

a false impression of China's willingness to use force (Interpret: China, Center for Strategic and International Studies, 8 May 2023, <https://interpret.csis.org/dare-to-fight-or-dare-to-struggle-translation-of-a-chinese-political-concept>).

Given his expertise and authorship of *A Nation-State by Construction: Dynamics of Modern Chinese Nationalism* (Stanford University Press, 2004) and *Construction of Chinese Nationalism in the Early 21st Century: Domestic Sources and International Implications* (Routledge, 2014), Suisheng Zhao is well positioned to advance the framework that acknowledges the inherent tensions and intertwining of state and popular nationalism (see pp. 147–151). Zhao's extensive knowledge of Chinese nationalism spans multiple decades, providing a remarkable continuity in his analysis.

Moreover, Zhao's inclusion of updated empirical evidence since Xi Jinping's term enables a comprehensive understanding of contemporary developments and their implications. This book takes into account new developments under Xi, presenting a meaningful comparison that highlights the continuities and changes witnessed throughout the terms of three transformative leaders. By examining the leadership styles, policies and ideologies of Mao, Deng and Xi, Zhao illuminates the similarities and divergences in their approaches to setting the course of foreign policy. This combination of historical depth and contemporary analysis enriches the framework and contributes to a more nuanced understanding of transformative leaders in different geopolitical contexts.

This book provides a valuable contribution that resonates with Xuezhi Guo's work, *The Politics of the Core Leader in China: Culture, Institution, Legitimacy, and Power* (Cambridge University Press, 2019). Guo argues that the current regime under Xi Jinping marks a significant transition from collective leadership to a more dominant, strongman-style politics, aligning with a cyclical pattern observed throughout the history of the Chinese Communist Party. While Guo's book primarily delves into the internal power struggles within the small circles of top leaders, Zhao's book takes a distinct perspective by examining the external implications of the strongman approach on China's foreign policy and diplomacy.

Overall, this book contributes to the field of Chinese studies by introducing a new conceptual framework that enhances our understanding of transformative leaders and their role in shaping China's foreign policy. By examining the abilities and limitations of transformative leaders, *The Dragon Roars Back* provides valuable insights into the intricate dynamics of China's foreign policy. Its appeal extends to both scholars and policymakers who seek a comprehensive understanding of how leaders influence and navigate the complexities of Chinese foreign policy.

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China and Its Small Neighbors: The Political Economy of Asymmetry, Vulnerability, and Hedging

Sung Chull Kim. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2023. 288 pp. \$95.00 (hbk). ISBN 9781438492353

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How do small powers engage with China in the Chinese neighbourhood? *China and Its Small Neighbors*, by Sung Chull Kim, provides a novel explanation with an emphasis on the political



implications of economic asymmetry between China and its small neighbours. On the one hand, economic asymmetry has made China's small neighbours vulnerable in terms of foreign policy, and small powers always adopt hedge-on and hedge-against strategies to mitigate pertinent political risks. On the other hand, different degrees of vulnerability bring about different patterns of hedging strategies. Cambodia and North Korea choose to align with China, but Vietnam, Myanmar, Uzbekistan and Mongolia adopt more balanced strategies to seek partnerships with both China and other extra-regional great powers, particularly the United States. Kim presents a timely analysis on how small powers in three subregions of Asia (Northeast Asia, Central Asia and Southeast Asia) manage their relationships with China in amid the shifts in US–China power balance.

Kim makes three contributions to the study of asymmetric relationships and Chinese regional diplomacy. First, he examines a research question with both theoretical and policy significance. His original definition of hedging strategies not only reveals a crucial trade-off between hedging on economic benefit and hedging against political risk, but also provides a typology of hedging strategies. Second, he advances original arguments on a state's vulnerability to coercion in terms of three factors: a small power's concentration of trade; the lack of transparency within the small power's domestic politics; and the small power's reliance on bilateral aid offered by a powerful neighbour. These discussions enable us to understand better how economic asymmetry between a small power and a great power benefits the great power's political interests. Finally, Kim utilizes a regional approach to develop a balanced theoretical framework: he defines China and Russia as regional great powers while classifying the US, Japan and South Korea as extra-regional powers. Kim's approach centres on Chinese economic strength over small neighbours and, therefore, suits his objective of explaining small powers' strategies toward a great power in the shadow of economic asymmetry.

It is undeniable that Kim provides incisive guidance on small powers' strategic choices in the Chinese neighbourhood. He not only joins a recent wave of academic interest in asymmetric relationships in Asia, but also provokes enormous interest for further discussions in the field.

First, Kim's book would further benefit from extended discussions of the four types of hedging strategies from a theoretical perspective. According to Kim, hedging strategies include typical hedging (by Myanmar and Uzbekistan), multidimensional hedging (by Mongolia), mixed hedging (by Vietnam) and alignment (by Cambodia and North Korea). These six cases support empirical discussions of the four types, but the first three types overlap to a certain extent. Moreover, the book would ideally include further analysis of alignment. As Glenn Snyder argues in his pathbreaking work *Alliance Politics* (Cornell University Press, 1997), alignment amounts to a set of mutual expectations between two or more states that they will have each other's support in disputes or wars with other states. However, Kim raises the exception of Cambodia, which accepts neither mutual defence pacts with foreign countries nor foreign military bases on its territories. Therefore, Cambodia's alignment with China would require further elaboration.

Second, Kim should make a more explicit distinction between the economic and political incentives behind China's trade and investment initiatives. Kim focuses on the political implications of economic interdependence, which undoubtedly has been a crucial part of a story of China's economic statecraft. That being said, it is necessary to identify the economic motivations behind China's foreign economic relations. Foreign trade has been a pillar of China's economic growth for more than four decades, meaning the imposition of economic sanctions – a political signal – could harm China's reform and opening-up programme. Chinese investment would also need to take into consideration Chinese investment agencies' (including state-owned agencies) profit rates. Small powers also understand these concerns. Therefore, it would be interesting and informative if the author could discuss how the distinction between political and economic concerns on the Chinese side shape small powers' hedging-on or hedging-against strategies toward China.

Finally, Kim's book could be further improved by including a case study in South Asia to test the validity of his theories. Kim convincingly points out that small powers exist in the four subregions of

Northeast Asia, Central Asia, South Asia and Southeast Asia, and he also provides excellent analysis of six small powers' hedging strategies toward China. These six cases, however, do not include any small power in South Asia. This omission leads to two pertinent questions. First, could Kim's theoretical framework be applied to India's hedging strategies in terms of Sino-Indian asymmetry? Second, other small powers in South Asia (e.g. Pakistan, Nepal and Bangladesh) need to consider asymmetries vis-à-vis India and China. Would Kim's theoretical framework then be able to explain Pakistan's hedging strategies, such as in terms of Indian–Pakistan or China–Pakistan asymmetry?

Overall, *China and Its Small Neighbors* highlights China's asymmetric relationships with its Asian neighbours and extends the ever-increasing scholarly links between studies of asymmetric relationships and Chinese regional diplomacy. It addresses principal theoretical questions of policy significance and bridges the gap between theory and practice in Chinese foreign policy.

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Rejuvenating Communism: Youth Organizations and Elite Renewal in Post-Mao China

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Jérôme Doyon's impressively researched monograph begins with an initial puzzle: "How does the Chinese party-state manage to attract recruits and maintain their commitment over time, when ideology does not structure recruitment anymore, and a liberalized employment market provides alternative career options?" (p. 153). In the course of providing a persuasive answer, he also contributes important points on some of the key issues in Chinese politics more generally – including factionalism, meritocratic bureaucracy, fragmented authoritarianism, authoritarian resilience, the relationship between institutions and individual agency, and gender and politics – often providing alternative explanations to counter what sometimes passes as conventional or received wisdom. As he notes, his research findings have implications for the study of authoritarian politics beyond the China case.

Doyon's work makes an excellent companion volume to the recent book by Konstantinos D. Tsimonis (*The Chinese Communist Youth League: Juniority and Responsiveness in a Party Youth Organization*, Amsterdam University Press, 2021). Both monographs are based on extensive fieldwork and interviews, along with a thorough reading of both primary and secondary sources, and both are concerned with the role of youth in the perpetuation of the Chinese political system. Tsimonis takes a systemic approach and focuses on the failures of Hu Jintao's policy initiative to increase the League's responsiveness through a "Keep Youth Satisfied" campaign, tracing the failures to the role of the League as a subordinate organization to the CCP within the Chinese political system. Doyon, however, is less interested in the League as an organization, and focuses instead on the perspectives, ambitions and agency of individual student cadres, and how they are progressively inducted into the world of officials, developing an "undogmatic commitment" to a political career. The party-state creates a "sponsored mobility" framework where young officials are "embedded"