

question of how China's expanding economic interests and the growing number of Chinese on the continent have, in turn, precipitated Beijing's growing focus on security. How have Chinese perceptions of the security environment in Africa evolved over time? Can we trace how security concerns have affected specific Chinese government policies? How do African leaders and populations view and respond to China's growing security presence in their countries?

Although an important contribution, the book does have limitations. Specifically, its paucity of systemic data and primary sources, and lack of a coherent theory-driven explanation for the phenomena it so expertly describes. Without these two elements both the book's shelf life and its ability to change or influence scholars' understandings of China–Africa relations are constrained. Instead, Large relies primarily on a rich variety of examples mostly from scholarly, policy and popular press reports. The limits of this approach can be seen in the subsection on relations between the CPC and South Africa's African National Congress (ANC) party, which is helpful, but does not place that bilateral political relationship in comparative context or offer systematic data on the number and frequency of party-to-party exchanges. Similarly, numerous illustrative examples of China training African political elites are cited, but without timeseries data and interviews with Chinese or African participants it is hard to comprehend the actual scale, content, intentions, and impacts of these engagements. Another shortcoming is that while the discussion of the evolution of the China model is quite strong, Beijing's efforts to alter the norms of international relations among states to reflect its own re-emerging primacy and centrality – an arguably more important and lasting strategic objective – are not well addressed.

In sum, Large has produced a well-written book that is accessible to various audiences from casual observers to experts. It flies at just the right level for a book of this breadth and is chocked full of facts and information making it a useful textbook for an undergraduate level course on the topic. Moreover, Large's work offers scholars a refreshing change of pace from the increasing number of narrowly focused studies on primarily economic topics. His conclusion – that the CPC's insertion of itself into all aspects and levels of China's domestic and foreign policy means that politics will remain Beijing's top priority in Africa for the foreseeable future – is an essential, if unnuanced, reminder to researchers that it is time to move beyond readily accessible economic indicators of China–Africa relations.

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*The Political Economy of Transnational Governance: China and Southeast Asia in the 21st Century*

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Hong Liu's latest book on the political economy of relations between China and South-East Asia is an important contribution to the latest analyses of the rapidly changing socioeconomic and political dynamics in the region. Undergirding this study is a novel argument on multidimensional interactions between China and Southeast Asian countries. The book documents with careful detail and empirical

data the complexity and depth of intraregional flow of goods, human capital, knowledge transfers and people, especially the diaspora community where locality, language and dialect, customs, cultural practices and kinship underpin the connectivity, reciprocity and network of exchanges in the region. That all this is happening at a time when China is rising as a geopolitical power and when South-East Asia is fast emerging as the new locus of economic growth and development demonstrates how multidimensional interactions can yield tangible benefits and cooperation to people and societies in the region.

There is no question that the region has seen a clear transition of power. The distribution of capabilities and of wealth have changed dramatically in Asia over the past generation. By most measures, China has already cemented its position as the regional economic power. For instance, over the last three decades, China's share of regional gross domestic product (GDP) grew from less than 10 per cent in 1988 to over 50 per cent in 2020, while Japan's has declined from nearly three quarters of regional GDP to less than 25 per cent during the same timeframe.

The debate on whether China's meteoric rise will provoke fear in the region has been raging for at least two decades, yet its surge to regional economic dominance has occurred without provoking an all-out war or conflict. Instead, by and large, the region has adapted to, benefited from and even helped to shape the narrative of China's rise, increasing, rather than decreasing, levels of pragmatic engagement that prioritize trade, business and economic ties. As the empirical analysis from the book shows, many of the new and important economic initiatives like the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), and the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) are filling an important void and gap in regional growth, development and governance. A key aspect facilitating this regional connectivity lies in the "multilayered interactions between China, Southeast Asia, and the Chinese diaspora (whose numbers are estimated to be 60 million, with more than 80% reside [sic] in Southeast Asia)" (p. 4). This important network uncovers the significance of the cultural origins of the region's political economy. Specifically, it shows that the historical and ideational interconnections between the various stakeholders – policy elites, institutions, transnational actors, multinational corporations, regional groupings, local communities, small and medium enterprises – can help to accommodate each other's interests.

The book is a fascinating read with its rich array of case studies (e.g. chapter four's detailed assessment of how Malaysia has become more adept in engaging with a rising China to advance key infrastructural projects under the BRI; the role of the diasporic Chinese returnee entrepreneurs in the region's political economy in chapters five and six; and the discussion in chapter seven regarding the implications of Singapore's socio-economic model, especially with its global talent recruitment strategy, emphasis on higher education and governance, for China and the region's growth more broadly). Notwithstanding these details and the core merits of the book, there is a key aspect of the region's political economy that is curiously missing. For one, it does not delve into a comparative assessment of other regional power's role in developing South-East Asia. Japan's historic and longstanding role in the region's political economy is well studied but largely absent in the analysis. In discussing China's priorities like the BRI and AIIB, it would be helpful to compare them with Japan's development assistance and/or the Asian Development Bank. Doing so could further augment the validity and significance of the book's argument on multidimensional interactions.

Similarly, discussion on the role of the United States is also noticeably scant in the book's analysis. While the scope of the book may be limited and confined to China and South-East Asia's transnational governance, it would be helpful to identify what role (if any) the US might occupy in the expanding transnational networks driving the

region's political economy. The book ends with chapter seven on the implications of Singapore's unique governance model. There is no concluding chapter that serves as a bookend to provide one final review and observation of the book's core argument as a whole. A concluding chapter would have been useful to close the book, not least to provide some commentary on the latest debate surrounding the potential decoupling of two of the world's largest economies, the growing uncertainties of US–China relations, Washington's emphasis on a new Indo-Pacific economic and security strategy, and their implications for the socioeconomic and political changes in South-East Asia and for the multidimensional interactions between China and South-East Asia going forward. Nonetheless, the book's rich empirical data, interdisciplinary approach to its subject matter, and innovative and refreshing argument are important advancements and contributions to the field and for those seeking to truly understand the political economy of this vibrant part of the world.

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*Decoding the Sino-North Korean Borderlands*

Edited by ADAM CATHCART, CHRISTOPHER GREEN and STEVEN DENNY

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The editors of *Decoding the Sino-North Korean Borderlands* write that they have “a high-order goal” – which is to capture “the full breadth of interactions, potential, disconnection, and unresolved history” (p. 17) of the thousand-mile border region where China meets the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK, or North Korea). They identify a variety of research questions, including the nature of social relations in the border regions, Sino-DPRK interstate relations, North Korean migration patterns, the social and national identities of ethnic Koreans living in border areas, changes in priorities of individuals, the Chinese state and the North Korean state over time, and understandings of socialist solidarity. The editors aim to provide “a historical element” capable of “achieving something new” as well as to introduce “data, theories, and perspectives from various sources” (p. 17), as well as various research methods.

The book comprises 18 chapters, an introduction and an afterword, written by 21 different authors. The book contains contributions both from experienced scholars and doctoral students, specialists and non-specialists in China and Korea, former diplomats and policy analysts.

As with all edited books, some chapters succeed better than others. Chapter eight, by Yuanhong Wang, subtitled “Fenghuang Gate and the emergence of the modern Sino-Korean borderline, 1636–1876,” provides the standout contribution of this book; it shows how and why both the empirics and the concept of the border between China and Korea changed over time. Dong Jo Shin's chapter nine on China's language policy in Yanbian, the Korean-speaking region in Jilin designated by the Chinese government as an autonomous prefecture, Adam Cathcart's critique of the mythologizing of Kim Il Sung's revolutionary exploits in China in chapter seven and Ed Pulford's ethnographic presentation of Korean identities in northeast China in chapter 18 provide persuasive, professional analysis as well as empirical novelty. What these chapters have in