China’s Expanding Sphere of Influence

China and the World
Edited by David Shambaugh
Oxford University Press, 2020,
416 pages, $27.46 (Paperback)

Edited by George Washington University sinologist David Shambaugh, this is a mosaic of China's evolving place in world affairs constructed by leading experts from across the US and Europe. Offering balanced and informed analyses of topics from traditional ones such as China's relations with great powers to cross-cutting issues such as global governance and multilateralism, it should work well as a primer for diplomats, professionals and students alike.

There is no central thesis per se, beyond the self-evident trend of China's expanding global influence. Early chapters by Odd Arne Westad and Chas Freeman give deep context, explaining how imperial traditions and authoritarian legacies shape Chinese political behavior today. Peter Gries offers one of the freshest chapters, on the social origins and constraints on Chinese foreign policy through the lens of popular nationalism. Leading experts in their fields, Zhao Suisheng discusses the making of foreign policy, and Barry Naughton offers a full yet succinct picture of the Chinese economy in a global context.

Many authors wrestle with China's effort at generating global "soft power," and Shaun Breslin offers an especially interesting account of how Beijing has fashioned "counter-narratives" on a global level. Richard Samuels, a professor at MIT and renowned Japan expert, has written the definitive history of Japan's intelligence community — or lack thereof. In covering the origins and expansion of a modern intelligence capacity, he culminates in the tactical triumph of the surprise attack on Pearl Harbor. But America’s "day of infamy" proved a strategic disaster for Showa Japan, leading Japanese planners to think they could defeat the US. After surrender in 1945, the shadow of militarism never receded from the view of Japanese public opinion, which, together with the structural dependency on the US, held the growth of intelligence in check throughout the Cold War.

Samuels enlivens the byzantine account of intelligence bureaucracy with dramatic spy stories, such as of Soviet legend Richard Sorge in the 1940s and spymaster Stanislas Levchenko in the 1970s, for whom Japan was "spy heaven." After the Cold War, political leaders tried to reform the intelligence infrastructure and address the root "pathology" of stovepiping (not unique to Japan, as Samuels notes). But not until Shinzo Abe's leadership in 2012 did a systematic "re-engineering" of how espionage and intelligence are done finally take form — and remains a work in progress. Anyone interested in intelligence and Japan's pattern of behavior, her study has important implications for understanding how Beijing approaches international co-operation, particularly intervention. There is one important caveat: Fung's cases are drawn from the Hu Jintao era of 2002-12. Whether Xi Jinping’s China "reconciles status" in the same way might inspire her to write a sequel.

Reviewed by John Delury, Professor of Chinese Studies at Yonsei University Graduate School of International Studies and Associate Managing Editor of Global Asia.

Special Duty: A History of the Japanese Intelligence Community
By Richard J. Samuels
Cornell University Press, 2019,
384 pages, $32.95 (Hardcover)

China’s Expanding Sphere of Influence

Why and Why China Interferes

China and Intervention at the UN Security Council: Reconciling Status
By Courtney Fung
Oxford University Press, 2019,
282 pages, $85 (Hardcover)

Given Beijing’s long insistence on the principle of “non-interference” as the golden rule of international society, why did Chinese diplomats at the UN Security Council condone humanitarian interventions in Darfur and Libya? And why did China revert by 2012 to its fierce aversion to anything smacking of “regime change,” most notably during the UN debates over the civil war in Syria? University of Hong Kong professor Courtney Fung offers a solution to this puzzle by emphasizing the under-appreciated importance of “status” in China’s diplomatic calculus.

With theoretical sophistication and detailed case studies, Fung argues that Beijing carefully gauges how two key “peer groups” will judge its position on sensitive cases of potential UN intervention in another state’s domestic affairs, and acts accordingly. One peer group consists of China’s fellow “great powers,” especially the US, the UK and France. The other is a much larger collection of developing countries that China refers to as the Global South. When these two constituencies are aligned, Beijing is likely to follow suit. When they diverge, it faces a dilemma. When they are internally divided, China chooses its own approach.

If Fung is correct about “status” as the key to China’s pattern of behavior, her study has important implications for understanding how Beijing approaches international co-operation, particularly intervention. There is one important caveat: Fung’s cases are drawn from the Hu Jintao era of 2002-12. Whether Xi Jinping’s China “reconciles status” in the same way might inspire her to write a sequel.

Reviewed by John Delury

What Gives Rising Powers Wings?

China Interferes

Leadership and the Rise of Great Powers
By Yan Xuetong
Princeton University Press, 2019,
260 pages, $29.95 (Hardcover)

Tsinghua University professor Yan Xuetong is among the most insightful and influential international relations thinkers at work in China. His newest volume offers an original contribution to the oft-debated topic of “power transitions,” those hinge-points in history when a rising power displaces a hegemonic state. Drawing inspiration from the ancient philosopher Xunzi — a kind of Chinese Thucydides — Yan argues that the quality of political leadership is the key factor in determining whether a rising power can turn the tables on an established one and achieve strategic superiority.

He defines leadership in terms of a ruling group’s commitment to “reform,” but the meaning of reform is never clearly delineated. Yan’s argument is further limited by the fact that, while he comments frequently on Donald Trump and the damage his administration is doing to US “strategic credibility,” Xi Jinping is barely mentioned (the Chinese leader’s name is not even included in the index). Given the centrality of Sino-US relations to Yan’s argument, this is a significant shortcoming.

Nonetheless, the book brings a deep reading of classical Chinese strategic thought to the contemporary debate over world order, and should be read by anyone seeking a better understanding of how leading theorists in Beijing are thinking through the profound shifts in international affairs.

Reviewed by John Delury

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Leadership and the Rise of Great Powers

By Yan Xuetong
Princeton University Press, 2019,
260 pages, $29.95 (Hardcover)
A New View of the US-China Rivalry

The Struggle for Recognition in International Relations: Status, Revisionism, and Rising Powers
By Michelle Murray
Oxford University Press, 2019, 280 pages, $75.00 (Hardcover)

It is now conventional wisdom in international relations scholarship to see the ongoing US-China rivalry in the frame of power transition theory, in which the differential growth of power among states leads a rising power to challenge the extant dominant power. The rivalry could lead to fatal conflict, including hegemonic war.

This book challenges these views. As not all shifts in the international distribution of power have led to war, how can an established power manage the peaceful rise of a new major power? Michelle Murray casts her analytical focus to the notion of status. For her, it is not simply acknowledging or accepting a state’s characteristics or capabilities; it is a social construct produced by a country’s social interactions with others. From this constructivist notion of status, Murray argues that as a rising power tries to get its aspirant identity as a major power recognized, its peaceful rise is a function of the struggle for recognition. She applies this social theory to two historical cases at the turn of the 20th century: the rise of Imperial Germany that led to the First World War, and the rise of the US that led to peaceful transition with Britain’s positive recognition.

The implications of the status approach are clear for the US-China rivalry: In formulating America’s strategic decisions, closer attention should be paid to China’s recognition-seeking and status-seeking needs rather than the dangers of shifting military and economic power.

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

Do Morals Matter? Presidents and Foreign Policy from FDR to Trump
By Joseph S. Nye, Jr.
Oxford University Press, 2020, 264 pages, $27.83 (Hardcover)

Do morals matter, or are they just window dressing that leaders use to justify personal or national interests? What makes foreign policy moral? Joseph Nye, the Harvard scholar who defined the notion of soft power, explores how US leaders choose to pursue national interest under different circumstances.

His approach to moral foreign policy is “three-dimensional,” weighing and balancing the intentions, means and consequences of decisions and incorporating three intellectual maps of world politics: realism, cosmopolitanism and liberalism. He applies this frame to the 14 post-war US presidents: Four (Roosevelt, Truman, Eisenhower, and Bush senior) combined morality and effectiveness in foreign policy, four (Johnson, Nixon, Bush junior, and Trump) hit the bottom. Beyond a firm conclusion that morals did matter, Nye draws patterns in the role of ethics and foreign policy: All presidents expressed formal goals and values attractive to Americans, including preserving US primacy. Provision of global public goods by the US had important moral consequences. Would an ethical foreign policy still matter in a new historical context? How would a future US leader balance moral concerns with national interest? The book offers a useful and timely approach.

Nye explores how US leaders choose to pursue national interest under different circumstances.

Of Ethics and Foreign Policy

Two Questions, Unanswered …
North Korea: Peace? Nuclear War?
Edited by William Overholt

Two contrasting constructs of North Korea are shown in this collection of contending views of leading experts: One is a North Korea aspiring to become a normal country through “economic construction” in exchange for, albeit not complete, de-nuclearization, the other is an abnormal country obsessed not only with security concerns but with an ideological vision of unifying the Korean Peninsula on its own terms. Arguments by the contributors here revolve around these two differing versions. Proponents of nuclear negotiations see the formula for success as a mix of flexible sanctions, calibrated economic incentives in response to good behavior, and phased confidence building for the agreed goal of “complete de-nuclearization.” Opponents contend that the idea of negotiations leading to de-nuclearization is a fantasy, as North Korea won’t give up its nuclear weapons. For the Kim Jong Un regime, a nuclear arsenal is less a “bargaining chip” than a deterrent, as well as the sole means to the long-term preservation of its regime by ultimately prevailing over incomparably richer South Korea.

As a corollary, the two sides diverge in their policy prescriptions. Conservatives argue for proactive, coercive diplomacy that employs unmitigating financial sanctions and multi-faceted information dissemination operations into North Korea. In contrast, liberals say overemphasizing on economic sanctions, international censure and shows of force are a way to “sharpen North Korea’s choices” needs to give way to proactive and sustained engagement, positive inducements and flexible diplomacy.

Reviewed by Taehwan Kim

… and Two More, Yet to be Asked
Bridging the Divide: Moon Jae-in’s Korean Peace Initiative
Edited by Chung-in Moon and John Delury
Yale University Press, 2019, 292 pages, $18.00 (Paperback)

After a near two-year whirlwind of diplomacy on the Korean Peninsula, stalemate in 2019 gave pause to critically reflect on peace and de-nuclearization. This three-part collection of essays by leading experts is intended to cast renewed light on the goals, theory and context of South Korean President Moon Jae-in’s peace initiative. The first part explicates facets of the initiative under the linear conceptual notion of peace-making, peace-keeping and peace-building set by Chung-in Moon. Inter-Korean arms control and trust-building are probed as a step toward peace-making, while the idea of a “peace economy” is assessed as a key driver of peace-building. The second part comprises theoretical and practical critiques of the initiative, while the third widens out to take in views from major powers (China, Russia, the US and Japan) as to what it means for the region and the roles of their countries.

Two core questions are raised for Moon to wrestle with to further his peace initiative. The first relates to aligning its dual goal of peace, Seoul’s primary concern, and de-nuclearization, the overriding US interest. How would he balance and sequence these? The second probes the initiative’s two-track approach. Inter-Korean relations appear conditional on US and North Korean progress toward de-nuclearization. So how would Moon make relations among Seoul, Washington and Pyongyang mutually reinforcing? Two more are for Moon to wrestle with to further his peace initiative.

Reviewed by Taehwan Kim
Exploring Asia’s Resilient Alliances

*Asia’s Regional Architecture: Alliances and Institutions in the Pacific Century*  
By Andrew Yeo  
Stanford University Press, 2019, 264 pages, $66.09 (Hardcover)

Can Japan Be a Force for Stability?

US President Donald Trump’s disdain for conventional alliance politics and nationalistic hostility to multilateral co-operation threaten to weaken the underpinnings of the global order and co-operation since 1945. Particularly so in Asia, where his demands for more burden-sharing commitments from traditional allies are fractious and a strident US mercantilist trade posture is undermining free trade. In this detailed look at regional co-operation in Asia during and after the Cold War, Andrew Yeo offers a theoretically innovative corrective to this pessimistic view. Applying a historical institutional model, he highlights how path dependency, positive feedback loops, strong and sustainable epistemic policy-making communities, and cultural factors have helped sustain the US hub-and-spokes system of alliances in Asia and a substantial, expanding network of multi- and mini-lateral institutions and partnerships. Critically, none of geostrategic power dynamics, or rational, functionalist arguments or identity politics are enough to explain the recent post-Cold War proliferation in new regional institutions such as the TPP-11, the Quad-based security partnership or trilateral co-operation among Japan, China and South Korea. Yeo’s historically informed analysis of US engagement with Asia and granular examination of most, if not all, of the region’s key institutions demonstrates the resilience of Asia’s many and diverse forms of co-operation.  
Reviewed by John Nilsson-Wright, Senior Lecturer, University of Cambridge, Korea Foundation Korea Fellow and Senior Research Fellow for Northeast Asia, Chatham House, and a regional editor for Global Asia.

The Crisis of Liberal Internationalism: Japan and the World Order

*The Crisis of Liberal Internationalism: Japan and the World Order*  
By Yoichi Funabashi and G. John Ikenberry  

The book identifies what Japan might do to mitigate the threats to international stability.

Few states have benefited more from the stability of the liberal international order since 1945 than Japan. But it has been a beneficiary rather than a vocal advocate for the importance of this order, preferring instead to pursue a low-profile diplomatic posture, focusing on economic growth and free from the ideological commitments that would have required an assertive defense of the order. Under Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, however, Tokyo has since 2012 become a much more outspoken defender of an order increasingly threatened by the populist reaction against globalization and the emergence of new, disruptive, demagogic leaders.  
John Ikenberry, a leading theoretical proponent of liberal internationalism, and Yoichi Funabashi, former editor-in-chief of *Asahi Shimbun*, have assembled an impressive group of seasoned and younger American and Japanese scholars to analyze this shift. In chapters on foreign and security policy, Japan’s role in international organizations, trade, nuclear non-proliferation, welfare policy, populist politics, historical debates, constitutional reform and the media, this timely book outlines Japan’s past contributions while identifying what it might do to mitigate the threats to international stability. Japan’s internal challenges mean it is not immune from the populist contagion, and the chance to play such a mitigating role may be limited.  
Reviewed by John Nilsson-Wright

The Staying Power of Illiberal Regimes

*Tyrrants: Power, Injustice, and Terror*  
By Waller R. Newell  
Cambridge University Press, 2019, 264 pages, $17.88 (Hardcover)

Can Japan Be a Force for Stability?

With democracy imperiled by the rise of new populist, demagogic leaders, Waller Newell of Carleton University offers a three-fold typology of tyranny that seeks not only to understand non-democratic governments of the past, but also the more recent vogue for illiberal regimes. Newell paints on a vast historical and methodological canvas, surveying political thinkers from ancient Greece to the present and a range of past and present governments.  
His frame includes kleptocracies or exploitative states based only on a leader’s material interests (such as Syria under Bashar al-Assad); reformist but still authoritarian regimes where leaders may advance public welfare (Alexandrian Greece, or Napoleonic France); and millenarian tyrannies promoting a collectivist, destructive, often utopian agenda (Mao’s China, or Cambodia under Pol Pot). Newell’s novel analysis is his claim that the tyrannical impulse is permanent, rooted in part in an anti-modernist reaction against Enlightenment thinking and dissatisfaction with the idea that material progress is enough for the needs of rulers and ruled.  
The historical breadth of analysis is impressive, even if Newell falters somewhat in making sense of recent developments (such as his claim that North Korea’s security crisis has been orchestrated by China under Xi Jinping is hard to sustain). In supporting a neo-conservative willingness to back moderate authoritarian regimes to combat the rise of more extreme millenarian tyrannies, he enters controversial waters.  
In supporting the liberal international order since 1945 than Japan. But it has been a beneficiary rather than a vocal advocate for the importance of this order, preferring instead to pursue a low-profile diplomatic posture, focusing on economic growth and free from the ideological commitments that would have required an assertive defense of the order. Under Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, however, Tokyo has since 2012 become a much more outspoken defender of an order increasingly threatened by the populist reaction against globalization and the emergence of new, disruptive, demagogic leaders.  
John Ikenberry, a leading theoretical proponent of liberal internationalism, and Yoichi Funabashi, former editor-in-chief of *Asahi Shimbun*, have assembled an impressive group of seasoned and younger American and Japanese scholars to analyze this shift. In chapters on foreign and security policy, Japan’s role in international organizations, trade, nuclear non-proliferation, welfare policy, populist politics, historical debates, constitutional reform and the media, this timely book outlines Japan’s past contributions while identifying what it might do to mitigate the threats to international stability. Japan’s internal challenges mean it is not immune from the populist contagion, and the chance to play such a mitigating role may be limited.  
Reviewed by John Nilsson-Wright

Partners over the China Challenge

*Fateful Triangle: How China Shaped U.S.-India Relations during the Cold War*  
By Tanvi Madan  
Brookings Institution Press, 2020, 380 pages, $35.99 (Paperback)

As new security partnerships are being used in Asia to supplement existing alliances, it is interesting to consider how nations choose to co-operate when facing common strategic challenges. Tanvi Madan, director of the Indian Project at Brookings, provides a revealing, innovative study of the relationship between India and the US, filtered through the lens of the strategic and ideological challenge posed by China in the Cold War. Drawing on a wealth of archival materials, she charts four stages in the evolution of ties between 1949 and 1979: “divergence, convergence, dependence and disengagement.” Madan helpfully removes India from the South Asian sub-regional box and the preoccupation with Pakistan to show that, despite the country’s formal non-aligned status, Indian leaders worked with their US counterparts to partner strategically in offsetting the China challenge.  
Madan’s analysis highlights India’s importance to the US, as economic counterpart to Beijing’s developmental model or as potential strategic partner at the time of the 1962 Sino-India border war.  
Without minimizing the periodic divergence of views on the China challenge (especially after Nixon’s 1971 rapprochement), Madan reveals the structural factors underpinning this partnership and how China loomed far larger in US and Indian officials’ thinking than has been acknowledged in existing scholarship.  
Reviewed by John Nilsson-Wright
Making a Case for Holistic Leadership

Transforming Systems: Why the World Needs a New Ethical Toolkit
By Arun Maira
Rupa Publications, 2019, 249 pages, $21.97 (Hardcover)

One of India’s top management gurus has written a highly relevant but unusual book. It is unusual both in its theme and its narrative. Arun Maira, a veteran of the corporate world, addresses the need for holistic and ethical leadership at a time when leadership is measured in terms of value creation in dollars and cents. The question of wise stewardship has never been more urgent than today. Although the book was not written with these kinds of life-threatening global issues in mind, serendipitously it has raised issues that address the urgency of today.

Maira begins with a quotation from American poet Robert Frost that seems eerily apt for today’s pandemic-ravaged world:

Forgive O Lord my little jokes on Thee,
And I’ll forgive Thy great big one on me.

The point the author raises in this volume, narrated through the lives of a few remarkable individuals (presented anonymously), is the urgent need for systems thinking. Leadership may allow one to play a little “joke,” to innovate policies to bring about changes, but one forgets how that may rebound on the broader world. People put in charge of organizations need to think of themselves as part of a larger system and behave accordingly even while pursuing their own dreams. Leaders need to remind themselves that their attempts to solve problems or increase productivity have systemic consequences.

In Maira’s words, it is like redesigning an airplane while flying. His slim volume is thought-provoking and raises some important issues.

Reviewed by Nayan Chanda

War or Peace: The Struggle for World Power
By Deepak Lal
Oxford University Press, 2018, 495 pages, $28.00 (Hardcover)

At a Shanghai conference in 2011, historian Deepak Lal was “appalled to hear that China wanted to challenge and replace the Pax Americana.” He set out to investigate and understand how and why it had this “insane” ambition — and how likely was it to succeed.

Amphly footnoted, this book is the result of that journey through recent economic and geopolitical history. Lal’s earlier work concluded the importance of empires, including the American empire, in undergirding civilizations. But in recent years, disheartened by Barack Obama’s attempt to dismantle the “US imperium,” Lal worried about the rise of a chaotic world. Searching through today’s resentful states likely to challenge US leadership, he finds China the prime candidate and fears nothing short of a path to war. Unless China can be stopped, he worries, a Third World War is inevitable.

Unless China can be stopped, Lal worries, a Third World War is inevitable. The BJP-led India could perhaps claim world leadership, he writes, if it could sustain a GDP growth rate of 10-11 percent for two decades and avoid narrow Hindutva communal politics. On both, though, Lal would be disappointed: Growth under a second BJP government has dipped below 5 percent, and a recent pogrom killed more than 50 in Delhi, mostly Muslims. The author’s final recommendation is a US-led “coalition of states with overwhelming military and economic power” to achieve an “explicit containment of China” to avoid war.

Reviewed by Nayan Chanda