

INREVIEW

The Mao That Roars



BOOKS

Big Dragon: China's Future
by Daniel Burstein and Arne de Keijzer. Simon & Schuster, 1230 Sixth Avenue, New York. \$25.

Daniel Burstein and Arne de Keijzer have written the best recent book on China for the general reader. *Big Dragon* is aimed at business people and foreign-policy wonks. But the authors' lively prose and commonsense balance address all the major issues, from generational change to Tibet to nuclear proliferation and China's spiritual emptiness. They present their views with journalistic liveliness and professorial erudition.

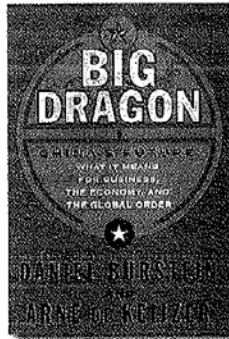
Big Dragon is strongest on foreign-policy issues. The authors examine the risk of a gratuitous second Cold War between the United States and China and dissect the weird coalition of right-wing old-but-cold warriors and left-wing human-rights warriors that threatens to bring this unnecessary conflict upon us. They argue persuasively against the policies (denying China most-favoured-nation trade status, excluding it from the World Trade Organization, upgrading relations with Taiwan, threatening it over human rights) that may provoke a new Cold War without achieving the ostensible objectives of those policies. Crucially, the authors point out that no Asian ally will support the U.S. in a confrontation with China.

Burstein and de Keijzer belittle those who consider every technological advance of the Chinese army a threat to the U.S. They argue correctly that China will be militarily weaker than the U.S. for decades to come, and quote an American naval officer who says that if he were Chinese, he would aspire to an aircraft carrier too. But they make such judgments from a position of realism and patriotism: "Our view presupposes that

America remains strong militarily, stays in Asia, and leads the world in military R&D."

Throughout the book the authors are scrupulously fair, abandoning the ethnocentrism that affects much Western writing on China: "With the high moral dudgeon characteristic of post-Cold War triumphalism, the pundits assume that Americans may rightly intervene in China's affairs; we, after all, are working for democracy and the good of the Chinese people... But when they intervene in our affairs, it is for sleazy and evil reasons, to corrupt our system and manipulate our leaders into appeasing their aggression."

They are at their best when they skewer chauvinists on both sides with their own words. For example, they quote the Chinese authors of



China Can Say No as alleging that the CIA insidiously encourages young Chinese to have sex and has enlisted television anchorwoman Connie Chung as part of an anti-Chinese conspiracy. One presumes that, with a population of 1.2 billion and a species-threatening appetite for rhinoceros horn, the Chinese need no encouragement regarding sex. The authors also have the courage to (accurately) describe *New York Times* columnist A.M. Rosenthal and his ilk, who compare China to Nazi Germany and Saddam Hussein's Iraq and publish exaggerated descriptions of Chinese militarism, as the mirror image of young Chinese chauvinists.

Occasionally, *Big Dragon* serves up Analysis Lite. It presents Lester Brown's now-discredited statistics on China's imminent inability to feed itself with the caveat that Brown probably exaggerates, rather than with the devastating ripostes that have been published in *Foreign Affairs* and elsewhere. The authors' discussion of China's rising domestic economic inequality is heavy with clichés. They count 10,000 elected officials in China, whereas the correct number is over 4 million. They have Zhu Rongji being elevated to premier in 1997, whereas that promotion occurred in March this year.

At the core of *Big Dragon* lies a thoughtful balance of the arguments of the China bulls and China bears. Burstein and de Keijzer state both cases eloquently, reject the extreme views and come out as Cautious Bulls. Along the way, they list China's burdens: For example, the number of disabled people in China is greater than the population of France; by 2025 China will have as many people over 60 as the rest of the world; and while an American on average is supported by four fertile acres of land, a Chinese has to live off the produce of a farm the size of a typical American backyard. China also has seven of the world's 10 most polluted cities.

Big Dragon loses its footing seriously only once, in the section on Hong Kong where the authors succumb

Jungle Graduate

Daniel Burstein, co-author of *Big Dragon*, has a more colourful background than most nonfiction writers. In 1978, while serving as editor of the Chicago-based American Communist Party newspaper, *The Call*, he led a delegation of journalists on an inspection tour of Cambodia, then controlled by the Khmer Rouge.

In an article in the *New York Times*, he later asserted that news accounts of mass genocide in Cambodia were fabrications that had found their way into U.S. newspapers.

In 1981, Burstein and journalist-producer Craig Buck trekked through the jungles of western Cambodia and witnessed fighting be-



Daniel Burstein.

tween Khmer Rouge guerrillas and the Vietnamese. In 1996, they turned this experience into a novel, *Joss*.

Today Burstein is senior adviser at Blackstone Group, a private investment bank in New York. He has also advised Sony, Toyota, Sun Microsystems and Microsoft.

Burstein is also the author of *Yen! Japan's New Financial Empire and its Threat to America* (1989) and *Turning the Tables: A Machiavellian Strategy for Dealing with Japan* (1992). ■

to paranoia. For instance, they take at face value the argument that the *South China Morning Post's* decision to employ a senior journalist from China as a consultant implies a decision to kowtow to Beijing's political sensitivities. They ignore the fact that the *Post's* indignant China critic and chief China correspondent, Willy Wo-Lap Lam, remains at his post, fiery as ever. It is simply untrue that Hong Kong journalism has been repressed, and there is no logic to the authors' view that Chinese companies' investments in Hong Kong firms are politically insidious. On the con-

trary, it would be surprising and disturbing if Chinese companies did *not* invest in Hong Kong companies.

The authors conclude by proffering a policy of Dynamic Engagement, which entails "understanding that one of the great, epochal positive events of world history is taking place in China and that we, in the United States, wish to be part of it, support it, contribute to it, and benefit from it." This is the ultimate rebuff to those newly minted human-rights advocates who worshipped China during the Cultural Revolution—one of the most hid-

eous events in a century of hideous events—and who have become great enemies of China now that, for the first time in centuries, the Chinese have enough to eat, have the *de facto* right to say just about anything they want to say, and the *de jure* right to sue their government.

Everyone from China specialists to novices should read this book.

■ William H. Overholt

William H. Overholt is head of research for Bank Boston's Asian business and author of *The Rise of China*.
