

2010

Reading Round-Up, 2/27/2010

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February 27, 2010 in [The Five-List Plan](#) by [The China Beat](#) | [Permalink](#)

1. Hat tip to [China Digital Times](#) for directing us to [this video](#) by Ian Johnson at the *Wall Street Journal* site. Johnson narrates a quick tour of the Palace of Eternal Joy (Yongle Gong) in remote Shanxi Province, where a 700-year-old Daoist mural covers the walls. The paintings include rare depictions of Daoist gods, as well as representations of Yuan Dynasty architecture, "very little of which has survived." Amazingly, the temple housing the mural was disassembled and relocated, piece by piece, during the Mao era, as a planned Yellow River dam would have flooded its original location.

2. "[Bloggers Open an Internet Window on Shanghai](#)," reports an article by Maile Cannon and Jingying Yang at the *International Herald Tribune*. Mentioning some of our own go-to blogs, including [Shanghaiist](#) and [Shanghai Scrap](#), the authors detail the shape of the Shanghai blogosphere. As blogger Wang Jianshuo explains,

the broad rise of blogging has meant a welcome increase in available information; and more information means a better idea of what is really happening in the city.

"Everything in this world is just like the elephant in the blind men and the elephant story," he said, referring to the tale of blind men confronting a strange beast, trying to identify it by touching different parts and each giving a different answer. "As a blogger, I'm just one of the blind men to feel this elephant. I am very sure that I write everything that I know and I never write anything that I know is not true, but this does not mean that my article is the whole Shanghai.

"Blogging provides a way for all the blind men to sit down together and share whatever they see," he added, "and when more and more people blog, we can understand this world better from many different perspectives."

3. Thanks to UC Irvine graduate student Silvia Lindtner for sending us the link to [this story by Jane Qiu in Nature](#), which discusses the results of a survey conducted among Chinese scientists in the wake of last month's announcement by Google that it might pull out of the country. The survey explored how much the Chinese scientific community would be affected by the loss of Google's search engine. Results seem to indicate that while other internet search sites would fill the Google gap, quite a few of the almost 800 scientists responding to the questions would prefer to maintain their access to Google's resources.

4. At Open Democracy, William A. Callahan writes about "[A new approach to human rights \(and China\)](#)," arguing that the time has come to move away from debates about the universal rationality of Western-style human rights and consider instead how we can develop an understanding of human rights as a culture,

a shared moral identity that extends sympathy to others. Here the reason to support for human rights is not because they are true, but because they are "good" — and more importantly, because violating human rights is bad. . . .

In the effort to expand human-rights culture, it is not possible just to rely on conversations among (for example) Hu Jintao, Barack Obama, and the Dalai Lama. There must be more transnational conversations in all sectors of society, including people who work in education, business, and NGOs.

5. We recently ran [a Q-and-A](#) between Jeff Wasserstrom and Warren I. Cohen, author of *America's Response to China*. Cohen has a provocative essay at the Columbia University Press blog, titled "[The China we're stuck with](#)." From the piece:

Much of Beijing's current outrage with American policy toward Taiwan, with American sympathy for the Dalai Lama, is based upon the conviction that China is a rapidly rising power and the United States is in steep decline. Chinese leaders, perceiving a change in the correlation of forces in their favor, expect Washington to behave more deferentially. They probably don't expect the *koutou*, the prostrations and head-bangings that the emperors demanded of foreign visitors back in the days when

China was on top of the world, but the rough equivalent—acceptance of Chinese values and priorities—would be welcome. Of late, American scholars and diplomats have been struck by the growing arrogance of their Chinese counterparts, lectures on the superiority of the Chinese model to the American model, the failure of American democracy, American economic profligacy, even on human rights in the United States. This will only get worse until we get our house in order, until we can demonstrate again that democracy works and that our economic system can provide jobs and a decent standard of living for all Americans.

The Chinese have been wrong before about America's decline, their analysts predicting it on the eve of the great expansion of American economic and military power in the 1990s. We can only hope to prove them wrong again—before they do much more harm to the international system. In the interim, our choices are very limited. China is too strong, too important to the world economy to be ignored or pressured into doing what we believe to be right. That leaves us with the unappealing policy of "engagement," to which Washington has ultimately turned under both Democratic and Republican administrations for decades. It means coexisting with a difficult, unsavory regime, relying on diplomacy to persuade Beijing that what we want is in its interest and accepting what little progress can be made.

Historically, China has overreached and self-destructed whenever it played the role of hegemonic power. The arrogance it currently exhibits suggests it is headed in that direction again. But it is not in the interests of the United States for China to collapse. It remains in our interest to have a strong, stable, and prosperous China. Optimally it would also be friendly and democratic. Don't hold your breath.