China Goes Global: The Partial Power
By David Shambaugh
Oxford University Press, 2013, 432 pages, $29.95 (Hardback)

A leading US scholar on China, David Shambaugh gives us a panorama of its changing place in the world and shifting expectations of how the world should make room for it, as a kind of companion volume to his last book on domestic politics, *China's Communist Party: Atrophy and Adaptation*. Shambaugh writes in the vein of an international relations academic with a command of how Chinese look out at the 21st century globe. Trying not to produce yet another book on “China’s rise,” he traces the footprints of China’s “spread” in Asia and beyond. The central discovery of his research, which included interviews with a hundred leading figures in Chinese foreign policy as well as a year living in Beijing, was that “China is not as important, and it is certainly not as influential, as conventional wisdom holds.”

Relative to the economic insignificance and low status of its recent past, its “rise” looks stunning; but by shifting the frame to measure China’s impact and influence, Shambaugh concludes that it leaves surprisingly light footprints wherever it goes, and plays a marginal role in the international community. The vaunted “China model” or “Beijing consensus,” he argues, in fact holds little global appeal, and Beijing is a “lonely power” acting forcefully to defend its narrow national self-interests, but never transcending them to become a truly global actor. International relations experts will benefit from reading this taxonomy of the vying schools of grand strategy among Chinese thinkers; general readers will form a broad picture of China as merely a “partial power,” even as the burden of expectations on it weighs heavier by the day.

Reviewed by John Delury.
From the Ruins of Empire: The Intellectuals Who Remade Asia

By Pankaj Mishra


In history, deciding where to begin a narrative is everything. So it is with Pankaj Mishra’s fascinating intellectual history of 20th century Asia, which opens with Japan’s victory over Russia in the 1905 Battle of Tsushima Strait and the elation of future Asian leaders such as Sun Yat-sen, Ataturk and even Gandhi at an Asian power defeating a Western one. For Mishra, it “struck the opening chords of the recessional of the West,” as the struggle against Western imperialism — militarily, intellectually and culturally — became the central feature of 20th century Asia’s thinking classes.

Mishra goes on to tell a sweeping tale of the lives of leading thinkers from Istanbul to Yokohama, singling out Ottoman activist Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, Chinese public intellectual Liang Qichao and Indian poet Rabindranath Tagore. His ambition is no less than rewriting the intellectual history of modernity from a pan-Asian perspective. He sees such revisionism as demanded by what we can only now see, that “the central event of the last century … was the intellectual and political awakening of Asia and its emergence from the ruins of both Asian and European empires.”

Showing how in Asia nationalism trumped everything and shining light on the connections between modern Asian political thinkers rarely treated in the same volume, Mishra fills a huge gap in the literature on the deep roots of “the rise of Asia.”

Reviewed by John Delury.
Former US official Donald Gross has written what he hopes will be the antidote to pervasive “China threat” opinions in the public sphere and policies of the US government. The “fallacy” he identifies is that America should fear China’s rise for strategic reasons and protect its market from Chinese competition. Instead, he argues, China’s economic boom is by far a net gain for the US economy, and the military challenge posed by a stronger China is remote. When he tallies assets and capabilities, it is indeed a sobering reminder of overwhelming American superiority. Even more interesting is his discussion of the US Navy’s extensive surveillance and intelligence gathering operations along the Chinese coast, a constant irritant to Beijing largely ignored by Washington and Western media. Gross concludes that the recently heralded US “pivot” toward Asia is yet one more big step in the wrong direction that started with neo-conservative theories of American “primacy” in the early 1990s and continued with former President George W. Bush’s “strategic hedging” against China’s rise in the 2000s. President Barack Obama’s “rebalancing,” Gross claims, is a “strategic encirclement” meant to contain China. But instead, it is inflaming nationalist opinion in China, and draining the US of resources that would be better invested in its own domestic economy. The China Fallacy is a plea for “a more prudent approach of conserving American power and investing in stability for the long term by seeking rapprochement with China.”

Reviewed by John Delury, Assistant Professor of International Studies at Yonsei University in Seoul and a book review editor for Global Asia.
What spurred the post-Cold War transformation of Vietnam, and why did it take the form it did? How did Vietnam manage its international integration over the past two decades, all the way to joining the WTO in 2006? David W. P. Elliott, a long-time Vietnam specialist and professor of Government and International Relations at Pomona College, searches for his answer in a mix of the nation’s neo-realist adaptation to the changing international structure and its peculiar learning process.

The analytical weight of this book leans toward the learning part, in which significant variations in individual responses to the same structural changes derive from variations in their cognitive structures, beliefs and processes. Elliott traces the changes in collective ideas on national security and international relations within Vietnam’s political elite with rich documentary and first-hand resources. The book points out three decisive moments of change: the rejection of the Marxist central-planning model in the 1980s; the upgrading of the economy as top priority and downgrading of military force as guarantor of Vietnam’s national interests; and the 1991 adoption of a policy of “becoming friends” with all countries that would agree to normal relations with Vietnam.

Elliott does not accept the “end of history” view that there is only one destination for Vietnam and all other countries to reach. He emphatically argues that Vietnam has a wide repertoire of models and examples in responding to globalization’s challenges and opportunities. So, idiosyncratic learning clearly comes ahead of neo-realist universal adaptation.

Reviewed by Taehwan Kim.
An era of imperialism ended long ago, yet nation-building is still under way in today’s Myanmar. In this context, a grand theme of this book is “unmaking Myanmar and remaking Burma” (the official name until the military junta rechristened it in 1989).

University of Hong Kong professor Ian Holliday, in this first book-length study on the nation since 2010’s contentious general election, traces Burma’s long and arduous political journey towards democracy, with a particular focus on the politically turbulent period of the past 25 years. His chronicle revolves around three “agendas” — transition to democracy, national reconciliation and “transition justice” amid the people’s democratic aspirations, entrenched military rule and ethnic conflict. In this tale, two things in particular stand out. First, the three issues are put on a rich comparative table as the author draws on numerous empirical cases and theoretical literature on regime transition and global justice. Second, going beyond the nation’s political challenges, Holliday delves into how foreign actors engage with Myanmar in an effort to bring global justice to a nation under “praetorian transition.”

This book is strongly recommended for those working in NGOs active in the region as well as students and scholars of Southeast Asian politics.

Reviewed by Taehwan Kim, Director of the Public Diplomacy Department at the Korea Foundation and a book review editor for Global Asia.
India Grows at Night: A Liberal Case for a Strong State
By Gurcharan Das

Like China, India is one of the fastest-growing large economies over the past two decades. Unlike China, it took place under a vibrant free-market democracy. What made India’s rise possible? Democracy established since independence from British rule, or to the two-decade-long free-market reforms?

Gurcharan Das, author of the bestseller India Unbound, argues that “India grows at night while the government sleeps” — that India has been rising despite the weak state. Finding a secret to its recent success in “private success and public failure,” he presents India’s development as driven by entrepreneurs more than the state; domestic demand more than exports; services more than manufacturing; consumption more than investment. “Democracy before capitalism” is featured as another peculiarity of the Indian path to modernity. Das goes over two decades of economic success to prepare India for further sustainable development. He proposes that India needs a strong state (a liberal regulatory one firmly based on the rule of law) as much as China needs a stronger society. Otherwise, India won’t avoid falling into a middle-income trap. The real issue, he argues, is the extent and quality of government regulation.

A beauty of this book is the ease with which it can be read. No prior knowledge of economic jargon or theories of economic development is required.

Reviewed by Taehwan Kim.