

Visiting Speaker Series 2016-17 Term 1

Talking Freely about Elections in the Chinese Republic

Joshua HILL

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6 Dec 2016 (Tuesday)

4:00 – 5:30pm

Room 1118, 11/F,

Yasumoto International Academic Park

ABOUT THE SPEAKER

Joshua HILL is a historian of modern China, with a specific focus on political ideas, institutions, and practices. His current book project, *Voting as a Rite: A History of Elections in Modern China*, examines the intellectual and cultural significance of voting during the late Qing, the Republic, and the early People’s Republic. He also translates contemporary Chinese historical scholarship into English; his most recent translation is Xu Qiyu’s *Fragile Rise: Grand Strategy and the Fate of Imperial Germany* [Cuiruo de jueqi: dazhanlüe yu Deyizhi diguo de mingyun] (The MIT Press, forthcoming).

HILL is assistant professor of history at Ohio University. He was a postdoctoral scholar at the University of California, Berkeley’s Center for Chinese Studies in 2012-13 and earned his Ph.D. from Harvard University in 2011.

ABOUT THE TALK

For eighteen months after the 1911 Revolution, voting became a common political activity in mainland China. At the same time, writers and intellectuals complained about the nastiness of electoral competition, the pettiness of political parties—and, above all, the ignorance of the electorate. Even in the earliest, and freest, moments of China’s republican experiment, many prominent voices doubted that elections were right for China.



Such rhetoric found its home in the Shanghai-based print media, particularly the *Shenbao* newspaper’s well-known “Free Talk” literary page. An exploration of the fiction, essays, and epigrams that appeared in “Free Talk” during China’s first parliamentary election in the winter of 1912-13 reveals the extent to which discomfort with elections, and with those elected to office, permeated the discourse of the new Republic. This predated the much more famous clashes between militarists and parliamentarians that doomed the elected institutions established after 1911.

Examining the set of values and beliefs about voting expressed by various “Free Talk” writers reveals why elections would prove both central to the Republic’s identity and pivotal to its demise—and provides a surprising mirror for reflecting on the contentious elections of the present day.

Free Admission

The seminar is conducted in English

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