A Rising Unknown: Rediscovering China in Japan’s East Asia

Chih-yu Shih

Abstract

The article argues that the difficulty for contemporary thinkers to conceptualize the meaning of China’s rise roots in the prewar history of political thoughts, especially thoughts on Asia and Japan’s role in Asia. According to these thoughts, it was always Japan that led Asia’s modernization. Defeat in World War II did not seriously challenge this self-image despite the temporary socialist obsession with China before China fell prey to the Cultural Revolution. In general, there has been no theoretical framework ever available in Japan to see Asia not under Japan’s leadership. The irony lies in the predicament that Japan relies on the United States to support its bid for leadership in Asia, aimed at eventual triumph of Asia over America. To Japan, as a result, the rise of China is ultimately an intellectual challenge rather than a strategic threat.

Chih-yu SHIH teaches civilizational politics and cultural studies at National Taiwan University. He has published on Chinese ethnic politics, Chinese foreign policy, and Chinese political and economic reform. His most recent books include Autonomy, Ethnicity and Poverty in Southwestern China, Democracy Made in Taiwan, and Navigating Sovereignty: World Politics Lost in China. His current research interest is comparative epistemology and intellectual history of China studies in the world.