



Norton Wheeler. *The Role of American NGOs in China's Modernization: Invited Influence.* Asia's Transformations Series. New York: Routledge, 2014. 240 pp. \$140.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-415-50657-1.

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Since the nineteenth century, the American urge to mold China in its own image has coexisted alongside the Chinese desire to use American technology and know-how to serve China's economic development. The missionary impulse is as deeply ingrained in America's DNA as the search for wealth and power is in China's. Many of the cultural exchange initiatives that followed the reestablishment of diplomatic relations between the United States and China in 1979 continued this longstanding pattern: Deng Xiaoping's government sought to use the United States as a model for China's technological needs and Americans hoped that people-to-people exchanges could shape China's modernization in ways that served American interests. In *The Role of American NGOs in China's Modernization*, Norton Wheeler, an assistant professor of history at Missouri Southern State University, examines how three American organizations have shaped US-China relations over the past thirty-five years.

Wheeler, a former businessman who served as Harlan Global Manufacturing's director of China operations before earning a PhD in American studies at the University of Kansas, argues that many American nongovernmental organization (NGO) projects "have found willing—often beckoning—

Chinese partners" (p. 141). He explores this argument through three case studies, tracing the origins, trajectory, and influence of the Johns Hopkins-Nanjing Center for Chinese and American Studies, the National Committee on United States-China Relations, and the 1990 Institute. Wheeler compensates for the shortage in relevant archival material and his lack of Chinese-language skills by carrying out extensive subject interviews and using translators and interpreters.

In 1979, the Chinese Foreign Ministry appointed Nanjing University president Kuang Yaming to lead a delegation of Chinese university professors to the United States. Around the same time, Steven Muller, the president of Johns Hopkins University, sought to establish a Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS) campus in China. A Chinese-born Hopkins physics professor named Chih-Yung Chien, who wanted to promote a better understanding between China and the United States, brought Kuang and Muller together by arranging a dinner at his home for the Chinese delegation. Kuang then invited Muller and Chien to visit China in 1980 in order to explore potential bilateral projects. After taking Kuang up on his offer, Muller and Chien decided that Johns Hopkins

ought to create a partnership with Nanjing University based on the SAIS program in Bologna, Italy.

After obtaining approval from China's State Council, representatives from the two universities signed an agreement in September 1981 that provided for a jointly managed campus on the grounds of Nanjing University. Chinese and American codirectors would share management duties, and Chinese students would take courses in English while the Americans attended classes taught in Chinese. Each dorm room would house one Chinese and one American student. Muller insisted on freedom of inquiry and an uncensored open stack library, and the Chinese demanded that Nanjing University maintain "sovereignty" over all center facilities (p. 11). Reaching agreement over these substantive issues proved easier than hashing out mundane details like air conditioning and electricity allocation. It took years of further discussion and planning before the center finally opened in September 1986.

The center has since weathered numerous challenges. Five American students left the program in 1988 after a fight between a Chinese guard and several African exchange students precipitated anti-African protests that took on an antiforeign and racist edge. After the Tiananmen crackdown, both Muller and Nanjing University president Qu Qinyue sought to keep the center open. In the United States, Muller resisted pressure from Hopkins staff and alumni to shut it down. In the period of heightened official tension that followed the crackdown, the center helped Chinese and Americans maintain informal contact. It also continued to operate during the protests following the 1999 North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) bombing of the Chinese Embassy in Belgrade as well as during the 2003 SARS epidemic—albeit at a temporary campus in Honolulu.

Wheeler argues that the Hopkins-Nanjing Center has been a useful complement to US diplomacy and a model for educational exchange programs in China. Wheeler points out that many center

codirectors have been Foreign Service veterans. Congress, for its part, has consistently supported the center, seeing it as a beacon of American thought and ideals. Many of the center's alumni have gone on to work in jobs dealing with US-China relations. Ren Donglai, for example, the late Nanjing University Americanist historian, attended the center during its first year of operations. Newer campuses following in the center's footsteps, like the University of Nottingham in Ningbo, have negotiated the same academic freedom and control over pedagogy enjoyed by the Hopkins-Nanjing Center. But Chinese authorities have not always adhered to these agreements. When Sergey Radchenko taught at Nottingham-Ningbo, the copies of Jonathan Spence's *The Search for Modern China* (1990) that he ordered for his class arrived with several photographs and the entire chapter on the Cultural Revolution cut out.[1] Wheeler does not discuss whether such problems have happened elsewhere.

Perhaps it is too soon to tell whether the Hopkins-Nanjing Center has lived up to its founders' visions. Their ultimate goal, Wheeler writes, was that one day both the US secretary of state and the Chinese foreign minister would be Hopkins-Nanjing Center graduates. American alumni have joined the Foreign Service, he notes, and SAIS graduate Cui Tiankai now serves as China's ambassador to the United States, though he studied at the school's American campus. Graduates certainly leave the program with greater linguistic skills and cross-cultural understanding, but Wheeler says little about the center's broader role in spreading American values or influencing Chinese higher education—at Nanjing University or elsewhere. He writes that most Chinese professors responding to a 2007 survey reported a significant expansion in autonomy, but many topics remain off limits. But since Wheeler published his book, Beijing has actually strengthened its efforts to impose ideological control over Chinese universities. For instance, in January 2015, Chinese education minister Yuan Guiren warned the country's universities "to nev-

er let textbooks promoting western values appear in our classes.”[2]

Yet American higher education remains the gold standard in China. More than 274,000 Chinese undergraduate and graduate students studied in the United States during the 2013–14 academic year, a 17 percent increase over the previous year. But many—probably most—of these students do not come to the United States to bask in intellectual freedom and develop their critical thinking skills. Like their upper-middle-class and wealthy American peers, they and their parents tend to focus on the same goals that William Deresiewicz outlined in his recent book, *Excellent Sheep: The Miseducation of the American Elite and the Way to a Meaningful Life* (2015): affluence, credentials, and prestige. This intertwined Sino-American struggle to collect gold stars in order to impress admissions offices at the university most likely to open the door to investment banking careers shows the strength of Sinologist Paul Cohen’s exhortation in *Discovering History in China: American Historical Writing on the Recent Chinese Past* (1984) to focus on the broader framework of historical convergence when studying Chinese-Western relations, rather than seeing things in terms of Western impact and Chinese response. Much work remains to be done in this fascinating subfield, and Wheeler’s book is essential reading for anyone attempting to delve in.

Wheeler’s second NGO, the National Committee on United States-China Relations, has also played an important role in Chinese-American educational exchange. Founded in 1966, the national committee organized forums and seminars about American China policy before President Richard Nixon’s visit to Beijing and began supporting educational exchange programs in 1973. Since the early 1980s it has administered short-term Fulbright programs and hosted Chinese education delegations in the United States. Wheeler describes how the national committee has also supported the establishment of private vocational schools in

Guizhou and exposed Chinese students and young professionals to American society through internships and tours of important American institutions, like the Supreme Court.

The national committee has also supported projects in other fields. It oversees numerous exchanges intended to reach future Chinese and American leaders, such as the Policy Leaders Orientation Program and Young Leaders Forum (YLF). Each year, the YLF brings together a group of young Chinese and American women and men from various fields for five-day retreats. Retired US congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords and deputy chief executive officer (CEO) of the Shanghai Stock Exchange Fang Xinghai both attended the forum in 2003. During the 1990s, the national committee also oversaw the Ussuri Watershed Project to protect northeast China’s wetlands, which earned praise from scientists and policymakers alike and paved the way for further joint environmental projects in China. Wheeler concludes that the national committee has filled a vital, unofficial niche in US-China relations by promoting mutual understanding through dialogue and exchanges in the cultural, educational, and policy spheres.

Finally, Wheeler looks at the 1990 Institute, a group founded by Chinese Americans. Inspired by the Tiananmen tragedy, the institute’s founders believed that the best way to ameliorate China’s underlying problems was to promote research on Deng Xiaoping’s economic reforms. Although the institute’s founders sympathized with the student movement, many of them thought the students’ calls for Western-style democracy were unrealistic. Rather than push China to follow American models, the institute sought to help China on its own terms. The institute’s first project brought together a team of nearly twenty scholars from China and the United States and produced an edited book, *China’s Economic Reform* (1993), which reviewed China’s economic changes during the 1980s. Subsequent collaborative volumes addressed Chinese legal, agricultural, and tax re-

forms. Wheeler argues that the 1990 Institute's work on tax policy helped to shape fiscal reforms in China during the 2000s. In 2001, the institute also became a major participant in China's Spring Bud program, which supports female education in rural areas.

Wheeler argues that these organizations have broken away from the patterns of cultural arrogance that characterized the efforts of many American reformers in China during the late Qing and Republican years. Chinese actors, he shows, have increasingly welcomed—on their own terms—American involvement in their nation's development. Yet officials in the Republic of China also welcomed American involvement, both before and after the retreat to Taiwan. A broader discussion of those exchanges would have helped Wheeler draw more incisive conclusions about change over time. To his credit, Wheeler is up front about his lack of Chinese-language skills, but future scholarship on this topic would benefit from engagement with relevant mainland Chinese and Taiwanese literature, such as Qiusha Ma's *Gaibian Zhongguo: Luokeyeifei jijinhui zai Hua bainian* (2013) (To change China: The Rockefeller Foundation's century-long journey in China) or work being done at Tsinghua University's NGO Research Center and Sun Yat-sen University's Institute of Civil Society. A greater engagement with Chinese sources may also help in understanding the motivations that Chinese officials and academic administrators have for partnering with American organizations.

But these criticisms do not take anything away from Wheeler's well-researched book. His extensive subject interviews are a real strength. He has spoken with dozens of people from China and the United States, and he offers valuable insights to both scholars and policymakers. Anyone planning to work in China or participate in an exchange program should definitely read this book. Most important, Wheeler demonstrates the centrality of mutual respect and working with the Chinese on

projects they consider significant, rather than pushing Americanization. The victimhood narrative at the core of Chinese nationalism leaves people hyper-attuned to any perceived mistreatment or cultural arrogance. But Wheeler also shows that Americans sometimes need to remind their Chinese counterparts that they too need to give the same respect and equal treatment that they themselves demand. In renegotiating the Hopkins-Nanjing Center contract, Wheeler shows, American participants had to remind Nanjing University that they were equal codirectors and not junior partners.

Wheeler ends by writing that if "Sino-American engagement remains largely constructive and China progressively empowers its citizenry, then NGOs such as those whose stories are told herein will share some of the luster with their Chinese partners and US policymakers" (p. 153). If not, he argues, those who warned against closer cooperation may look prophetic. But the United States has already exerted tremendous influence over China's development since the late 1970s, and the trend shows no signs of abating. Both ordinary people and officials in China look to America because of its wealth, power, and dynamism. If Americans want to continue influencing China, the United States would best be served by keeping its own house in order. But because China's rulers want capitalism and economic growth without electoral democracy, those who expect political reforms along American lines are bound to be disappointed.

When China embarked on reform in 1978, nobody could have expected that within thirty-five years Chinese people would be no less obsessed than Americans with NBA basketball, conspicuous consumption, flipping houses, and getting their kids into Ivy League schools. What will unfold in the next thirty-five years is anyone's guess, but scholars of US-China relations are lucky to live in such interesting times.

Notes

[1]. Sergey Radchenko, "China's Secrecy about Its Past Could Stifle Its Future," *Washington Post*, December 30, 2011, http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/chinas-secrecy-about-its-past-could-stifle-its-future/2011/12/21/gIQAd9FORP_story.html.

[2]. "Education Minister Warns against 'Western Values' in Colleges," *Xinhua News Agency*, January 29, 2015, <http://www.globalpost.com/article/6379681/2015/01/29/education-minister-warns-against-western-values-colleges>.

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