**Pro-Health Politics**

**Security and Public Health**

By Simon Rushton

Policy, 2019, 240 pages, $64.95 (Hardcover)

**Middle Powers With a Difference**

Vast literature on middle-power diplomacy has piled up since the 1980s. But discussions face an inflection moment as a new group of non-Western “emerging” middle powers join the “traditional” group. Increasing divergence in behavior among those in the broadened group even renders questionable the idea of them as a single category of middle powers.

This volume raises questions regarding how the largely “Western” bases of previous theorizing need revising in light of the non-Western middle powers, many of which are in Asia. A series of case studies shows countries, most notably India, aspiring to be regional or global powers. The authors also observe different attitudes and role perceptions towards the existing international order among today’s middle powers. The traditional, such as Canada and Australia, tend to provide legitimacy to the current order and prefer the status quo, but some emerging powers are critical of the liberal international order, the hegemonic status of the US in particular, advocating reform or revision of global governance.

The book raises questions over how the largely ‘Western’ bases of previous theorizing need revising.

Reviewed by Taehwan Kim, a professor at Korea National Diplomatic Academy and book reviews co-editor for Global Asia.

**Rethinking Middle Powers in the Asian Century: New Theories, New Cases**

Edited by Tongy Struye de Swielande, Dorothée Vandamme, David Walton & Thomas Wilkins

Routledge, 2019, 252 pages, $150.65 (Hardcover)

**An Inchoate End to the Age of Imitation**

In an era of liberal retreat, this book convincingly tells how liberalism has recoiled over three decades from its historical triumph in the Cold War. Stephen Holmes of New York University and Ivan Krastev at the Center for Liberal Strategies in Sofia, Bulgaria, mark the Soviet bloc’s collapse as the onset of a 30-year “Age of Imitation,” in which the world was divided anew between relatively stable and prosperous liberal democracies and countries including ex-communist ones that hoped to emulate them.

The authors contend that between 2008 and 2016, however, the Age of Imitation had come to an end. They trace the origins of today’s worldwide anti-liberal revolt in three parallel, interconnected and resentment-fueled reactions to Western liberalism: the intolerant Central European populism; Russia’s grievance against the imperative Westernization; and Donald Trump’s resentment against a world full of countries that seek to emulate America, trying to replace the model they imitate. The authors also designate the rise of China as an additionally decisive factor. They argue that China too imitated the West, but by borrowing technical means without changing its identity, while Central European ex-communist countries imitated moral ends of the West, fundamentally transforming their identities.

The authors in unison propose a new way forward in the academic thinking on middle powers, closer to openly disrupting domestic liberal consensus in the West.

Reviewed by Taehwan Kim

**The Light That Failed: Why the West Is Losing the Fight for Democracy**

By Ivan Krastev and Stephen Holmes

Pegasus Books, 2020, 256 pages, $14.75 (Hardcover)

**Exit from Hegemony: The Unraveling of the American Global Order**

By Alexander Cooley and Daniel Nexon

Oxford University Press, 2020, 304 pages, $29.95 (Hardcover)

**No Roads Lead to Washington**

American hegemony is doomed. This book sends a robust message that its unraveling has already begun, driven most importantly by alternative-order building and contention over liberal norms and governance.

Alexander Cooley, director of Columbia University’s Harriman Institute, and Daniel Nexon, professor at Georgetown University, identify opposite trends in today’s world in the three areas that once supported American hegemony back in 1989: Russia and China are now engaged in their own activities to counter the US-led international order; states in various regions are increasingly undermining the order by exiting its institutions and rules to solicit assets and governance from alternative patrons; and new networks that promote liberal forms of order are now interacting to openly disrupt domestic liberal consensus in the West.

For a post-hegemonic world, the authors project three scenarios: a world increasingly dominated by China-India competition; a multipolar world where multiple great powers co-operate while smaller powers lack agency over broad rule-making; and a world of globalized oligarchy and kleptocracy where much existing global economic architecture remains, but elements of political liberalism significantly erode. They conclude that the international system is too far down multiple pathways for a return of America’s former hegemonic role.

Reviewed by Taehwan Kim
What Hope Left for Hong Kong Protests?

A Novel Attempt to Comprehend China

Great State: China and the World
By Timothy Brook
Harpers, 2020, 476 pages, $21.99 (Hardcover)

A historian’s biggest decision is when to start the story — all flows from there. Timothy Brook’s ingenious choice is to start his history of “how China has been in the world” in the 13th century, when Chinese people were absorbed into a vast Eurasian empire created by the Mongols.

Brook, a professor at the University of British Columbia, weaves colorful yarns from the centuries to follow into the underlying pattern of “great state” (daguo in Chinese) invented by the Mongolian khans. The “great state” ideal was a far more expansive notion of imperium than the classical Chinese model of the Han or Tang dynasties. The Mongols’ territorial ambitions were nearly matched by another inner Asian people, the Manchus, who ruled China until a century ago. The borders of today’s China, and the allure of global hegemony, can only be understood in that context, as Brook writes: “China became a mega-state not by conquering others so much as by being conquered by others.” Whether accepting the “great state” thesis or not, no one could regret reading this book, which marshals profound erudition in tackling an array of historical puzzles. Did the Black Death spread from China to Europe? Were the Ming emperor’s fleets larger than Columbus into the Indian Ocean, but not conquer it? How did a Manchu prince win the allegiance of the Dalai Lama? Reviewed by John Delury

Vietnam Revealed Through Fiction

The Mountains Sing
By Nguyễn Phan Quế Mai
Algonquin Books, 2020, 352 pages, $26.95 (Hardcover)

Of the countless books in English on the Vietnam War, how many are written by women and tell the horrors of war and complexity of politics from a female viewpoint? In The Mountains Sing, Nguyễn Phan Quế Mai probes painful territory in Vietnam’s past through the eyes of a matriarch and her granddaughter. Like the best works of historical fiction, the interpersonal, psychological dramas of the main characters reflect broader, impersonal forces beyond their control. The Trần family endures French and Japanese colonial occupation, revolutionary violence and civil war, and US military onslaught. Even nature seems intent on destroying them during the Great Hunger at the end of the Second World War. But alongside the incessant violence of the powerful against the powerless, Nguyễn tells a parallel tale of resilience and resistance (taking literal form when Grandmother Trần learns martial arts). The novel also reveals enduring sources of strength within Vietnamese society — the spiritual refuge of Buddhism, the value placed on learning even in a broader, impersonal forces beyond their control. The Trần family endures French and Japanese colonial occupation, revolutionary violence and civil war, and US military onslaught. Even nature seems intent on destroying them during the Great Hunger at the end of the Second World War. But alongside the incessant violence of the powerful against the powerless, Nguyễn tells a parallel tale of resilience and resistance (taking literal form when Grandmother Trần learns martial arts). The novel also reveals enduring sources of strength within Vietnamese society — the spiritual refuge of Buddhism, the value placed on learning even in a world on fire, village democracy kept up despite the vicissitudes of national politics, and most important of all, solidarity of the family unit.

Interwoven with all these themes is the centrality of women to the Vietnamese historical experience — as fighters and survivors, as oppressors and liberators. An award-winning poet who grew up in Vietnam, Mai probes painful territory in Vietnam’s past through the eyes of a matriarch and her granddaughter. Like the best works of historical fiction, the interpersonal, psychological dramas of the main characters reflect broader, impersonal forces beyond their control. The Trần family endures French and Japanese colonial occupation, revolutionary violence and civil war, and US military onslaught. Even nature seems intent on destroying them during the Great Hunger at the end of the Second World War. But alongside the incessant violence of the powerful against the powerless, Nguyễn tells a parallel tale of resilience and resistance (taking literal form when Grandmother Trần learns martial arts). The novel also reveals enduring sources of strength within Vietnamese society — the spiritual refuge of Buddhism, the value placed on learning even in a world on fire, village democracy kept up despite the vicissitudes of national politics, and most important of all, solidarity of the family unit.

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Reviewed by John Delury

US Colonialism’s Philippine Legacy

Bound by War: How the United States and the Philippines Built America’s First Pacific Century
By Chris Capozzola
Basic Books, 2020, 480 pages, $35 (Hardcover)

Nations often forget their sins, and Americans rarely reflect on their 50-year colonization of an archipelago thousands of miles across the ocean. Fortunately, historians such as Chris Capozzola at MIT refuse to let their compatriots forget the legacies of American imperialism in the Asia-Pacific. His gripping book sheds light on US history while giving agency to Filipinos, colonial subjects turned Cold War allies. Deeply researched and engagingly written, it focuses on the US-Philippine relationship’s military dimension, starting with the 1898 US war against Spain that devolved into an imperialist campaign to exterminate local “insurgents.” Within a decade, Filipinos became a vital source of US Navy recruits as Teddy Roosevelt planned a Pacific show of naval power known as the Great White Fleet. Capozzola documents how the Philippines played a key role in the conflicts that defined US interests in the first Pacific Century — the Pacific War against Japan, the Korean War, the Vietnam War, even the global War on Terror. A notable absence in this tangled tale is the role of China, which barely merits a footnote in the litany of great-power struggles and regional conflicts until we get to the past decade. It remains an open question how the US-Philippine relationship will evolve in the face of China’s rise, which seems likely to shape the second Pacific Century as America’s rise did the first. Reviewed by John Delury

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Vigil: Hong Kong on the Brink
By Jeffrey Wasserstrom
Columbus Global Reports, 2020, 112 pages, $15.99 (Paperback)

Jeffrey Wasserstrom has made a career out of linking Hong Kong’s past and present, with a special interest in the history of political protest and social movements. His slim book, Vigil: Hong Kong on the Brink, adds historical context to first-hand observation of Hong Kong’s protests in the 2010s, from the Occupy Central with Peace and Love and Umbrella Revolution to last year’s anti-extradition law demonstrations. He traces the extraordinary transformation of Hong Kong from a politically apathetic financial hub into a global icon of people power.

Wasserstrom has a knack for illuminating historical analogies — comparing Hong Kong to Cold War Berlin and Shanghai, for example. Yet he keeps reminding the reader, “history does not repeat itself.” He ends his meditation on a bleak note. The question is not whether or not Beijing will honor the pledge to grant Hong Kong “universal suffrage,” as written into its mini-constitution, known as the Basic Law. “Rather, will the resistance be able to stop the erosion of Hong Kong’s hopes and liberties?” he asks.

Beijing’s recent moves to bypass Hong Kong authorities entirely and draft a national security law for the city would seem to support Wasserstrom’s pessimism. Yet as he also points out of the history of protest in general, it is hard to tell when a civic movement is really over, or merely entering a period of “temporary dormancy,” waiting to be re-awoken.

In that light, Hong Kong’s vigil for democracy may not be at the point of being extinguished. Reviewed by John Delury, Professor of Chinese Studies at Yonsei University Graduate School of International Studies and Associate Managing Editor of Global Asia.
**Tinkering with the ‘Temple of Science’**

A Political Science Manifesto for the Age of Populism

By David M. Ricci

Cambridge University Press, 2020, 254 pages, $90.04 (Hardcover)

While the expanding literature on populism highlights many reasons for the rise of the new politics of anger and resentment, David Ricci, former chair of the department of American Studies and Political Science at Hebrew University, focuses on economic factors, in particular the distorting impact of neoliberalism and the acceptance of market-driven forms of “creative destruction” by mainstream economists.

Part advocacy, part analysis, Ricci’s elegant work critiques the over-specialization of academic life. This he frames as a “Temple of Science” in which individual disciplines are isolated as separate pillars and in which only economics (with a misplaced sense of scientific, quantitative rigor) appears to provide a superstructure or roof to allow for effective policy solutions. In contrast, Ricci argues that political science, based both on qualitative analysis and engagement with public life, is better placed to respond to the populist challenge. The solution is to engage with the substantive and procedural aspects of political life, to question the dominant view of the individual as a rational economic actor, to look for collective, historical and philosophically informed alternatives to neoliberal capitalism, and above all to develop compelling narratives in favor of policy reforms consistent with traditional American political (not economic) liberalism.

Ricci offers a moderate manifesto for change, persuasively challenging many mainstream assumptions of public discourse.

Reviewed by John Nilsson-Wright, Senior Lecturer, University of Cambridge, Korea Foundation Korea Fellow & Senior Research Fellow for Northeast Asia, Chatham House and a regional editor for Global Asia.

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**US-Korea-Japan: Evolving Ties**

With relations fraught between the US and Northeastern Asian allies Japan and South Korea, it helps to re-examine the historical and contemporary dimensions of the trilateral relationship. Kim offers an innovative model of a “triangular hierarchy” structured around two formal alliances between the US and Japan and the US and South Korea, and an informal partnership between Japan and South Korea.

The US has been the dominant actor intervening periodically via diplomatic lobbying, coercion, application of economic and security power, moral suasion, legalistic interpretations, business intermediation, and occasionally by an explicit policy of non-intervention. Kim sees Japan as the more capable middle power. But with South Korea moving into a relatively more influential position economically after joining the OECD in 1996, their relationship has become less asymmetrical over time.

In parallel, a changing post-Cold War context, along with domestic change, has amplified contentious historical issues rooted in national identity politics. Kim’s post-1965 case-study approach, backed by trilingual sources, offers a nuanced and valuable reading of trilateralism. Less clear is advice for policymakers on resetting today’s relationship while combating the persistent emotionalism that too often limits both alliances and the partnership.

Reviewed by John Nilsson-Wright

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**Revolution Redefined After Tiananmen**

Realistic Revolution: Contesting Chinese History, Culture and Politics after 1989

By Els van Dongen

Cambridge University Press, 2019, 283 pages, $72.48 (Hardcover)

For anyone tempted to assume that authoritarian states are uniform in their support for narratives of nationhood and political change, Els van Dongen’s analysis of intellectual discourse in China between 1989 and 1995 offers a valuable corrective. Focusing on the differences between radical and conservative expressions of Chinese thought, she interrogates how the concept of revolution has been reassessed as both a contemporary and historical phenomenon in the years after Tiananmen and while the state has grappled with the reform challenges of economic, political and social modernization.

Uniquely among Western scholars, she engages with the work not only of mainland Chinese thinkers but also émigré intellectuals in Hong Kong, Taiwan and elsewhere. Many have rejected the social utopianism of the Mao era in favor of a form of Enlightenment thinking that embraces elements of Western modernity. While engaging with the West reflected China’s status as a rising power, it also included culturally driven efforts to assert Neo-Confucian ideas as inspiration for a more nationally defined vision of the future. Van Dongen’s “realistic revolution” embraces four elements: a focus on pragmatism; a willingness to reassess the impacts of earlier revolutions (including turning points such as the May 4th movement); a comparative, international perspective that sets China’s political evolution against the experience of earlier revolutions from the Glorious Revolution of 1688 onwards; and the debate between moderate, rational change and more idealized, moralistic if not utopian visions of the future.

Reviewed by John Nilsson-Wright

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**Uncovering Japan’s Informal Politics**

Uncovering Japan’s Informal Politics: Grassroots Action and the Crises of Democracy

By Tessa Morris-Suzuki

Cambridge University Press, 2020, 248 pages, $99.99 (Hardcover)

Focusing on Japan’s neglected experience of informal, grassroots politics in Japan since the 19th century, Morris-Suzuki offers a mix of intellectual history, political analysis and anthropology.

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