East Asia and Pacific

The first half of the book concludes that China’s space programme is not part of an effort to gain global hegemony and that China sees space as a basis for cooperation, not competition. The second half of the book explores this theme further, with chapter six examining debates about space races in Asia and between China and the US, and chapter seven offering an in-depth account of the state of and potential for Europe–China space cooperation.

Aliberti’s conclusion is that the current space dynamics in Asia, between Japan, India and China, do not constitute a regional space race, though there is some diplomatic (‘soft power’) and commercial competition between China and Japan, for instance in the provision of space-related services (p. 207). The more complex issues are between China and the US. Aliberti argues that China does not see itself in competition with the US and has been willing to cooperate. But this cooperation would not be on American terms—tellingly, NASA understands ‘international cooperation as the acceptance by other partners of a programme conceived, planned, and directed by NASA’ (quoted on p. 238)—and the decision to exclude China from the international space station was one motivation for Beijing to push ahead with its own programme (p. 108). Whether there is a US–China space race therefore depends primarily on whether the US wants one or if it is prepared to engage in genuine cooperation.

This is where Europe enters the discussion. Aliberti questions whether a ‘space race’ is a useful paradigm in a post-bipolar world (p. 213). He recounts the European decision in 2003 to open up its Galileo satellite programme to Chinese participation and then close it off again in 2008, primarily due to US concerns. Nonetheless, he argues that Europe should act as a ‘bridge builder’ in international space cooperation, and while he is realistic about the extent of European capabilities, he suggests that Europe’s ideational and material strengths allow it to offer alternatives to both China and the US. Space can therefore become a symbolic field for a European role in avoiding a return to a two-bloc world, this time featuring China as the US’s strategic ‘other’.

This book is well argued and thoughtful, and the ideas deserve wider consideration by European policy-makers grappling with other implications of China’s rise. Needless to say, there will be some, in the US especially, who are not persuaded by this approach, but anything which addresses the growing security dilemma between China and the US should be seriously considered. This book not only offers an excellent resource for understanding China’s lunar ambitions, but is a stimulating contribution to these wider debates.

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This is an especially timely book, published the year after Myanmar’s (Burma) landmark democratic elections. Metamorphosis seeks to address some of the pressing issues which the newly elected government is likely to face: the relationship between the military and civilians; ethnic tensions, and especially the disputes between Rohingya Muslims and the Buddhist majority; and protests by farmers against the acquisition of land for development projects.

In the first chapter, Renaud Egreteau acknowledges the frictions between the armed forces and civilians. He notes that ‘antagonism and mutual distrust between the Burmese armed forces (or Tatmadaw) and the civilian sphere have long characterized Myanmar’s post-independence politics’ (p. 15). Tatmadaw publications and official discourse blame the
civilians and politicians for Burma’s problems and claim that the army remains a binding force for the nation. While highlighting some of the changes in this relationship, the author highlights an important way in which the army has ensured its crucial position in the nation’s politics. Article 6 (f) of the constitution categorically states that the army is ‘able to participate in the national political leadership role of the state’ (p. 22). Interestingly, the army, while wanting to play a role in national politics, has been wary of getting involved in party politics. Egreteau ends the chapter with insightful concluding remarks: first, the army may see no incentive to withdraw from political institutions, and second, a pragmatic, non-confrontational approach towards it on the part of the civilian government may be the most advisable way forward.

Ethnic tensions are a key challenge for Myanmar and they are addressed in appropriate detail by several of the contributors. The second chapter by Alexandra de Mersan deals with the 2010 election and with problems afflicting the Arakan region. Mersan highlights some of the initiatives, such as promotion of Arakanese culture, proposed by U Maung Nyo, a parliamentarian from the region, to reduce the rift between Rakhine State (formerly known as Arakan Province) and the rest of Myanmar. In chapter four, Maxime Boutry gives an overview of Burmese nationalism, pointing out that General Ne Win, founder of the Burma Socialist Programme Party and military leader of Myanmar for 26 years, especially targeted Indians during the ‘Burmanization’ of the country (p. 111). According to Boutry, the National League of Democracy (NLD), the party of Aung San Suu Kyi, itself is not free from policies promoting Burmese domination. In chapter seven, Carine Jacquet examines the Kachin conflict. Fighting in the region erupted again in 2011, and Jacquet argues that despite the political transition in 2011 and the ceasefire and peace talks of 2013 and 2014, there is not much hope for the Kachins. The book also provides readers with a strong background on the Rohingya dispute.

The key role that civil society has played in raising important economic and social issues in Myanmar is widely recognized. Chapter three, by Elliott Prasse-Freeman, is devoted to grassroots movements, especially by farmers against the forcible occupation of their land. One interesting example is the protest against land acquisitions for a Chinese copper mine project. NLD leader and current foreign minister Aung San Suu Kyi was appointed head of a commission which ultimately concluded that the project had to go ahead. Chapter nine by Susan Banki, which focuses on transnational activists, is especially important given the crucial role activists in the Burmese diaspora have played in raising awareness of political issues.

Apart from ethnicity and the role of civil society, the gender issue in Myanmar is also indirectly addressed by some of the contributors. Chapter eleven, by Hiroko Kawanami, examines an interesting aspect of this: the role of Buddhist nuns in social and political life. Nuns are playing an increasingly prominent role within society, even though this had been previously discouraged. ‘Buddhist Nuns are increasingly co-opted by the state to work as ritual functionaries alongside monks and as state missionaries who could promote a peaceful image of Myanmar abroad’ (p. 318). Their biggest contributions have been in the charitable and educational spheres. Interestingly, NGOs and welfare organizations have been arguing against the ‘subservient stance’ of nuns vis-à-vis monks. While social frictions are often flagged as one of the serious problems afflicting Myanmar, not enough space is given to the challenges faced by the health care sector. Chapter ten by Celine Coderey looks at the abysmal state of health care in Myanmar. Two key reasons for this are the fact that only 2 per cent of GDP is allocated to health and that due to international sanctions, not much attention has been paid to this area. In any democracy, health and education should receive the highest priority.
Finally, while some contributors draw comparisons with those south-east Asian countries that have dealt with challenges similar to Myanmar’s, some use of south Asian examples—Pakistan comes to mind—would have been welcome and relevant, given the issues surrounding civil–military relations and religious frictions. The potential role of important Asian powers in the consolidation of Burmese democracy is another question that is left unexamined. And while the editors have identified some key issues in Burmese politics, the volume’s structure could have been more cohesive.

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North America*


From the Nuremberg and Tokyo tribunals in the 1940s, to the Yugoslavia and Rwanda tribunals in the 1990s, the United States has often demonstrated a commitment to transitional justice and a particular penchant for courts. In United States law and policy on transitional justice, Harvard Senior Fellow Zachary D. Kaufman examines why. In tracing inconsistencies across four cases, Kaufman underscores the limitations of the ‘liberal norms of justice’ in explaining America’s historical approach to transitional justice—thus posing a direct challenge to Gary Bass’s leading theoretical framework of ‘legalism’. While Kaufman acknowledges that beliefs matter, he develops a new theoretical approach—‘prudentialism’—to better account for the role played by politics and pragmatism in the US decision to support legalistic or non-legalistic transitional justice options in various cases, including the 1988 Lockerbie bombing and 1990 Iraqi invasion of Kuwait.

Seeing that certain methods of transitional justice can alternatively contribute to or detract from international security, the puzzle for those studying it is why states would accept the risks inherent in prosecution. In Stay the hand of vengeance (Princeton University Press, 2000), Bass explains that liberal states will often pursue prosecution for war criminals because they believe this to be right, even if action could inflict political costs. Pointing to the manifold non-legalist alternatives liberal states sometimes support—from inaction, lustration, amnesty and truth commissions to exile, indefinite detention and lethal force—Kaufman disagrees. Not only did the design of the four major international criminal tribunals (ICTs) differ along key dimensions, but the importance of ‘prosecution’ as a tool of transitional justice varied significantly in its importance across time.

Even when the United States felt a heightened obligation to prosecute war criminals for their behaviour, that did not preclude it from using non-legalist options more in line with its interests. As perhaps the most striking illustration of pragmatic calculation, Kaufman explains how, after the Second World War, the US diluted its commitment to prosecute Nazi war criminals through a secret amnesty programme called ‘Operation Paperclip’. According to the programme, the US identified and then hired more than 1,600 German scientists who had previously been associated with the Nazi Party. The father of the US space programme, Dr Wernher von Braun, was apparently one of those identified—having designed and developed the V-2 rocket that Nazi Germany showered on the UK during the Second World War. Similarly, in Japan, the United States granted amnesty to more than 50

* See also Frank Sauer, Atomic anxiety, pp. 1266–7; and Michael Mayer, US missile defence strategy, p. 1268.

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