectives chinoises* and *China Perspectives*. His most recent publications include *Le système politique de la Chine populaire* (Paris: PUF, 1994); *Taiwan-Chine populaire: l'impossible réunification* (Paris: Ifri-Dunod, 1995); and *Le système politique de Taiwan* (Paris: PUF, 1999). He can be reached at <cabestan@cefc.com.hk>.

of their dissertation work known to the English-speaking world. We have gradually expanded and diversified our objectives, however, inviting an increasing number of external contributors—from Greater China, Europe, North America, Australia, or other parts of the world—to write in our columns and cover subjects not researched at the CEFC.

China Perspectives has not, however, become just another scholarly journal on contemporary China. Located in Hong Kong, being close to the research field, publishing six issues a year, and translating from and to French all the articles that appear in our English edition, we have sought (and, I hope, succeeded) to give *China Perspectives* a proper niche in the current marketplace of Chinese studies.

First, our location has helped us to publish a number of fresh field studies undertaken by researchers from China, Taiwan, or Hong Kong on the one hand, as well as those resulting from Sino-Western cooperation projects on the other.¹ This has also given us the opportunity to provide better coverage of Taiwan, Hong Kong, Macau, and Southern China—thereby helping to begin to flesh out some of the most blatant gaps in contemporary China studies. Moreover, our location has facilitated our ability to put together special issues or topics on a particular theme.²

Second, more than other scholarly journals, we strive to publish as quickly as possible (under the imperative of outside assessments) timely and in-depth articles on current developments in the Chinese world. This quick turnaround is particularly crucial when studying a country like China, which is on the fast track of development. In many instances, the release of books on contemporary China generally requires so much time

¹A good example is Jean-Philippe Béja, Michel Bonnin, Feng Xiaoshuang, and Tang Can, "How Social Strata Come to Be Formed: Social Differentiation Among the Migrant Peasants of Henan Village in Peking" (two parts), *China Perspectives*, no. 23 (May-June 1999): 28-41 and no. 24 (July-August 1999): 44-54.

²See our special issues on the WTO (no. 40, March-April 2002 and no. 41, May-June 2002); Education (no. 36, July-August 2001); and Macau (both no. 26, November-December 1999 and no. 44, November-December 2002). See also our special topics on Chinese Industry (no. 23, May-June 1999, 4-26); Falungong (no. 35, May-June 2001, 4-23); Taiwan's 2000 Presidential Election (no. 29, May-June 2000, 24-56); the China-Taiwan Dispute (no. 34, March-April 2001); and Hong Kong Legal Changes and the "Big Spender" Case (no. 22, March-April 1999).

(two years on average) that they are often outdated as soon as they become available to the public. Although a constraint for our editors, the journal's periodicity is also in that respect a strength.

Third, with academics as a priority readership target, *China Perspectives* has from the very beginning ambitioned to reach a wider readership—including journalists, diplomats, and business people. We have, therefore, been keen to publish articles that are easily accessible, avoiding as much as possible trendy—but easily *passé*—jargon, and favoring articles that are not unnecessarily long and those that are illustrated by meaningful charts, tables, and photographs. It is our goal to make the reading of, or skimming through, *China Perspectives* both an instructive and pleasant experience. This policy is a deliberate one since, in view of the multiplication of electronic publications, only an attractive journal—which does not hesitate to remain serious—will be able to survive in the coming years.³

Fourth, as the journal of a European research centre, *China Perspectives* ambitions to present as often as possible the research work made in Europe not only by local scholars but also by Chinese researchers based there; this research, moreover, does not necessarily have to be originally written in English.⁴ This priority also applies to book reviews, since many books published in the United States or in England are already reviewed in other scholarly journals; our policy, therefore, is to concentrate on the most important books published in continental Europe (France, Germany, and Scandinavia in particular).

Does it make a difference being a French or a European journal on China? In many respects, the answer is negative: there are at least two other journals on contemporary China published in Europe: *The China*

³This does not mean that *China Perspectives* does not contemplate undertaking an electronic version: such a plan will be soon implemented. In order to preserve the journal's visibility, reputation, and quality, however, *China Perspectives* will still continue to publish a paper edition.

⁴See, for instance, Yu Wenli, "Lawyers in China. A Flourishing Profession in a Rapidly Changing Society?" *China Perspectives*, no. 27 (January-February 2000): 20-34. We have also contributed to some extent to presenting the state of the field in France: cf. "Chinese Studies in France: Interview with Léon Vandermeersch," *China Perspectives*, no. 30 (July-August 2000): 56-61.

Quarterly and *China Information*. *China Perspectives* belongs, moreover, to a global community interested in the same object of research and uses—as a means of convenient communication—the same language. Nevertheless, European methodology and conceptual approaches in the social sciences can sometimes be quite different from the ones adopted by our American colleagues. Moreover, Europe's China specialists have more often emphasized qualitative rather than quantitative studies, partly because they are less able to mobilize similar financial and human resources. The handicap of such research work is that they take the risk of being founded on less solid ground than works based on a rich set of figures and data; their benefit, however, is that they can sometimes establish bridges over ill-connected disciplines and contribute to the de-compartmentalization of research projects which have become over the years too specialized.⁵ *China Perspectives* has promoted such articles and intends to expand this policy in the future in order to enrich the global dialogue on contemporary China, especially by making this discussion more cross-disciplinary and diversified.

⁵Cf. Lucien Bianco, "Fifty Years of Communism in China: The Result So Far," *China Perspectives*, no. 27 (January-February 2000): 4-19; and Marie-Claire Bergère, "Post-revolutionary Social Transformations and the Chinese People, 1949-1961," *China Perspectives*, no. 28 (March-April 2000): 4-17.