Matthew Crabbe, *Myth-Busting China's Numbers: Understanding and Using China's Statistics,* Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014, 268 pp. ISBN 978-1-137-35319-1 (paperback).

Matthew Crabbe's *Myth-Busting China's Numbers: Understanding and Using China's Statistics*, is a curious book. Discussing statistics of important sectors of China's economy, it is concerned more with the analytical, explanatory work of the political and socio-economic factors behind the numbers, rather than the numbers themselves. The book is a great introduction or companion to Chinese statistics and how to understand them as products of political, social and economic realities. However, it falls somewhat short in showing how to use statistics. The book is therefore a great guide and introduction to the many 'China numbers' everyone is confronted with on a daily basis in both mainstream media and professional publications, especially for the inexperienced China watcher, and those who want to learn more about the complex realities and rationalities that translate into China's sometimes puzzling statistics.

The book's thematic organization adopts an analytical sequence moving from macro to micro, presenting national accounts, moving through industry and company levels, and finally ending with retail and property. While this vertical zoom is good for creating a logical structure, the individual chapters mix the various types of data in a way that underlines what seems to be one of Crabbe's main points, namely the importance of understanding the complex realities behind the numbers. And this is the most important contribution of Crabbe's book. In times where the often extreme character of China's statistics in terms of size, speed, growth, etc. fascinates the world, a simultaneous lack of knowledge about the underlying structures and social factors behind the numbers often leads to sensationalism and highly decontextualized reporting—both praising and bashing—in the media.

Crabbe's impressive collection of what perhaps could be called narratives of statistics, discusses not only the raw statistical material itself, but introduces key policies, institutions and socio-economic factors behind the numbers. Writing on the pension system, for example, Crabbe shows not only the numbers themselves, but includes an introduction of relevant institutions, related policies, and the structural challenges to the pension system brought about by implementation issues, fiscal problems, etc. (pp. 57-63). The same, rich contextual knowledge that is vital to make sense of China's numbers is applied to the large variety of sectors Crabbe has included in his book.

The insightful and very readable prose is only burdened by the annoying editing style throughout the book, inserting diagonally aligned bullet points into the text. This is also mirrored in the theme of diagonal chapter numbers and page numbers, giving the book the feel of a 'dummies guide to X'.

While Crabbe's book does provide an impressive insider's view on China's statistics, it is not strictly speaking an academic publication. The strength and novelty of the book is the impressive contextual knowledge and systematic discussion of underlying institutional, socio-economic, and political factors behind the numbers that fascinate China scholars and broader audiences alike. And this is what makes this reader recommend the book to anyone who is interested in China's economy, or who wishes to know what lies behind the decontextualized, naked numbers quoted in the media every day. *Myth-Busting China's Numbers* is a very readable and useful book for those interested in Chinese economics and politics, and highly recommended as an introduction to a more critical engagement with statistics as product of the very complex realities on the ground, perhaps not only in China, but everywhere.

Nis Grünberg
PhD Fellow
Asia Research Centre
Copenhagen Business School