

Professor Martin Albrow: China at 70 - Looking Back; Looking Ahead
Summary of Presentation
SACU Panel Discussion, 16 October 2019, King's College London

Professor Albrow began by stating that he is not a sinologist, but he goes to China to learn from China. His first visits were in 1987 and 1988, when he was Director of a Population Centre in Cardiff, Wales. They gave courses on population policy programmes in developing countries, and Chinese officials were among their students.

At the time of his visits, China had the One Child Policy, which was highly contentious, and incurred hostility in many parts of the world, particularly from churches. The policy involved precise monitoring of procreation within villages - there were charts of individual women's monthly cycles on village office walls. Professor Albrow was taken by his translator to a village, where he particularly wanted to talk to women, so they went to a large extended family, in a traditional courtyard house. He wanted to interview individual women, but in rural areas the group was the relevant unit.

Professor Albrow feels that the west needs to learn from Chinese experience. He went on a tour of Qinghai, where they visited a small Muslim community. The mosque had been destroyed during the Cultural Revolution, then rebuilt by the government. The people had saved the Koran during Cultural Revolution by giving individual pages to individuals, then reassembling them afterwards. When driving on the Tibetan plateau in Xining, they came upon a huge superstructure outside a town, with huge characters on it, and the English translation: 'prosperity democracy civility harmony freedom equality justice rule of law patriotism dedication integrity friendship', these being the 12 socialist values, adopted at the 18th Congress of the Party in 2012.

Spirit is everywhere in Chinese life. There are seventy-four mentions of different kinds of spirit in Xi Jinping's recently published book. For China, spirit and reality are intimately connected - this is why Marxism is particularly appropriate for contemporary China; Marx said there was no division between spirit and reality. Invoking spirit is a normal feature of political discourse in China, and an important part of China's success in the world.

In the west we cannot suddenly generate this kind of spirit, but we can still learn from China. For example, we believe in the west that pure form of democracy is representative democracy, which is in trouble in the west for many reasons. China sees the failings of western democracy. China has been committed to democratic development from the beginning. China has its own special kind of consultative democracy. The west needs to engage seriously with China about democracy - it would help in China too if we were to say we were interested in what China had to say about democracy. China needs that kind of sympathetic interest in its own institutions and development that it so often doesn't get.

China's goal for 2049 is building China into a modern socialist country - prosperous, strong, democratic, culturally advanced and harmonious.

Professor Albrow concluded by complimenting SACU as a shining example of bringing east and west together, and complimenting Counsellor Wang Qi on China's 70th Anniversary.



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