

Cabestan could have developed further even though he points out that domestic Chinese viewpoints between constructivist (more favourable to reform and to cooperation with the West) and the realists (protecting the one-party system from outside interference) (p. 54) is not the focus of this book. In addition, the author rightly notes that China wants to use its influence to change the whole international order in those areas where it is able to exercise its power with both capacity and willingness, such as the UN. However, the argument about China's intention not only to reform but also to improve the international order could have been pushed further by linking it to more recent speeches and addresses from Beijing – for example, Xi Jinping's address at the UN clearly mentioned that “Bolstering Confidence and Jointly Overcoming Difficulties to Build a Better World” (76th Session of UN General Assembly, 21 September 2021). As far as development goes, China appears to be more confident to demonstrate to the world its different points of view on global development, to say the least.

This book is written with policy makers in mind and as such it will prove essential reading. The no-nonsense style and jargon-free writing can attract other potential readers such as researchers on Chinese foreign policy, academics working on East Asian international relations and graduate students of Chinese politics and international relations. This book is well in line with academic disciplines such as contemporary Chinese politics, international relations studies and foreign policy analysis.

doi:10.1017/S030574102400064X

Birth of the Geopolitical Age: Global Frontiers and the Making of Modern China

Shellen Xiao Wu. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2023. 309 pp. US\$32.00 (pbk). ISBN 9781503636842

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With China asserting itself as an economic and military power, the theme of empires is making a strong comeback. Shellen Xiao Wu's book is a stimulating contribution that invites us to rethink the political structure of modern China and how its sovereignty is legitimized. The period covered runs from the Treaty of Kanagawa (1854) and the forced opening up of Japan to the start of the Cold War. Drawing on a rich corpus of sources, ranging from the private collections of geopolitologists who founded the discipline (Bowman, Haushofer, Mackinder, Lattimore) to the archives of the Kuomintang and the Rockefeller Foundation, Wu traces the historical roots of geopolitical narrative in China and shows that countries as different as the US and Germany have continued to reproduce the patterns of empires. In doing so, Wu sets out to find the thread that inserts China into the global history of the 19th and 20th centuries – the role of agriculture, but also the way in which energy supply and transport infrastructure networks determine spatial hierarchies.

Wu's comparative and multidisciplinary approach is commendable, skilfully combining the contributions of geographers, agronomists and lawyers with the concerns of Chinese intellectuals during this period and revealing areas of controversy that have remained in the shadows. The argument is structured around a strong idea: the concept of geo-modernity, a neologism that the author defines as the clear demarcation of borders and the use of science and technology to develop

boundaries through the intensive exploitation of natural resources. The combination of geography and agronomy thus links the ancient conception of knowledge and modern science. The author recalls the place of work on agriculture, mathematics and geography in the work of Xu Guangqi (1562–1633) and finds a strong link with the contributions of Zuo Zongtang and his efforts to develop cotton crops in the north-west to replace opium.

How did China manage the contradiction between maintaining the territories of the empire and the era of the nation state? The author explores the links between geography, natural resources and the social Darwinism that permeated intellectual circles at the end of the 19th century, mainly through translations of Japanese works. The classic characteristics of the empire – extension of the bureaucracy, construction of infrastructures – were enriched by a new element: the production of “modern” knowledge. Development planning became the hallmark of maritime and continental empires. Settlement became a science serving the rational use of space. In this respect, Wu recalls the deep impression made on Sun Yat-sen by German investment in the remodelling of urban space in Qingdao.

Wu finely reconstructs the collapse of a Chinese-centric system with a loose concept of sovereignty as it came up against a model based on international law developed in Europe. This makes it possible to read the current conflicts linked to China’s ambitions in the South China Sea with the requisite historical depth. Wu shows that the economic development of Mongolia, Xinjiang and the territories of south-west China followed a similar pattern as that undertaken on the island of Hokkaido, with the development of plans supported by the state or by merchants, long before the arrival of Western imperialism. And in the 1930s, China’s nationalist phraseology did little to disguise the desire to hold on to the territories it had acquired and maintain the territorial extent of the empire, while adorning itself with the attributes of the nation state.

Studying the link between agriculture, science and imperialism, Wu examines the different perceptions of the frontier (chapter three) in Eurasian empires. Science must save the nation, and the slogan finds a point of application in the land reclamation undertaken in frontier regions. During the Republican period, this objective was shared by the Kuomintang and warlords such as Yan Xishan and Zhang Xueliang, who saw themselves as modernizers and saviours of the nation. Ardent promoters of science and technology, they conceived the border as a space for experimentation, but also as a marker of their patriotism. The parallel between the brutality of internal colonization, such as that carried out in the north-west, and the quest for self-sufficiency for the garrisons stationed on the empire’s borders from the Han era onwards, is striking here.

With its extensive references to the fathers of geopolitics (Ratzel, Haushofer and Mackinder, as well as Huntington and Bowman), the book’s account of the reception of geopolitical knowledge in China (chapter four) in the 1930s is certainly its most original contribution. Fairgrieve, applying Mackinder’s key concepts, was already detecting a homogeneity in the Chinese empire given by geography and designated the north-western plateau of the country as a heartland for China, the Soviet Union and Mongolia. The survival of Communist bases in the north-west in the 1930s comes to mind, as does Mao’s definition of a “third line” for Chinese industry in the early 1960s.

Caught up in this complex transition from empire to nation state, China saw geopolitics in the 1930s as part of a national defence strategy, rather than as a justification for territorial expansion. At the time of the Japanese invasion, the geographer Hu Huanyong emphasized the explicit link between geography, national defence and resource management, and justified China’s claims to the border regions and the minorities living there. The political scientist Lin Tongji discerned in the confrontations of the Second World War the return of the era of the Warring Kingdoms, with its alliances, its desire for expansion ... and the triumph of social Darwinism. Others, such as the geographer Sha Xuejun, saw the Sino-Japanese war as a conflict between an agrarian China and an industrialized Japan. It is regrettable that in this comprehensive overview of Chinese geopolitics, the author does not discuss the work of Ji Chaoding (1903–1963), whose seminal work *Key Economic Areas in Chinese History* (Allen & Unwin, 1936) emphasized the importance of geographical and economic factors in building the power of the various Chinese dynasties.

Birth of the Geopolitical Age is abundantly illustrated with reproductions of plates describing agricultural experiments and town planning projects, among others. It is a pity, however, that there is no bibliography summarizing the rich critical apparatus.

The often-provocative conclusions on the metamorphosis of empires and the new elements of imperial language invite a new interpretation of Chinese ambitions and will no doubt be debated. However, the question remains open as to whether formations as heterogeneous as transnational corporations, the European Union and the *Belt Road Initiative* can be defined as new empires. How will power and law combine in this new configuration of international relations? How can we think about these new imperial policies, which in China's case involve combining surveillance methods linked to an impressive arsenal of high technologies with traditional forms of incarceration and re-education? The merit of *Birth of the Geopolitical Age* is that it raises these crucial issues clearly and forcefully.

doi:10.1017/S0305741024000511

From Missionary Education to Confucius Institutes: Historical Reflections on Sino-American Cultural Exchange

Jeff Kyong-McCain and Joseph Tse-Hei Lee (eds.). London and New York: Routledge, 2023. 258pp. £130.00; \$170.00 (hbk). ISBN 9781032487860

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This book has a number of unique features in that it deals with Sino-American educational interaction over a period of more than a century. While readers will be familiar with iconic figures such as Tao Xingzhi and Hu Shi, students of John Dewey, in this book we meet lesser-known figures who played highly significant roles – Ma Yinchu, Dexter Walcott, Wu Yifang and three women scholars in Home Economics she mentored, Wu Leichuan and Paul Lam Chi-Fung. The four periods covered begin with the transition from the late Qing to the early Republic, the Nanjing decade, the Maoist/Cold War period, and finally China's opening up and the establishment of Confucius Institutes in the US in recent decades.

As a scholar of comparative education, I have always felt that context matters deeply in comparative reflection, also that diachronic comparison can be as interesting as the more common comparison across nations and regions at a given time. What is particularly notable in terms of China and America is how this kind of historical review can give hope, with certain dramatic turning points over the century making possible new and unanticipated developments.

First, let me say that the 14 authors and editors constitute a remarkable group, mainly from the fields of history, anthropology, political science and law, who bring new insights drawing upon documentary and archival sources that are little known. In some cases, interviews were done as well, opening up many new perspectives. As a Canadian who has spent a lifetime doing parallel research on Canada–China educational relations I have found this a fascinating read and will simply try to identify highlights in each section, in the hope of stimulating readers to embrace a topic that could not be more important in these difficult geo-political times.

Part one, dealing with the late Qing and early Republican period, starts with a study of the World Chinese Students' Journal and Federation in Shanghai, where Chinese who had studied in America