


11-11-2008

China Annals: Elizabeth Perry

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/chinabeatarchive>

 Part of the [Asian History Commons](#), [Asian Studies Commons](#), [Chinese Studies Commons](#), and the [International Relations Commons](#)

"China Annals: Elizabeth Perry" (2008). *The China Beat Blog Archive 2008-2012*. 276.
<http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/chinabeatarchive/276>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the China Beat Archive at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in The China Beat Blog Archive 2008-2012 by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

China Annals: Elizabeth Perry

November 11, 2008 in [China Annals](#), [Watching the China Watchers](#) by [The China Beat](#) | [No comments](#)

[Elizabeth Perry](#) of Harvard University is the outgoing president of the [Association for Asian Studies](#) (AAS) and the author of many books. She has also edited and co-edited nine books (one



with *China Beat*'s Jeff Wasserman (erstrom) which address issues of workers' rights, popular protest, revolution, and reform. Last April, she delivered the presidential address at [the Annual Meeting of the AAS in Atlanta, Georgia](#). In this address, which will appear in print in the November issue of the *Journal of Asian Studies*, she focused on the non-violent worker strike at the Anyuan coal mines in the early 1920s, and called for a more positive re-assessment of China's twentieth-century revolutions. Nicole Barnes of *The China Beat* interviewed Dr. Perry about the content of her address and her current research.

Nicole Barnes: After serving your term as President of the Association for Asian Studies (AAS), what direction do you see or would you like to see the Association moving in? What future challenges do you see the AAS having to overcome?

Elizabeth Perry: The AAS is a wonderful organization, the largest area studies association in existence and one that – unlike many scholarly associations these days – is continuing to grow and change. My hope is for still greater internationalization and diversification of the AAS membership. In particular, I would like to see more Asian-based members, younger members, and more members drawn from the social science disciplines and professions. As the terms of “intellectual trade” between America and Asia shift, with more influential scholarship being produced by our colleagues in Asia, it will be increasingly important for the AAS to identify, introduce and incorporate that work into our annual meeting program and our journal. The recent economic growth of China and India has generated considerable public interest in the prospect of an “Asian twenty-first century.” While we can never sacrifice the high academic standards for which our association is known, it is also important for us to find ways to make our knowledge of Asia more publicly accessible.

NB: Would you like to let our readers know about your upcoming book, and in what journal issue they may find a tantalizing piece of that work?

EP: The book I am currently writing is entitled, *Anyuan: Mining China's Revolutionary Traditions*. The book will explore the early history of the labor movement at the Anyuan coal mine as well as the political uses of that history over the years by politicians, artists, writers, and ordinary Chinese citizens. In addition to the paper in the November 2008 JAS, I have published an article in [Twentieth-Century China](#), which focuses on the Communists' early efforts at mass education at Anyuan.

NB: Can you describe the intellectual and professional trajectory that led you to your topic for the presidential address?

EP: Most of my work has been concerned in one way or another with the Chinese revolution. My first book (*Rebels and Revolutionaries in North China*) focused on the countryside, looking at the relationship between “traditional” peasant rebellion and the Communist revolution. Subsequent books (*Shanghai on Strike*; *Patrolling the Revolution*; *Proletarian Power*) focused on the city of Shanghai, from the 1920s through the Cultural Revolution. The Communist mobilizing effort at the Anyuan coal mine had major implications for both the rural and urban wings of the Chinese revolution. Moreover, its history became highly contested during the Cultural Revolution. A study of Anyuan serves, I believe, as a revealing prism through which to understand the unfolding of the Chinese revolution.

NB: In your address, you mention several China scholars whose assessment of worker and peasant revolutions in China have changed drastically over the years. You include yourself among this list. What would you say you have learned about the successes and failures of revolutions in your scholarly career? How has your assessment of popular revolutions changed?

EP: Like many in my generation, I was initially drawn into the field of Asian studies because of a fascination with Asian revolutionary change – in both China and Vietnam. But after living in China as a visiting scholar for a year in 1979-80, I arrived at a more sober assessment of the Chinese revolution, especially as it developed under the PRC. My latest book, *Patrolling the Revolution: Worker Militias, Citizenship and the Modern Chinese State*, reflects that perspective. The current study of Anyuan has renewed some of my youthful admiration for the initial ideals of the Chinese revolution, while providing a vehicle for studying what went so wrong in its subsequent development.

Tags: AAS, Anyuan, Association for Asian Studies, Communist Revolution, Elizabeth Perry