**There Are Three in This Relationship**

**China’s Asia: Triangular Dynamics Since the Cold War**

**By Lowell Dittmer**


Veteran China scholar Lowell Dittmer’s book offers an original take on post-Cold War Asia caught in the pull and push of big powers. He argues that with the US and China engaged in a contest for control of Asia, regional relations have taken on a triangular dynamic. He seems to agree with Washington’s fears that “America’s Asia is becoming China’s Asia.”

The result is a fascinating tapestry that reveals the undercurrents of strategic, economic and political interests of Asian countries as they interact with the rival powers. After presenting a masterful summary of US-China relations in a chapter on “Contesting Hegemony,” Dittmer spends six chapters examining how the triangular approach shaped the relations of Russia, Japan, India, Taiwan, the Korean peninsula, Australia and 10 Southeast Asian countries. The red thread running through the book is China’s obsessive ambition to surpass the US. While accepting the likelihood that China will, he thinks a “major hegemonic war” is unlikely, because both the US and China are acutely aware of the cost of such a conflict.

Dittmer sees the current state of relations in Asia broadly as “a romantic triangle in which the rest of Asia ... enjoys better relations with both China and the United States than the latter have with each other.”

But the demonstration of strategic power and harmless diplomatic maneuvers that Asian countries have faced so far may prove ephemeral. It could simply be “elevated discourse above the diplomatic table and kicking beneath it.” Dittmer’s depth of research and incisive analysis makes the book a valuable contribution to understanding modern Asia.

Reviewed by Nayan Chanda

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**How India Sees the World**

**By Shyam Saran**

New Delhi: Juggernaut, 2017, 320 pages, $17.00 (Hardcover)

Visiting Japan to seek support for India’s entry into the Nuclear Suppliers Group, Shyam Saran, former Indian foreign secretary and the prime minister’s special envoy, faced Tokyo’s habitual resistance. Foreign Minister Taro Aso solemnly read out the ministry’s brief on its opposition, but on the short walk to the elevator later, he asked Saran to take home a message from his prime minister: “Japan may have to ‘make a lot of noise’ at the NSG, but would not oppose a consensus in favor of India,” he said. As it turned out, India did overcome all the obstacles.

Saran’s erudite book — part memoir, part history, part a discourse on India’s search for strategic autonomy — is full of such telling anecdotes. What makes the book a page-turner is Saran’s engaging style and the depth of knowledge and personal experience he brings. Especially engaging are the chapters on the India-China boundary negotiations, the India-US talks on a nuclear deal and the climate negotiations — to all of which he brings an insider’s perspective. For instance, he shows how a smart maneuver by US President Barack Obama earned him a public relations victory as the savior of the climate pact, while in reality the US contributed nothing. Saran’s book is a must-read for anyone wishing to understand the foreign policy of this vast and ancient country.

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**Foreign Policy With An Indian Twist**

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Reviewed by Nayan Chanda.
Which Path Will South Korea Take?

Amid the “fire and fury” of 2017, South Koreans fretted over a perilous sense that the country was being bypassed. So for this year, however, President Moon Jae-in seems to be “in the driver’s seat,” or at least with a hand on the wheel, in steering a dramatic diplomatic effort at peace and denuclearization. These recent developments render this new book by Scott Snyder, a longtime Korea watcher at the Council on Foreign Relations, remarkably timely.

He uses an elegant framework of South Korea’s desire for autonomy and need for alliance as the essential tension in near every major foreign-policy decision since its birth as a state 70 years ago. In a sense, his real subject is not South Korea per se, but Korea’s trajectory. He offers no easy answers or cheap predictions, but shines light on the problem facing Beijing.

Beijing Faces New Challenges

In his landmark 1994 book, The Rise of China, William Overholt presciently anticipated the decades of explosive economic growth awaiting the world’s most populous nation. Now he argues that the very success of Deng Xiaoping’s “reform and opening-up” policy has created an impasse for President Xi Jinping’s quest to realize “the Chinese dream.” At the core of this dilemma is the contradiction between the freedom and complexity of social and economic life and the simplistic formula of authoritarian rule.

Overholt explains four areas of growing challenge — inequality, corruption, pollution and globalization — as manifestations of this deeper “crisis of success.” Along the way, he draws on a deep knowledge of neighboring countries — Japan, South Korea and the Philippines, to name a few — to put China’s success and the crisis it now faces in comparative perspective. The Asia-wide lens is also useful in thinking through future scenarios. For example, Overholt warns of signs that China is heading into a version of Japan-style stagnation. Yet he does not rule out the possibility that China’s political economy could adapt and reinvent itself with the kind of dynamism evident in South Korea’s trajectory. He offers no easy answers or cheap predictions, but shines light on the problem facing the leadership in Beijing, whose failure or success will impact the region and the world.

Reviewed by John Delury, Associate Professor at Yonsei University Graduate School of International Studies and book reviews co-editor of Global Asia.

China’s Crisis of Success

By William H. Overholt

Cambridge University Press, 2018, 302 pages, $25.99 (Paperback)

The Marshall Plan That Ran Aground

The last time generals played so prominent a role in US politics and diplomacy was at the end of the Second World War, when General of the Army George Marshall was possibly the most revered man in America. He was ready to retire to his country home, but President Harry Truman saw him as an irresistible choice to take on the hardest job in post-war foreign affairs: Brokeri...
Two Bears With Much in Common

China and Russia: The New Rapprochement
By Alexander Lukin
Polity, 2018, 272 pages, $55.94 (Hardcover)

There is a sizable English-language literature on the Russia-China relationship in general, and the rapid rapprochement more recently, but this book grows out of the observation that most Western analyses are skeptical, biased or outright incorrect. Alexander Lukin, professor at National Research University Higher School of Economics in Moscow, contends that the Moscow-Beijing rapport is far more solid than the West perceives, as it is premised on normative affinities between the two: similar views on the world geopolitical situation and the common prospects for a polycentric system of international relations.

Lukin traces the evolution of the relationship from each side’s perspective and probes the details of the maturing strategic partnership, drawing on official documents from both countries. Having lost its trust in, and being disillusioned with, the West as a partner during a turbulent period in the 1990s, Russia has been shifting to Asia and deepening its ties with China. Lukin finds a core reason for this, beyond economics, in geopolitical considerations: the world is now moving towards a polycentric order, in which several new non-Western centers of power are seeking opportunities to co-ordinate efforts as a counterweight to a world unified on Western terms.

Why Beijing Has Been Going Global

Modern China has a long tradition of reaching out to the developing world. In the Cold War era, this was mostly in the context of ideological competition with the West and the Soviet Union. In the early 2000s, Beijing saw developing countries mostly as sources of commodities and outlets for its manufactured goods, but its focus has evolved into the ideological and military dimensions.

Ten China experts here explore China's engagement in Southeast Asia, Central Asia, South Asia, Africa, the Middle East and Latin America, under a uniform set of questions including Beijing's primary objectives, means and evaluation of regional engagement, and other countries' perceptions and responses to its growing influence. The book draws key patterns of China's strategy: Pursue a package approach, or “comprehensive engagement,” bringing economic, political and soft power to bear in a co-ordinated manner. The authors argue in unison that Beijing has sought to partner with developing countries to foster a more “democratic,” multilayer international order, aimed at countering US pre-eminence and limiting its scope for unilateral action. In this way, China ushers in an ideational “human interest” perspective that underscores human values such as empathy, respect, nonviolence and social justice.

The book draws key patterns of China’s strategy: Pursue a package approach.

China Steps Out: Beijing’s Major Power Engagement with the Developing World
By Joshua Eisenman and Eric Heginbotham (eds.)
Routledge, 2018, 452 pages, $115.00 (Hardcover)

Use Others’ Eyes to See Yourself

Engaging Adversaries: Peacemaking and Diplomacy in the Human Interest
By Mel Gurtov
Rowman & Littlefield, 2018, 196 pages, $17.00 (Hardcover)

Ask a North Korean: Defectors Talk About Their Lives Inside the World’s Most Secretive Nation
By Daniel Tudor (ed.)
Tuttle Publishing, 2018, 288 pages $15.95 (Hardcover)

The past two decades have witnessed a silent, dual transformation within North Korea — a move from socialism to a feudal dynasty at the regime level, and to a de facto market economy through spontaneous marketization from below at the social level. Yet relatively little is known about this. This book, which grew out of the weekly column “Ask a North Korean” on website NK News, offers a rare chance to look into “normal” lives in an “abnormal” country. Subjects covered span from economic life, work, study, health and welfare, religion, and fun and leisure to love and sex. Also revealed are the differences in daily life between residents of Pyongyang and the rest of the population, and between nouveau riches and the rest of the population.

From economic life, work, study, health and welfare, religion, and fun and leisure to love and sex.

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Global Asia Book Reviews
Middle-Class Mythbreaking

From Miracle to Mirage: The Making and Unmaking of the Korean Middle Class, 1960-2015
By Myungyi Yang
Cornell University Press, 2018, 183 pages, $41.00 (Hardcover)

In considering South Korea's miraculous post-war economic growth, it has been customary to view the emergence of the middle class as among factors that helped overturn the long period of authoritarian rule and usher in the democratic transition of the 1980s and 1990s. Similarly, since the candlelight protests of 2016, it has been common to point to a new grassroots political resurgence that some observers have likened to a new democratic revolution.

Myungyi Yang's innovative new study challenges such assumptions, outlining the state's manipulative role in advancing a narrative of social change premised on a depiction of middle-class prosperity that was more myth than reality. Widespread middle-class identity was often more aspirational than actual, particularly for salaried and self-employed workers. Also, the middle class has been increasingly split into winners and losers, with the former benefiting from a "selective and exclusionary" process fueled by real-estate speculation and preferential state-led policies. Through a history of three stages of social development — the Park Chung-hee era, the Gangnam real-estate boom of the 1980s to 1990s, and the post-1997 financial crisis to the present — Yang explains persuasively the rise of middle-class alienation, disaffection and anti-elite sentiment — trends that may, at some point, lead to a challenge to the democratic values and norms at the heart of South Korea's recent history. 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.

Japan’s Security Renaissance: New Policies and Politics for the Twenty-First Century
By Andrew L. Oros

Setting Japanese Security in Context

Debates over Japanese security policy under Prime Minister Shinzo Abe are often led by the question of whether Abe should be seen as a pragmatist or as a revisionist nationalist. Andrew Oros's timely new work steps back to argue that the changes in security policy reflect long-term, evolutionary changes, accepted across the Japanese political spectrum, in response to a more threatening post-Cold War security environment in Northeast Asia and beyond.

Japan's security “renaissance” has been reinforced by a weakening of some taboos that once dominated security debates in Cold War Japan. At the same time, the country’s identity politics remains split between contested narratives about the wartime era, the country’s anti-militarist, and pacifist beliefs, and ambiguities around the long-term US alliance. Oros skillfully blends English and Japanese-language scholarship to give us a comprehensive picture of the intersection between domestic politics, security policy and debates about the past. He offers an optimistic view of the future in which Japan continues its gradual, evolutionary trajectory towards greater security activism, without compromising its measured approach towards foreign policy. He persuasively depicts Abe as advancing a gradualist process of security policy reform, not forcing an abrupt and radical departure from post-war norms and values. Reviewed by John Nilsson-Wright.

Intersection between Domestic Politics, Security Policy and Debates about the Past

From Hedgehogs to Foxes and Back

On Grand Strategy
By John Lewis Gaddis
Penguin Press, 2018, 384 pages, $20.80 (Hardcover)

In a world ever more threatened by the revival of national rivalry and great-power conflict, a fresh analysis of the nature of strategic thinking seems timely. John Gaddis, America’s pre-eminent Cold War historian, departs from his traditional focus on contemporary history to offer a wide-ranging analysis of leadership and strategic thinking from 5th century BCE Greece to the present.

Inspired by Oxford intellectual historian Isaiah Berlin, Gaddis uses the simplifying distinction between leaders as "hedgehogs" (motivated by a single, central vision) and “foxes” (embracing multiple and often contradictory ends) to present a view of strategy that encompasses both general principles and the peculiarities of personality, chance and unique conditions. Contrasting the strategic strengths and weaknesses of a diverse group of historical figures (military commanders, political philosophers, monarchs, politicians and presidents), Gaddis takes the reader on a fascinating biographical excursion encompassing, in part, Xenes, Pericles, Sun Tzu, Augustus, Augustine, Machiavelli, Elizabeth I, Philip II of Spain, the Founding Fathers of the US, Abraham Lincoln and Franklin Roosevelt.

Imaginatively incorporating von Clausewitz and Talley, Gaddis highlights the similarities between artists and strategic thinkers. The importance of originality and ingenuity, the value of experience in adapting to both regularities and uniqueness in complex situations, and the ability to tolerate inconsistencies while applying common sense in the face of differences of scale, space, and time.

Reviewed by John Nilsson-Wright.

The Challenge of Japan’s Century

Japan’s Population Implosion: The 50 Million Shock
By Yoichi Funabashi (ed.)
Palgrave Macmillan, 2018, 235 pages, $99.95 (Hardcover)

Any close observer of Japan could be forgiven for believing that what ails the country is that its body politic is missing the panic gene. What else could explain Japan’s failure for years to deal convincingly with an impending demographic disaster, and its decades-long economic stagnation?

Japan’s Population Implosion, edited by Yoichi Funabashi, a distinguished commentator, former editor-in-chief of the Asahi Shimbun and now chairman of the Rebuild Japan Initiative Foundation, assembles a remarkable array of experts to dig deeply into the causes, consequences and possible solutions to one of the starkest threats Japan faces: its rapidly aging population, low birth rate, and the attendant hollowing out of the countryside and the slow demise of its cities. At current trends, Japan’s population of 127 million is expected to decline to 50 million by the century’s end. Any close observer of Japan could be forgiven for believing that what ails the country is that its body politic is missing the panic gene. What else could explain Japan’s failure for years to deal convincingly with an impending demographic disaster, and its decades-long economic stagnation?

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As Inagawa Hidekazu says in the introduction to this fascinating volume, Japan’s demographic crisis “stands as the country’s greatest challenge since the start of the Meiji Restoration in 1868.” First published in Japanese in 2015, the volume is now in English translation and is essential reading for anyone interested in the future of Japan.

Reviewed by David Plott, Managing Editor of Global Asia.