

ASIA MAIOR

THE JOURNAL OF THE ITALIAN THINK TANK ON ASIA
FOUNDED BY GIORGIO BORSA IN 1989

Vol. XXVI / 2015

The Chinese-American Race for Hegemony in Asia

Edited by
Michelguglielmo Torri
and Nicola Mocci

Asia Maior. The Journal of the Italian Think Tank on Asia founded by Giorgio Borsa in 1989.

Copyright © 2016 - Viella s.r.l. & Associazione Asia Maior

ISSN 2385-2526

ISBN 978-88-6728-699-7 (paper) ISBN 978-88-6728-700-0 (e-book pdf)

Annual journal - Vol. XXVI, 2015

This journal of the Associazione Asia Maior is published jointly by Associazione Asia Maior & CSPE - Centro Studi per i Popoli extra-europei "Cesare Bonacossa" - Università di Pavia

Editor (direttore responsabile): Michelguglielmo Torri, mg.torri@gmail.com

Junior editor: Nicola Mocci, nicolamocci@yahoo.it

Editorial Board: Axel Berkofsky, Simonetta Casci, Diego Maiorano, Nicola Mocci, Giulio Pugliese, Michelguglielmo Torri, Pierluigi Valsecchi

Book review editors: Oliviero Frattolillo, oliviero.frattolillo@uniroma3.it;

Francesca Congiu, francesca_congiu@hotmail.com

Graphic design: Nicola Mocci

Asia Maior. The Journal is an open-access journal, whose issues and single articles can be freely downloaded from the think tank webpage: www.asia-maior.org.

| | | | | |
|---------------|-------|---------|--------|---------|
| Paper version | Italy | € 50.00 | Abroad | € 65.00 |
|---------------|-------|---------|--------|---------|

| | | |
|--------------|--|--|
| Subscription | abbonamenti@viella.it | www.viella.it |
|--------------|--|--|



viella

libreria editrice

via delle Alpi, 32

I-00198 ROMA

tel. 06 84 17 758

fax 06 85 35 39 60

www.viella.it

CENTRO STUDI PER I POPOLI EXTRA-EUROPEI “CESARE BONACOSSA” - UNIVERSITÀ DI PAVIA

ASIA MAIOR

The Journal of the Italian think tank on Asia founded by Giorgio Borsa in 1989

Vol. XXVI / 2015

The Chinese-American Race for Hegemony in Asia

Edited by

Michelguglielmo Torri and Nicola Mocci

viella



ASSOCIAZIONE ASIA MAIOR

Steering Committee: Marzia Casolari (President), Enrica Garzilli, Nicola Mocci (Vice President), Riccardo Redaelli, Michelguglielmo Torri (Scientific Director)

Scientific Board: Guido Abbattista (Università di Trieste), Domenico Amirante (Università «Federico II», Napoli), Elisabetta Basile (Università «La Sapienza», Roma), Luigi Bonanate (Università di Torino), Claudio Cecchi (Università «La Sapienza», Roma), Alessandro Colombo (Università di Milano), Anton Giulio Maria de Robertis (Università di Bari), Thierry Di Costanzo (Université de Strasbourg), Max Guderzo (Università di Firenze), Franco Mazzei (Università «L'Orientale», Napoli), Giorgio Milanetti (Università «La Sapienza», Roma), Paolo Puddinu (Università di Sassari), Adriano Rossi (Università «L'Orientale», Napoli), Giuseppe Sacco (Università «Roma Tre», Roma), Guido Samarani (Università «Ca' Foscari», Venezia), Filippo Sabetti (McGill University, Montréal), Gianni Vaggi (Università di Pavia), Alberto Ventura (Università della Calabria)



CSPE - Centro Studi per i Popoli extra-europei "Cesare Bonacossa" - Università di Pavia

Steering Committee: Axel Berkofsky, Arturo Colombo, Antonio Morone, Giulia Rossolillo, Gianni Vaggi, Pierluigi Valsecchi (President), Massimo Zaccaria

Asia Maior. The Journal of the Italian Think Tank on Asia founded by Giorgio Borsa in 1989 [hereafter *Asia Maior*, *The Journal*] is the journal of Asia Maior – An Italian think tank on Asia (the legal name of which, in Italian, is: «Associazione Asia Maior»). *Asia Maior* is a peer-reviewed journal which has been classified by ANVUR, the Italian authority in charge of the evaluation of Italian higher education and research, as a class A journal in the field of Asia's history. It is possible to publish in *Asia Maior* only by invitation; authors are chosen on the basis of their previous scientific work. However, scholars with adequate experience, who are willing to publish, are encouraged to submit their candidacy, accompanied by a curriculum vitae and a paper whose subject is related to the country which the aspirant author desires to analyse in *Asia Maior*.

CONTENTS

- 7 NICOLA MOCCI & MICHELGUGLIELMO TORRI, *Foreword: Asia Maior in 2015*
- 19 FRANCESCA CONGIU, *China 2015: Implementing the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road*
- 53 BARBARA ONNIS & MARCO MILANI, *Korean peninsula 2015: One step forward and two steps back*
- 93 GIULIO PUGLIESE, *Japan 2015: Confronting East Asia's geopolitical game of go*
- 133 SALVADOR SANTINO F. REGILME JR. & CARMINA YU UNTALAN, *The Philippines 2014-2015: Domestic politics and foreign relations, a critical review*
- 157 ELENA VALDAMERI, *Indonesia 2015: The first year of the «People's President»*
- 197 STEPHAN ORTMANN, *Singapore 2011-2015: A tale of two elections*
- 213 STEFANO CALDIROLA, *Malaysia 2015: Najib Razak's hardest year*
- 229 PAVIN CHACHAVALPONGPUN, *Thailand 2015: Anxiety over the royal succession in the post coup 2014*
- 245 NICOLA MOCCI, *Cambodia 2015: 30 years of Hun Sen's government and the progressive centralization of power*
- 265 MICHELA CERIMELE, *Vietnam 2014-2015: The strengthening of relations between Vietnam and the United States*
- 297 PIETRO MASINA, *Myanmar 2015: Political turning point, economic and social challenges*
- 311 MARZIA CASOLARI, *Bangladesh 2015: The emergence of radical Islam*
- 339 MICHELGUGLIELMO TORRI & DIEGO MAIORANO, *India 2015: The uncertain record of the Modi government*
- 407 DANILA BERLOFFA, *Sri Lanka 2015: The downing of a new era?*
- 445 MARCO CORSI, *Pakistan 2015: Domestic and foreign policy challenges*
- 455 DIEGO ABENANTE, *Afghanistan 2015: The national unity government at work. Reforms, war, and the search for stability*
- 469 MATTEO FUMAGALLI, *Kyrgyzstan 2015: A country adrift*
- 483 FABIO INDEO, *Turkmenistan 2015: Existing challenges to the permanent neutrality and the strategic development of the multivector energy policy*
- 501 ANISEH BASSIRI TABRIZI & CLAUDIA CASTIGLIONI, *Iran 2013-2015: In the midst of change*
- 527 *Reviews*
- 535 *Appendix*

REVIEWS

THE OTHER SIDE OF THE CHINESE ECONOMIC MIRACLE:
THE DILEMMAS OF ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE IN THE
PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA

Barbara Onnis
Università di Cagliari
bonnis@unica.it

Daniele Brombal, *Curarsi è difficile. Curarsi è costoso. Storia, politica e istituzioni della sanità cinese, 1978-2013*, Roma, Aracne, 2015, 167 pp. (ISBN 9788854883390).

Daniele Brombal's book focuses on an extremely relevant issue – health care in the People's Republic of China (PRC). In some respects, health care can be seen as a litmus test of the ability of the Chinese ruling class to manage the numerous imbalances, determined by the economic miracle that resulted from the reformist policy initiated by Deng Xiaoping in the late 1970s. Beyond the astonishing growth rates and a widely recognized absolute poverty reduction, the economic miracle has in fact given rise to serious imbalances and social inequalities, as shown by the fact that the Gini coefficient has risen from 0,16 (urban) and 0,21 (rural) at the beginning of the reform era (1978), to 0,46 (national average) at the beginning of the new millennium, well above the recognized warning level of 0,4. Not surprisingly, these increasing imbalances and inequalities have fuelled widespread social unrest over the years. For the Chinese rulers, health care reform remains one of the many challenges ahead, which needs to be urgently addressed, being compounded by the challenges represented by both a rapidly aging population and increasing levels of pollution. Three decades ago, only 5% of the population was over 65; today, 123 million people, or 9% of the population, are over this age; and a report released by a government think tank at the end of 2013 forecasts that China will become the world's most aged society in 2030. With regards to pollution, it is one of the major causes of the increase in the number of diseases within the Chinese population.

In *Curarsi è difficile. Curarsi è costoso. Storia, politica e istituzioni della sanità cinese, 1978-2013* [«To Take care of one's health is difficult. To take care of one's health is expensive»], Brombal provides a deep and meticulous analysis of the political, economic and social changes that occurred in China since the launching of the policy of reform and opening (*gaige kaifang*), in December 1978, during the Third Plenum of the 11th Central Committee Congress of the Communist Party of China. The *gaige kaifang* included the growing political and administrative decentralization, the *de facto* privatization of social services. This, in turn, brought about the establishment of strong economic interests, triggered pervasive social and economic imbalances within the population and, more recently, caused the regime's attempt to promote social equity in order to ensure its legitimacy and stability to the regime.

This complex process is analysed in Brombal's monograph by using the evolution of the health sector as a case study. In particular, the volume describes the serious social imbalances existing in China today; the dysfunction of the health care system, the preponderance of the private interests to the detriment of the health system consumers, the central government disengagement in relation to the health sector during the 1980s and the 1990s (strictly related to the belief of the substantial unproductiveness of all social sectors), the longstanding problem represented by the lack of enforcement of central government's regulations by local authorities when these go against their interests and the general disinterest by the local authorities towards the citizens' well-being.

In 2000, all the above factors brought the World Health Organization (WHO) to rank PRC's health care system at the 144th place for its general performance (behind Burundi) and at the 188th place in terms of equity (in a general classification of 191 countries). This is in sharp contrast to the fact that, only 18 years before (at the end of the Maoist era and on the eve of the abolition of the Commune system), China had been considered an outstanding example of primary health care (p. 81).

During the 2000s, the lack of coordination and the laxity of a part of the administrative machinery in the field of health care became apparent, even outside the PRC's boundaries, with the burst of both the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) and Avian flu (or «bird flu») epidemics.

The author's choice to concentrate the analysis on the rural areas is not accidental; on the contrary, it has provided awareness that the rural areas represent the «mouthpiece» of the contradictions that affect the Chinese system today. Going beyond «the limits of the coastal cities and the big industrial centres» allows the author to observe the «raw matter/first matter by which the so-called 'Chinese miracle' was fed» (p. 16).

In writing the book, Brombal has availed himself of a rich bibliography – including scientific articles, laws and government regulations, policy directives, propaganda and advertising campaigns – both in the Chinese and Western languages. But the strong point of the book is represented by the material collected by the author in the field, thanks to his sinolog-

ical background and his language skills. Brombal has in fact carried out quite-difficult fieldwork research, especially considering that this kind of research is still viewed in China as a «sensitive activity» (p. 130). He has conducted interviews and accepted spontaneous witnesses among medical and administrative personnel, governmental officials, researchers, students of the Faculty of Medicine and employees of the pharmaceutical industry, in three Chinese provinces (Hubei, Shaanxi and Sichuan), in the autonomous region of Inner Mongolia and in the municipalities of Beijing and Shanghai. This impressive fieldwork has been part of a research project (headed by the author himself) funded by the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (in particular the general direction of development cooperation) and realized in cooperation with the PRC Ministry of Health, between 2008 and 2011.

By making extensive use of the material collected in the field, Brombal's monograph shows that, starting from the mid-1980s, different economic interest groups have acquired a remarkable capacity to influence the definition and the implementation of health policies in order to maximize their profits. This happened often with the connivance of the local authorities in charge of the health care management. In the last decade, these trends have had a profound effect on the ability of the central government to remedy the crisis in the health industry. This crisis was made more evident by the lack of access to health care by the most disadvantaged sections of the population, the widespread impoverishment due to illness and, finally, the outburst of the SARS crisis.

Brombal's book is articulated in three chapters and a conclusion. The first chapter describes the evolution of the Chinese health care system from 1949 until today, focusing on the role played by the Party/State in supplying health care service in three different phases (1949-1983, 1983-2002 and 2002-2012), each one characterized by peculiarities that pertain to the different financial and distribution methods of health care services. The second and the third chapters are structured as case studies of rural health in China, aimed at demonstrating the working hypothesis, i.e., the fact that, beginning with the mid-1980s, different economic interest groups – formed largely by doctors, hospital managers and pharmaceutical companies – have acquired a considerable capacity to hack into depth on the definition and the implementation of health policies, in order to maximize their own profits. In particular, the second chapter analyses the modes that have allowed the proliferation of private interests in the health sector through the exploitation of the loopholes, the weaknesses in the existing regulations and the ability to promote the maximization of profits. The third chapter focuses on the impact of private interests on the health policies adopted by the administration, led by Hu Jintao and Wen Jiabao. In the conclusion, the author reflects on the failure of the health policy measures adopted by the Hu Jintao-Wen Jiabao's administration in order to put an end to the distortions introduced by the neoliberal policies adopted during the 1980s and 1990s,