1-4-2009

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January 4, 2009 in In Case You Missed It by The China Beat | No comments

For quite some time, the online journal Japan Focus has been moving toward covering Asia more generally, and recently it made that shift official with its new name, The Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus. In our series of lists of “surprising places to find great writing on China,” this is perhaps not the most shocking as it is coordinated by Mark Selden, whose first book, The Yenan Way, is on every China specialist’s exam reading list (and who has published widely in the last thirty years on China, Japan, and Asia).

So here is a list of five sample pieces from The Asia-Pacific Journal that prove how much good China writing happens there—but you can find even more by visiting the homepage and searching titles for “China” or “Chinese.”

1. **Ashes of the American Raj in China: John Leighton Stuart, Pearl S. Buck, and Edgar Snow**, by Charles Hayford

   Hayford is a regular blogger at Frog in a Well and has contributed several pieces to China Beat as well (such as his postings on “Wiki-ing China” in October). One of his persistent research interests in recent years has been the relationship between Americans and Chinese in the early twentieth century (particularly Americans who shaped US impressions of China—for instance, see “What’s So Bad About the Good Earth?” and “When is a Farmer not a Farmer?”) In this piece, Hayford examines the three title Americans in the following context:

   All three played roles in an informal but real American Raj in China partly modeled on the British Raj in India and partly reacting against its imperial arrogance and racism.

   This Raj developed in the early twentieth century after the Boxer Rebellion provoked not only a ruthless allied intervention but also the Open Door notes. Diplomatically, the Open Door asked the other great powers to maintain free trade in their zones of influence; culturally, the Open Door echoed the famous goals President McKinley set for colonial rule in the Philippines: “To uplift, civilize, and Christianize.” The Open Door Raj assumed that when the doors were open and restraints removed, China would naturally follow the American path to democracy, prosperity and Christianity.

2. **Red Shanghai, Blue Shanghai**, by Jeffrey Wasserstrom

   In this piece, Wasserstrom reflects on the complicated position of Shanghai—a city that looks both in and out, celebrating both Communism (“red”) and internationalism (“blue”). As Wasserstrom writes:

   Twenty years ago, while some guidebooks in Western languages presented Shanghai’s allure as tied to its glamorous treaty-port era incarnation as a cosmopolitan “Paris of the East,” the ones in Chinese simply took it for granted that the city’s importance lay in its contributions to the Revolution. No Chinese reader needed to be reminded then that Shanghai had a “red” side. The treaty-port era was presented in domestic guidebooks of the time as a period of humiliation, when Chinese were treated as second-class citizens within a part of their own country and evil imperialists exploited the local population.

   In recent years, this vision of the past has changed dramatically. Chinese and Western guidebooks alike celebrate the city’s “blue” sites—whether old ones like the Custom House and Hongkong and Shanghai Bank and other landmarks of the Bund, such as the Peace Hotel, or new ones like the futuristic German-engineered high speed magnetic levitation train across the river in Pudong (East Shanghai).

This piece by Barmé was written just after the anti-Japanese protests of spring 2005 and reflects on the uses of history in China and the way understanding and misunderstanding (some purposeful, some not) laid the groundwork for the complicated Sino-Japanese relationship:

Facing up to history, respecting history, learning the lessons of history are all themes of both official and popular protests against Japan’s officially-sanctioned textbooks, the visits of government officials to the Yasukuni Shrine in Tokyo and the perceived failure of Japan as a nation to show full and continued contrition for the acts of imperial aggression throughout East and Southeast Asia before and during WWII.

I remember well as a young scholar living in Kyoto in 1982 hearing about and then being party to the heated discussions of Chinese students at Kyoto University when the first ructions regarding Japanese high-school textbooks appeared. The texts being protested against then used the vocabulary of modest obfuscation to describe the egregious acts of aggression in China, in particular at the time of the Marco Polo Bridge Incident, the bloody occupation of Nanjing and the invasion of East China. Such popular discontent has been a feature of the creation of the ‘public’ since the end of the Cultural Revolution. The outrage and despair felt by Chinese colleagues then has, in later generations, only grown as new texts, even if only marginal within the Japanese education system, feed into a perception that China’s neighbour continues to avoid confronting its—albeit imperial—past. There is an abiding—and even mounting—sentiment that ‘Japan’ continues to be insensitive to the feelings of others in the region in regard to that past, and that it is a nation that is incapable of redressing those wrongs through meaningful, substantive and sustained acts and expressions of official contrition. This is also despite the fact that the issue of comfort women and the atrocities in Nanjing are now mentioned in some texts, even if inadequately. At the same time, continuous regional unease and even hostility towards Japan appears to have encouraged and legitimated a resurgence of neonationalism in Japan itself.


Wang Jisi is Dean of International Studies at Beijing University and an important commentator on US politics and US-China relations (see, for instance, his 2005 *Foreign Affairs* article, “China’s Search for Stability with America” or his 2003 piece, translated from Chinese, “The Logic of American Hegemony”). This interview ranges widely over economic issues, Sino-American relations, and the reasons for the international influence of American ideas. For instance, one exchange:

NFC: What is your assessment of "Pax Americana"? If the United States declines, what will happen to the world? And as far as China is concerned, what are the pros and cons of US hegemony?

Wang: The so-called "Pax Americana" does to a certain degree benefit international stability, but this is a peace achieved by power politics that has sacrificed the rights and interests of other countries. It is morally unfair, unjust, and is also very difficult to sustain for a long time. Speaking in theoretical terms, a multipolar world will be more just than a unipolar one, but it is certain that it will not be very stable. Is not achieving both justice and stability easier said than done? In a situation in which there is no better substitute, as far as China is concerned, the workable approach is to acknowledge the existing international order and, amid that, safeguard its own rights and interests as much as possible. This not only includes struggling with US hegemony, it also includes the other aspect of coordinating and cooperating with the United States, working together to deal with nuclear proliferation, climate change, energy shortages, and other such problems. This is also what we commonly refer to as “fighting dual tactics with dual tactics.” The United States’ ability to maintain its leading position in the world in overall national power must have some lessons that other countries might learn from. For example, in some countries the ethnic, religious, and sectarian conflicts are very intense, and some ethnic groups are militating for independence. US society is becoming more and more diverse internally, and there are also several million to tens of millions of Muslims, but there have been no real threats of national break-up or religious clashes. The United States always wants to interfere in the domestic affairs of other countries, but other countries also want to intervene in US affairs. For example, sending people to the US to lobby Congress, and the public in quite a few other countries has taken a position supporting the election of Obama, etc. However, the United States does not worry much about other countries discussing its domestic affairs.
5. Taiwan in the Chinese Imagination, 17th–19th Centuries, Emma Jinhua Teng

A professor of foreign languages and literatures at MIT, Teng here explores the topic of her first book, *Taiwan's Imagined Geography: Chinese Colonial Travel Writing and Pictures, 1683-1895*, where she considers that:

The Qing incorporation of this island involved not only a reconsideration of Taiwan’s place in imperial geography but also a reconceptualization of the Chinese domain itself. The Ming conviction that Taiwan was not part of this domain was rooted in the traditional conception of China as a territory bounded by natural geographic features, such as mountains, rivers, the desert, and the sea. Since Taiwan was separated from the Chinese mainland by the Taiwan Strait, it was, ergo, outside China. The Qing expansion into territory "beyond the seas" entailed a shift from the established conception of China to a new spatial image of an empire that transgressed the traditional boundaries.

**Tags: Japan Focus**