

A Survey of Some Graphical Socioeconomic Atlases

A friend recently loaned me several socioeconomic atlases filled with multi-colored graphical charts, and maps showing the varying demographic and economic characteristics of different countries and areas. He asked me to try to briefly summarize their strengths and weaknesses. Ah, yet another challenge that I am not really up to! But, anyway, here's my response to him and to everybody.

There are in fact quite a number of very valuable socioeconomic atlases available now which are indeed very informative and very useful. They include these 4 atlases which I will be commenting on specifically:

- *World Bank Atlas*, (Washington, D.C.: The World Bank, 2004)
- *Third World Atlas*, 2nd edition, ed. by Alan Thomas, et al., (Washington, D.C.: Taylor & Francis, 1994).
- *Global Inc.: An Atlas of the Multinational Corporation*, by Medard Gabel & Henry Bruner, (NY: New Press/W.W. Norton, 2003).
- *The State of China Atlas*, revised and updated, by Robert Benewick & Stephanie Hemelryk Donald, (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 2009).

Of course there are many general atlases which also include some graphical charts and socioeconomic maps along with their numerous standard geographical maps. Some of these actually rival the specialized atlases listed above in certain limited areas. These include atlases published by the National Geographic Society, Rand McNally, and the *Collins World Atlas, Complete Edition* (2008).

Then too, there are now a number of "satellite atlases" of the world, which consist of many photographs taken from space. These photos are not only fascinating and filled with valuable (though generally hard to appraise) information, but they are also often quite beautiful. A good example is the *Satellite Atlas of the World*, (NY: Oxford University Press, 2004). For a few special types of investigations these satellite atlases (and their Internet equivalent) may be the most useful of all. There are now also some specialized satellite atlases, including the following which focuses on global climate change specifically:

- *The Atlas of Global Change*, (NY: Macmillan/Simon & Schuster, 1998).

But even with regard to something as inherently "geographical" as climate change, charts and graphs are needed as well as satellite photos. The *Collins World Atlas*, for example, has on p. 13 a map showing the projected increase in average temperatures in different areas of the world by the last decade of the 21st century. (The upper latitudes of the Northern Hemisphere, and the region north of the Arctic Circle in particular, are destined for quite a phenomenal blast of heat!) This is the sort of information that can be well conveyed graphically, but which no individual photograph can possibly accomplish.

What about the Internet? Are there now better sources of graphical socioeconomic information there now than you can find in any atlases? I'm still continuing my investigations about this, and don't yet have a sufficient grasp of the general situation.

One great advantage of the Internet versus a possibly quite expensive atlas that you have to buy, is that the Internet is much more frequently updated, and by many different agencies, organizations and individuals. It is much easier to post a new updated chart showing one particular fact than it is to keep updating and reissuing entire books. But on the Internet the information is widely scattered and not always very trustworthy.

There are several great problems with statistics in general. Among these are:

1. Statistics tend to be unreliable, to one degree or another. It is not in the interest of governments, especially bourgeois governments where the few rule over the many, to be completely honest about unemployment rates, inflation rates, the real income of the working class, the real quality of education, and so many other things. Even where the bourgeoisie is not consciously lying about these things, they are still presenting the statistics from their own twisted point of view. Moreover, in some cases statistics are still gathered haphazardly and are little more than rough estimates.
2. The very specific statistics that you really want and need are often not readily available (and may not even be gathered at all). For example, how much of the actual wealth produced by the workers in the U.S. actually goes to the working class? This is hard to determine precisely, because (for one thing) official income statistics lump workers and CEO's all together! Even harder to determine is the actual amount of surplus value which is generated by the working class each year, and how precisely it all gets parceled out. The bourgeoisie does not *think* in terms of a Marxist political-economic category like this, and *does not even try* to directly gather such statistics.
3. What we almost always want are *up-to-date* statistics, and most of the time the statistics which are actually available are not at all up to date. This is especially true of those which are found in books published possibly several years ago or more.

When we look at these graphical socioeconomic atlases we are looking at statistics which are presented in a way that is often much easier to grasp than long boring tables of numbers from which these pretty charts are constructed. But making these statistics easier to grasp in no way changes the fact that they tend to be somewhat unreliable, sometimes not really the statistics we actually want, and generally not at all fully up to date. These are things we have to always keep in mind when looking at statistics gathered by the class enemy, even when they are published in nice graphical books.

A. *World Bank Atlas*, (Washington, D.C.: The World Bank, 2004)

This atlas—not surprisingly—uses all sorts of bourgeois euphemisms, such as “developing countries” when they are referring to poor, oppressed and exploited (Third World) countries. Though it does have much useful information in it, care must be taken. Some specific comments:

1. The map on p. 7 shows the [Gross National Income](#) per capita for each country. First, this suffers from the usual bourgeois anti-class perspective of lumping all classes together. *We* want to know the incomes of working people and the capitalists separately! Second, the categories are apparently arbitrarily chosen: “Low income countries” are those with an average GNI of \$765/year or less. Personally, I’d say that a country where the average GNI is say five times that (\$3825/year) is also pretty damned poor! “Lower-middle-income” countries are said to be those with a GNI range of \$766 to \$3,035. That’s quite a big jump to be in just one range. Probably, if you first removed the income of the small upper classes from the picture, and then set up more reasonable categories, you would find that the great majority of all the countries of the world should be considered either desperately poor, very poor, or poor. In other words, this graphic is really one big distortion, one big lie, the way it is presented here.
2. The map on p. 9 shows the [Age Dependency Ratios](#) for each country. (I.e. the ratio of those younger than 15 or older than 65 to the “working age” population.) This is an interesting map, of a sort I haven’t seen before. However, it doesn’t bring out the supposed main topic here very well, “the world’s growing population”. The map showing [Total Fertility Rates](#) (on p. 23) or even a map showing the current percentage population growth rates (not included in this atlas) would be better in this regard. ADR stats combine several different phenomena: birth rates and population growth *plus* population aging.
3. The map on p. 11, Life Expectancy at Birth (2002) brings out very well the especially horrible situation in sub-Saharan Africa, even compared to most of the rest of the Third World.
4. The map on p. 15, percent of the population living on less than \$1/day (or \$1.08/day in 1993 prices) in each country is very important. But again it sets the poverty standard way too low! (Even so, an estimated 1.2 billion people were living below that absurdly low poverty line!) This also shows that the prominent claim next to this map that “The share of people in developing countries living on less than \$1/day fell from 40 percent in 1981 to 21 percent in 2001” is a ridiculous distortion of reality. One might just as well argue that capitalism is really wonderful because virtually everybody in the world now makes at least 10 cents/day! It seems to me that even \$3/day or \$4/day still leaves people in very serious poverty. Ideally there would be several maps in a series here, showing the percent of the population living below each of these levels. The fact that the World Bank sets the poverty level so ridiculously low shows once again how they are putting a bourgeois spin on things.

5. The phenomenon of setting the bar excessively low appears again with the education map on p. 17, primary school completion rates. That is useful information, but so would be high school completion rates and college completion rates.
6. The health statistics maps, such as the “Under-five mortality rate” serve to show the main overall conclusions in this atlas: a) that the Third World countries are much worse off than the rich (imperialist) countries; and b) that even within the Third World, Africa is much worse off than the rest.
7. There are many interesting facts in this atlas, including things such as that food production for decades has been expanding faster than population growth throughout the world (except for sub-Saharan Africa). This shoots down the still common Malthusian assumptions.
8. The thing that first pops out on the [GDP](#) growth rates map (p. 35) is the fact that over the period 1990-2003 Russia, Ukraine, Venezuela, Saudi Arabia, Nepal, and a number of other countries (especially in Africa), all had *negative* economic “growth”! The collapse of the Soviet Union explains Russia and Ukraine, of course. The areas of most rapid economic growth during this period are—as expected—China, India and East Asia (other than Japan, the Philippines & N. Korea). This is the sort of information that we mostly already knew, but which presentation in graphic format gives good emphasis to.
9. The map on p. 37 about the percentage of GDP which consists of services (rather than manufacturing, mining, and agriculture) is very interesting. While the World Bank thinks that the higher level of services in the economy is a mark of advanced capitalism, the most vibrant capitalist country today (China) has only about 1/3 of its GDP in the form of services instead of the 2/3 (or so) in the U.S. and Western Europe. (Despite what the bourgeoisie thinks, one of the biggest parts of the services “industry”—financial services—is actually mostly parasitic, and not a positive thing!)
10. The Gross Capital Formation map (p. 39) shows one of the reasons that China is zooming ahead (in GDP) so fast, even compared to India. But this map and accompanying charts also bring up questions that are not fully answered here, such as: How much of China’s gross capital formation is due to [foreign direct investment \(FDI\)](#), and how much is due to local capital generation? And what are the trends in this ratio? There is one chart (on p. 38) that shows that for East Asia & the Pacific as a whole domestic savings far exceed FDI, but I’d like to know more.

This brings out a major criticism of these sorts of graphic atlases as a whole: They are good high-level summaries of things, but if you want to dig further you need access to the statistical tables which were used in constructing the graphics.

Interestingly, South Asia is more dependent *percentage-wise* on FDI for its growth than China is; that is, it is in more of a comprador situation in that respect. (The total *volume* of FDI in China, however, is much greater than in India, as is shown in a chart on p. 46.)

11. The map on p. 45, “Fixed line and mobile phone subscribers”, is misleading. It is true that China is way behind the U.S. and Western Europe in land lines, but this actually shows that China is leapfrogging the old technology in this regard. Probably a newer edition of this book would recognize this particular fact.) In general, China is rapidly expanding its infrastructure, something which is not at all evident in this section of the atlas.

12. The map on p. 51 is entitled “Indebtedness, 2002”. Since it is in the section focusing on “external debt” of countries, it should have been explicitly labeled “External Indebtedness” if that is what it actually is. Sometimes the difference between external and internal debt is important, and sometimes it isn’t. In the case of Japan, it is definitely important that most of its enormous government debt is internal (i.e., owed to Japanese corporations and citizens), just as it is extremely important that a huge part of the U.S. government debt is owed to foreign countries. (This makes Japanese debt—huge as it is—probably less dangerous to Japan than U.S. debt is to the U.S.) Strangely this map in the atlas does not even show the level of the large government debt of the U.S., Japan and Western European countries. The reason seems to be that this section of the atlas is focused on the external debt of “developing countries”. On the other hand, the very large debt now in some European countries (Greece, Portugal, Spain, Italy, etc.) is a serious problem whether or not most of it is owed to its own citizens. (This is because of its denomination in Euros, and the threat to the stability of the European Union.) In other words, this entire section of the atlas is quite inadequate.

13. The map on p. 53, “Aid per capita” shows that the very poorest countries (such as in Africa) tend to receive more foreign “aid” per capita than somewhat less poor countries. However, the question not even considered is whether there might be some actual connection between this foreign “aid” and keeping those countries so poor! As of course we should expect, the World Bank simply *assumes* (at least in public documents) that foreign “aid” is a good thing, and even *defines* it that way! As they put it: “Development is a partnership between low-and middle-income countries and high-income countries.” One thing is certain: After many decades of experience with little of a positive nature to show for it, this foreign “aid” is either grossly ineffective or else actually part of the problem that is keeping these countries so poor!

14. This atlas has a nice glossary of the terms it uses, which is valuable because those terms are not always adequately explained elsewhere.

B. *Third World Atlas*, 2nd edition, ed. by Alan Thomas, et al., (Washington, D.C.: Taylor & Francis, 1994).

This atlas is valuable in that it covers a part of the economic world that is normally given quite inadequate attention. On the other hand, it is quite out of date. (There does not seem to be any newer edition.) Roughly half of this atlas is devoted to historical information and statistics, which is especially important for understanding the present status of the Third World. And this portion is not adversely affected by being out of date.

There are many positive features to this atlas, including maps which bring out things in a better way than merely color-coding countries. For example on p. 9 there is a map which show the sizes of countries based on their population and another map showing their sizes based on gross national product (GNP). Another map on that page is a three-dimensional representation of population density in different countries. That sort of map is especially good at emphasizing those countries with the greatest population density.

Other specific comments:

1. The time-line chart on p. 11 showing events, wars, paradigms and concepts, etc., by decades since 1940 is a very useful thing, and somewhat unexpected!
2. The graph showing when countries have become independent (p. 12) similarly has much useful information compressed into a small space.
3. On the other hand, the map of “levels of industrialization” (p. 17) is pretty messy and does not bring out the information in an easy-to-understand way. (This is atypical; most the maps & graphs are quite good.)
4. The “Commodity dependence” map (p. 18) showing the different degrees of commodity diversification (or lack thereof) in the exports of different countries is very important. It is of course one of the indicators of how Third World countries are exploited and kept poor. It’s too bad the information is almost a quarter century out of date.
5. Various graphs showing the degrees in inequality among the population within different countries (pp. 20-21) are certainly important, and the sorts of things that are hard to find elsewhere.
6. A large part of the atlas is appropriately devoted to the history of colonization and domination of the Third World by European countries. And it doesn’t pull its punches, talking quite openly and honestly about this horrendous history of pillage and plunder. On the other hand, there seems to be little comprehension of the nature of neo-colonialism and the continuing fact of imperialism in the world today (despite the nominal “independence” of most of the colonies). Although the authors use occasional phrases such as “the end of direct European control”, I didn’t spot any references to the term neo-colonialism. While the authors state that “world capitalism remains intact as a controlling economic force” in the Third World (p. 25), they make little if any direct reference to modern capitalist-imperialism. So while this is a very valuable atlas, it is not a Marxist-Leninist work by any means.

C. *Global Inc.: An Atlas of the Multinational Corporation*, by Medard Gabel & Henry Bruner, (NY: New Press/W.W. Norton, 2003).

This valuable atlas focuses on the Multinational Corporation (MNC), sometimes called the Transnational Corporation (TNC), and on economic *globalization*. The atlas is written from an openly

bourgeois perspective, and despite the fact that it is focused on MNCs and globalization, you will find no references to capitalist-imperialism in it! But it is still an extremely valuable work because of the wealth of information about the world economy.

A large part of this atlas is devoted to the operations around the world by specific giant MNCs, such as General Motors, Toyota, ExxonMobil, Du Pont, Citibank, and so forth. But the most interesting and useful material is found in the overall summaries. (Especially in Chapter V on the impacts of MNCs.)

Some specific comments:

1. There are many important factoids scattered throughout this book, starting even in the Preface, where it is stated that 53 of the largest 100 economies in the world are not countries at all, but rather MNCs! (See also p. 2 for the detailed list.)
2. On the other hand they draw some false conclusions from things like that. This volume accepts and promotes the doctrine that MNCs are in the process of *replacing* capitalist states as the centers of world power. (See especially p. 2.) This is the absurd notion also popularized on the “left” by Michael Hardt & Antonio Negri. The very fact that almost every important MNC is itself controlled at the top by citizens of a single capitalist country, that it is closely associated with that one country politically, and that it is dependent on that one country especially for support (including military support when necessary), shows that MNCs are by no means *replacing* the power of states, but merely that they are part of the capitalist-imperialism system of exploitation that *also* fundamentally depends on the continued existence and strength of imperialist states.

For the bourgeoisie, the doctrine that MNCs are replacing states as the centers of world power is just another way of attempting to *hide* the essential fact of imperialism from the people.

3. While in general the graphics in this atlas are very good, sometimes there is a bit *too much* color. For example, some of the maps & graphs (such as those on pp. 4 & 5) are harder to read than they should be because of the colored background of the pages.
4. The graphic on p. 8 shows that more and more of the world’s top 500 MNCs are centered outside the U.S. In 1962 398 of the top 500 were in the U.S., while in 1999 just 179 of the top 500 were in the U.S. And in the past decade that trend has continued. (The atlas doesn’t make this point, but this is part of the long-term trend for the U.S. to lose out economically. There will be some qualitative leaps in this direction over the next couple decades.)
5. Also on p. 8 is the comment that competition between MNCs is “brutal and fast”. This is an important point. Within particular capitalist countries competition between home-based companies has weakened tremendously during most of the imperialist era. During the first age of globalization (up to World War I), there was also an international trend toward cartelization (lessening international competition). But over the past several decades, in this new age of globalization, there has instead been an *intensification* of international competition. China,

especially, is now playing an important role in that heightened competition. The failure of new rounds of cartelization to appear and dominate is only partly due to anti-trust laws; it is just as much, if not more, due to *nationalist* competition and economic conflict. This once again shows the falsity of the notion that MNCs are replacing capitalist states as the real locus of power.

The real puzzle is not why there is not more international cartelization now, but rather why there was so much cartelization in the period before World War I! If anything, economic nationalism seems *stronger* now (except within Europe). Perhaps the answer to this puzzle is that there was much more cartelization during the first round of globalization simply because the world economy at that time was much more centered on Europe.

6. The maps and discussion of “International Economic Barriers” (pp. 14-15) includes some interesting points (or admissions), such as that in general Third World countries are more “open” (to economic penetration) than are “developed” countries. However, one of the major questions of the world economy at the moment, whether foreign investment is becoming more or less important *within* particular countries (especially in China), is not answered. (I.e., the data presented is static, and not a dynamic picture.) My own estimate is that for a quarter century foreign investment became much more important in the Chinese economy, but that the trend now is for it to become gradually less important—though FDI in China is no doubt still growing fast in absolute terms.
7. A strength of this atlas is its discussion of “the First Global Economy” (pp. 25-27). Strangely they date this from 1800-1914, though the text correctly indicates that the bulk of the development of this first wave of globalization was toward the *end* of the 19th century and the early period of the 20th century up until World War I. They remark “In the latter half of the 19th century, cross-border trade and investment flows grew at such a rapid rate that by 1913 foreign direct investment represented around 9% of world output, a level not approached again until the mid-1990s.” It is very important for people to understand that “globalization” is not really a new thing, even though it has arrived in distinct waves with a long period of relative decline after WWI.

The atlas does not, of course, recognize the connection between this “first global economy” and the advent of capitalist-imperialism! But it does remark that for the first $\frac{3}{4}$ of the 19th century foreign investment was mostly passive “portfolio investment” rather than the FDI which became prominent in the last quarter of the 19th century. (This again confirms the picture that Lenin presented about the new importance and changed nature of the export of capital with the advent of capitalist-imperialism.)

8. The atlas does a surprisingly poor job in talking about the *volumes* of growth of FDI in specific countries, though it does have an interesting map of the annual average inward FDI *growth rate* for the period 1986-2000 on p. 30. The map on p. 29 of “outward FDI 1980-2000” shows China first becoming a significant exporter of capital (though still far behind the U.S. and Europe at that point).

9. There are many basic and important questions about MNCs/globalization that this work doesn't answer. Such as: What fraction of U.S. corporate profits comes from overseas? In fact the whole topic of *profits* is shied-away from in this book! It does mention that "pharmaceutical corporations averaged a 17% profit margin in 2000, the largest of any industry" (p. 48), but it is very coy about the massive transfer of wealth from the Third World to the imperialist homelands.
10. This atlas appropriately emphasizes the importance of MNCs, and talks about how much of the world's products are produced and sold by MNCs. However, what it does not do is talk about MNCs as part of the imperialist system. This is its biggest political weakness. It does briefly mention (p. 120) that there is a "negative" side to MNCs, including the "accusations" that they interfere in sovereign affairs, aggravate disparities between rich and poor, turn blind eyes toward bad conditions at the workplaces, corruption, environmental destruction, and so forth. This critique is of course pathetically inadequate and amounts to an almost total whitewash of the real situation.
11. The section on the role of MNCs in the transfer of technology to other countries (on pp. 126-127) is interesting, though already a bit out of date. The atlas correctly notes that Japan has been determined to keep its R&D and technological know-how within Japan even as it moves a lot of its actual production to other countries (especially China). (The one partial exception—not noted in the atlas—has been with South Korea, where Japanese technology has been widely spread to native South Korean chaebols.) MNCs connected with other imperialist countries have attempted to do the same thing of course, but not as successfully. In particular, there have been massive transfers of technological know-how to locally-owned Chinese companies, despite attempts by foreign MNCs to prevent this.

Moreover, the claim in the atlas that almost all R&D is done within the advanced industrialized countries—while true in the past—is now changing. Many R&D labs themselves are now being set up in China (and to a lesser extent in India). Certainly the *goal* is keep the discoveries and inventions of these labs in the hands of the MNCs who own them, but technological know-how is bound to more rapidly seep out to local companies because of the hiring away of researchers, etc.

12. The discussion of "capital" and financial corporations (on p. 128) is especially interesting. The graphs at the bottom of the page show the 10 largest financial firms in the world in 1990 and in 2001. In 1990 they were almost all Japanese banks. In 2001 there were no Japanese corporations at all, and most of the companies were American with a few British & European. (Of course the picture has now changed again since the 2008 Panic; AIG, for example, was number 2 in 2001, but is now just a shadow of its former self, and Citibank is also quite wounded.)
13. There is a useful couple pages about horrible environmental disasters perpetrated by MNCs in various countries on p. 133. Not only fairly well known things like the Union Carbide chemical disaster in Bhopal, India, but numerous less well known outrages.

D. *The State of China Atlas*, revised and updated, by Robert Benewick & Stephanie Hemelryk Donald, (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 2009).

This is a relatively good socioeconomic atlas devoted to just China (and its relationships to the rest of the world). While it is very recent, things are developing so fast in China (and the world!) these days that it still seems a bit out of date already. But since China has become one of the most important countries in the world capitalist economy, this atlas is highly useful.

There are numerous interesting factoids in this volume, such as the comment on p. 13 that in the first half of 2008, while the U.S. and the rest of the world were in a developing credit crunch and sinking into recession, fully one-third of all the GDP growth in the entire world occurred in China!

There are two important things going on in the world right now that are in partial contradiction to each other: 1) China is rapidly expanding its importance in the world economy and its proportion of both physical production and overall GDP; and 2) The world as a whole is in a new more serious stage of the long-developing economic crisis, and this will also lead to a serious economic crisis in China too (though it hasn't yet done so). This atlas is much better at providing information about the first point than it is with regard to providing information which will lead to the second point. A really excellent atlas should allow you to make some sound predictions about the future, but in reality the best that most atlases do is give you information about the recent past.

Some specific comments:

1. Each two-page section of the atlas contains not only a map but also a several paragraph summary of important points in connection with the specific topic. These summaries seem to be pretty good and are well worth reading. In fact I found these summaries almost as interesting as the maps themselves.
2. Since this atlas is prepared by those whose own outlook is that of western imperialism, there is some considerable note taken of "China's ambitions as a world power" (p. 13). On p. 16 they note that "China's own direct investment overseas is of huge importance to the global economy, but has political implications, not only in Africa, but in the USA and Australia." It is easy to see the inter-imperialist political worries just below the surface here.
3. The statistics presented seem to be almost entirely the official statistics of the Chinese government. There has been a lot of debate in the West as to how reliable these statistics are. Certainly some of them (such as the unemployment rate) seem to be "politically adjusted".
4. This atlas does not use [Purchasing Power Parity](#) figures (in comparisons of GDP, GNI, etc.) but rather just standard translations of values based on official currency exchange rates. For some purposes (such as with regard to international trade) this is OK, but in general it distorts the real relationships of the economies. Some of the other atlases mentioned above did a better job on this point. Ideally both exchange rate values and PPP values would be given, with PPP values given the most prominence.

5. The atlas notes the importance of trade to the Chinese economy, but pays much less attention to the issue of trade surpluses & deficits. It notes the large trade surplus overall that China had in 2006 (\$177 billion), but since the intensification of the world economic crisis that trade surplus has fallen considerably. In fact, in the past two quarters China has run a trade *deficit* with the world as a whole (though not with the U.S. of course), as the weakness of the world economy has prevented Chinese exports from keeping up with their imports. It is important in economics to keep in mind that things can change quickly!
6. There are occasional problems in presenting information graphically in a non-misleading way. On p. 17, for example, there are two charts next to each other showing inward and outward foreign direct investment, but which use different vertical scales. This gives the false impression that Chinese investment overseas is almost as big as overseas investment in China. (Both have been growing rapidly, of course, and outward FDI has been growing *faster* than inward FDI. But new inward FDI is still much larger.)
7. There is a section on employment, but it is mostly devoted to average wage rates in different provinces, the percentage of women in different industries, and such. (All valuable information of course!) What gets very little attention is unemployment. One small note states that “The urban unemployment rate rose from 3.1% in 2000 to 4.0% in 2007”, but I would like to see a whole lot more info about the massive unemployment of rural migrants into the cities, their status, etc. (There is however a section on rural-urban inequality on pp. 32-33 and another with similar themes on pp. 54-55.)
8. Interesting factoids on p. 54: “China is undergoing the largest internal migration in the history of world. 120 million people have moved to the cities, and 80 million to small towns, seeking work.”

“By 2020 at least 60 percent of people [in China] are expected to be living in cities and towns.” It seems to me that Mao’s method of revolution, with the countryside surrounding the cities, would no longer work even in China itself!

9. At the back of the atlas are 10 pages of tables. While the colorful graphic charts and maps in the main part of the atlas are its main draw, to be honest I actually found more of interest in these tables than I did in many of the graphic charts and maps. In fact, I wish there were a lot more of them! The data in such tables is actually often much easier to use and grasp, and is certainly more precise!

For example, while there is a multi-colored map on pp. 16-17 which shows the sources of foreign direct investment (FDI) in China, column 7 in the table on p. 95 actually presents that information in a better way for me. It pops right out that as of 2007 the most important countries for FDI in China are (in order) South Korea, Japan, Singapore and the U.S. (That’s right, the U.S. is only number 4!)

There is much of value in this atlas on many other topics, including demographics, the environment, establishment politics, international relations, and so forth. But as with all bourgeois references, caution must be used in relying on this atlas, and there is much more that we would like to know that is not in there at all!

—Scott
(5/10/10)