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In case you are interested in reading more from writers we’ve referenced recently or on topics we’ve been tracking lately, here are a few recommendations from this week.

The New York Times ran a set of commentaries yesterday on "what the Chinese want from Obama,” including commentaries by Michael Meyer and Daniel Bell (links to their previous pieces at China Beat).

Meyer writes about Clinton’s visit to China, and the power she has to shift discussions in China (and the U.S.) about China’s desire for an "American lifestyle":

Yet as modernizing Chinese cities emulate America’s car-friendly designs — and often employ American architects, but not clean-energy firms to realize it — she could tie China’s urbanization into her broader agenda of engaging Beijing in a partnership to reduce emissions and increase energy efficiency, measures that would affect global health and the economy.

“If Chinese want to live the American way of life, then we need seven earths to support them,” the founder of China’s first environmental nongovernmental organization once told me. That impact is of less concern to a government funding large-scale urbanization in the service of economic growth. Planners and officials here often insist, with rightful indignation, that “we have every right to make the same development mistakes that America did.”

Mrs. Clinton could correct that perception with a visit to the hutong the way her husband galvanized AIDS awareness when he hugged an H.I.V.-positive girl at a Beijing speech in 2003.

Daniel Bell relays what his students think about Obama, emphasizing their resistance to “Obama mania”:

Of course, there is respect for Mr. Obama’s intellectual abilities and leadership skills. But even “liberal” students are given to skepticism. One of my graduate students told me that she was dismayed by the uncritical coverage of the inauguration, the kind of love-fest for a political leader that could only make the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party envious. We discussed, only half-jokingly, the possibility that China should adopt some form of constitutional monarchy, so that the public could project its emotions on a symbolic leader while evaluating the de facto political leader’s performance more rationally.

Of course, this “uncritical coverage” is rather debatable—since there was indeed a great deal of critical coverage of the inauguration and of Obama in the United States, but Bell’s point that the stories of Obama’s popularity in China have been hyped up is well taken.

We have mentioned James Hevia’s work on imperialism in China; he was quoted in a recent piece at The Christian Science Monitor on the Christie’s auction flap.

The “imperial objects are an absent presence in a tale of loss, humiliation, and the recovery of national sovereignty,” says James Hevia, a professor at the University of Chicago and expert in European military traditions of plunder.

Last month, we ran a short list from Claire Conceison on Chinese actor Ying Ruocheng, taken from her work on his autobiography, Voices Carry. This week, she did an interview about the book on NPR’s Here and Now. You can listen by making a jump to Here and Now’s website.

Clinton’s visit to China was much in the news lately—a piece from Reuters discusses her indication to Beijing that human rights will not be at the top of the U.S.’s Sino-American agenda:
Making her first trip abroad as secretary of state, Clinton said three of her top priorities in Beijing will be addressing the global economic crisis, climate change and security challenges such as the North Korean nuclear weapons programme.

“Now, that doesn’t mean that questions of Taiwan, Tibet, human rights, the whole range of challenges that we often engage on with the Chinese, are not part of the agenda,” Clinton told reporters in Seoul before flying to Beijing. “But we pretty much know what they are going to say. “We have to continue to press them but our pressing on those issues can’t interfere with the global economic crisis, the global climate change crisis and the security crises,” she added. “We have to have a dialogue that leads to an understanding and cooperation on each of those.”

The environment is at the top of Clinton’s agenda, but it is as yet unclear what U.S.-China collaboration on this issue will look like. At his blog, James Fallows provided links to a new report from the Asia Society and the Pew Center that makes specific proposals for cooperation on energy and climate change.

Last week, we also ran a commentary from Ken Pomeranz about water in China. For an additional viewpoint, those in the New Haven area may be interested in an upcoming talk (on February 25) by Chunmiao Zheng on “Will China Run Out of Water?”