

Thomas L. Friedman 「THAT USED TO BE US — How America Fell Behind in the World It Invented and How We Can Come Back —」 F・S・G 2011 年刊を読む

If You See Something, Say Something

- 1 . This is a book about America that begins in China.
- 2 . In September 2010, Tom attended the World Economic Forum's summer conference in Tianjin, China. Five years earlier, getting to Tianjin had involved a three-and-half-a-hour car ride from Beijing to a polluted, crowded Chinese version of Detroit, but things had changed. Now, to get to Tianjin, you head to the Beijing South Railway Station—an ultramodern flying saucer of a building with glass walls and an oval roof covered with 3,246 solar panels—buy a ticket from an electronic kiosk offering choices in Chinese and English, and board a world-class high-speed train that goes right to another roomy, modern train station in downtown Tianjin. Said to be the fastest in the world when it began operating in 2008, the Chinese bullet train covers 115 kilometers, or 72 miles, in a mere twenty-nine minutes.
- 3 . The conference itself took place at the Tianjin Meijiang Convention and Exhibition Center—a massive, beautifully appointed structure, the like of which exists in few American cities. As if the convention center wasn't impressive enough, the conference's co-sponsors in Tianjin gave some facts and figures about it ([www.tj-summerdavos.cn](http://www.tj-summerdavos.cn)). They noted that it contained a total floor area of 230,000 square meters (almost 2.5 million square feet) and that "construction of the Meijiang Convention Center started on September 15, 2009, and was completed in May, 2010." Reading that line, Tom started counting on his fingers: Let's see—September, October, November, December, January. . .
- 4 . Eight months.
- 5 . Returning home to Maryland from that trip, Tom was describing the Tianjin complex and how quickly it was built to Michael and his wife, Anne. At one point Anne asked: “Excuse me, Tom. Have you been to our subway stop lately?” We all live in Bethesda and often use the Washington Metrorail subway to get to work in downtown Washington, D.C. Tom had just been at the Bethesda station and knew exactly what Anne was talking about: The two short escalators had been under repair for nearly six months. While the one being fixed was closed, the other had to be shut off and converted into a two-way staircase. At rush hour, this was creating a huge mess. Everyone trying to get on or off the platform had to squeeze single file up and down one frozen escalator. It sometimes took ten minutes just to get out of the station. A sign on the closed escalator said that its repairs were part of a massive escalator "modernization" project.

6. What was taking this "modernization" project so long ? We investigated. Cathy Asato, a spokeswoman for the Washington Metropolitan Transit Authority, had told the Maryland Community News (October 20, 2010) that "the repairs were scheduled to take about six months and are on schedule. Mechanics need 10 to 12 weeks to fix each escalator."

7. A simple comparison made a startling point: It took China's Teda Construction Group thirty-two weeks to build a world-class convention center from the ground up—including giant escalators in every corner—and it was taking the Washington Metro crew twenty-four weeks to repair two tiny escalators of twenty-one steps each. We searched a little further and found that WTOP, a local news radio station, had interviewed the Metro interim general manager, Richard Sarles, on July 20, 2010. Sure, these escalators are old, he said, but "they have not been kept in a state of good repair. We're behind the curve on that, so we have to catch up . . . Just last week, smoke began pouring out of the escalators at the Dupont Circle station during rush hour."

[コメント]

私も参加した 2010 年 9 月の中国大連でのダボス会議「ニューチャンピオン」での体験からスタートするトマス・フリードマン氏の最新刊。中国での超ハイスピードの経済発展、インフラ整備と、帰国後のワシントン D.C.での地下鉄工事の遅れを対比しての記述は示唆に富む。アメリカが、そして日本や欧州が中国をはじめ新興諸国とどう折り合いをつけながら歩んでいったらよいのか。フリードマン氏とともに本書を通じて考えたい。

— 2011 年 9 月 24 日 林 明夫記 —