

one in English and the other in Chinese, and interviews with political leaders from both Singapore and China to further understand the meritocratic system.

The book is provocative for Western political theorists and has noticeable strengths. First, it promotes a deeper understanding of political meritocracy as an ideal and as a partial reality in the Chinese political system (p. 12). Second, with his challenge to electoral democracy and his identification of fixable flaws that are generally overlooked and downplayed, Bell calls for improvements to the way electoral democracy currently functions. Third, he provides both theoretical and practical solutions to these problems, on the basis of careful analysis. Finally, Bell's hybridization of Eastern and Western academic thought strengthens his argument of how political meritocracy can be incorporated theoretically into Western political systems.

However, the book presents an ideal type of political meritocracy that may not give a full understanding of the current Chinese political system. China's political system is also a Leninist regime with powerful tools of repression. Current political and social realities in China seem to undermine some of the theoretical lessons that the book intends to draw for democracies. Bell also notes that it takes 20 years to become a vice-minister (p. 186) and that increased promotion of women is needed within the system (p. 93). What are the implications of this skewed demographic representation in the Chinese political leadership?

Overall, Bell addresses a larger debate about the processes by which political leaders are selected and suggests an alternative to elections which can be captured by populist leaders. Could a meritocratic system filter out such demagogues? This book questions the West's relentless and unwavering belief in electoral democracy, which can prevent it from noticing its flaws, and provides alternatives that appear potentially reasonable in the face of the global ascendancy of populist political leaders. With tensions rising between China and the United States, though, it is hard to believe that *The China Model* will ever have the impact Bell intended. The ideological aversions between China and the US suggest that if any country in America's sphere of influence were to take on some meritocratic characteristics in their political system, it would meet with powerful pushback.

Epidemics and Society: From the Black Death to the Present. By FRANK M. SNOWDEN. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2020. 582 pp. \$36.40 (paperback).

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Frank M. Snowden's book, *Epidemics and Society: From the Black Death to the Present*, situates infectious disease within the "big picture" of human history. With Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS), Avian Influenza, and Ebola as recent reference points, Snowden explores the impact of epidemics on public health, human behavior, intellectual history, and war. The key lesson is that contagions are predictable products of societal vulnerabilities stemming from our relationships with the environment, other animals, and one another. In the preface to the book's 2020 paperback edition, Snowden is rightfully critical of the "who would've thunk it" rhetoric of leaders and institutions in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic, especially with SARS still fresh in our minds. He discusses society's tendency to "lapse into forgetfulness" in the intervals between epidemics, resulting in the dangerous misrepresentation of infectious diseases as random or accidental events. Time and time again, *sales populi supreme lex esto*—public health as the highest law, has taken a backseat to the laws of the marketplace. As COVID-19 has reminded us, ignoring public

health threats in the interlude between crises undermines our ability to respond effectively when disaster strikes.

The East Asian state–society model, which emphasizes social cohesion and deep respect for institutional authority, has garnered unprecedented outside attention given the region’s success at containing COVID-19. Despite sharing borders with China, Vietnam and Mongolia both avoided mass outbreaks through swiftly imposed travel restrictions and face mask wearing in early 2020. Since flattening the curve in March 2020 through more draconian means, China has favored a multilateral approach to tackling COVID-19, as exhibited through their mask diplomacy and vaccine cooperation. East Asia’s whole-of-society approach to containing outbreaks has instigated a worldwide reckoning as states navigate the balance between preserving individual freedoms and promoting communal well-being during this crisis.

There are especially profound parallels between events of the past year and Snowden’s discussion of SARS. SARS and COVID-19 are both respiratory illnesses caused by coronaviruses, spread by droplets and with asymptomatic incubation periods. Following the initial outbreak of SARS in China’s Guangdong province in November 2002, government authorities attempted to conceal the outbreak until March 2003. Nearly 20 years later, the Chinese Communist Party replicated this pattern almost exactly. In the earliest stages of COVID-19, authorities resisted openness and actively suppressed information, but adopted increased transparency once the WHO began sounding the alarm. Snowden describes SARS as a “dress rehearsal” for the twenty-first century. Key takeaways from the SARS epidemic included the need for improved infrastructure to accommodate surge capacity in hospitals and health-care systems, and the importance of multilateral cooperation to combat microbial challenges.

Citing feasibility reasons, Snowden does omit certain tropical diseases very significant to the global south. These include sleeping sickness (trypanosomiasis), otherwise known as Chagas Disease, and Guinea worm disease. However, the rich discussion of the Plague, with case analyses of Bombay and Hong Kong, adds to the book’s impressive geographical scope. From the Black Death’s desecration of the Mongol Empire to the deaths of millions of Northeastern Chinese at the hands of the Third Pandemic, the Plague has been a key scourge in Asia. The book’s discussion of the Plague imparts especially relevant lessons about public health and human behavior.

The Plague bacterium originates from rats and fleas, making this disease one of the many “epizootics”—unnoticed epidemics emanating from animal reservoirs—that have terrorized humanity. Similarly, the Ebola virus originated from the dejecta of fruit bats displaced by deforestation, and HIV/AIDS from infected bush meat of chimpanzees in Central or West Africa. This is an urgent signal for human society to reassess our interactions with the environment in order to avoid deadly consequences in the future. The book could have addressed the public health threats posed by biodiversity destruction and factory farming in greater detail. In terms of public response, Snowden discusses the advent of quarantine and protective gear (i.e. masks) as products of the Plague. These public health measures have been co-opted in our fight against COVID-19 centuries later. Also raised was the rise in antisemitic and gender violence in the Plague years. Anxious and fanatical communities were hasty to scapegoat local “sinners” such as Jewish people, prostitutes, “witches” and others deemed sexually immoral. This appetite for scapegoating and xenophobia as a response to disease has stood the test of time. Since the onset of COVID-19, hate crimes and other forms of discrimination against East Asians has skyrocketed. Statistics from the Vancouver Police Department show that anti-Asian hate crimes have risen by a disgraceful 878 percent since last year. Not all political elites have condemned this trend, with Donald Trump flippantly referring to COVID-19 as the “Wuhan virus” and “China Plague” in political speeches. Snowden could have mentioned this rise of anti-Asian sentiment in the preface and connected it to other cases of scapegoating discussed in the book.

Contrary to Snowden’s predictions, wealth and “developed” status does not guarantee comparative success in combatting microbial threats. How the United States and Western Europe have

fared in the COVID-19 pandemic relative to China, Vietnam, Thailand, and Korea is a case in point. However, the book's fundamental argument remains pertinent: the vulnerabilities introduced by globalization, urbanization, and inequality will act as a gateway for future diseases. COVID-19 is a resounding call for multilateral, preemptive mobilization of human wit against the next microbial threat. This requires not only national, regional, and global cooperation, but deep understanding of how disease interacts with other pressing issues of our time, such as biodiversity loss, socioeconomic inequality, and anti-science disinformation campaigns.

Shanghai Sacred: The Religious Landscape of a Global City. By BENOÎT VERMANDER, LIZ HINGLEY, AND LIANG ZHANG. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2018. 255 pp. \$30.00

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Parsing the diverse array of religious communities within one of the world's largest cities, each with their own unique set of rituals, institutions, and markers, in order to find points of commonality, can be a herculean feat. However, this is exactly what the authors of *Shanghai Sacred: The Religious Landscape of a Global City* set out to do in their sociological overview of the practice of religion in China's most cosmopolitan city of Shanghai. This book examines the various ways that—amid the chaos and bustle of more than 24 million people—believers in Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, and other religions have carved out their own sacred spaces where they can perform their rituals in concert with others.

In the first chapter, the authors present a contemporary history of the five officially recognized religions in China (Buddhism, Daoism, Catholicism, Protestantism, and Islam), including how they survived Mao Zedong's Cultural Revolution (1966–1976), and were revived in its aftermath. The chapter also draws a contrast with “civil religion,” which sanctifies particular elements of the city's history or identity (e.g. the Communist revolution) and elevates certain sites or memorials to the level of civic sacredness. The chapter features several maps of both traditional religious places of worship and the sites of such “worship” throughout Shanghai.

The second chapter examines the temporal element of sacredness, demonstrating how religious sites can “accrue particular significance at certain times of the year,” particularly during key religious festivals (p. 44). Here, the authors discuss the significance of traditional religious festivals like the Tomb Sweeping Festival, Chinese New Year, Christmas, and Eid al-Adha, which follow either the lunar or Gregorian calendars, as well as modern phenomena like “Singles' Day,” which was invented by the online shopping giant Alibaba in 2009 to encourage Chinese singles to buy gifts for themselves. This chapter also discusses the importance of the geographic locations of different religious landmarks in determining where different faith communities might be concentrated in the city, and where an outsider might catch a glimpse of religious rituals being carried out on festival days.

This leads into the third and fourth chapters, which respectively analyze the relevance of the physical structures of houses of worship in separating the sacred from the profane, and the homely characteristics of these holy places for the believers who worship there. Referred to as “compounds,” these temples, churches, and mosques welcome their members to leave the busy streets of Shanghai and enter a holy place where they can find support from their faith and their communities. The authors argue that these “compounds” offer many of the same “functions played in the socialist