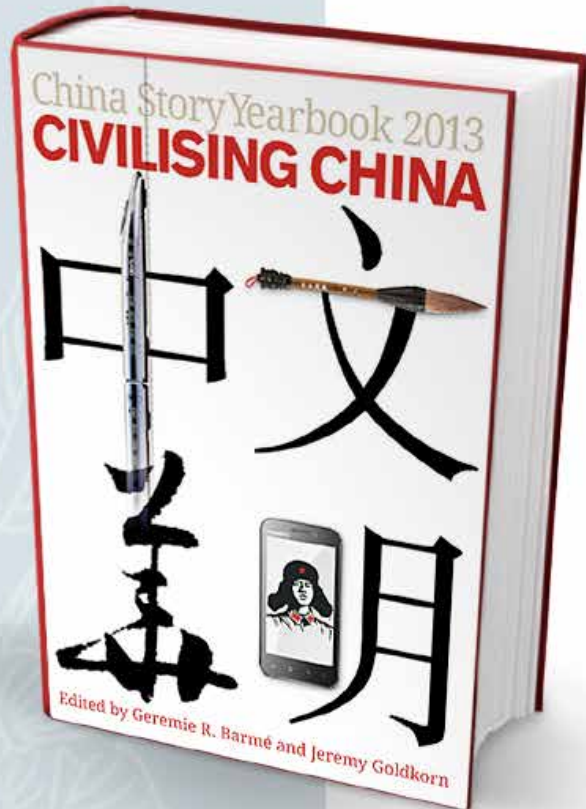


The China Story



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FORUM

POLITICS AND SOCIETY

Excerpt from

CHINA STORY YEARBOOK 2013

CIVILISING CHINA

文明中华

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The China Story
中国的故事

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As China becomes wealthier and more confident on the global stage, it also expects to be respected and accommodated as a major global force — and as a formidable civilisation. Through a survey and analysis of China's regional posture, urban change, social activism and law, mores, the Internet, history and thought — in which the concept of 'civilising' plays a prominent role — *China Story Yearbook 2013* offers insights into the country today and its dreams for the future.



Chinese football fans, Guiyang, June 2011.
Source: ImagineChina

come a ‘Party Empire’ (*dang tianxia* 党天下). The term largely disappeared from public discussion thereafter (along with Chu, who was labelled an ‘anti-Party, anti-people, anti-socialism bourgeois rightist’). It has now re-emerged as mainland scholars attempt to develop a uniquely Chinese approach to the theory and practice of international relations. We may situate this within the wider narrative of Chinese exceptionalism, the discussion of ‘Chinese characteristics’ and China’s search for ‘discursive authority’ (*huayuquan* 话语权) — that is, definitive ways of speaking about reality.

A series of articles and books by Zhao Tingyang of the Philosophy Department of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences explicates the contemporary, utilitarian form of *Tianxia*. Zhao argues that the world we know is still a ‘non-world’, inasmuch as it has not yet become a single entity, remaining in a Hobbesian state of chaos. The key problem is not failed states, but a failed world. The world needs ‘an institutionalized system to promote universal wellbeing, not simply the interests of some dominating nations’. By maintaining the

interests of nation states, globalisation exacerbates international conflict rather than promoting universal wellbeing. The United Nations, too, fails as a truly global institution by performing only as an organisation in which nations negotiate and bargain in their own interests; moreover, it lacks the power to resist domination by any superpower.

Enter the concept of *Tianxia*, first developed by the Zhou to govern the many culturally and ethnically diverse tribes and kingdoms under their rule. Zhao Tingyang acknowledges that this system eventually failed. He believes that it still provides the basis for the creation of a system the world sorely needs. His *Tianxia* is inclusive of all people and all lands; it understands the world as being physical (territory), psychological (national sentiment) and institutional (a world institution). It would rebuild the world on the model of the family, making it a home for all peoples, somewhat in line with Sun Yat-sen’s *Tianxia wei gong*). The ‘world institution’, as the highest political authority with global reach, is crucial to this model, which envisages a world characterised by harmony,

co-operation, and without hegemony in any form. Zhao’s work has elicited both positive and critical responses within and beyond the borders of the People’s Republic. Reviewing Zhao’s two major books, Feng Zhang, an associate professor in the Department of International Relations at Tsinghua University, writes that Zhao’s work has ‘made him a star in China’s intellectual circles, helping to extend his influence beyond the confines of philosophy into the realm of international relations’. Feng Zhuang also credits Zhao’s *Tianxia* theory as having had a ‘huge impact’ on China’s international relations scholars. Internationally, Zhao’s theory is of sufficient importance to have warranted a major workshop at Stanford University in May 2011, with fourteen scholars from Asia and North America in attendance.

Zhiqun Zhu claims that the *Tianxia* theory, together with the radical thinking and reform movements of China’s nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and the traditional concept of the tributary system form the ‘three milestones of China’s ideational and practical development and therefore could provide rich nutrition

for a Chinese international relations theory'. Zhang Yimou's blockbuster film *Hero* (*Yingxiong* 英雄), which celebrates the ancient Qin dynasty quest for unity despite the cost: the obliteration of difference and opposition, offers a somewhat disconcerting, if subliminal vision of *Tianxia* to global and Chinese audiences alike.

Yet even some of Zhao's Chinese supporters acknowledge his concept as interesting, even beautiful, but criticise it as ultimately utopian and lacking any practical pathway to realisation. Others argue that it is based on a flawed understanding of the Zhou dynasty example. Still others have warned that the idea attempts to revive a China-centred hierarchical world order. Professor William A. Callahan of the London School of Economics reaches an identical conclusion: 'rather than guide us toward a post-hegemonic world order, *Tianxia* presents a new hegemony where imperial China's hierarchical governance is updated for the twenty-first century'. The international relations scholar Yan Xuetong of Tsinghua University, who himself draws deeply on Chinese traditions of statecraft and international relations in his work,



Zhao Tingyang's book *The Tianxia System: World Order in a Chinese Utopia*.
Source: Wikimedia Commons

declares that in no way should Zhao be regarded as an international relations thinker: 'his books are about philosophy, rather than about the real world... . In fact I find it quite strange that Western scholars consider his work as part of the China IR schools.'

Yan's views notwithstanding, the concept of *Tianxia* now plays a significant part in debates within China about the role a 'risen' China should play in the world — a role that many Chinese thinkers agree should neither be defined nor guided by purely Western norms.



SOCIAL ISSUES AND INTELLECTUAL TRENDS

THE TOP TEN SOCIAL ISSUES

Baidu, China's leading search engine, posted a list of the top ten search terms for 2012 in its Hot-button Social Issues (Shehui redian 社会热点) category. The terms, translations and a brief explanation of the context follow:

The Wang Lijun Affair (*Wang Lijun shijian* 王立军事件)

The head of the Chongqing Public Security Bureau and the driving force behind the city's campaign against organised crime made news in February when he spent twenty-four hours in the US Consulate in Chengdu, directly precipitating the fall of the city's party secretary, Bo Xilai. Tried in September 2012, Wang was sentenced to fifteen years in prison for abusing his position and attempting to defect; the entertaining, gossipy exposés that subsequently came out in the media



Wang Lijun on trial.
Source: CCTV

portrayed him as a megalomaniacal strongman obsessed with his image; at his own trial, Bo Xilai accused

Wang of additionally having had a special relationship with Bo's wife, the also-imprisoned Gu Kailai.

The Price of Silver (*baiyin jiage* 白银价格)

The volatility of silver had investors and speculators frequently searching for its price, which fluctuated between US\$20–30 throughout the year.

Bo Xilai Removed from Office (*Bo Xilai bei mianzhi* 薄熙来被免职)



Bo Xilai on trial.
Source: CCTV

The Party dismissed Bo Xilai from his posts in Chongqing in March, and suspended him from the Politburo and Central Committee in April. Stripped of his last remaining position, as a member of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress in October, Bo was expelled from the Party on 4 November.



Car licence lottery in Beijing.
Source: CarsChina.com

Fuel Prices (*youjia* 油价)

Government regulators raised prices in February and March, lowered them in June, and raised them again in August.

Paper Gold (*zhi huangjin* 纸黄金)

Gold certificates gave investors another place to put their money instead of real estate and stocks.

Income Tax (*geren suodeshui* 个人所得税)

The exemption threshold was increased from 2,000 yuan to 3,500 yuan in September 2011, and on 22 July 2012, the government announced plans to collect income tax on a household basis.

Car License Lottery (*yao hao* 摇号)

Beijing implemented a lottery system for assigning car license plates in 2011 in an attempt to control traffic gridlock. Guangzhou instituted a similar system in August. A minor commotion arose in November when keen-eyed applicants noticed that the name Liu Xuemei had been picked in the lottery eight times since May. This turned out to be well within ordinary probabilities.

Labor Contract Law (*laodong hetong fa* 劳动合同法)

The resolution of employment disputes now involves the use of this law.

Double-ninth Festival (*Chongyangjie* 重阳节)

A traditional festival associated with chrysanthemums and hill climbing, 'Double-ninth' now doubles as 'Senior Citizens Day'.

Bureau Chief's Daughter-in-Law Flaunts Wealth (*juzhang erxi xuan fu* 局长儿媳炫富)

The daughter-in-law of the Director of the Drug Administration of Sanmenxian, Zhejiang province, posted photos of her luxury purchases



Bureau chief's daughter-in-law posted her luxury purchases online.
Source: Weibo.com

online, boasting that her husband held a highly paid sinecure at a local state-owned enterprise, drawing the wrath of online commentators and prompting police to investigate.

THE TOP TEN INTELLECTUAL TRENDS

On 21 January 2013, the People's Tribune (Renmin luntan 人民论坛), a magazine produced by the People's Daily Publishing Agency, ran an article listing the top ten ideological trends, as decided by an online poll and a panel of experts. The article's brief descriptions of the top ten trends offer a pro-establishment perspective on some of the major issues in China and the world in 2012.

Nationalism

Patriotism was the order of the day during several prominent international disputes involving China in 2012. The *People's Tribune* observes that Chinese nationalism was state-based (*guojia minzuzhuyi* 国家民族主义, as opposed to ethnic nationalism *minzuzhuyi* 民族主义), but that it tended toward extreme forms of expression, as in the violent sentiments expressed by young people participating in demonstrations over the Diaoyu Islands dispute. It is anticipated that extreme expressions of nationalism will continue to break out over the next several years.

Marxism

In his Work Report to the Eighteenth Party Congress, Hu Jintao stated: 'The whole Party should have every confidence in our path, in our theories and in



Hu Jintao, former leader of the Communist Party. Source: Wikimedia Commons



The *People's Tribune* website with article on the top ten ideological trends, as decided by an online poll, on 21 January 2013. Source: rmlt.com.cn

our system', neatly encapsulating the concept of socialism with Chinese characteristics. Of these 'three self-confidences' (*sange zixin* 三个自信), the most significant is 'confidence in our theories', the article states. (It has also been the subject of fervent discussion among Neo-Maoists.)

Neo-liberalism

The perennial privatisation debate heated up in late 2012 after a number of economists identified with neo-liberal values put forth provocative suggestions about the future of China's state-owned enterprises (SOEs). In November, Guo Shuqing, then Chairman of the China Securities Regulatory Commission, said that SOEs ought to 'shift 30 percent of their assets, instead of the current 10 percent, to the social security fund for preserving and increasing the value' (translation by *China Daily*). Zhao Xiao — an economist at the University of Science and Technology Beijing who specializes in state enterprise reform — applauded Guo's suggestion, adding: 'Using SOE dividends to enrich the social security fund is a good idea'. Zhang Weiying — a free-market economist — suggested in December that China will only have a full market economy when SOEs contribute ten percent of GDP. The favourable reception these opinions received had left-leaning ideologues worried that neo-liberals



Zhao Xiao, a Chinese economist specialising in state enterprise reform. Source: Baidu Baike

were stealthily swapping 'liberalism' for 'socialism' in the socialist market economy.

Materialism

In a report released on 12 January 2012, the Beijing-based World Luxury Association (WLA) named China the world's biggest market for luxury goods, accounting for 28 percent of the global total. Although the WLA was publicly shamed in 2013 for fraud and had its business license revoked, there is no doubting the growing hunger for luxury consumption in China. That the WLA was not far off in its estimate was confirmed in December 2012 by a Bain & Company report claiming that Chinese consumers accounted for twenty-five percent of global luxury spending. The *People's Tribune* lamented the pursuit of materialism, calling the identification of liberty with the accumulation of material goods symptomatic of a new kind of 'Chinese malady'.

Universal Values

The *People's Tribune* article identified a new tactic in the debate over 'universal values' (*pushi jiazhi* 普世价值). These values are generally un-

derstood in China to include concepts such as democracy and human rights. Opponents of universal values see them as Western inventions incompatible with China's social and political system: they accuse advocates of universal values of stealthily injecting them into discussions of other hot-button topics, and even of using them to subvert the 'spirit of the Eighteenth Party Congress' for their own ends.

Extremism

The ideological split between 'left' and 'right' in China became more polarised in 2012, and in the crowded sphere of public opinion, people were driven to adopt extreme positions in order to be heard. Calls for complete privatisation the moment SOEs run into problems are matched on the other side by accusations that any criticism of SOEs is an attack on socialism. The Little Yueyue incident, in which a toddler was run over in a hit-and-run accident and ignored by passers-by (see the 2012 *Yearbook*), was to some people a sign of a looming moral apocalypse, but others pointed to heroic acts by common people in other situations as proof that public morality was in good order.

Neo-Confucianism

A trend that began with early education has spread to encompass the reading of traditional classics by adults. The influence of Confucianism in the humanities has moved beyond the disciplines of history and philosophy and has been taken up within such disparate fields as economics, law, political science, sociology, religion and education.

Populism

From developed Europe and Japan to fast-rising Russia and India and the countries of Latin America, populism crept into the political process in 2012 and found expression in right-wing governments and among grassroots politicians who turned public discontent into a base of support. The *People's Tribune* cautions that while populism can give voice to the needs of the underclass, its negative repercussions should not be ignored.



Funeral of Wu Bin, a driver who was acclaimed for doing his duty.
Source: Baidu Baikē

Moral Relativism

Moral exemplars are often described in China as 'most beautiful' (*zuimei* 最美). In 2012, frequent reports of heroes like 'the most beautiful teacher', 'the most beautiful taxi driver', 'the most beautiful soldier' and 'the most beautiful mother' gave the public models of selflessness, courage and integrity. The *People's Tribune* opined that the beauty demonstrated by these heroes transcends moral relativism and reinforces positive values.

Social Democracy

In addition to the French Socialists winning the presidency and a parliamentary majority in France, British Labour, Germany's Social Democratic Party and the Italian Democratic Party all made headway in 2012. After retooling their policies and refocussing their attention on their traditional political power bases following previous setbacks, European social democratic forces are making a recovery.

