

BOOK REVIEWS

Erik Ringmar, *History of International Relations: A Non-European Perspective*,
Cambridge, UK: Open Book Publishers, 2019, 218 pp.

The book under review is primarily a textbook in international relations, focusing on the non-European perspective from a historical point of view, dating back to the 18th century. The book deals with six major regions of the world, namely China and East Asia, India, the Muslim Caliphates, the Mongol Khanates, Africa, and the Americas (p.3). The final chapter deals with European colonialism. Unlike the European international system, based on state sovereignty under the 1688 Westphalia Treaty, non-European international systems are characterized by unique institutions, norms, and rules in which “political actors” and empires rather than states played a decisive role in shaping cultural and societal values. Unlike European system, there is no “norm of non-interference and self-determination” (p.5), whereas “a hierarchical system” pervaded most of the empires in a non-European system.

The author has brilliantly illuminated each region’s peculiarities in terms of history, culture, societal structures, and role of empires. The chapter on China in East Asia, in particular, is instructive and interesting. It is relevant in understanding China’s world views under the current leadership of President Xi Jinping. The chapter expatiates on how China’s “Middle Kingdom” mentality is still deeply etched among the Chinese people. In addition, China is engaged in disseminating its culture, its language, and its civilizational values through setting up of Confucius institutes globally. If viewed from this angle, the book makes an important contribution to the understanding of the ruling leadership’s perception of China’s assertive role in shaping the new global world order in accord with Chinese characteristics.

Chapter 3 titled “India and Indianization” is enlightening. The author has discussed myriad dimensions of the evolutionary process of Indian history with a five thousand-year old Indus River Valley civilization. Ringmar notes that Indian culture has a “profound impact on societies elsewhere”(p.58). Importantly, India’s power has been “civilizational” rather than that of the “force of arms.” The author highlights some turning points in Indian history, ranging from Vedic India, dating back from around 1500 BCE through Indian mathematics, Kautilya’s *Arthashastra* (statecraft manual), and Vatsyayana’s classic *Kama Sutra* (a sex manual) to the Mughal empire and India’s place in the international system. The author spells out the impact of “Hindutva nationalists” on India’s domestic and foreign policies.

Chapter 4 titled “The Muslim Caliphates” presents the readership with a rich and objective analysis of the role of Caliphate, the place of Ottoman Empire, and the impact of the Byzantine Empire on human history. Chapter 5 picturesquely reveals how Mongols created the “largest contiguous empire the world has ever known” (p.101). The Mongols, known as “merciless warriors” and blood thirsty barbarians,” not only destroyed the cities but also killed humans and even animals like cats and dogs. They made no breakthroughs in the field of technology. Nor did they build monuments and develop “simple techniques in the field of weaving and poetry.” The important points covered in the chapter include tracing the root of the family tree of Genghis Khan, and the key to conquering the world. This chapter is extremely useful for the students of world history to understand the dynamics of Mongol empire and its impact on China—the emerging superpower.

Chapter 6 highlights the importance of Africa that constitutes a fifth of the world’s landmass with diverse ethnic groups, a thousand languages, varied climates and environments. Interestingly, the Sahara Desert constitutes the size of Europe (p.127) and provides “a harsh environment.” It is important to underline that Egypt in North Africa is one of the “oldest civilizations” in the world, dating back to 3000 BCE. In addition, the Nile River, the longest river in the world, facilitated irrigation and fertilization of the fields.

So far as an integrated African international system is concerned, the author is of the view that there is no African international system as such but does not explain how and why? Therefore, it warrants a detailed and critical analysis. Perhaps, the reason is that the continent is too sparse and vast, creating obstacles “in the formation of the kind of political structures which we think of as states” (p.145). However, northern Africa has close links with the Middle East and Europe, rendering it important for the United States to cultivate its ties for its strategic foothold in the region.

Chapter 7 on Americas presents an overview of their historical roots and social and cultural interactions with the outside world. It is said that “some five million people in the United States who count themselves as “Native Americans”... there may be more than some 1.5 million Native Americans in Canada” (p.173). Chapter 8 on European expansion provides Europe’s unique history, marked by the onset of renaissance, which later “came to spread to every corner of the globe” (p.179). This chapter sheds light on how “at the turn of the twentieth century it came to rule the world” (p.179). In the first half of the fifteenth century, Europeans embarked on sea voyages, enabling Europe to spread its economic and trade activities by looking for new markets in India and China. Its economy strengthened and found huge consumers in India and China for export of goods. Europeans were amazed at the wealth of Asian countries, triggering the rise of colonialism. In fact, Britain took the lead since the Industrial Revolution occurred there. Its strongest navy helped

consolidate the British imperialism in many parts of the world, which facilitated British merchants to have a “free access to foreign markets.” So far as the British rule in India was concerned, it was heavily dependent on local elites, and princely states that helped perpetuate the British imperialism in India. It was Mahatma Gandhi who led the freedom movement in India and addressed the problem of “home rule” in his famous book *The Hind Swaraj*.

In brief, the book is a rich mine of historical narratives that give an interesting, objective and enlightening account of crucial stages of the world history. Without its comprehensive study, one cannot better understand the complexity of today’s world. It is a must read for graduate students, faculty and researchers. The book is highly recommended for all those who are keen enough to have an access to the world history through objective lenses.

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Alfredo Toro Hardy, *China Versus the US: Who Will Prove?* Singapore: World Scientific Publishing Company Pvt. Ltd., 2020, Xvii +284 pp.

China’s ascendancy to economic, military, and technological power has raised eyebrows of America—the lone superpower. The US’s underlying worry is understandable. At the same time, it is a myth that the US is fearful of a multipolar world. Rather, it welcomes a fragmented multipolar world led without leadership. The real US fear is China’s incorrigible ambition to replace America in the current international system.

Keeping the above background in mind, Alfredo Toro Hardy, a retired Venezuelan diplomat, introduces multiple dimensions of the ongoing rivalry between China and the United States. Interestingly, Nixon recognized the “one-China theory” under the Shanghai communiqué. As part of negotiations, China became a permanent member of the UN Security Council in 1978, replacing Taiwan—the United States’ old ally.

Hardy traces the history of the US-China détente with President Richard Nixon’s historic visit to China in 1972. The US opening to China was rooted in the Vietnam nightmare that forced Nixon to recognize China with the real motivation of ending the two-decade old Vietnam War in order to withdraw US troops from Vietnam. But in realistic terms, America has had to pay a heavy price for enabling China’s permanent membership to the UN Security Council. Further, with the launch of an open door policy by Deng Xiaoping in 1978, American mistakenly believed that China would gradually embrace liberal political and democratic values. Hardy writes, “The conversion of China into the values of liberal democracy and the free