in Silicon Valley appreciate the democratic government, education system and living conditions in the U.S., will Chinese who travel or expatriate to Asia share Chinese-American values such as civic participation with their business partners, communities and families in China?

- Wong considers issues related to intellectual property rights, but not as they relate to international law. How do Chinese-American entrepreneurs, engineers and other technology workers in Silicon Valley respond to infringement of intellectual property rights in China?

- Will Chinese-Americans doing business in China decide there are economic benefits to the rule of law and create additional momentum for reforms to China’s legal system?

Even without exploring these topics, The Chinese in Silicon Valley is an informative resource for anyone interested in Chinese diaspora studies, including public policy leaders and others who wish to tap into the intellectual and social potential of this group.

A Second Kind of Optimism: An Interview with Guy Sorman

BY SHARON HOM

French journalist, economist and philosopher Guy Sorman earlier this year published his new book on China, L’année du Coq : Chinois et rebelles, which will soon be published in English by Penguin Books India as The Year of the Rooster: Chinese Rebellions. Additional editions are planned in the U.S., Japan, Korea, Argentina and Taiwan. Following are some of Sorman’s views on China.

Sharon Hom (SH): What made you decide to write this book?

Guy Sorman (GS): Well, the French take on China is quite “Maoist,” and I wanted to challenge some of these romanticized notions of Chinese Communism. I also wanted to look critically at the so-called “economic miracle” that is given such attention in the West. In The Year of the Rooster I focus on individual voices, people living in villages and small towns. I also interviewed what might be the next generation of Communist leaders, including individuals at the Shanghai Party School and Central Disciplinary Committee.

Books on China tend to be by experts making predictions about the future, but Year of Rooster is about now. It describes an economic system that is a “capitalist” system, but with only one entrepreneur—the Party—one owner and no real competition, and no private entrepreneurship.

SH: Your analysis echoes that of Chinese political commentators such as Hu Ping who are critical of the Party’s exploitation of China’s land, resources and people.

GS: The purpose or ambition of the party is to develop and maintain the power of the Party and China as one entity. With the concentration of wealth in the hands of a small elite and no trickle-down of the benefits, what we have is the clear consequence of developing a strong China, not a genuinely developed China.

In the area of health, for example, HIV/AIDS is still a serious problem despite the money being spent. Photographs of Bill Clinton with children receiving treatment simply reflect the Party’s propaganda skills. The Party has become very sophisticated in its use of human rights rhetoric, and knows what to sell to western audiences; it makes all the right noises, for example issuing a White Paper on Democracy.

So basically, there are no economic downsides: foreign investment remains strong with no reason for it to decline. Foreign markets will remain open to Chinese exports. The only threat is the threat of the collapse of the banks. As the liberal economist Mao Yushi says, “To lose freedom is acceptable, but to lose your savings is not acceptable.” There is a race now between the necessary transformation of the banking system and the descent into bankruptcy. We need to watch closely what is happening in the financial sector.

SH: On the political reform front, there has been increasing attention to the introduction of local elections, with a number of key overseas donors actively supporting these developments. How do you assess their impact and the prospects for producing a greater foundation for democratization?

GS: Let us assume that this sudden passion for local elections, however primitive the exercise, is because the Party has woken up to the growing discontent of 800 million peasants. It is they who sustain the army of apparatchiks camping in their villages; on average there is one Party apparatchik for every 20 rural inhabitants, a proportion growing by the day.

Other observers, neither Communist nor Chinese, especially those from the Ford and Carter foundations, which are both very active in China, feel that local elections have set an irreversible process in motion: the Communist Party will eventually loosen its grip and in the long run be absorbed by the democratic process. For this reason, both foundations favor village elections in China; they provide logistic support and organisational know-how to the local authorities that hold elections. This was the case in Chala, Qinghai Province, where Party cadres beamed as they told me Tibetans were a free people. Additionally, the foundation headed by the former American president Jimmy Carter provided computers to the local government. The Chinese government is not short of computers, so who is being taken in, a naive Carter or the Chinese Communists caught up in the electoral system?

SH: How do you assess the role of foreign funders in China?

GS: I have a detailed discussion in my book about the activities of the Ford Foundation and the Carter Foundation and why they have decided to play with the Party. They are totally naive to believe that change will result from their funding of local elections. They forget that this is a totalitarian regime—you can’t change it from inside. What they are doing is window-dressing—they do not understand the nature of the regime and the ambition of the Party, which is to maintain power.

Without trying to generalize, the manner in which village elections are conducted suggests that the Party is in no mood to move further down the road to democracy.
In any case, what legitimacy can democracy have when one does not have access to information or freedom to organize?

SH: Do you think that Party and central control is really so monolithic? What about central-regional and local tensions?

GS: The infinite variations on the ground tell us that the central government is not as strong as it seems. Although the state lays down general policy guidelines, it is the local representatives of the Party who implement these guidelines. They go about their business with an eye to personal gain, depending on the power equations in the village and how much influence they wield. Centralization in China amounts to a permanent negotiation between the authorities in Peking and the local potentates of the Communist Party.

SH: At the same time, you observe that the Party appears to be losing legitimacy and ideologically no longer enjoys the faith and support of the people.

GS: In fact, despite the crackdowns on freedom of expression, there is a religious renaissance underway in China. However, the Buddhists are very weak, with limited influence, and are controlled by the Party. Taoism is also very weak. The officially-recognized Catholics are going for legitimacy, and the hope that staying within Party restrictions will allow the development of a larger Catholic church. The Protestants are very active, especially those evangelicals churches. I don’t agree with the book Jesus in Beijing1 that the rise of religious practices is just shifting from one obedience set to another.

Another reason for the loss of Party legitimacy is widespread corruption, which is a key source of unrest but also of Party unity. The government publishes new regulations and publicizes some executions to show it is serious about combating corruption, but in fact the Party uses corruption to maintain unity by distributing the economic benefits of political privilege. This can be traced back to Mao. Also, if you criticize the Party, you will be attacked for undermining China’s national pride, which is only possible if the Party holds itself up as synonymous with the nation.

SH: Given this landscape, what do you think are the long-term prospects for change and political reform?

GS: I think there is a kind of economic determinism operating in China; due to the increasing power and wealth of Party members, there is very little incentive for change.

Some people argue that faced with the threat of unrest, the Party will transfer resources to quell rising protests. But that won’t happen, because the Party has the situation under control and there is no possibility that these movements will cement and coalesce into an effective force for change. Also, the fear of civil war and social chaos is stronger than hatred of the Party, which suggests that the Party has been successful at convincing people that there is no alternative.

But perhaps we are not looking at the right things in assessing future prospects for change. The future is happening where you don’t expect it. For example, looking at popular cultural phenomena, like the Super Girl contest on Hunan TV—the Chinese equivalent of American Idol, in which the winner did not in any way reflect an official version of beauty or talent. Instead you could see the globalized influences of Japanese and Korean pop culture and even U.S. pop culture. The Party criticized the result as an example of the consequences of an “unprepared democracy,” because the “wrong” candidate, i.e. not educated and not the best singer, had won.

Jiang Rong, author of The Wolf Totem,2 writes that there are two ways to be a Chinese—a wolf or a sheep, which is just a wolf converted into a sheep by Marxism or Confucianism. This is a huge metaphor for China. What does this mean? Simply that cultural change may not necessarily take place at an obvious level. There is a sea change underway on the Internet and on popular shows, but will this be translated into political argument? 2008 will be a decisive year: for the Party, the Olympic Games must be a symbol of the triumph of the Party, but for human rights organizations it also presents a window of opportunity.

NOTES

OPEN FORUM

Another View of Mao: The Unknown Story

BY LOIS WHEELER SNOW

In China Rights Forum No. 4, 2005, Roger Garside wrote a review of Jung Chang and Jon Halliday’s book Mao: The Unknown Story. I am not acquainted with Mr. Garside’s work, but I note from CRF that he served as a British diplomat in China during the Cultural Revolution and then again in 1976–1979. It does not follow that these two experiences, revealing as they probably were, would automatically make him an expert on Chinese revolutionary history, a fact borne out by his high praise of the Chang-Halliday book as demonstrating “scholarship on an heroic scale.”

A number of acknowledged China scholars have pointed out many flaws in The Unknown Story. Andrew Nathan, Chair of the Department of Political Science at Columbia University, has stated that so-called revelations in the book came “from sources that cannot be checked,” adding that “others are openly speculative or are based on circumstantial evidence, and some are untrue.” He has further stated that many claims are “based on distorted, misleading or far-fetched use of evidence.”

This contrasts with the Garside report of “diligent and resourceful research of primary sources [that] has enabled the authors to make important revelations,” among which is the dismissal of Edgar Snow’s accounts of the Long March in Red Star Over China, many told to him directly by