

2010


## Blogging AAS 2010

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Wu, Shellen Xiao; Little, Daniel; and Callahan, William A., "Blogging AAS 2010" (2010). *The China Beat Blog Archive 2008-2012*. 752.  
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## Blogging AAS 2010

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March 27, 2010 in [Uncategorized](#) by [The China Beat](#) | [8 comments](#)

As many of our readers are already aware, the Association for Asian Studies Annual Meeting is taking place this weekend in Philadelphia. The largest annual gathering of Asia scholars in the world (this year there will be about three thousand in attendance), the AAS meeting brings together university-based and independent scholars and writers who work in fields ranging from history to political science to literature and studying cultures and countries across Asia.

Between roundtable discussions, panels, book exhibits, movie screenings, and keynote talks (this year's are by [Wang Hui](#) and Jomo Kwame Sundaram, the UN assistant-secretary general on economic development), there is much to keep tabs on at the meeting. So, for the benefit of those who couldn't make it (or those who could, but couldn't make it to everything at the conference), China Beat will be running short reports on some of the meeting's events over the next few days.

Those interested in learning more about the meeting's events can browse the program at the [AAS website](#), or read reporter [Jeff Gammage's overview of the conference](#) at The Philadelphia Inquirer.

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### SESSION 30: "STRANGERS WITHIN THE GATES: EXTERNAL INFLUENCE ON DOMESTIC SOCIAL, ECONOMIC, AND POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT."

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(Abstracts for this panel may be found at the AAS website, [here](#).)

By Shellen Xiao Wu

It was a real pleasure to present on the Friday morning panel "Strangers Within the Gates: External Influence on Domestic Social, Economic, and Political Development," not least because the panel truly integrated research in political science and history. The panelists as well as the chair and discussant reflected the interdisciplinary nature of the panel, with Professor [Lynn White](#) from Princeton University serving as Chair, and Professor [Edward A. McCord](#) from George Washington University as Discussant. As McCord pointed out in his comments, panels such as this one are perhaps reflective of new trends within modern China studies – decades after [Paul Cohen](#) issued his call for China-centered research, scholars are now returning to reexamine topics in diplomatic history, international relations, and foreign influence on China.

It turns out that China didn't do as badly during the "century of humiliation" as the traditional historiography showed. Three papers by Ian Chong, Chunmei Du, and myself (the former a political scientist, and the latter two historians), started the positive reassessment during the late Qing and Republican period. Both Chong and my own paper offered competing notions of Chinese sovereignty in the early twentieth century, Chong's as a political science concept, and mine as a term which appeared with frequency in late Qing mining laws.

But perhaps the return of China and the world is also revealing of the gains in Chinese economic and international standing in the last two decades. Holding 25 percent of American treasury bonds can soothe a lot of insecurities, but is it actually a good thing? Elya Zhang's presentation sketched a history of Chinese sovereign debt defaults from the early 20th century to the present day. Equally intriguingly, political scientist Min Ye showed that contrary to popular expectations, ethnic direct investments (EDI) played a far greater role in both Chinese and Indian economic development in the 1990s and early 2000s than foreign direct investments (FDI). The glossy billboards of foreign brands in Shanghai and Shenzhen, it turns out, hid the reality that the majority of investment came from ethnic Chinese in Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Macau.

China/Asia remained the center of research, but all the papers revisited the impact of foreign influence and expanded the boundaries of research to greater China and beyond.

*Shellen Xiao Wu is a graduate student at Princeton and a contributor to the blog, "[History Compass Exchanges](#)."*

**SKINNER'S LEGACY (DISCUSSING [SESSION 54: ROUNDTABLE: THE LIVING LEGACY OF G. WILLIAM SKINNER](#) AND [SESSION 83: ROUNDTABLE: G. WILLIAM SKINNER'S DATA AND NEW QUANTITATIVE APPROACHES](#))**

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By Daniel Little

Friday's AAS program included two panels on the legacy of G. William Skinner. Skinner has influenced several generations of China scholars, through his writings and through many collaborative research projects. And, as became apparent in both panels, there is a large amount of unpublished research and data that are soon to become available to other scholars as well.

A few highlights of the retrospective –

Skinner's influence on the China field has been broad and pervasive. Many of the concepts he introduced are now a standard basis of conceptualizing China.

Skinner also did a lot of good work on subjects that don't have to do with China. And some of that work has never been published. For example –

- Conjugal power and historical demography of Japan
- Regionalization of France and Japan
- Fieldwork in Thailand

Skinner's work on regionalization anticipated the GIS revolution in history and the social sciences. And it is the more remarkable when we consider that the desktop computing and geographical information tools that we now take for granted did not then exist.

Skinner was consistently interested in gender and family issues in his research on China, Japan, and France. In this way he was an early advocate of gender studies.

Myron Cohen recounted having attended lectures that Skinner offered at Columbia early in Skinner's career. He quoted Skinner as saying, "I am a Parsonian." This involved thinking of society as a whole system and as a system possessing internal functional organization.

The volume of unpublished work that Skinner left is startling. So it is good news that work is currently underway to digitize and catalogue Skinner's unpublished papers and data sets. Harvard University's Center for Geographic Analysis and the University of Washington have taken the lead on these efforts. Here are some important web resources where Skinner's work is being curated and presented to the public.

- Data and maps are being [curated and presented at Harvard's Center for Geographic Analysis](#). Researchers are building on a geographical information system platform, [AfricaMap](#).
- Unpublished papers and research materials are being digitized and presented at the University of Washington. The link is [here](#).
- The [China Historical GPS project at Fudan University](#) is presenting an ambitious digital mapping collection as well.
- Ruth Mostern presented some of her work on the information available through a digital archive of Song gazetteers; visit [here](#).

Here is a [link](#) to the slides I used in my contribution to the first session, called "Skinner's Spatial Imagination."

*Daniel Little, of the University of Michigan-Dearborn, blogs regularly at [Understanding Society](#) and has previously [written about Skinner's legacy](#) and other topics for China Beat.*

## SESSION 149: CULTURE, MEMORY, AND POLITICS IN EAST ASIA

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By William Callahan

As your mother surely taught you, in polite society it's impolite to discuss religion or politics. Session 149 at the AAS, "Culture, Memory and Politics in East Asia," impertinently explored such issues in China, Japan and Taiwan. All five of the panelists — Elena Barabantseva, Daniel C. Lynch, Shogo Suzuki, Zheng Wang, and myself — are self-confessed IR scholars; so it was fascinating to see how we each explored cultural issues to see how memory and power are produced in East Asia. The four papers overlapped in interesting ways, but I think that the most interesting axis of distinction was between those who focused on (semi) official discourse (Wang and Lynch), and those who looked more to popular culture and popular resistance (Suzuki and Callahan). This reflects the perennial chicken and egg conundrum that faces studies of Chinese identity: which is more important, state propaganda or popular feelings? Surely they're intertwined, but understanding just how they're interwoven remains a challenge. The discussion was lively, at least for an 8:30 a.m. session. After the performance Shogo Suzuki and I remarked, with surprise and a touch of disappointment, that the Q&A period lacked any outbursts of injured national feelings. Surely our outrageous comments on comfort women and national humiliation had offended someone. But then again, it was an 8:30 a.m. session.

*William A. Callahan of the University of Manchester is the author most recently of [China: The Pessoptimist Nation](#), which includes themes he has previously explored in posts at China Beat (such as [this one](#) and [this one](#)).*