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All Good Things Must Come to an End: China Beat's 1,000th Post

Maura Cunningham

National Committee on U.S.-China Relations, mcunningham@asian-studies.org

Kate Merkel-Hess

Pennsylvania State University, kxm81@psu.edu

Ken Pomeranz

University of Chicago, kpomeranz1@uchicago.edu

Jeff Wasserstrom

University of California, Irvine, wasserstromjeff@gmail.com

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All Good Things Must Come to an End: China Beat's 1,000th Post

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With much gratitude, the China Beat editors say goodbye

What a difference four years can make—for a blog, a country, and a planet. (“Blog, country, planet” might have made a nice coat of arms if we’d thought of it...) When China Beat launched early in 2008, blogs seemed like relatively new kids on the block, at least to academics. Four years later, the genre is old hat, sharing a landscape with newcomers like Tumblr, Twitter, and other microblogging platforms, and we’re increasingly catching up on China news not on computers but on devices that fit in our palms.

It isn’t just the technology that’s changed, but also the way China is written and thought about in the West. In early 2008, China had never held an Olympics or World’s Fair and it wasn’t the world’s second economy. Not many people were talking yet about a day coming when it would “rule the world” (though Jon Stewart, always ahead of his time, [had already parodied the notion](#)), and Bo Xilai hadn’t made headlines—good, bad, or indifferent—outside of China. Few besides China buffs had heard of Ai Weiwei or Chen Guangcheng.

Many things related to China that we’ve dealt with on the blog could have been predicted, but there have been many surprises as well. Perhaps the biggest surprise has been how many of the stories that captured our attention four years ago have rolled forward to today. The riots in Tibet in March 2008 caught us off guard, but it has now become a—tragically, depressingly—persistent story with the continued self-immolations, in some cases of people who were arrested during spring 2008. The Sichuan earthquake that year is another story that has continued to resonate in multiple ways, particularly for how it has highlighted China’s inability to make space for public calls for local government accountability. In July 2008, riots roiled Weng’an, Guizhou in response to concerns over local corruption—again last year, riots (in response to a very different form of local corruption, it should be noted) in Wukan, Guangdong garnered headlines around the world. Finally, as it has turned out, the furthest-reaching (at least to today) of 2008’s stories has certainly been the economic downturn of that fall, a downturn China seemed to weather well. At the end of [China in 2008](#) we predicted that that story would probably dominate at least the next couple of years, but also predicted, hesitatingly, that in China, its pain it would ultimately be filed under “the human cost of continued development” rather than “the beginning of a breakdown” in economics and/or politics. As it turns out, we’re all still holding our breath.

The blog itself developed in ways that we never could have foreseen back in January 2008. We began China Beat with a small core group of contributors, imagining that each would write for

the site once or twice a month, with an occasional guest post thrown in every now and then if someone outside the group wanted to post. That setup changed quickly, as more people than we ever imagined expressed an interest in becoming China Beatniks, and the distinction between “regular contributors” and “guest contributors” became irrelevant.

Even we aren’t sure exactly how many China Beatniks are out there, but over the past 999 posts, we’ve featured the writing and photography of an incredibly wide range of people. They include undergraduates, graduate students, faculty, journalists, photographers, and freelance writers from around the world. A number of them have pieces in *China in 2008: A Year of Great Significance*, the book that grew out of the blog’s first year—another development that we didn’t have in mind when we began the site. In the meantime, a group that started over lunch around a little table outside Murray L. Krieger Hall on the sunny, eucalyptus-laced campus of the University of California, Irvine, has now scattered far from California.

Along the way, though, the blog showed us what the brave new academic world looks like—not a lone professor writing quietly in a dim office, or even (if you were lucky, as we were at Irvine) a small cohort of China geeks in a single place—but a cacophonous, global network of like-interested scholars, journalists, and everybody else chiming in, debating, sharing, linking, recommending, analyzing. (And there’s yet another group of people who read without commenting, whose identities might surprise us even more: one of us discovered an airline seatmate with no China background of her own who was an avid reader, because her son was working in Shanghai.) It’s been a pleasure for China Beat to be part of that conversation. And while the site is closing down, the vibrant community that the blog contributed to will continue to do its good work of sharing and showcasing provocative and thoughtful writing about China. We’ll see you there.

Maura Cunningham
Kate Merkel-Hess
Ken Pomeranz
Jeff Wasserstrom

A few notes on the future

We will be maintaining the China Beat site for the time being, so our archives will not disappear immediately. And China Beat will live on through our [Twitter feed](#), where we will continue to post links to great China stories and announcements about events around the world. You can also follow three of our four editors on Twitter—[Maura Cunningham](#), [Kate Merkel-Hess](#), and [Jeff Wasserstrom](#). We’ve been very happy to feature book reviews from [Twentieth-Century China](#) at the site for the past eighteen months; stay tuned for information about where those reviews will appear in the future.

Thank you