[Q&A]

PW Talks with Martin Jacques

China: East Is East

Jacques reveals the implications of China's assuming the status of the world's biggest market and most influential superpower in *When China Rules the World* (Reviews, Aug. 31).

You write that China is playing a long game that's very subtle and hard for the West to understand. Is this a consciously articulated strategy or a modus operandi central to Chinese consciousness?

I think it's both. Because the U.S. is such a recent creation, the American timescale is extremely short. China's civilization goes back 5,000 years, and the Chinese constantly access very distant history to illustrate the problems of the present. Kissinger once asked Zhou Enlai what he thought about the French Revolution, and Zhou Enlai said, "It's too soon to say." With that mentality coupled with its size and growth, the balance of power is constantly being reconfigured in China's favor, and they can be patient. But it's also conscious strategy; after the "century of humiliation," they prioritized creating the best possible circumstances for development, and they've tried to get on with the countries that they perceive to matter.

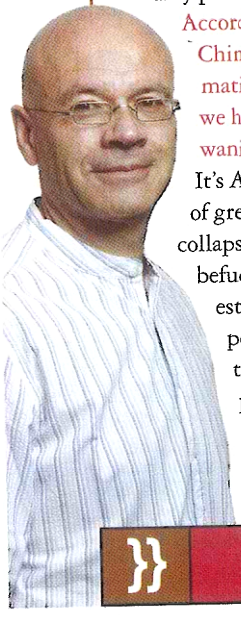
According to you, the rise of China will be "profoundly traumatic" for the U.S. Why don't we hear more about the U.S.'s waning power?

It's American hubris; 50 years of great power influence and the collapse of the Soviet Union has befuddled the mind. The greatest period of danger for great powers is when they think they're at the height of their powers—remember that song, "Britannia rule the waves?"—they translate what is contingent into something that is eternal. The Bush administration thought that the world was going to be redrawn according to American interests, that this would be the real legacy of the cold war. And they were totally wrong; American power was actually in decline, and the reason it was in decline was the rise of the developing countries and above all, China. But the West thinks that there is only one form of modernity, Western modernity, that developing countries are on an escalator heading in the same direction toward a Western-style society, and that China's rise should be viewed narrowly, as an economic phenomenon—not as something operating according to a different political, cultural, philosophical template.

What's next for you?

I don't know. This book has been a very long journey. It's an intellectual work, but also a love story. The seed for the book was planted in 1993, and it coincided with my meeting my wife, Hari, who was Malaysian. I started the book in 1998, but 14 months in, it was brutally interrupted by her death. The book was given its power and passion by my overwhelming love for her: I had finally met my soul mate, this magical person, from profoundly different worlds from mine, and I had became enormously sensitive to race and had to deconstruct myself as a white person to understand our differences with humility. And that was a motif, in a way. To understand East Asia, I had to dump my baggage and approach these cultures with due modesty.

—Parul Sehgal



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See the review at www.publishersweekly.com/whenchinarulestheworld

★ **Blues and Chaos: The Music Writing of Robert Palmer**

Edited by Anthony DeCurtis. Scribner, $28 (416p) ISBN 978-1-4165-9974-6

Throughout his career as a critic and journalist for the *New York Times*, *Rolling Stone* and other publications (as well as books like *Deep Blues*), Palmer (1945–1997) strove for a unifying perspective that could cover all strains of American music, "a set of procedures that will allow us to evaluate Charles Ives and James Brown" as he wrote in a seminal 1979 essay. The breadth of his journalism is outstanding: he was one of the first writers to interview Sam Phillips, the head of Elvis Presley's first music label; soon after, he was alerting *Times* readers to the developing "world music" movement, and the year after that he was hanging out in the recording studio with John Lennon and Yoko Ono. He could write reviews of comprehensive box sets or write the liner notes for them, and either way the result would be an engaging, insightful essay crammed with historical details. One key test of any retrospective anthology of this sort is whether the reviews and essays are as relevant today as when they were first published, and on that front, Palmer scores an absolute success—his work, like that of Greil Marcus and Peter Guralnick, sets a standard for a critical appreciation of American culture. *(Nov.)*

Notes Left Behind

Brooke and Keith Desserich. Morrow, $19.99 (272p) ISBN 978-0-06-188639-3

A Cincinnati couple bravely and lovingly recorded the last months of their six-year-old daughter's life after she was handed the devastating prognosis of terminal brain cancer. A trip to the doctor's office to treat Elena's strep throat resulted in an MRI that revealed a large tumor lodged within the walls of Elena's brain stem—"in the worst place with one of the worst tumors out there." The kindergartener, who also had a younger sister, Grace, was given three to six months to live. A miracle was what the family hoped for, traveling to Memphis for six weeks of an experimental treatment involving intensive radiation, chemotherapy and tests; already Elena's speech, mobility and ability to eat had been affected, symptoms of