
BOOK REVIEW ESSAY

The First (Westerner) Dean of Political Science in China: A Valuable Idealist

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The Dean of Shandong: Confessions of a Minor Bureaucrat at a Chinese University, by Daniel A. Bell. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2023. 208 pp. US\$27.95 (Hardcover). ISBN: 9780691247120.

When I first heard that Daniel Bell left Tsinghua University to serve as a dean at Shandong University in 2017, my reaction was that he was doing it to write another book. After all, his previous books have been born from his experiences in Singapore, Hong Kong, and Beijing. Holding a bureaucratic position in a Chinese university would provide a unique opportunity for him to observe the Chinese system from inside, a rare vantage point. Whether or not this was his real intention, here we are: Bell has produced a light-hearted and reflective account of his five-year deanship at Shandong University. It is not a reflection of light weight, as Bell's well-known defense of the China model—posited as political meritocracy and a viable alternative to western democracy—has landed him in heated controversies amidst the ideological competition between democracy and authoritarianism in the rising U.S.-China rivalry.¹

1. Insider's Vantages

Although the book description flaunts Bell as the first foreign dean of a political science faculty in mainland China, this is not the case if we

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