

The book also engages important methodological questions. How can one remain grounded during ethnographic explorations of planetary change? How to grasp meaning (or deal with the un-graspable) when it comes to socio-political and geophysical transitions? Zee argues that we should also think of ethnography as an experiment, promoting a “parallax” approach that (suitably for the book’s volumetric inclination) seeks depth over singular truth, and presents a variety of perspectives, sites, scales, and possibilities rather than a linear story (p. 27). The final pages of Chapter Six and the second part of the last apparatus (“Monsters”) reflect key ideas and summarize the book’s main messages, but there is no clearly delineated conclusion section. Our predicament is argued to be open-ended, and so too is the text.

Continent in Dust is a timely and critical intervention in the roles and relationships of China and Asia in weather-world-systems. This book will be valuable for scholars and students of political and environmental anthropology, geography, media theory, and environmental humanities in Asian Studies and beyond; and for those teaching and engaging with creative modes of ethnographic theory, method, and writing. It is a welcome contribution to a growing conversation about how material, ecological and meteorological phenomena are mutually implicated with practices, knowledges and experiences of sovereignty, ethics, and sociality.

References

- Billé, Franck** (ed) (2020). *Voluminous States: Sovereignty, Materiality, and the Territorial Imagination*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Choy, Timothy** (2016). “Distribution.” Theorizing the Contemporary, *Fieldsights*, January 21. <https://culanth.org/fieldsights/distribution>.
- Cohen, Jeffrey Jerome and Lowell Duckert** (2015). *Elemental Ecocriticism: Thinking with Earth, Air, Water, and Fire*. Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press.
- Elden, Stuart** (2013). “Secure the Volume: Vertical Geopolitics and the Depth of Power.” *Political Geography* 34, pp. 35–51.
- Folch, Christine** (2019). *Hydropolitics: The Itaipu Dam, Sovereignty, and the Engineering of Modern South America*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Loeffler, Jack and Celestia Loeffler** (eds) (2012). *Thinking Like A Watershed: Voices From the West*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press.
- Neale, Timothy, Thao Phan and Courtney Addison** (2019). “An Anthropogenic Table of Elements:”, Theorizing the Contemporary, *Fieldsights*, June 27. <https://culanth.org/fieldsights/series/an-anthropogenic-table-of-elements-1>.

doi:10.1017/S1479591422000158

Taiwan and the Changing Dynamics of Sino–US Relations: A Relational Approach

by Hung-Jen Wang. Routledge, 2022. 86 pages. Hardback, \$59.95; Ebook, \$20.65.

Dean Chen

Political Science, Ramapo College of New Jersey, Mahwah, New Jersey, USA

Author for correspondence: Dean Chen, E-mail: dchen@ramapo.edu

(Received 2 June 2022; accepted 2 June 2022)

The overarching objective of this book was, in the words of the author, Professor Hung-Jen Wang, “to take a relational approach to understanding Taiwan’s current status in the context of the changing dynamics of Sino-US relations – a purposeful attempt to step away from conventional and mainstream

IR explanations that emphasize the factors of power or national interests, explanations that deny the ability of a small power like Taiwan to determine its future independent of the competition between China and the United States, currently the world's top two economic and military powers" (p. 68).

A relational perspective is promoted as an alternative explanation of the increasingly competitive, even adversarial, relationship between the United States and the People's Republic of China (PRC) as well as the warming up of ties between Washington and Taipei since the Trump administration. Essentially, relationality, rooted in the constructivist perspective of international relations, involves identity-building and that nation-states tend to move toward a consensus while creating imagined commonalities. States participate in a "continuous and intersubjective learning process" (p. 69). States relations, in other words, are based on the "identification and/or assignment of roles such as friend, enemy, competitor, rogue, great power, small power, beacon of democracy, dragon, and tiger. Each role contains social meanings that influence positive or negative feelings about others, as well as ways that states should interact with each other" (p. 69). In the light of that, the United States, Taiwan, and the PRC are acting and reacting in a mutually constitutive way.

These changing dynamics cannot be accounted for by a sole preoccupation predicated upon a rationalist approach based on power-politics and national interest assumptions. If one were to assess these interactions from purely realist or liberal lenses, then we would not be able to fully understand the elevated status of Taiwan, empowered by its greater soft-power and democratic appeals as a force for good in America's grand strategic design. Thus, in terms of power-politics, Taiwan "is often described as a small and weak state, but according to relational frameworks, it is considered an epistemological equal of the United States. Taiwan benefits from its willingness to practice democratic principles, free markets, and autonomy in civil society. It has built and maintained its relationality with the United States via ongoing democratization, reforms to its past authoritarian governance mechanisms, improved enforcement of intellectual property laws, transformation to a fairly unrestricted capitalist system, and peaceful power transitions between political parties, among other practices" (p. 19). Indeed, former U.S. president George W. Bush had described Taiwan as a "beacon of democracy to Asia and the world" (p. 19). The shared values and like-mindedness between Washington and Taipei, in a sense, have reinforced their trust level and consolidated their ties, despite that President Trump was allegedly viewing Taiwan more as a "bargaining chip" in dealing with the PRC (p. 27). The Biden administration, according to the author, is more prone than its predecessor in having a comprehensive and steady Taiwan Strait policy.

By the same token, though transpired in an opposite trajectory to the betterment of U.S.–Taiwan ties, the sharp deterioration in U.S.–PRC relations emerged as much from Beijing's heightened nationalism, escalated belligerent behaviors (i.e., in the South China Sea, East China Sea maritime territorial contentions with the neighboring Asian states) and the Chinese leader Xi Jinping's seemingly unilateral attempts at disrupting cross-strait peace and stability as from the "reduction of trust" – an ideational concept – when such assertiveness is "interpreted as harming the sense of relationality expected from 'responsible states' [or] 'responsible stakeholder' comment made in 2005 by then-Deputy Secretary of State Robert Zoellick regarding role expectations for China" (p. 16). This sense of U.S. disappointment regarding the PRC's attitude of "rejection and irreverence" dashed Washington's long-standing expectation that its patient and constructive engagement with the PRC would eventually bring China closer toward accepting the internationally recognized values, norms, and becoming more politically open, transparent, and democratic. The continued decline in their mutual trust will lead to a more damaging bilateral relationship between Washington and Beijing.


Overall, this book is nicely written, well-researched, and cogently analyzed. The author has relied on extensive interviews with at least 43 experts, scholars, analysts, and policymakers deeply familiar with U.S.–China–Taiwan relations. While the author had, in several instances, acknowledged the inevitable influence of power-politics in the "asymmetric power relationship that exists between the United States and Taiwan [as] Washington will continue to exert considerable control over the country's general policies and to influence actual and planned actions on the part of the Taiwanese government" (p. 20), this research has lucidly and compellingly demonstrated the crucial explanatory role of a

relational theory. Taiwan's relatively marginalized role in international affairs notwithstanding, the island democracy's stellar democratic identity and commitment to human rights and deepening of its civil societal contributions to high-tech innovation, global public health, and environmental sustainability have bolstered its global prominence, visibility and attractiveness, gaining ever greater support, amity and recognition of its achievements from the broader world community. And, that is a form of power instrument which is arguably becoming more potent and resilient than the traditional military, nuclear, and economic capabilities wielded by leading strong states in the international system.

doi:10.1017/S1479591422000201

Human Rights in a Time of Populism: Challenges and Responses

Edited by Gerald L. Neuman. Cambridge University Press, 2020. 277 pages. Hardback, £85.00, ISBN: 9781108485494. Ebook, £64.00, ISBN: 9781108621311

Veronika Bílková 

Faculty of Law, Charles University, Praha, Czech Republic

Author for correspondence: Veronika Bílková, E-mail: bilkova@iir.cz

(Received 23 January 2022; accepted 25 January 2022)

There is little doubt that human rights and populism both belong among the buzzwords of our times. And yet, leaving aside certain isolated articles and essays (Alston 2017; Bílková 2019; Mégret 2021), the complicated, and at instances antagonistic, relationship between them has so far largely escaped scholarly reflection. The collective monography under review is one of the first attempts to engage in such a reflection. Emerging from a conference organized at Harvard Law School in March 2018, the book, edited by Gerald L. Neuman, brings together eleven contributions authored predominantly by legal scholars and political scientists.

The contributions could be divided into two categories. The first encompasses six chapters (by Neuman, Waldron, Heydarian, Johnson, Helfer and Neuman again) which deal with populism from a general perspective. These chapters, drafted mainly by Anglo-Saxon scholars, discuss, in accordance with the subtitle of the book, the challenges that populism produces for human rights and the responses that human rights – acting through international institutions, non-governmental organizations and other supporters – provide in response. The second category consists of five country-specific case studies (by Pomper and Levine-Spound, Sadurski, Alviar García, O'Connell and Mon Htun). These case studies, drafted in their majority by scholars and practitioners from the countries concerned, describe and analyse the rise of populism in the USA, Poland, Colombia and Venezuela, Turkey and Myanmar.

The book provides no explanation for the selection of these countries and the omission of others (Brazil, Hungary and the Philippines are among the obvious candidates). The geographical distribution nonetheless suggests that the ambition probably was that of presenting the rise of populism as a world-wide phenomenon. This ambition has largely been achieved. The case studies, moreover, communicate well with the general chapters, illustrating on a concrete level the abstract processes analysed in these chapters. It is just somewhat regrettable from the formal point of view that the difference between the two categories of contributions has not been reflected in the structure of the book, where general chapters and case studies follow one another in what seems to be a random order.