



## How China Escaped the Poverty Trap (Cornell Studies in Political Economy)

By Yuen Yuen Ang

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Before markets opened in 1978, China was an impoverished planned economy governed by a Maoist bureaucracy. In just three decades it evolved into the world's second-largest economy and is today guided by highly entrepreneurial bureaucrats. In *How China Escaped the Poverty Trap*, Yuen Yuen Ang explains this astonishing metamorphosis. Rather than insist that either strong institutions of good governance foster markets or that growth enables good governance, Ang lays out a new, dynamic framework for understanding development broadly. Successful development, she contends, is a coevolutionary process in which markets and governments mutually adapt.

By mapping this coevolution, Ang reveals a startling conclusion: poor and weak countries can escape the poverty trap by first harnessing weak institutions—features that defy norms of good governance—to build markets. Further, she stresses that adaptive processes, though essential for development, do not automatically occur. Highlighting three universal roadblocks to adaptation, Ang identifies how Chinese reformers crafted enabling conditions for effective improvisation.

*How China Escaped the Poverty Trap* offers the most complete synthesis to date of the numerous interacting forces that have shaped China's dramatic makeover and the problems it faces today. Looking beyond China, Ang also traces the coevolutionary sequence of development in late medieval Europe, antebellum United States, and contemporary Nigeria, and finds surprising parallels among these otherwise disparate cases. Indispensable to all who care about development, this groundbreaking book challenges the convention of linear thinking and points to an alternative path out of poverty traps.

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### Editorial Review

Review

#### WINNER OF THE 2017 PETER KATZENSTEIN BOOK PRIZE

"Yuen Yuen Ang offers a revisionist theoretical framework that grapples with complexities of institutional adaptation alongside detailed analyses of sub-national variation in development outcomes... her systematic engagement with diverse literatures circumvents disagreement over which came first, democracy or development, to make a field-shifting move to non-linear complex processes... Anyone concerned with institutions, development, or the role of China in the world, should read this elegantly written book."

-- Peter Katzenstein Book Prize Committee, for "best book in international relations, comparative politics, or political economy."

"The first takeaway of the book, that a poor country can harness the institutions they have and get development going is a liberating message... This provocative message challenges our prevailing practice of assessing a country's institutions by their distance from the global best practice... The second part of the book is equally thought provoking. While adaptive approaches to development have become new buzzwords, Yuen Yuen's work brings rigor to this conversation... this analytical lens has enormous potential for thinking through the adaptive challenge, whether at the national level, subnational level or sectoral level."

--Yongmei Zhou (Director of the World Development Report 2017), *World Bank Development Blog*

*How China Escaped the Poverty Trap*... is an original and insightful take on what is perhaps the biggest development puzzle of my lifetime... Her unconventional insight is that the first challenge of development is to harness 'weak/wrong/bad' institutions to create markets... China wanted to begin a process of "adaptation" and for that they needed to create conditions conducive to "directed improvisation."... Professor Ang is making important advances in understanding how development can be made possible in her approach to Complexity and Development 2.0.

-- Lant Pritchett (Harvard Kennedy School), State Capability Blog

"Ang provides specialists and nonspecialists alike with a fresh inside-the-black-box account of how the Chinese state--from the center to the periphery, across time and space--has actually practiced (not merely preached) innovation, problem solving, and effective implementation... Future studies of bureaucratic life in China and elsewhere must reckon seriously with Ang's account; she has set an admirably high bar and capably filled a conspicuous scholarly vacuum. It is encouraging that the development policy community is also taking note... Her book is compelling, important, and deserving of a wide audience."

-- Michael Woolcock (World Bank), *Governance*

"Development economists have struggled to explain the extraordinary growth of the state-led Chinese economy despite apparent violations of the usual 'micro rules.' Yuen Yuen Ang unpacks the process with convincing detail, explaining the underlying logic of a story so apparently different from the textbook models. Are there lessons here for today's low-income economies? *How China Escaped the Poverty Trap* is worth reading with that in mind."—Nancy Birdsall, President, Center for Global Development

"Sometimes the best way to answer a difficult question is to ask a different question. In this book, instead of asking the usual question—How has China developed despite having low-quality institutions?—Yuen Yuen Ang asks how China has used those institutions to kick-start economic development, which then set off a mutually reinforcing cycle between institutional development and economic development. This innovative and sophisticated book is an outstanding contribution not only to the study of Chinese economic development but also to the long-running debate on the role of institutions in economic development."—Ha-Joon Chang, University of Cambridge, author of *Kicking Away the Ladder* and *Economics*

"In this major new contribution, Yuen Yuen Ang offers a fresh synthetic explanation for the stunning economic transformation of China in recent decades. She shows how China experienced sustained rapid economic development by transforming weak institutions in ways that strengthened states and markets simultaneously. This book points toward a potential model of growth for other countries and is a must-read for all scholars interested in explaining development trajectories in the Global South."—James Mahoney, Northwestern University, coauthor of *Advances in Comparative-Historical Analysis*

"*How China Escaped the Poverty Trap* addresses an enduring question in political economy: Why are some nations rich and others poor? This core question is explored through a secondary question about the sequential relationship between effective governance and economic growth: Did growth follow or result from state capacity? Yuen Yuen Ang states that the government and economy coevolved, meaning they adapted to each other. She identifies a three-step sequence to this coevolutionary process and shows, surprisingly, that the first step of development is actually to build markets with 'weak' institutions, that is, features inconsistent with norms of good governance. Ang crafts this original and compelling argument using a rich base of fieldwork, including more than three hundred interviews that introduce readers to real voices on the ground."—Kellee S. Tsai, Hong Kong University of Science & Technology and Johns Hopkins University, author of *Capitalism without Democracy*

"Future studies of bureaucratic life in China and elsewhere must reckon seriously with Ang's account; she has set an admirably high bar and capably filled a conspicuous scholarly vacuum. It is encouraging that the development policy community is also taking note... As an opening statement, her book is compelling, important, and deserving of a wide audience."—Michael Woolock (World Bank), *Governance*, (July 2017)

"The first takeaway of the book, that a poor country can harness the institutions they have and get

development going is a liberating message... This provocative message challenges our prevailing practice of assessing a country's institutions by their distance from the global best practice... The second part of the book is equally thought provoking. While adaptive approaches to development have become new buzzwords, Yuen Yuen's work brings rigor to this conversation... this analytical lens has enormous potential for thinking through the adaptive challenge, whether at the national level, subnational level or sectoral level."—Yongmei Zhou, The World Bank (January 2017)

"China's transformation cannot be attributed to a single cause; rather, it arose from a contingent, interactive process—Ang calls it 'directed improvisation.' She formalizes this insight by using a novel analytic method that she terms 'coevolutionary narrative,' which has the potential to influence future studies of institutional and economic change beyond China."—Andrew J. Nathan, Foreign Affairs (March/April 2017)

"[This book] investigates why some nations succeed and overcome their disadvantages, focusing on China's rise from a communist political economy to a middle-income, capitalist power since market reforms began in 1978. [Ang] discusses how development actually happens; mapping coevolution; directed improvisation; balancing variety and uniformity; franchising the bureaucracy; moving from building to preserving markets; connecting first movers and laggards; and how development actually happened beyond China."—Journal of Economic Literature (March 2017)

"The book combines methodological rigour, employing a complexity perspective hitherto unknown in standard political economy analyses... with rich original empirical data drawn from more than 400 interviews... This is an important book with a bold thesis that, at its most ambitious, demands a rethinking of the history and evolution of capitalism... In terms of policy implications, Ang's thesis has the potential to upend much that the global development establishment holds dear."—Linda Lim, The Straits Times (January 2017)

#### About the Author

Yuen Yuen Ang is Associate Professor of Political Science at the University of Michigan. She received her Ph.D. from Stanford University. Before joining Michigan, she was Assistant Professor of International and Public Affairs at Columbia University. She is winner of the Peter Katzenstein Book Prize, the GDN & Gates Foundation international essay prize on the Future of Development, the Eldersveld Prize for Outstanding Research (awarded by the University of Michigan), and two Early Career Fellowships from American Council of Learned Societies. Learn more at [sites.lsa.umich.edu/yy-ang/](http://sites.lsa.umich.edu/yy-ang/).

## Users Review

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Exactly why? Because this *How China Escaped the Poverty Trap* (Cornell Studies in Political Economy) is an unordinary book that the inside of the book waiting for you to snap that but latter it will jolt you with the secret it inside. Reading this book alongside it was fantastic author who else write the book in such wonderful way makes the content interior easier to understand, entertaining way but still convey the meaning entirely. So , it is good for you for not hesitating having this any longer or you going to regret it. This unique book will give you a lot of positive aspects than the other book get such as help improving your expertise and your critical thinking method. So , still want to hold off having that book? If I were you I will go to the e-book store hurriedly.

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