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The Cambridge Confucian and the hungry general

'The Miracle' is a comprehensive study of how a coterie of political and business leaders dragged Asia from abject poverty to economic dynamism

BY LE-MIN LIM
BLOOMBERG

Deng Xiaoping (鄧小平), Lee Kuan Yew (李光耀) and Park Chung Hee make for an improbable trio.

One was a Communist who loved French wine and spurned *Das Kapital*. Another was a Cambridge-educated lawyer who ruled with Confucian values. The third, more taciturn, was a former army major-general who mixed rice with cheap barley to stay mindful of his people's hunger.

Yet all three Asian leaders had something remarkable in common — an unwavering pragmatism, writes Michael Schuman in *The Miracle*, a comprehensive study of how a coterie of political and business leaders dragged Asia from abject poverty in the 1950s to economic dynamism today.

"By nature and experience, we were not enamored of theories," Schuman cites Lee as saying. "What we were interested in were real solutions to our problems and not to prove someone's theory right or wrong."

A writer for *Time* magazine, Schuman has spent 13 years in the region and won an Overseas Press Club Award as part of a *Wall Street Journal* team covering the 1997-1998 Asian economic crisis. He draws on interviews with some four dozen political and business leaders — including Lee, the late South Korea President Kim Dae Jung and Infosys Technologies Ltd co-founder N.R. Narayana Murthy — to trace the ascent of nine nations and a dozen industries over some five decades.

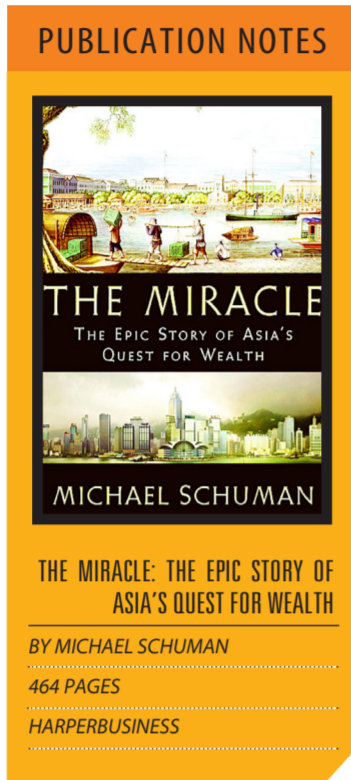
Taking us into boardrooms, cabinet meetings and factories, Schuman shows how the Asian model of growth might become a template for Africa and other emerging countries — and how it might teach developed nations now grappling with financial crisis some lessons about state intervention in the economy.

Schuman's prose meanders at times, and he has an annoying habit of repeating the word *Miracle* (with a capital M) to describe Asian economic growth. Yet he also has an eye for nuance, understands the region and seeds the book with first-hand material, presenting strong portraits of men who played the odds and bent fate to their wills.

South Korea's Park, for example, fought the parliament in the late 1960s to fund an expressway linking the cities of Seoul and Busan, convinced it would spur commerce. In Singapore, Lee invited multinational companies to set up shop on the island state, defying critics who said the foreigners were out to exploit the resources and labor of poor countries.

China's Deng, thrice purged by his own party for capitalist leanings, set up zones with liberal economic rules that would pave the way for the nation's current exponential growth.

Asia got its first lift out of poverty by selling cut-priced radios, dolls and plastic knick-knacks to Europe and the US in the 1950s. By the 1980s, companies



like Sony Corp had become synonymous with cool gadgetry. The secret behind this transformation lies in a mix of government aid, grit and favorable trade conditions, Schuman writes.

In Japan, the Ministry of International Trade and Industry, or MITI, restricted foreign investment to give local companies time to grow and take on overseas rivals, he says. International Business Machines Corp, for example, was repeatedly thwarted when it sought to expand in Japan, pitting executives at the Armonk, New York-based company against one of MITI's top bureaucrats, Shigeru Sahashi, Schuman writes.

When IBM refused to give Japanese companies access to its computer patents, Sahashi issued a blunt warning. "If you don't agree to our conditions, we will take any measures necessary to deter IBM from operating in Japan," he said. IBM capitulated, Schuman writes.

IBM spokeswoman Harriet Ip declined to comment on the book. Government intervention by largely authoritarian regimes is the one constant in almost every economy profiled here. Hong Kong is the odd one out: Its laissez-faire capitalism and hands-off government bred entrepreneurs like billionaire Li Ka-shing (李嘉誠).

Schuman acknowledges that Asia's hierarchical structure, while conducive to growth, foments corruption and nepotism, as evinced by Indonesia under former president Suharto. Asia also relies too much on exports, a weakness exposed when the credit crisis choked new orders from the US and Europe.

If the Asian model were superior, as Schuman implies, the region would surely have discouraged excessive saving and done more to develop its domestic markets. That, perhaps, is the subject for another book.

PHOTOS: TAIPEI TIMES



Does Bing have the search engine bling to topple Google?

In June Microsoft released a new search engine named Bing, which is available in a beta version for Taiwan. Already, reports are suggesting that Google might be running scared — but does Bing really have the search engine bling to topple the titanic Google?

It strikes me as quite obvious that if Google has made all of its money from a search engine, why can't others? Why aren't there more competing search engines from huge companies like Microsoft, Apple or Sony? The main problem is what people perceive as your core competence these days, and only Google seems to be synonymous with search. To be fair, this reputation evolved very quickly: before Google there were AltaVista, Lycos, WebCrawler, Yahoo, Excite, Hotbot — just to name but a few — but Google completely destroyed the competition in less than two years by being able to get more relevant search results for its users using a more advanced search algorithm. Before long, word of mouth had almost everyone using Google.

However, if Bing were actually better than Google, one would assume that in the long run, after a period of competition, Bing would evolve as the dominant search site, exactly as Google did. Of course, history is littered with examples of better technologies that failed to prevail: Beta Max vs VHS, Qwerty vs Dvorak, Amiga vs PC. The fact is, now that the majority of people are Net savvy and search engines are no longer the exclusive tools of geeks, being better does not automatically mean commercial success. Things like advertising, strategic marketing and management play just as heavy a role as the product itself.

In this respect, Google employed a shrewd business plan: It didn't spread

Microsoft's new search engine is similar to Google's, but it must employ strong marketing if it wants challenge its competitor's dominance

BY GARETH MURFIN
CONTRIBUTING REPORTER

itself too thin in its early stages by claiming to be anything other than a search engine. It only began to expand once it had literally become synonymous with search — to the extent that "google" has replaced "search" in our vocabulary.

However, whereas "google it" can now be used without further explanation, "bing it" is still meaningless. Google became involved with search in its infancy, back in the days it was almost impossible to see an ad for a search engine, so word of mouth was the best advertisement and being known as the "search guys" worked. Since then times have changed, people are hungry for more and there is room for more search engines — but people need a reason to swap. Firefox, for example, offered a better browsing experience than Internet Explorer.

Marketing is almost certainly going to play a big role in whether or not Bing succeeds. Nowadays, Google spends around US\$25 million on advertising per year. Microsoft is planning to spend up to US\$100 million to promote Bing, according to reports.

So what makes Bing any different? It appears to be almost identical to Google in every way, inspired by Google's years of research into sparse user interfaces. The main visual difference is a background image that changes daily (I personally find that Bing's background and logo make it look less professional than Google, but that doesn't really matter if it's more competent).

Apart from different backgrounds

and logos, the most obvious distinction is the way Microsoft is marketing Bing as a "decision engine." This strategy is obviously Bing's unique selling point, as articulated by the catchphrase: "When it comes to decisions that matter, Bing & Decide." But aggressive marketing and buzzwords like "decision engine" and "Bing & Decide" do not a better browser make.

On Bing's Web site (I selected US because the site was not fully functional in Taiwan) I browsed a description of the engine explaining its merits. After reading the blurb, I was convinced that Bing was somehow optimized for certain things. One statement in particular — "Bing digs deep into airline Web sites so you don't have to" — piqued my interest.

To compare Bing with Google, I googled "Taipei to London flights" in both search engines. The two sites offered almost identical hits. However, Google provided a slightly more convenient way to compare prices, as Bing's results weren't integrated with Expedia and other online ticket sellers as Google's were. Nonetheless, the fact that Bing was able to almost match Google's results was highly impressive, considering it has been going for less than two months — it also makes me question just where it gets its data, and what its algorithm does. Out of curiosity, I tried Yahoo, which produced results similar to both Bing's and Google's, as did Webcrawler and AltaVista — it's astonishing just how similar

search engines actually are.

Next I tried searching for a product. Here Bing slightly outdid all its competitors, including Google, by bringing up a bar on the left-hand side that displayed categories relevant to the product, such as troubleshooting, reviews, etc. It also brought up a handy review of the product in the form of graphics. This may be more efficient than Google, especially for those who are fairly new to using search engines. After exploring Bing further, I found a pretty capable video site (www.bing.com/videos) where users can view previews of videos by running the mouse over them.

Bing is certainly a capable search engine — if it had been available in its current form five years ago, it would probably be where Google is now — but its merits may not be uncovered for a while. It's clear that breaking into the search engine market is tough; most existing search engines produce results of comparable quality, so it would appear that reputation is key. Buzzwords like "decision engine" and novel ways to search might not help. Take, for instance, the launch of a revolutionary new "computational knowledge engine" called Wolfram Alpha released within the last few months but still completely unheard of. Likewise, "Google Squared," an application launched this summer that shows search results in spreadsheet form, remains largely unknown.

Over the coming months, I hope to see more from Bing. The capacity to predict prices, allowing users to wait for cheaper airline tickets, for example, would really set it apart from the rest. But for now, I will be alternating between Google and Bing until I decide which, if either, is better.

Gareth Murfin is a freelance applications developer and technology consultant: www.garethmurfin.co.uk

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Who are these people? Well, that depends

Dan Chaon manages to bridge the gap between literary and pulp fiction with a clever, insinuating book equally satisfying to fans of either genre

BY JANET MASLIN

NY TIMES NEWS SERVICE, NEW YORK

Dan Chaon's strange, stunning new novel, *Await Your Reply*, is both a ghost story and a valentine. That combination isn't as peculiar as it sounds. At the end of a book that makes spine-tingling use of shifting, elusive identities, Chaon takes time to applaud some of the authors whose great, spooky stories have haunted his own memories. His list includes not only the usual suspects (Ray Bradbury, Stephen King, J.R.R. Tolkien, Shirley Jackson) but also relatively overlooked popular authors like Ira Levin and Thomas Tryon. Flash back to *The Other*, by Tryon, for a classic tale of scary twins.

Await Your Reply has scary twins too. But that device is just for starters. In a book that makes wittily exaggerated use of conventional thriller tricks, Chaon is not content to start his story with one reader-grabbing opener; he provides three. The

first chapter presents Ryan, a boy whose father is assuring him that he, Ryan, is not going to bleed to death even though Ryan's hand has just been severed. This is quickly followed by a second piquant setup: "A few days after Lucy graduated from high school, she and George Orson left town in the middle of the night."

Third up: A twin, Miles Cheshire, en route to find his brother, Hayden, near the Arctic circle. "Welcome to Tsigehchi!" says a none-too-welcoming local sign.

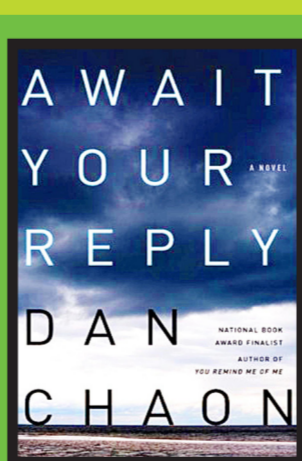
Chaon is in no hurry to connect these dots and explain what the three opening scenes have to do with one another. But he is not stalling; he's not generating arbitrary suspense by withholding information, though thriller writers routinely resort to that lazy method. The pieces of this plot will all fall into place eventually, and there will be shock value as their mysteries unravel. But the real pleasure in reading Chaon is less in finding

out where he's headed than in savoring what he accomplishes along the way.

Suffice it to say that nobody in *Await Your Reply* is exactly who he or she first appears to be. And nobody is a complete entity, either; perhaps the single most horrific plot motif here is that in a world where identities can be created, hacked into, shed or altered with apparent ease, the full and true self is an endangered species. This book takes its title from a computer spam message that uses *Await Your Reply* to lure unwitting fraud victims with the promise of a financial windfall from Ivory Coast. The mordant joke here is that the message's recipient is even more unscrupulous than its sender.

The recipient is Jay Kozelek, the father of teenage Ryan, even though Jay has only lately told Ryan that he is his father and not his uncle. "You trust me, don't you?" Ryan asks Jay, setting up the kind of ambiguous exchange

PUBLICATION NOTES



AWAIT YOUR REPLY
BY DAN CHAON
324 PAGES
BALLANTINE BOOKS

in which Chaon so evidently delights. "Sure I do," Jay answers. "You're my son, right?" Sure.

Jay and Ryan play out an homage of sorts to Patricia Highsmith's Mr Ripley, busily swindling and creating the fake personae that are clones or avatars of the video-game-savvy Jay. Citing a poem about the road not traveled by that guy "David Frost," Jay wonders why the poem's narrator had to make a choice. "How come you can't travel both?" Jay asks about the divergent roads. "That seemed really unfair to me."

Meanwhile, the runaway Lucy seems to be on more solid ground. She has escaped a small Ohio town with George Orson, her Maserati-driving history teacher, who never quite seemed to be the person he claimed to be. George would tell his students that American history was full of lies, "and he paused over the word 'lies' as if he liked the taste of it."

George has spirited Lucy off to Nebraska, to the musty motel with a lighthouse motif that he describes as his mother's home. George also says that the place was once situated lakeside, but all Lucy can see is dust where the lake used to be. There is a body of water in evidence, but it's on the television set that conveniently plays *Rebecca*, with Mrs Danvers' sinister sweet talk about the sea, in a handy Hitchcock-Du Maurier reference. No wonder Lucy's a little nervous.

Then there's the Arctic piece of this puzzle: Miles' search for the lost Hayden, his troubled and alarming twin brother. When Hayden began to refer to "a hodgepodge of crypto-archaeology and numerology, holomorphy and brane cosmology, past-life regression and conspiracy-theory paranoia" as "my work," Miles realized that he needed to be his brother's keeper. But Hayden, who is even sneakier than the book's other

secretive characters, which is saying quite a lot, would much rather bait Miles than let Miles find him.

Chaon takes his sweet time — and if you're lucky, he'll take some of yours — in aligning the elements of his story so that clarity can begin to emerge. Like Kate Atkinson, who is not officially referenced here but might as well be, he's particularly good at scrambling timelines in ways that conceal the truth, and in creating quick, occasional *deja vu* moments that show readers how certain events are connected.

So Chaon succeeds in both creating suspense and making it pay off, but *Await Your Reply* also does something even better. Like the finest of his storytelling heroes, Chaon manages to bridge the gap between literary and pulp fiction with a clever, insinuating book equally satisfying to fans of either genre. He does travel two roads, even though that guy David Frost said it wasn't possible.