**Meaningful Life of a Missionary Spy**

**John Birch: A Life**

By Terry Lautz

Oxford University Press, 2016, 317 pages, $29.95 (Hardcover)

When Bob Dylan wrote his 1962 anti-McCarthyite anthem *Talkin’ John Birch Paranoid Blues*, the John Birch Society was at its height. Dylan likely knew as little of the real Birch as did members of the right-wing movement he mocked. In his riveting book, Terry Lautz, visiting professor at Syracuse University’s Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs, shows Birch’s story as that of US-China relations writ large. Lautz painstakingly reconstructs the brief life of this missionary, soldier, and spy, who arrived in China to save souls in 1940 and was shot dead by Communist soldiers five years later. Birch becomes a case study in the “well-meaning idealism and misguided adventurism” that had animated the interest of Americans in China since the 19th century.

His violent murder by local Communist soldiers also opens a window onto the chaotic transition from the anti-fascist united front of World War II to the Cold War’s bipolar order. Americans saw in his shooting a signal of Mao Zedong’s hostility, although it was not ordered from on high and senior Chinese officials liked on Chinese soil. Thus, in life, Birch embodied the imperialistic attitudes of the Americans, who demanded the right to send spies like Birch anywhere and in death he symbolized the two countries’ profound mutual distrust. These remain essential parts of the US-China relationship today, and Lautz has written an enlightening reflection on a complex history. Reviewed by John Delury, Associate Professor at Yonsei University Graduate School of International Studies and book reviews co-editor for Global Asia.

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**Rival Reputations: Coercion and Credibility in US-North Korea Relations**

By Van Jackson

Cambridge University Press, 2016, 228 pages, $19.99 (Kindle)

North Korea says its nuclear deterrent is a defense against US “hostile policy”. Washington insists that tensions are due to Pyongyang’s build-up of nuclear weapons. Is there a way out of this loop? Not judging from the US presidential contest, where one candidate says he’d talk to Kim Jong Un but apparently has no idea what to say, and the other derides the idea of talking but does not offer a viable alternative.

Let’s hope advisors to future POTUS 45 don’t find time to read serious books like Van Jackson’s *Rival Reputations*, a densely researched study of how the US and North Korea misread each other’s signals and are locked in a pattern of interaction that serves neither’s national interest. Jackson, associate professor at the Daniel K. Inouye Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies in Honolulu, combines international relations theory and documentary research in a monograph with practical foreign policy applications. He applies the theory that “reputation” drives international relations to a series of crises in US-North Korea relations from the late 1960s onwards. He describes a symbiotic pattern: North Korea makes so many threats that the US can’t tell signal from noise; the US often seeks to de-escalate confrontation, but backs down in a way that reaffirms hostility. Solving this requires no less than an end to the rivalry that has driven US-North Korea relations for decades. Reviewed by John Delury.

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**Is Democracy the Best Medicine?**

**The Fix: How Nations Survive and Thrive in a World in Decline**

By Jonathan Tepperman

Tim Duggan Books, 2016, 320 pages, $28 (Hardcover)

How did the world’s most populous Muslim country stop the rise of Islamic extremism within its borders? How did the world’s only island city-state leap from one of the poorest nations to richest without allowing corruption to take root? How did an OECD latecomer figure out how to avoid the middle-income trap? Jonathan Tepperman, associate editor of Foreign Affairs, explains the secrets to such successes by Indonesia, Singapore and South Korea, as part of a global tale of practical problem-solving. He draws on his luck in having been able to interview world leaders and to get a truly global perspective on common challenges. But his book goes beyond conventional generalities of foreign policy establishments, and is a breath of fresh air on a number of levels.

First, he defies the trend of doomsday predictions of great-power conflict, environmental catastrophe or financial cataclysm. Rather, he highlights models that worked in one particular country to address widespread problems of inequality, immigration, natural resources and political gridlock. Without being a Pollyanna, he succeeds in being pragmatic. Second, he avoids the “great power” bias to focus on smaller actors. Norris avoids reductionist solutions, and the story he tells is fraught with irony. Take China’s quest for energy security: Beijing struggled to control the so-called SOE whose Sudan investments acquired needed oil resources … but at an exorbitant cost to China’s global image; whereas it successfully guided Chinalco to buy a controlling stake in mining titan Rio Tinto… a deal later undone by the Australians.

Norris isolates the question of how much Beijing dictates the economic behavior of Chinese firms. He applies the theory that “reputation” drives international relations to a series of crises in US-North Korea relations from the late 1960s onwards. He describes a symbiotic pattern: North Korea makes so many threats that the US can’t tell signal from noise; the US often seeks to de-escalate confrontation, but backs down in a way that reaffirms hostility. Solving this requires no less than an end to the rivalry that has driven US-North Korea relations for decades. Reviewed by John Delury.

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**If Money Talks, What Does It Say?**

**Chinese Economic Statecraft: Commercial Actors, Grand Strategy, and State Control**

By William J. Norris

Cornell University Press, 2016, 320 pages, $39.95 (hardcover)

How well does China translate its wealth into power? Does its novel form of state-owned capitalism endow its grand strategy with economic weapons that are the envy of rival states? Will it rule the world one day by “renminbi diplomacy”? Texas A&M professor William Norris brings sophistication and careful research to these questions, isolating the core question of how much Beijing dictates the economic behavior of Chinese firms, even state-owned giants.

Analyzing case studies in China’s outbound investments in natural resources, cross-strait economic diplomacy with Taiwan, and forays into the brave new world of sovereign investment funds, Norris identifies a critical set of success factors in economic statecraft. Most important is “unity of the state” across bureaucratic agencies as well as regional and local actors. Norris avoids reductionist solutions, and the story he tells is fraught with irony. Take China’s quest for energy security: Beijing struggled to control the so-called SOE whose Sudan investments acquired needed oil resources … but at an exorbitant cost to China’s global image; whereas it successfully guided Chinalco to buy a controlling stake in mining titan Rio Tinto… a deal later undone by the Australians.

How Beijing wields economic might is a pressing question across Asia, and Norris equips readers with a sophisticated method to find answers case by case. Reviewed by John Delury.
Tools to Describe the Modern World

The Global Transformation: History, Modernity and the Making of International Relations
By Barry Buzan and George Lawson
Cambridge University Press, 2015, 426 pages, $80.85 (Hardcover)

This book traces the origin of modern international relations to the "long 19th century." Barry Buzan and George Lawson, both London School of Economics professors, posit that since the start of the 19th century, global modernity, or global transformation, has undergone three phases — from Western colonialism and Western globalism to today's decentered globalism, which is marked by the relative, if not absolute, decline of the West.

In particular, they see the mode of power, not the conventional diffusion of power, as the driving force of the modern global transformation, during which industrialization, rational statehood and ideologies combined to generate and provide the leading edge for the West. Changes in the mode of power in this century, however, are eroding Western dominance and closing the West's power gap with the rest. With this main contention, the authors revisit the study of contemporary international relations. They draw the global transformation's implications for six key agendas of international relations — power, security, globalization, ideational structure, periodization and history — all of which look quite different seen from the perspective of global transformation. Their ultimate message is clear: international relations should take its place as a "historical social science" that aims to write new narratives of global modernity. They indeed sound a fresh alarm at mainstream international relations studies, which are dominated by hyper-realist, state-centered strategic statecraft. Reviewed by Taehwan Kim, Associate Professor at the Korea National Diplomatic Academy and a book review co-editor for Global Asia.

Forget Boundaries, Study Networks

At a time when academia abounds with discussions on the return of classical geopolitics, this book offers insights into a new world unfolding through the rapid expansion of explosive infrastructures — highways, railways, airports, pipelines, electricity grids, Internet cables and more — in the real and cyber worlds. Parag Khanna, senior research fellow at the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy at the National University of Singapore, argues that we are witnessing the rise of "global network civilization" amid the infrastructure revolution, which has profound implications not only for people's daily lives, but for world politics at large. He sees global infrastructures morphing our world system from divisions to connections and from nations to nodes. As the lines that connect us supersede the borders that divide us, "connectography," or functional geography, is becoming more important than political geography. The implications? First of all, geopolitical competition is evolving from territorial war to "tug-of-war" over connectivity.

Geopolitical competition is evolving from territorial war to “tug-of-war” over connectivity.

Connectography: Mapping the Future of Global Civilization
By Parag Khanna
Random House, 2016, 406 pages, $18.90 (Hardcover)

Uncertain Nation In Search of Identity

Explaining Russian Foreign Policy Behavior: Theory and Practice
By Alexander Sergunin
Ibidem Press, 2016, 220 pages, $36.00 (Paperback)

Moscow’s harsh reaction to NATO’s 1999 intervention in Kosovo, its 2008 Georgian offensive in South Ossetia, its 2014 takeover of Crimea and support for Donbass rebels, and its unexpected intervention in the Syrian civil war and air strikes against Islamic State in 2015 left many to wonder whether a new Cold War had returned. Some also see Russia’s foreign policy as "unpredictable," "aggressive" or "irrational." Alexander Sergunin, professor at Russia’s prestigious Higher School of Economics and St. Petersburg State University, sees otherwise, arguing that Russia’s post-communist foreign policy is the upshot of its ongoing search for a new national identity. He seeks to ground his claim in three ways: First, upholding Russian behavior against Western international relations theories, he argues that Russia is neither a status quo state nor revisionist, but a reformist state, unsatisfied with the existing rules of the game but not seeking radical change. He then draws some consensual conclusions from different schools of thought in Russian foreign policy: a moderate version of Eurasianism, together with realism and geopolitics, is tacitly accepted by Russian foreign policy elites as a way to nation-building. He seeks to support this point by tracing the evolution of Russian threat perceptions and national security doctrines in the post-communist period, which he argues have been effective in nation-building and forging a new Russian identity. His message is clear: Russia has finally decided to retreat to its home base, the heartland in Eurasia, prioritizing co-operation with non-Western countries, especially China. Reviewed by Taehwan Kim.

South Korea’s New Nationalism: The End of “One Korea”?
By Emma Campbell
First Forum Press, 2016, 228 pages, $67.00 (Hardcover)

“I hate the idea of Korean unification.” Through such statements, South Koreans in their 20s and 30s reveal with little reluctance their reservations about what has long been held as the ultimate goal of the Korean nation. Piqued by this puzzle, Emma Campbell, a Korea specialist at the Australian National University, traces the evolution of Korean nationalism since the late 19th century and argues that it is now being morphed from ethno-cultural nationalism into a "globalized cultural nationalism." She argues that a new type of Korean nationalism, based on shared cultural values such as modernity, cosmopolitanism and status, and influenced in its formation and expression by globalization and neoliberal values, fundamentally challenges the decades-old dominant discourse of the elites and older generations that calls for unification and the restoration of "one Korean" nation. Such South Korean globalized cultural nationalism will become more distinct and assertive. Its implications will be profound indeed — the "end of one Korea" and the dangers of pursuing unification without comprehending and admitting the realities of Korea’s entrenched division and the scale of the resulting social and economic estrangement of the two nations. It might be high time for policy-makers in both the North and South to fundamentally revisit the notion of a unified Korea. Reviewed by Taehwan Kim.

Reassessing Korea’s Unification Goal

One Korea?
The End of
By Alexander Sergunin
Ibidem Press, 2016, 220 pages, $36.00 (Paperback)
The Bloody End to East Pakistan

The war that gave birth to Bangladesh 44 years ago still haunts the nation. The guilty face belated justice in recent ongoing trials, and passions are being reignited. Journalist Saill Tripathi’s searing account of the conflict’s origins and aftermath offers one of the finest contemporary histories of the period.

Bangladesh nationalism in what was then East Pakistan in 1971 placed linguistic and cultural identity over the Islamic bond with West Pakistan and led to the secessionist struggle. Tripathi’s well-researched history is a fine contribution to understanding the deeper causes of a war that killed hundreds of thousands. Tripathi was then a young boy, but in his reporting and research since the mid-1980s he has caught up with history by interviewing hundreds of actors and victims. His interviews — with Col. Farooq Rahman, one of the plotters to assassinate the first president of Bangladesh, Mujibur Rahman, who bragged of his action (the unrepentant colonel of the book’s title), as well as with politicians from all sides — offer valuable documentation for future historians.

Insightful chapters of history, vivid accounts of events and places, and Tripathi’s moving interviews with survivors make for rewarding, if harrowing, reading. He notes that recent violence and the criminal tribunals suggest that “the division that tore the Indian subcontinent apart in 1947 and then again in 1971 remain alive.” In this context, a fuller account of India’s role in Bangladesh’s birth might have helped: that might partially explain anti-India sentiment there.

Reviewed by Nayan Chanda, founding Editor of YaleGlobal Online and a Global Asia Editorial Board member.

All Under Heaven: China’s Dreams of Order
By Jeanne-Marie Gescher
Kaduba House, 2015, 686 pages, $39.95 (Paperback)

China: Myths and the Dream of Unity

It is hard to categorize Jeanne-Marie Gescher’s fascinating book, a personal narrative of the past three tumultuous decades of China intertwined with mythology and history winding into the mists of time.

A lawyer by training, Gescher has lived in China for 25 years and has produced a sweeping account very unlike standard history or a visitor’s report. Her imaginative, often lyrical rendering of China’s long history and modern commentary on contemporary China fuse the present with the past — crouching dragons, monkey kings, tigers and more fleet in and out. One recognizes them in today’s rulers, plotters, rebels and commoners engaged in China’s perennial drama over establishing order between heaven and the earth. The same struggle between the top-down authority of Sons of Heaven (aka the Communist Party today) and the masses from below continues, with attempts to keep order at home and keep foreign barbarians at bay. Pondering the future in the chapter “Dreaming,” Gescher imagines in 2019 President Xi Jinping appearing with the Dalai Lama, Liu Xiaobo, Xu Zhiyong and Jack Ma to announce Da Tong — Great Unity. If that does not happen and the Party and the people cannot find a way to talk to each other and restore mutual trust, the outlook, she says, is dismal.

Despite its hefty 686 pages, All Under Heaven is highly readable, if marred by the absence of an index.

Reviewed by Nayan Chanda.

A Social Activist’s Guide to Success

This innovative and exhaustive study of citizen activism in contemporary South Korea and Japan explores the impact of victims’ groups in seeking redress for grievances via three detailed political case studies: the experience of sufferers of leprosy, victims of hepatitis C tainted blood products, and Japanese and Korean citizens abducted by North Korea.

Celeste Arrington’s research is based on more than 200 detailed primary interviews with policy activists. She explores the relationship between victims and third-party actors (politicians, members of the media or legal representatives) that are instrumental in producing positive policy outcomes for those seeking redress. Her primary, somewhat counterintuitive conclusion is that early access to elite allies can harm victims’ groups by delaying or undermining efforts to mobilize wider, grassroots voices that often prove decisive in leading to successful policy outcomes. In this context, her surprising secondary conclusion is that victims’ movements have tended to be more successful in Japan than in Korea. Despite roots in the 1980s democratization movement, political protest in South Korea too often is confined to the national level and takes place in an overly polarized context. In contrast, in Japan, the role of local citizens’ activism, a homogenous media and the decentralized network of lawyers, has ensured that citizens’ groups have been relatively more successful in securing substantive redress for grievances.

Reviewed by John Nilsson-Wright, Senior Lecturer in Modern Japanese Studies at the University of Cambridge.

How Dangerous Is Nationalism Really?

At a time when popular nationalism appears on the rise across Asia, this timely volume brings together 20 Asian, European and North American authors to explore the impact on regional peace and prosperity.

The book begins with a valuable theoretical essay stressing the absence of any compelling, overarching theory to explain nationalism in Asia and surveying competing theories of nationalism split broadly into two categories: essentialist, primordial accounts and those that argue that nationalism is contingent and the result of modernization. The book is in two sections; the first explores thematic questions including energy competition, religion, military and nuclear rivalry, territorial tensions, US-China hegemonic rivalry, and the use of the law and forms of political leadership to promote nationalist agendas.

The second focuses on nine country case studies: China, Japan, India, South Korea, Indonesia, Thailand, the Philippines, Myanmar and Russia.

The surprising but welcome conclusion is that the risk of conflict is not as great as some pessimists have feared. The welcome conclusion is that the risk of conflict is not as great as some pessimists have feared.

Reviewed by John Nilsson-Wright.