

UC San Diego Prof. Susan Shirk in The Economist 'Live' Debate on China

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The Economist is hosting an online debate today in which two international experts on China discuss how the country is making its voice heard in the shaping of the world order, from the financial realm to that of global security in what influential Western observers have dubbed the "China model."

Susan Shirk, director of the University of California Institute on Global Conflict and Cooperation at UC San Diego's School of International Relations and Pacific Studies (IR/PS), explains "a vision distorted by angst about the decline of the West." Shirk, the Ho Miu Lam professor of China and Pacific Relations at IR/PS, says many Westerners overestimate the strengths of the Chinese system, just as they idealized Japan in the 1980s.

The Economist has adapted the Oxford style of debating to an online forum in which Shirk's viewpoint is in contrast to that of Stefan Halper, senior fellow of Politics and International Studies at the University of Cambridge. Halper argues that China exports a form of "market authoritarianism." Beyond any other aspect of China's example, and beyond everything else that China sells to the world, Halper argues that China functions as the world's largest billboard advertisement for "going capitalist and staying autocratic."

Others are invited to express their opinions in an online vote, and add their comments to the discussion at <http://www.economist.com/debate/days/view/553>

Since introducing market reforms and opening itself to foreign trade and investment in 1978, China has achieved a historically unprecedented three decades of over 7 percent per-capita income growth. But there are many reasons for China's remarkable economic performance, some of which—such as the more than 70 percent of the population of working age or the massive domestic market—have nothing to do with the wisdom of its policies. Moreover, Beijing's economic strategy has shifted over the 30 years of reform and opening. Chinese economists scoff at the notion that there is one consistent "Chinese model of development."

Nations from Iran to Myanmar to Venezuela have poached Chinese innovations to solve problems; parts of China's internet-monitoring protocols, for example, are now found in Iran. Its significance has less to do with "development models" and more to do with winning the "battle of ideas" about the optimum relationship between the rulers and the ruled.

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