A View of History From the Mountains: Daosit Hermitage in the Six Dynasties

Author: Bin Wei

Abstract: During the Six Dynasties period, the cultural landscape of the mountains underwent a transformation. Most notable among these were the appearance of monasteries and Daoist temples as well as the system of immortals' grottos and estates that accompanied the latter. Because of this shift, mountains began to constitute a special religious and cultural space. Two factors contributed to this shift. The first was religious, specifically, the movement of Daoist and Buddhist practice into mountain retreats. The second was political, namely, how political power was shaped by new geopolitical configurations centered on the city of Jiankang (Nanjing). With these two factors at work, a new cultural form and spatial configuration emerged from the mountains that reflects the intimate relationship between the Six Dynasties politics, society, and culture.

Mount Longjiao's "Capital of Immortals" [龍角仙都] : Representation and Evolution of a Sacred Site from the Tang Dynasty

Author: Wen Lei

Abstract: "Meritocracy" is among the political phenomena and political orientations found in modern Western democratic systems. Daniel A. Bell, however, imposes it on ancient Confucianism and contemporary China and refers to it in Chinese using loaded terms such as xianneng zhengzhi 賢能政治 and shangxian zhi 尚賢制. Bell's "political meritocracy" not only consists of an anti-democratic political program but also is full of logical contradictions: at times, it is the antithesis of democracy, and, at other times, it is a supplement to democracy; sometimes it resolutely rejects democracy, and sometimes it desperately needs democratic mechanisms as the ultimate guarantee of its legitimacy. Bell's criticism of democracy consists of untenable platitudes, and his defense of "political meritocracy" comprises a series of specious arguments. Ultimately, the main issue with "political meritocracy" is its blatant negation of popular sovereignty as well as the fact that it inherently represents a road leading directly to totalitarianism.

Medieval Daoist Concepts of the Middle Kingdom

Author: Yi Liu

Abstract: To construct socialism with Chinese characteristics, advance socialist democracy, and establish a political ecology for socialism with Chinese characteristics, we should devote our efforts toward building a stronger political system and strengthening the rule of law and democracy. Important projects, such as the anti-corruption campaign, mass-line education, or team building for government officials should be guided by the spirit of democracy and the rule of law and proceed in an orderly and regulated manner. Still, voices in support of political meritocracy have become increasingly audible in Chinese political and academic circles, supporting a political phenomenon completely incompatible with the goal of building a socialist

democracy. Meritocracy as a political system entails a high degree of uncertainty, unsustainability, and risk and is essentially just a modified version of the rule of man or, to put it differently, the rule of man "2.0." Its fatal weakness is its inability to resolve two fundamental problems related to the legitimacy of political power: Where does power originate, and how can we control it? An important theoretical prerequisite for building a clean political ecology is thus to demystify meritocracy and dispel any popular myths surrounding it.

They Symbolic Construction of Realkity: The Xici and Ernst Cassirer's Philosophy if Symbolic Forms

Author: Shuchen Xiang

Abstract: Compared to Wang Shaoguang's approach to re-interpret the old concept "democracy" to overcome the Schumpeterian model of political legitimation, Daniel Bell's Political Meritocracy takes a more challenging path, attempting to build a new discourse of legitimacy centering on the concept "meritocracy" and incorporating elements of ancient China's traditions, the socialist revolutions in the twentieth century, and the system of competitive elections common in the Western world today. This inspiring work is full of incisive arguments, but could be improved by further considering the tension between the Confucian tradition and the revolutionary tradition in the twentieth century.

New Literature in Chinese: China and the World, written by Zhu Shoutong

Author: Yuanfei Wang

Abstract: In the pre-Qin era, the xianneng 賢能 [those of virtue and talent] were a commonly discussed topic, on which every school of thought had its own views. Daoist discussions on the xianneng sometimes reflected strong aversion and rejection, yet at other times gave them abundant praise and approval. Because of uncertainty on the universality of moral principles, on the limitations of one's individual ability, and on the effectiveness of political actions, views in the Laozi 老子 and the Zhuangzi 莊子 on the xianneng saving society were skeptical in nature, sometimes even taking a mocking tone. Scholars of the Huang-Lao tradition had realized the limitations of individual ability and hoped that the greatest level of political benefit could be attained. Consequently, under the premise of safeguarding monarchical authority, fully displaying the skills and talents of all kinds of sages (imperial teachers and virtuous officials) through the practice of wuwei 無為 [inaction], and the highest leaders' respect for virtue became the main direction in the Huang-Lao understanding of the xianneng. This tendency has much in common with the Legalist school of thought.

Enticement: Stories of Tibet, written by Pema Tsenden

Author: Ronald Suleski

Abstract: Lucian W. Pye, the renowned American Sinologist, argues that power/authority

in Chinese culture follows a paternalistic structure, that the distinction in Chinese society between public and private has historically been in a state of tension, and therefore that Chinese governance has always emphasized central power over local self-governance, suppressed cultural pluralism, and rebuffed multipolar structures of power. Even though the inherent tension identified by Pye certainly exists, the thesis that Chinese culture has a deeply ingrained authoritarian orientation is simply incorrect. In order to resolve the tension between the public and private realms, Chinese thinkers—from the various strands of legalist thought to the Confucian notion of "kingly governance"—have premised the division of power on the priority of preserving centralized power. In other words, diffusion of power has been premised on the idea of an already collectivized authority. Therefore, the power structure that defines Chinese culture has certainly not been the polycentric one that Pye implicitly values, but neither has it been the centralist, authoritarian structure that he abhors. Rather, it has been the Confucian model premised on the values of governance through ritual and moral virtue. Insights from cultural psychology help explain ethical governance—that is, rule by an ethical meritocracy—in Chinese society and culture.

The Top Ten Developments in Studies on Chinese Humanities in 2017