

A Chinese voice extols free market for China's economy

By Alan Wallace

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Americans can familiarize themselves with a Chinese scholar whose views, echoing the thinking of Friedrich Hayek and other members of the “Austrian school,” have helped shape his nation's dramatic economic rise by reading Zhang Weiying's “The Logic of the Market: An Insider's View of Chinese Economic Reform” (Cato Institute).

Originally published in China in 2010 and now translated into English by Matthew Dale, the book is a collection of essays by an economist known as China's “leading market liberalist,” according to the publisher. Zhang, who earned his economics doctorate from Oxford University, directs Peking University's Center for Market and Network Economy.

Zhang believes a market economy fits with an old Chinese proverb, “benefit yourself by benefiting others.” He advocates letting prices fluctuate freely in response to market forces, sees institutional respect for private property as essential, endorses profit as a motive and considers entrepreneurs vital for extending China's economic liberalization while reducing state ownership and control. He remains optimistic about China's economic potential. But the book deals with both successes and failures of his country's economic reforms.

Zhang's free-market advocacy helped lead to his ouster as dean of Peking University's Guanghua School of Management in 2010. That didn't deter him from speaking out. He's scheduled to appear Thursday at a Cato Institute event in Washington, D.C.

There are two ways in which people make themselves happy, according to Zhang. He told The Wall Street Journal in 2012 that one way is to make others unhappy: “I call that the logic of robbery. The other way, you make yourself happy by making other people happy — that's the logic of the market.”

Whether the state yields its dominance of the Chinese economy to truly private enterprise will be determined in the long run. Zhang's book, however, shows that free-market principles usually thought of as Western have an influential, prominent advocate in China.

THOUGHTFUL PROGRESS

“The Moral Arc: How Science and Reason Lead Humanity toward Truth, Justice, and Freedom” by Michael Shermer (Henry Holt and Co., available Tuesday) — This book maintains that applying such principles of scientific thinking as abstract reasoning, rationality, empiricism and skepticism in such fields as politics, economics and moral philosophy has changed our perceptions of morality and made our world better. It's a process and outlook that played a major role in forming the notion of natural rights, a concept that helped democracy supplant the divine right of kings, for example. The author — founding publisher of *Skeptic* magazine, editor of its website, *Scientific American* columnist and writer of eight prior books on the evolution of human beliefs and behavior — sees steady, if sometimes halting, moral progress as mainly stemming from the free, open approach to inquiry championed by the great thinkers of the Age of Reason and the Enlightenment.

FRENCH MYTHS

“They Eat Horses, Don't They?: The Truth About the French” by Piu Marie Eatwell (Thomas Dunne Books) — The American outpouring of sympathy for, and solidarity with, the French prompted by the recent terrorist attacks in Paris is a sharp contrast to the disdainful U.S. view fueled by France's opposition to the Iraq War in 2003. Many old stereotypes about the French, which that disdain brought back to the fore, overlap with this book's subject matter. Its British author, who lived in France for many years, tackles 45 myths and misconceptions about French food, drink, women, sex, marriage, plumbing, manners, history, society, language, culture and more. She explains their origins and truthfulness, rating each on a three-star scale for veracity. She draws on her own experiences, historical periodicals, government surveys, statistics and interviews as she explores today's France, its people and how British and American perspectives on the French sometimes diverge.

IN THE PIPELINE

Forthcoming titles from both ends of the political spectrum:

Conservative

- “The Reaper: Autobiography of One of the Deadliest Special Ops Snipers” by Nicholas Irving with Gary Brozek (St. Martin's Press, Jan. 27)
- “Boko Haram: Inside Nigeria's Unholy War” by Mike Smith (I.B. Tauris, Jan. 30)
- “The Triumph of the Gun-Rights Argument: Why the Gun Control Debate Is Over” by Harry L. Wilson (Praeger, Jan. 31)

- “Intellectual Privacy: Rethinking Civil Liberties in the Digital Age” by Neil Richards (Oxford University Press, Feb. 2)

- “The Hundred-Year Marathon: China's Secret Strategy to Replace America as the Global Superpower” by Michael Pillsbury (Henry Holt and Co., Feb. 3)

Liberal

- “The Assault on International Law” by Jens David Ohlin (Oxford University Press, Friday)

- “Change the Story, Change the Future: A Living Economy for a Living Earth” by David C. Korten (Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Feb. 2)

- “Believer: My Forty Years in Politics” by David Axelrod (The Penguin Press, Feb. 10)

- “Climate Shock: The Economic Consequences of a Hotter Planet” by Gernot Wagner and Martin L. Weitzman (Princeton University Press, Feb. 22)

- “The Utopia of Rules: On Technology, Stupidity, and the Secret Joys of Bureaucracy” by David Graeber (Melville House, Feb. 24)