**An Exemplar for China’s Sharp Power**

Silent Invasion: China’s Influence in Australia
By Clive Hamilton
Hardie Grant Books, 2018, 376 pages, $20.77 (Paperback)

Along with the last decade’s global trend of liberal retreat and authoritarian ascent, and as authoritarian states—China and Russia in particular—vigorously try to expand their influence across the globe, a new notion of “sharp power” has recently begun to attract attention. This refers to the ability to affect others to obtain desired outcomes, not through attraction, as with soft power, but through distraction and manipulation of information. Often involved are attempts by governments to guide, buy or coerce political influence and control discussion of sensitive topics globally, typically by means non-transparent and questionable, if not outright illegal.

Clive Hamilton here thoroughly probes China’s sharp power in Australia. Beijing uses its economic clout, political pressure, local media, its cultural promoter Confucius Institutes, pro-Chinese local organizations, even students to exert influence on such diverse targets as Australia’s Chinese diaspora, journalists, think tanks, universities and academics, and politicians. There is ample evidence that China’s sharp power extends widely across the world, and Hamilton’s analysis is thorough and convincing enough to act as a warning for not only Australia, but also those open societies vulnerable to Chinese penetration, to be prepared. But oddly, his key suggestion that Australia build a more balanced US alliance by pursuing an Alliance of Asian Democracies to Beijing’s pervasive, perforating campaign.

Reviewed by Taehwan Kim, Associate Professor at the Korea National Diplomatic Academy and book reviews co-editor for Global Asia

**Political Tribes: Group Instinct and the Fate of Nations**

By Amy Chua
Penguin Press, 2018, 304 pages, $16.57 (Hardcover)

The world is seeing the unfolding of deleterious identity politics challenging liberalism in both international and domestic arenas. Yale Law School Professor Amy Chua explains here the failures of US foreign policy in Vietnam, Iraq, Afghanistan and Chavez’s Venezuela, and the rise of the Donald Trump phenomenon, through the prism of what she calls “tribal politics” — a distinctive group politics based on national but more primal group identities such as ethnic, regional, religious, sectarian, or clan identity.

Her argument is straightforward: US foreign policy tumbled in these countries for failing to understand local tribal politics. But why? Chua finds her answer in America’s own distinctive historical experience: Because it is a super-group, a distinctive kind of group, in which membership is open to individuals of any background, but that binds them with a strong, group-transcending collective identity. But the widening chasm between the tribal identities of the country’s haves and have-nots is driving America to display the destructive dynamics of tribal politics, which contributed to propelling Trump into office.

To get its foreign policy right, the US must grapple with political tribalism abroad.

Reviewed by Taehwan Kim

**Tribal Failings of ‘Super-group’ US**

Since the term BRIC was first coined in a 2001 Goldman Sachs report, much has been said and written about the growing importance of the Brazil, Russia, India and China grouping, in particular their economic potency. But little has been said, outside of analysis on China, about how the four fare in terms of soft power. This volume explores this important but neglected side of the story.

The story of the BRICS (South Africa was added in 2011) is not merely about a group of states claiming a greater share of global hard power, it is also about an effort to change the underlying principles on which the global order is founded. As the BRICS slowly emerge as an alternative forum that can stand up to the dominant worldview of established economies, soft power is increasingly seen as a crucial element of their power inventory. Five of the seven articles in this volume assess the soft power of the bloc’s individual nations, while two examine the BRICS as an entity.

The authors contend that although the BRICS countries fall short of the leading Western powers in most dimensions of soft power, they still can be expected to change the international landscape of relative influence, particularly when their effort to delegitimize the current international order create the conditions for the emergence of a revisionist, counter-hegemonic coalition. When the BRICS countries advocate counter-liberal values and principles over liberal ones to be shared by non-liberal developing states, their soft power becomes influential. But is this still soft power in its original sense? We may need to rethink the radically-biased notion of soft power.

Reviewed by Taehwan Kim

**Seeing the BRICS from a New Angle**

Emerging Powers in International Politics: The BRICS and Soft Power
Edited by Mathilde Chatin & Giulio M. Gallarotti
 Routledge, 2018, 180 pages, $140.00 (Hardcover)

**Putin, Ruler with a Fortress Mentality**

The Code of Putinism
By Brian D. Taylor
Oxford University Press, 2018, 264 pp, $99.00 (Hardcover)

Vladimir Putin is Russia’s longest-serving ruler since Joseph Stalin. Over his 18-year reign, Russia experienced impressive economic growth, due in great part to high oil prices, followed by economic decline and stagnation, political authoritarianism, and an increasingly assertive, anti-Western foreign policy. What explains Russia’s evolving domestic political economy, and its foreign policy, under Putin? The story of the BRICS (South Africa was added in 2011) is not merely about a group of states claiming a greater share of global hard power, it is also about an effort to change the underlying principles on which the global order is founded.

The Code of Putinism — that combines emotion, habit and ideas: Putin and his cohorts view Russia’s position in the international community as a “besieged fortress” under threat from internal and external enemies working to weaken the country. This is reinforced by habits of control, order and loyalty acquired in the Soviet era, and emotions related to loss of status, resentment, desire for respect, and vulnerability.

Taylor contends that the way Putin pursues his ideal of a strong state has actually led to a weak state, and has led to foreign-policy choices that are holding back Russia’s standing in the world. Taylor concludes that Putinism may be coming to a dead end.

Reviewed by Taehwan Kim
For Superpowers, It Takes Two to Tangle

The Return of Bipolarity in World Politics: China, the United States, and Geostructural Realism
By Øystein Tunsjø
Columbia University Press, 2018, 271 pages, $65.00 (Hardcover)

After a couple of decades as the world's only superpower, the United States now defines in its national-security strategy two surging great powers, China and Russia, as "peer competitors." As the sense of rivalry intensifies in Washington, Beijing and Moscow, an enlightened voice from Oslo weighs in on the theoretical and strategic debate. Although geographically closer to the strategic challenge that Russia poses to Europe, Øystein Tunsjø argues that China is in a different class and poses the only strategic challenge to the US. Indeed, Tunsjø's central argument is that we have entered a bipolar structure of international relations, where China is closing the gap with the US, albeit slowly, with no other states coming close in terms of national power. This "distant third" phenomenon, which Tunsjø demonstrates with extensive empirical evidence, is the basis of his claim about the "return of bipolarity."

He adds to this an ambitious new theory of international relations termed "geostructural realism." In Layman's terms, it stresses how geography shapes the ways in which states work out a balance of power. Tunsjø's assessment of the future of our bipolar world is, as one might expect from a realist, rather pessimistic. Given the geography of East Asia, with fluid and disputed maritime borders and revisionist aspirations of numerous states, the two poles, Washington and Beijing, will find it hard to work out a new equilibrium without coming to blows. Reviewed by John Delury, Associate Professor at Yonsei University Graduate School of International Studies and book reviews co-editor of Global Asia.

Bloodless War’ and Its 14 Million Dead

Paul Chamberlin here rejects the conventional Cold War narrative of a "bloodless" contest between the US and Soviet Union, "the long peace." In place of that story, focused on tensions in a divided Europe, Chamberlin looks at Asia, broadly defined (from Korea to Lebanon), which suffered from terrible violence linked to the superpower struggle. Some 14 million people perished in regional conflicts, civil wars and massacres in Asia's "Cold War borderlands."

Chamberlin traces three broad phases of violence. First, the decade after the Second World War saw the Chinese Civil War, Korean War and first Indochina War. Second, from 1964 with US escalation in Vietnam and shifting from East Asia to the "Indo-Asian bloodlands" — the 1965 massacre in Indonesia, genocide in Bangladesh, the 1971 India-Pakistan War, and the terror of Pol Pot's Cambodia. The final period erupts with the 1975 Vietnamese civil war and follows sectarian violence along Asia's rimland, from the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan to wars in the Middle East. Some conflicts fit Chamberlin's superpower culpability thesis better than others. And the linkage between the phases, as well as exclusion of proxy warfare from sub-Saharan Africa to Central America, might invite challenge. The book's scope is formidable, and like any strong work of historical interpretation, it is likely to raise new questions as it answers old ones. Reviewed by John Delury

The Cold War’s Killing Fields: Rethinking the Long Peace
By Paul Thomas Chamberlin
HarperCollins, 2018, 629 pages, $29.99 (Hardcover)

What Lay Behind the Opium Wars?

Imperial Twilight: The Opium War and the End of China’s Last Golden Age
By Stephen R. Platt
Alfred A. Knopf, 2018, 556 pages, $35.00 (Hardcover)

Readers expecting a history of the Opium War, conventionally treated as the starting point for modern China — or at least, modern Chinese nationalism — will find themselves happily disappointed by Stephen Platt’s masterful new book. Imperial Twilight is about the path leading up to war, and restores a sense of contingency to one of the most over-determined episodes in modern Chinese experience.

It is also a book of world history, for Platt deals as intimately with Victorian Britain as with Qing Dynasty China, drawing widely on archival sources. He vividly reconstructs the diplomatic, economic and personal stories behind the clash of two utterly different empires — maritime vs. continental, industrial vs. industrious, Confucian vs. Christian. The one element that seemingly unites them is insatiable pride, along with its shadow, a keen sensitivity to slight. Indeed, pride is perhaps the best single answer to the question that drove Platt to write this marvelous history: why did Britain go to war halfway around the world with a lucrative trading partner (and why didn’t China anticipate that it would do so)? Platt brings a colorful cast to Xi Jinping's China

Haunted by Chaos: China’s Grand Strategy from Mao Zedong to Xi Jinping
By Sulmaan Wasif Khan
Harvard University Press, 2018, 320 pages, $29.95 (Hardcover)

Sun Tzu’s Art of War may be on the syllabus at West Point, but little has been written on grand strategy in modern China. Sulmaan Wasif Khan tries to fill the gap by tracing the evolution of strategic thinking by China’s top leaders since 1949. Style toward the end aims for original sources on which to base his narrative. But he ends up focusing overwhelmingly on continuities, going so far as to dismiss critical episodes like the Cultural Revolution as a “great aberration.” Khan constructs a tradition of grand strategy that changes in means but hardly at all in terms of ends. Haunted by the chaos of the early 20th century, each Communist Party leader sought nothing more than “securing the state,” and pursued a defensive and pragmatic approach to war and diplomacy. Mao Zedong comes across as a Chinese Bismarck, and everything done by Deng Xiaoping, from invading Vietnam in 1979 to crushing student protestors in 1989, aimed hardly at all in terms of means. Khan constructs a tradition of grand strategy that changes in means but hardly at all in terms of ends. Khan sees Xi Jinping as no different — his goal is “keeping the state intact.” Khan detects insecurity behind his vigilance, which keeps China, as Susan Shirk put it a decade ago, “fragile superpower.” Reviewed by John Delury

Mapping Sun Tzu to Today’s China

Sun Tzu’s Art of War may be on the syllabus at West Point, but little has been written on grand strategy in modern China. Sulmaan Wasif Khan tries to fill the gap by tracing the evolution of strategic thinking by China’s top leaders since 1949. Style toward the end aims for original sources on which to base his narrative. But he ends up focusing overwhelmingly on continuities, going so far as to dismiss critical episodes like the Cultural Revolution as a “great aberration.” Khan constructs a tradition of grand strategy that changes in means but hardly at all in terms of ends. Haunted by the chaos of the early 20th century, each Communist Party leader sought nothing more than “securing the state,” and pursued a defensive and pragmatic approach to war and diplomacy. Mao Zedong comes across as a Chinese Bismarck, and everything done by Deng Xiaoping, from invading Vietnam in 1979 to crushing student protestors in 1989, aimed hardly at all in terms of means. Khan constructs a tradition of grand strategy that changes in means but hardly at all in terms of ends. Khan sees Xi Jinping as no different — his goal is “keeping the state intact.” Khan detects insecurity behind his vigilance, which keeps China, as Susan Shirk put it a decade ago, “fragile superpower.” Reviewed by John Delury

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Reviewed by John Delury
How America Lost Its Objectivity

By Michiko Kakutani

The Death of Truth
Tim Duggan Books, 2018, 208 pages, $14.71 (Hardcover)

Democracy on Life Support

Democracy is fragile, open to attack not just through coups but more insidiously through erosion of political norms and institutional safeguards. Harvard political scientists Levitsky and Ziblatt offer a close analysis of its current state in the US through historically informed comparative studies of democratic decline drawn from Latin America and Europe.

While unambiguously warning of Donald Trump’s authoritarian impulses, they date the weakening of America’s democratic political culture from the 1980s and the polarization of political life, accelerated by relative economic decline, the growing salience of race and immigration in politics, and the rise of new partisan media outlets. Political parties, not the attitudes of ordinary Americans, constitutional rules or the institutions of the three coequal branches of the US government, are democracy’s primary gatekeepers.

Democracy isn’t destined to die in the United States, but it remains imperiled.

How Democracies Die: What History Tells Us About Our Future
By Steven Levitsky & Daniel Ziblatt
Crown, 2018, 320 pages, $11.00 (Hardcover)

Napoleonic View of Modern Asia’s Rise

Asia Reborn: A Continent Rises From the Ravages of Colonialism and War to a New Dynamism
By Prasenjit K. Basu
Aleph, 2018, 680 pages, 1,999 rupees (Hardcover)

In this ambitious volume, running close to 700 pages, the author presents a breathtaking account of Asia under colonial rule. Beginning in the early 20th century, Basu takes his very detailed accounts of the depredations of European colonial powers, especially the British until the end of the Second World War. In his recounting, which flows like a swollen river in a monsoon carrying events big and small in its tide, he has reserved a special place for the Japanese Imperial Army and its ally Subhash Chandra Bose of the Indian National Army, as change agents. He narrates in detail Bose’s dalliance with Adolf Hitler and his heroic wartime submarine journey from Europe to Asia. In the course of the perilous voyage, Bose transferred from a German to a Japanese sub before continuing to Sumatra. The hospitable Japanese commander vacated his own cabin and made special arrangements “for curies to be cooked.”

Basu’s central argument, he says, is that “Japan’s role in 20th-century Asia was akin to Napoleon’s in 19th-century Europe,” creating widespread institutional change that helped modernize Europe. But bogged down in the minutiae of wartime developments, he seems to have run out of space to fully develop his thesis other than barebones reports of a number of students going to school in Japan, the rise of a future crisis to bolster his power. Protecting it requires a new pro-democratic coalition, Republican Party reform and serious practical steps to reduce today’s sharp polarization in US society and politics.

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

India’s Liberal Values Wither

India’s Liberal Values Wither
From Billings, Montana to Budapest, liberalism is under assault. While US President Donald Trump harangues his ecstatic base, Hungarian President Viktor Orban thrills his supporters with racist rants. Like many anxious authors in the West, historian Rudrangshu Mukherjee (disclosure: he’s a colleague) has tried to identify what went wrong. He is especially concerned by the rise of hatred and attacks on liberal democratic values in India, once a poster child for tolerance among developing countries. This book is part history, part contemplations on the rise and then erosion of liberal ideas, individual freedom and equality before the law; Mukherjee offers a sobering analysis of what went wrong.

To start, the British harbingers of liberalism in India didn’t believe that traditional backward India was ready for the liberalism of John Stuart Mill. Then modern India’s founders, like Jawaharlal Nehru and Mahatma Gandhi, let collective interests trump individual rights, priming the pump for serious equal-rights distortions. Nehru’s own daughter, Indira, destroyed an independent judiciary and impartial bureaucracy and imposed emergency rule. Mukherjee is shaken by the deterioration of liberal values in India and the poisonous effect.

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

Twilight Falls on Liberalism
By Rudrangshu Mukherjee
Aleph, 2018, 173 pages, 399 rupees (Hardcover)

Mukherjee is shaken by the deterioration of liberal values in India and the poisonous effect.