"Rethinking the Chinese World Order: Historical Perspectives on the Rise of China"

May 9, 2014

BIographies AND ABstracts


The China Dream Goes Global: Socialist Modernization in the World of Great Harmony

Abstract: How will China influence world politics in the twenty-first century? Many people answer this question by looking to Chinese history, and particularly to traditional models of Chinese World Order. This essay seeks to complicate this question by asking which history? And which tradition? While it is common to look at China's pre-modern history as "tradition," this essay argues that we also need to appreciate how “socialism” is treated as a tradition alongside Chinese civilization. The essay does this by examining how China's popular futurologists appeal to two seemingly odd sources: Mao Zedong’s 1956 speech “Strengthen Party Unity and Carry Forward Party Traditions,” and the “Great Harmony” passage from the two millennia-old Book of Rites. It will argue that these two passages are employed as a way of salvaging socialism; the ideological transition thus is not from communism to nationalism, but to a curious combination of socialism and Chinese civilization. This new socialist/civilization dynamic integrates equality and hierarchy into a new form of statism, which is involved in a global contest of models. Or to put it another way, what these two passages have in common is not necessarily a positive ideal, but a common enemy: liberalism, the West and the United States.

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The Party and the Sage: Communist China's Use of Quasi-Confucian Rationalizations for One-Party Dictatorship

Abstract: This paper examines the development and uses of Confucian political theory as a tool for buttressing the legitimacy of CCP power since the mid-1980s. It examines the development of state-sponsored quasi-Confucian theorizing as part of the Party’s effort to undermine the appeal of Western ideals in the pre-
Tiananmen era, and describes the acceleration of such ideological work after the 1989 massacre as the CCP has searched for a new legitimacy narrative consistent with marketization and with the nationalist fervor cultivated by PRC officials in the 1990s and thereafter. In particular, Ford explores the contours of the antidemocratic and pro-"meritocratic" theorizing offered by politicized Confucian theorists in the 21st Century -- writers whom he discusses under the label of "Neo-Kongs" -- and the role that such narratives play in the Party-State's self-justificatory propaganda outreach both a home and in the international arena.

Peter C. Perdue is Professor of History at Yale University. He is the author of Exhausting the Earth: State and Peasant in Hunan 1500-1850 A.D. (Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University, 1987) and China Marches West: The Qing Conquest of Central Eurasia (Harvard University Press, 2005). He has also written on grain markets in China, agricultural development, and environmental history. His research interests lie in modern Chinese and Japanese social and economic history, history of frontiers, and world history. He is a recipient of the 1988 Edgerton Award and the James A. Levitan Prize at MIT. He was elected to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences in 2007.

The Tenacious Tributary System
Abstract: A remarkably diverse group of commentators on contemporary China have invoked the concept of a “tribute system” to explain China’s foreign relations in the past and present. Even though most serious historians have rejected it, it survives as a durable myth, designating China as an exceptional civilization whose policies were completely distinct from Western modes of interstate relations. Like other historians, I question the appropriateness of this concept and raise questions about its intellectual coherence and biases. On the other hand, we must recognize that the tribute system myth endures because it is rooted in earlier historical inquiries about imperial China created in the twentieth century. Chiang Kai-shek’s ideological statements in China’s Destiny of the 1940s and the historical geography school of the 1930s illustrate the multifarious uses of these historical ideas connecting China’s imperial past to its nationalist present. We should examine the “tribute system” not for the truth that it tells, but for the cultural work that it does.

Stephen Thomas has a PhD in political science and Chinese politics from Stanford University. He has taught in the political science department at the University of Colorado Denver since 1976. He held the Fei Yi-Ming Chair of Comparative Politics at the Johns Hopkins-Nanjing University joint center program in 1994-1995, teaching US-China relations and Asian Development. In 2009, he taught American Government at the China Agricultural University in Beijing. He has done research on early (1870 to 1911) Chinese industrialization (economic “self-strengthening”) and post-1978 Chinese financial reforms.

China’s “Century of Humiliation” and Resulting Search For “Wealth and Power”
Abstract: How has China’s “Century of Humiliation” influenced its current search for “Wealth and Power?” From 1842 to 1943 China suffered a series of unequal treaties that legalized opium imports into China, freed foreign merchants from legal and financial accountability to the Qing Chinese government, and led to a collapsing domestic economy. In response Qing China developed economic and military “self-strengthening” programs to increase Imperial China’s “wealth and power.” Although these pre-1949 economic and military self-strengthening efforts yielded mixed results, China’s pre-1949 century of humiliation is often mentioned as a source of lessons for post-1949 (and particularly post-1978) Chinese economic development and military strengthening efforts. In my paper I will explore the costs and lessons of the unequal treaties and point out how there appears to be no Chinese consensus either on what the lessons are or what influences China’s history should have on current Chinese economic development and military strengthening policies. I will, nevertheless, offer several possible answers based on my assessment of China’s “century of humiliation” and the opportunities and constraints for China’s economic and military empowerment in the current global environment.
Discussants:

**Charles Horner** is Senior Fellow at Hudson Institute in Washington. He is a China scholar who pays special attention to how China's evolving views of its modern historical experience and its intellectual and cultural traditions influence contemporary developments. The first volume of his projected two-volume study, *Rising China and Its Postmodern Fate*, was nominated for the Joseph Levenson Prize of the Association of Asian Studies and the second volume is in progress. In the administrations of President Reagan and the first President Bush, Horner served consecutively as Deputy Representative to the United Nations Conference on the Law of Sea, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Science and Technology, and Associate Director of the United States Information Agency. He is a recipient of the Department of State Superior Honor Award.