The Street Mob’s Role in Diplomacy

How does popular nationalism shape China’s foreign policy? It is an old question, but recent debate is over whether Chinese leaders are “riding a tiger,” genuinely afraid that mass patriotism will turn against Beijing, or merely “crying wolf,” artificially manufacturing xenophobia in the streets when it suits their purposes. Jessica Chen Weiss, an assistant professor at Yale University and a rising star in the China field, develops a powerful, original argument revealing a complex relationship between anti-foreign street protest and authoritarian foreign policy making. Her book provides meticulous, readable retellings of anti-US and anti-Japan populist outbursts since the 1980s. She shows how Beijing sometimes repressing protest are limited by a hardline US Congress. It thus has an authoritarian equivalent to the negotiating tactic of allowing it to signal resolve in an international dispute. China and India both embarked on major economic reforms as the Cold War wound down, but while Deng Xiaoping led China down a “pro-foreign direct investment reform” path, Indira Gandhi put India on a track of “pro-domestic-business change.” To explain this fundamental divergence, Boston University professor Ye Min’s sophisticated work brings in a much overlooked actor — their overseas diasporas. India’s Westernized professionals played a critical role in developing their homeland but lacked the raw capital to over power domestic vested interests who opposed liberalizing foreign direct investment flows. In China, by contrast, the diaspora provided the lion’s share of start-up capital for the early years of Deng’s “reform and opening up,” and helped put China on a FDI-dependent trajectory for even faster growth in the 1990s and 2000s. For example, Hong Kong provided three-quarters of all FDI into mainland China in the first 15 years of opening up. After the Berlin Wall’s fall and the Tiananmen Massacre, diaspora wealth continued to pour in, maintaining the “trustworthiness” of foreign investment.

Ye Min brings in a much overlooked actor — China and India’s overseas diasporas.

Out of Country, Not Out of Mind

Ye Min's work on the diaspora is complemented by her thorough and accessible narrative of recent protests, which she contextualizes in the broader history of Chinese nationalism. She shows how Beijing represses protests by redefining them as “domestic” matters, thus avoiding the need to directly confront foreign influences. The book is particularly strong in its analysis of the dynamics between the Chinese state and the Chinese diaspora, which she argues has a significant impact on Chinese foreign policy. By highlighting the role of diaspora in shaping Chinese foreign policy, she provides new insights into the complexity of China's foreign relations.

Diasporas and Foreign Direct Investment in China and India
By Ye Min
New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014, 260 pages, $29.95 (Hardcover)

A Wartime Wound Still Unhealed

As voices of revisionism and denial gain ground in Japan, this book is a timely intervention into the controversial arena of Japan’s imperial legacy in Asia. Vassar College professor Qiu Peipei draws on research conducted since the 1990s by Su Zhiliang and Chen Lifei at Shanghai Normal University and lets a dozen elderly Chinese survivors of sexual enslavement during Japanese occupation tell their stories, for the first time, to an English-language readership. The harrowing tales of rape and brutality speak for themselves. But the authors also provide important historical context, based on extensive documentation including Japanese diaries and military sources, to reconstruct the big picture of sexual slavery in wartime China. They show how it was, in a bitter irony, due to bad international press and local outrage at the large-scale “Rape of Nanjing” in 1937 that Japan’s military began to rely more systematically on “comfort stations.” The victims who survived the war next suffered decades of shame both personal and political, as their victimization was at odds with Maoist China’s heroic, forward-leaning nationalism. Only in the 1990s did grassroots researchers and NGOs in China begin seeking truth and justice in their names.

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Chinese Comfort Women: Testimonies from Imperial Japan’s Sex Slaves
By Qiu Peipei with Su Zhiliang and Chen Lifei

Too Many Missiles, Too Little Strategy

As analysts of China’s rise find it hard to avoid being either a panda hugger or panda slugger, and experts on maritime security tend toward the latter. Military analyst and former US Marine Corps officer Robert Haddick is no exception. His book is a shot across the bow of the US foreign policy establishment for underestimating the threat to US interests posed by Chinese military growth in the Pacific. Haddick makes no effort to understand China’s political intentions, which he argues are easily changed and therefore unreliable indicators. He focuses purely on Beijing’s growing military capabilities and argues that China is a major beneficiary of the “missile and sensor revolution” in weapons technology and can rely on massive missile power to deny US access in case of war. US strengths in aircraft carriers and short-range fighters would be rendered obsolete. These are probably the best chapters of the book, where the author critiques the misallocation of resources that render US preparations for a likely conflict with China “ineffective, uncompetitive, and impractical.”

By ignoring Beijing’s intentions, Haddick reduces reality to counting missiles.

Fire on the Water: China, America, and the Future of the Pacific
By Robert Haddick
Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2014, 288 pages, $37.95 (Hardcover)

Out of Country, Not Out of Mind

Peter Haddick reduces reality to counting missiles.

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Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2014, 288 pages, $37.95 (Hardcover)
Freeing Japan From Post-War Thinking

Strategic Japan: New Approaches to Foreign Policy and the U.S.-Japan Alliance
Edited by Michael J. Green and Zack Cooper
Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2014, 150 pages, $18.00 (Paperback)

Seeing Subtlety in Kissinger’s World

In a wide-ranging, reflective analysis of the challenges to world order, former US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger offers a sober assessment of the limits to global and regional co-operation. Unsurprisingly, he is broadly positive in assessing America’s record as a global power over the past century, but he sensibly avoids any hint of triumphalism. Nor does he minimize the challenges of the contemporary world. Rich in detail, this is in some respects a deeply pessimistic book. Its strength is its depth of analysis and richness of its historical content, consistent with Kissinger’s early career as an academic and historian. He examines in detail competing notions of order in the Middle East and Asia (historically and today) and shows a surprisingly astute awareness of the “psychological, philosophical…and religious convictions” that underpinned non-Western civilizations in contrast to the empirically grounded beliefs of the Western Enlightenment.

Rich in detail and analysis, this is in some respects a deeply pessimistic book.

Under the premiership of Shinzo Abe, Japan has adopted a more “proactive” approach to foreign and defense policy, involving expanding relations with its traditional alliance partner, the US, developing new “mini-lateral” partnerships with the likes of Australia and India and bilateral arrangements in Southeast Asia, such as with Vietnam and the Philippines. Against this backdrop, the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) in Washington invited five Japanese visiting scholars to write on whether Japan has a “strategy” to confront its principal security challenges. They explore critical issues including the emergence of a more assertive China, the risk of maritime conflict in the East and South China seas, the persistent threat of a nuclear North Korea, the challenge of boosting Japan’s energy “resilience” in the wake of the Fukushima disaster, and the task of enhancing Japan’s economic, security and political ties with Southeast Asia.

The authors present concrete, often innovative policy options, demonstrating that Japanese policymakers and academics are increasingly comfortable thinking strategically. Abe’s government has faced criticism for historical revisionism and looking backward; this volume shows that young scholars in Japan are happy looking forward and articulating a vision reflective of Japan’s increasingly “normal” status and the diminishing salience of post-1945 norms of low-profile non-intervention.

John Swenson-Wright is Senior Lecturer in Modern Japanese Studies at the Faculty of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies, University of Cambridge. He is also a regional editor for Global Asia.

World Order

By Henry Kissinger
Akin Lane, 2014, 432 pages, £12.50 (Hardcover)

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Mel Gurtov, editor

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