Chinese Models and Institutional Secrets: Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore

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Venue: Peter Ho Lecture Theatre (LT–10), Yeung Kin Man Academic Building (AC1)
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Abstract
Since the reform-and-opening up period, the Chinese Communist Party has been eager to learn from other countries in order to speed economic development, reduce corruption, and remain politically stable. As post-Mao China has aimed to find a ‘Chinese way of development’, cultural considerations make Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Singapore potentially crucial in the country’s effort to learn important ‘lessons’. It might be thought that for Chinese observers Taiwan would be viewed as the most relevant case for emulation because under Chiang Kai-shek the island was institutionally similar to China today as it had a Leninist-style political party that oversaw rapid capitalist economic development within strict authoritarian controls. However, the process of political liberalisation and eventual democratisation of Taiwan led the Chinese leadership to shun it as a possible model. Moreover, while Hong Kong was briefly seen as a model of how to effectively fight corruption as well as an example of a free market economy, Chinese observers eventually lost interest both because of Hong Kong’s growing political liberalism and ‘Westernisation’ as well as the decision to retain an important statist element amidst economic reforms. These worries intensified given Hong Kongers’ support for the Tiananmen student movement in 1989 and a series of post-handover demonstrations. Instead, Chinese scholars and policy-makers have flocked to Singapore since it was singled out by Deng Xiaoping as the most appropriate model in 1992 to study practical governance lessons and to provide ideological confirmation that economic modernization can be combined with one-party rule. Institutionally, however, due to the legacies of British colonialism, Singapore is more similar to Hong Kong, particularly given the importance of the legacy of the rule of law. However, Chinese observers have largely seen what they want to see in Singapore: a one-party state built on Confucian principles which is successful and legitimate.

All are welcome
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