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10/19 Reader

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1. This is a rather belated link, but in case you missed it at China Digital Times, you might be interested to read their translation of a piece on “The Wall’ and ‘Climbing Over the Wall’” by Tu Zifang from Southern Metropolis Weekly.

For so many years, the busiest people on the Chinese internet are those who make the Wall software and the “Climbing the Wall” software. It has been said that those people all have something in common: 1. They are all Chinese, 2. They all made a fortune, 3. They all have studied in the US. The only difference is that those who write the Wall software have come back from the US and those who write the Climbing the Wall software are still in the US.

2. Last week, we ran an image of the Expo buildings from contributor Jonathan Hwang. For more amazing pictures—including workers doing quite a high-wire act against the structure’s frame—check here.

3. The new issue of The Journal of Current Chinese Affairs is now available. Articles of interest include “The Chinese Communist Party: Recruiting and Controlling the New Elites” by Cheng Li and “Climate Change in China — The Development of China’s Climate Policy and Its Integration into a New International Post-Kyoto Climate Regime” by Andreas Oberheitmann and Eva Sternfeld.

4. Timothy Garton Ash had a review essay in this weekend’s New York Review of Books titled “1989!” Though none of the books under discussion are related to the 1989 event that will most likely spring to mind for China Beat readers—instead they focus entirely on the events in Eastern Europe—Garton Ash calls for a reinvestigation of ‘89’s events that rings close to home for those interested in China 1989:

So, in a classic Rankean advance of historical scholarship, we know more than we did at the time about these traditionally documented areas of high politics. By contrast, we have learned little new about the causes and social dynamics of the mass, popular actions that actually gave 1989 a claim to be a revolution, or chain of revolutions.

I spent many hours of my life standing in those crowds, in Warsaw, Budapest, Berlin, and Prague; their behavior was both inspiring and mysterious. What had moved these individual men and women to come out on the streets, especially in the early days, when it was not self-evidently safe to do so? What swayed them as a crowd? Who, in Prague, was the first to take a key ring out of his or her pocket, hold the keys aloft, and shake them—an action that, copied by 300,000 people, produced the most amazing sound, like massed Chinese bells?

Historians such as George Rudé, with his pioneering study of the crowd in the French Revolution, E.P. Thompson, and Eric Hobsbawm have attempted to understand the underlying dynamics of popular protest in earlier periods. It is surely time for contemporary historians, with better sources at their disposal (hours of television, video, and radio footage, for example), to take up the challenge of trying to analyze 1989 from below, and not merely from above.

And, indeed, at the end of the essay, Garton Ash raises the China case and argues for its resonance in the narratives of Europe’s ‘89:

China also plays an important part. The Tiananmen Square massacre occurred on the very day of Poland’s breakthrough in a semifree election, June 4, 1989. I will never forget seeing on a television screen in the makeshift offices of the Polish opposition daily Gazeta Wyborcza, amid the excitement of Poland’s election day, the first footage of dead or wounded Chinese protesters being carried off Tiananmen Square. “Tiananmen” happened in Europe, too, in the sense that both opposition and reform communist leaders saw what could happen if it came to a violent confrontation, and redoubled their efforts to avoid it.
To put it another way, the fact that Tiananmen happened in China is one of the reasons it did not happen in Europe. However, an influence then flowed back in the other direction: from the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe to China. As David Shambaugh and others have documented, the Chinese Communist Party systematically studied the lessons of the collapse of communism in Europe, to make sure it did not happen to them. Today’s China is a result of that learning process.

The *NYRB* has also launched a blog. One of their first posts several weeks ago was from Perry Link, “China at 60: Who Owns the Guns?” and it is well worth reading.

5. For those readers in the Salt Lake City area, Ken Pomeranz will be giving a talk at the University of Utah on October 26 on “Chinese Development and World History: Putting the ‘East Asian Model’ in Perspective.” Pomeranz has also just been awarded the Distinguished Faculty Award for Research from the University of California, Irvine and will be giving a lecture at the December 3rd award ceremony on “Land, Water and Economic Development in China: Historical Perspectives and Contemporary Implications.” Both events are open to the public.