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Blogging the AAS

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Blogging the AAS

March 27, 2009 in [missives from academia](#) by [The China Beat](#) | [1 comment](#)

The Association for Asian Studies [annual meeting](#) is taking place this weekend in Chicago. We'll be posting occasional updates from China Beatniks who are attending the meeting and will be checking in about the sessions and meetings they've participated in. Below, our first two postings from the meeting.

From Jeff Wasserstrom (3/26/09, 11:53 a.m.):

As Editor of the *Journal of Asian Studies*, I needed to be on site a couple of days before the Association for Asian Studies panels and other main events begin, and I have been struck since arriving by how many things I've seen inside or near the Sheraton hotel (the conference base) that link up to Chinese events and locales, blogging, or things people whose China blogs I follow have addressed. I've rolled thoughts and images relating to these into a pre-conference post.

Blog-Based Books Enter the Mainstream (of American publishing)

On the blogging front, this morning's edition of *USA Today*, provided free to all hotel guests, had a piece called "[Books Editors Look to Bloggers for Possibilities](#)," which caught my attention in part because this conference is the first at which [China in 2008: A Year of Great Significance](#) will be on sale. Like most American reports on the topic of blog-based books, it didn't mention the fact that such publications became more routine in China before doing so in the U.S. It also didn't give any examples (are there any out there?) of books that, like ours, is based on a group blog with many contributors, as opposed to, for example, solo ones by Colby Buzzell. The piece ends by wondering: "Can the Twitter novel be far behind?"

The Games after the Games after the Beijing Games

Here's a photo taken a block from the hotel, of a flag promoting Chicago's bid to host the 2016 Games. Surely, the backers of this bid are relieved for many reasons, including budgetary ones that, if they succeed, they will be following London's show as opposed to Beijing's.



Did They Know the Asian Studies Crowd Was Coming When This Statue Went Up?

Here are two photos of a massive piece of public art, playing upon a famous American painting. Its presence a few blocks from the hotel has nothing to do with the AAS meetings, but it is hard to imagine a more fitting statue to see when walking near a Midwestern conference with panels dealing with many of the cities and countries flagged on the suitcase.





Some Ties Grow Tighter, Others Loosen

If the statue suggests an increase in travel between Chicago and Asia (also signaled by the number of flights to Asian cities that leave from O'Hare airport), there's one kind of longstanding connection between here and there that [a recent blog post by Evan Osnos](#) reminds us have recently been severed. Namely, the *Chicago Tribune* (whose headquarters is right near the stature) closed its Beijing bureau (part of a general scaling back of reporters based abroad)—Osnos (who now works for *The New Yorker*) was the Windy City newspaper's final China correspondent.



The *Tribune's* tradition of fine reporting from Asia will be represented at this conference, however, as Michael Lev, who used to be based there and now is Chicago-based, though still working for the paper, has graciously agreed to pinch-hit for a panelists who had to pull out at the last minute on a special roundtable devoted to

"Asia and the Global Economic Downturn" that takes place on Saturday at 5 p.m. (with Nayan Chanda, Ted Fishman, and Ezra Vogel, the other participants). I'll be on a different panel at the same time, but maybe someone else will blog about that session, which covers a topic that could hardly be more timely. I hope so, as I'm eager to learn what transpires there.

From Paul Katz (3/26/09, 9:12 p.m.):

Just spent the first night of our Annual Meeting bopping between [Sessions 16 & 17](#), both of which concerned the religious revival in China today. The papers by Sebastien Billioud (on Confucianism), as well as Gareth Fischer and Wu Keping (on lay Buddhism) were particularly striking in terms of demonstrating the intensity of popular participation in these movements, as well as its links to the formation of different types of individual and group identities. Their works suggests that religion in China today is actively addressing the concerns of its people, which in some ways seems related to ideas of modernity. At the same time, however, this also exhibits profound continuity, as religious movements have been dealing with the concerns of their worshippers throughout the ages.

Tomorrow will be a typically hectic AAS schedule, beginning bright and early at 8:30 with my paper on images of the judicial underworld, which will be presented in Session 44 ("Visualizing Order: Images and the Construction of Legal Culture in Ming and Qing China"). I also plan to attend two other Chinese religion panels: one on lay Buddhism in modern China (#93), the other on the Mandate of Heaven at the local level (#118).