

clearly laid out data pulled from diverse official sources, explained and summarized in layman terms addressing grounded questions. For instance, the opening discussion of the historical roots of key budgetary principles in chapter one is an especially perceptive addition to the literature – I hope that Lin will elaborate this part in a future, book-length work. Chapter two on the overview of government revenue explains the four major parts constituting the entirety of government revenue in contemporary China (the general fiscal revenue, government funds, social insurance contributions, and revenue from state-owned capital), explicates their relative shares and development and reform trajectories over time and discusses major issues and problems in each of the parts. Readers will learn about the rises and falls of the respective part of the government revenue and the underlying reasons for them. For example, the “extra-budget” was once a major constituent in the government revenue dating from the 1950s; its proliferation after the 1980s started the incessant efforts to improve its management and incorporation into the “in-budget” side of government revenue during the late 1990s to early 2000s, until its elimination in 2011 (p. 42). Government funds became a new ascendant category of government revenue thereafter, accounting for over 40 per cent of general fiscal revenue as of 2019 (p. 47, table 2.4) and about one-third of total government revenue (p. 52, figure 2.4), and in particular the revenue from land sales which accounted for 84 per cent of revenue from all government funds in 2019 (p. 45, table 2.3). Another spark of delight is Lin’s discussion of government debts in chapter six as part of the overview analysis of expenditure pattern and structure, and in chapter ten on local government debts. The reader is reminded of the omission in much of the discussion on government expenditures of the resultant “off-budget” expenditure financed by the expanding local government debt (pp. 171–172). This part of expenditure, which is getting increasingly large, is absent in official statistics on government expenditures but can only be “figured out by the annual increase in total local government debt” (p. 172). The examples can go on. A major strength of the book is that whilst its wealth of data requires dense reading, the narrative is clear and ably assists the reader in navigating through the maze for better comprehension of the big picture.

In the author’s words, this book “demystifies many enigmas of China’s public finance and presents an easily understandable context to readers” (p. 20). The importance of readability cannot be overemphasized – students of public finance and government will benefit from it and seasoned observers of China will enjoy the perceptive analysis. I have profoundly enjoyed reading this book and learnt a great deal from it.

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## A Hierarchical Vision of Order: Understanding Chinese Foreign Policy in Asia

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*A Hierarchical Vision of Order: Understanding Chinese Foreign Policy in Asia* revolves around a topic that has fascinated, and continues to fascinate, many scholars: the relationship between

China's imperial history and traditions, on the one hand, and its contemporary foreign policy and institutions, on the other.

With the sitting General Secretary of the Chinese Communist Party, Xi Jinping, often described as the most powerful Chinese leader since Mao and depicted by pundits as a new emperor, the arrival of Antoine Roth's book seems quite in step with the times. Drawing from the English school of international relations theory, the core argument of *A Hierarchical Vision of Order* is that ancient ideas about the creation of an enduring Sinocentric political order have survived into the modern era and continue to guide Chinese foreign policy today.

After setting the theoretical stage in the first chapter, Roth presents the ideal blueprint of hierarchical order based on the foundational texts of Confucianism and Legalism that formed the bedrock of the "imperial orthodoxy." The following chapters are meant to show that Chinese leaders and intellectuals throughout history held those ideas and often put them into practice. To make this argument, Roth utilizes a vast range of primary and secondary sources, including academic works produced by Japanese scholars that are otherwise rarely seen in English-language publications.

Roth's work must surely be commended for its ambition, covering a period spanning from the imperial era to Xi's "new era" (*xin shidai*). At the same time, he provides a clean and coherent narrative while touching upon several different aspects of China's relations with its neighbours. Roth's concluding remarks also provide nourishing food for thought, especially the first half of the last chapter in which he discusses if and how China's idea of hierarchical order differs from that of other countries. In general, the book is written clearly. However, Roth does not always succeed in providing enough depth and nuance. Several passages would have benefitted from more elaboration. Ideas, and their influence on human actions, are a notoriously difficult subject to study. It would have been useful, for example, to have a more detailed discussion of *how* and *why* those ideas that Roth claims guide China's actions were transmitted, weakened, strengthened and, especially, used selectively at different moments in history. At the end of the book, one cannot but wonder whether Roth thinks that Chinese policymakers will be forever doomed to think about the world within the parameters of the "imperial orthodoxy." I find this proposition difficult to believe. It is also unclear who are the holders of those ideas, whether it is the entire Chinese society or only the elites, or whether this is a distinction that even matters.

Moreover, the fact that similar actions can originate from different ideas is something that should have been addressed. For example, many scholars such as Courtney Fung and Shogo Suzuki have emphasized the role of status in shaping China's actions. Yet, they have not traced the origin of Beijing's status-seeking behaviour to its imperial past. The various types of partnerships that China has established with neighbouring and faraway countries since the 1990s are another case in point. Yes, that network somehow might seem to be the product of the "imperial orthodoxy" described by Roth. However, this is far from enough to prove that this actually is the origin of those agreements. In other words, some of the claims made in the book seem plausible but those who are sceptical of such history-focused accounts of Chinese behaviour will not be fully convinced by the argument that is put forward in *A Hierarchical Vision of Order*.

To conclude, Roth's book is undoubtedly a pleasant and informative read. It will be of interest to both novices of Chinese foreign policy and more seasoned observers. Even those that might not be convinced by the argument in its entirety, will find some of the points made by Roth worth their time.