Book Reviews

Michael J. Green

By More Than Providence: Grand Strategy and American Power in the Asia Pacific Since 1783 (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017). 760 pp. \$45.00 (cloth).

In *By More Than Providence: Grand Strategy and American Power in the Asia Pacific Since 1783*, Michael J. Green takes on the ambitious challenge of tracing the entirety of United States policymaking toward East Asia. He argues that variations within and between presidential administrations hinged on how leaders approached commitments to American interests in Asia relative to other foreign policy concerns. This included with which nations they prioritized engagement, whether they adhered to ideas of self-determination or spreading universal values, and whether they advocated for protectionism or free trade. Green analyzes policies from the founding of the United States to the present day through these frameworks, eliciting the myriad of ways those in power succeeded and failed to live up to their own ambitions. He notes that the United States always has approached Asia policy in much the same way as other nations—"the definition of Asia usually reflects the identity and national interest of the government in question" (p. 14). Yet, the ability of the United States to realize those interests is unique. The core of this work is the thorough delineation of how generations of policy makers responded to the changes the United States has undergone—from emerging republic, to expansionist force, to international combatant, to Cold Warrior, to potential unipolar power—and how these evolutions of national identity played out in the Asia Pacific.

By More Than Providence focuses almost exclusively on the most influential figures involved in formulating and guiding American policymaking through four phases—the emergence of United States interests in the Pacific, the growth and collapse of imperial Japan, concerns about expanding Soviet influence in the Cold War, and the emergence of China as a global player. Using a fairly strict chronology to help enhance how shifting concerns affected and

reflected United States aims, Green manages to tease out the internal tensions between American officials. He examines how these debates influenced, and at times undermined, efforts to develop and enact a coherent and overarching Grand Strategy during the “rise” of each of these four forces. While Green lauds some (Theodore Roosevelt and Richard Nixon) and is more critical of others (Jimmy Carter) in their ability to enact sustainable visions in the Pacific, he determines the relative successes of each administration as a reflection of their own goals in context with regional and global events and as part of the *longue durée* of American diplomacy.

Green tackles the influence of a wide range of individuals who contributed to U.S. ambitions in Asia. From the missionary impulses of Peter Parker in late-imperial China to the strategic, expansionist ambitions of Alfred Thayer Mahan to the realpolitik of Henry Kissinger, he illustrates how U.S. policies more often than not hinged on the extent to which presidents and these advisors sought to extend American influence into the region, the lengths to which they were willing to reinforce those desires, and the factors that constrained them. As such, the narrative generally focuses on the diplomatic, military, economic, and national security infrastructures that administrations mobilized to carry out those visions, mostly relying on the tried and true sources of traditional diplomatic history, such as presidential papers and the U.S. Department of State’s *Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS)* series. Green does, however, weave in less-familiar sources, such as the Navy Board’s “War Plan Orange,” a pre-World War II analysis of the ability of the United States to win a conflict against Japan. These less familiar sources add welcome depth and help to reinforce arguments about the fluctuations and consistencies within U.S.-Pacific policy.

It is not surprising, however, that in a work attempting to project a comprehensive scope of U.S. Grand Strategy in the Asia-Pacific, issues not immediately relevant to the highest levels of diplomacy receive less analytical attention. The author hardly, if ever, touches upon the impact of domestic issues, such as congressional enactment of anti-Asian immigration laws or the events surrounding Japanese internment, in relation to their impact on the policymaking process. Likewise, there is a strong and growing historiography surrounding the ways that travel narratives, news media, and other cultural and social forces continue to shape U.S. foreign policy. Green rarely includes these approaches as historiographic footnotes, resulting in missed opportunities where he could have enhanced his arguments regarding national identity and Asia policy. For example, born to missionaries in Shanghai and eventually the owner of *Time* magazine, Henry Luce wielded influential, vocal, and

vociferous public support for Chiang Kai-shek. Supplemental information such as this would have paired well with Green's claims about the fluctuations in Sino-American relations throughout the early Cold War. Likewise, the ability of the United States to effectively wield "soft power" to enhance alliances is another effective methodology he mentions, but does not fully explore. And while Green unsurprisingly locates the modulating relationships between the United States, Japan, and China at the core of the text, other nations within the Asia-Pacific region, such as Vietnam and the Philippines, only surface in relation to the priorities of particular administrations at any given moment. So gaps emerge in understanding the continuous relationship between the United States and these nations outside of their impact on a Grand Strategy.

Readers need to know that Green, as a member of the National Security Council staff during the George W. Bush administration, eventually becomes a figure of his own analysis. While not overly jarring, the shift from the mostly analytical tone of the text to the inclusion of personal narration serves as a reminder of the careful balance scholars must maintain when dealing with memory and potential accusations of how scholars can fairly or unfairly frame personal experiences. As such, Green successfully treads a very cautious line in mostly describing his role in the administration without justifying his own involvement in the decision making process *ex post facto*.

While those who advocate for a more idealistic approach to foreign relations might balk at his more critical perspective of that methodology, Michael Green effectively argues that the United States was and is best served if its presidents follow a consistent, realist approach to Asia-Pacific policy, and that this serves the best interests of Asian nation-states as well. He concludes that the decline of authoritarian regimes, the emergence of strong economic ties, and the gradual democratization of Asian nations over the past five decades are testaments to the ability of the United States to exert its positive influence region-wide. It would be interesting, then, to see how current events unfolding in Asia—the rise of an authoritarian violence in the Philippines, the increasing power of religious nationalism in India, the U.S. abandonment of the Trans-Pacific Partnership, and the escalation of nuclear tensions on the Korean peninsula—would factor into his analysis. Are these actions a rejection of the post-Cold War consensus that Green asserts the United States succeeded in constructing, or is this moment simply a temporary anomaly in the historic ability of the United States to maintain its influence in the region? Regardless of the answer, *By More Than Providence* provides the greatest value in illustrating how the draw of the Asia-Pacific has been an enduring influence in

the United States for nearly two-and-a-half centuries. While the relationships have evolved, the impulses that drive policy, and the strategies that result, have surprising continuities that lack clarity unless viewed through the framework of a Grand Strategy.

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