“Editorial”

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Donald J. Trump has finished his term as president of the United States, having led the nation to a place of confusion and uncertainty on the world stage. His impact on U.S. relations with East Asia has been especially detrimental, as its allies in the region no longer look to the United States as the great stabilizer, but instead as a primary source of uncertainty. This result should not be surprising, given Trump's pledge to put “America first” in his inaugural address.¹ Just three days later, he repudiated the Trans-Pacific Partnership and repeated doubts he raised during his presidential campaign about the value of U.S. alliances with South Korea and Japan. Meanwhile, the People's Republic of China (PRC) has continued to promote its Road and Belt Initiative for cooperative economic ventures with its neighbors. Trump countered with his Free and Open Indo-Pacific Initiative, but gave it scant personal or financial support.² Indeed, he has not attended the annual summit of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations for the last three years. Trump's policies toward the PRC steadily increased tensions in the region. After at first courting China's leader Xi Jinping, he ignited a trade war with the PRC, while increasing arms sales to Taiwan. Fearing American abandonment, Japan and South Korea resisted U.S. pressure to impose sanctions on China and instead sought to improve relations with Beijing. A 2019 Pew Research Center poll found that just 36 percent of respondents in Japan and 46 percent of South Koreans said they had confidence in Trump to act wisely. In 2016, President Barack Obama's numbers were 88 and 78 percent respectively. In Southeast Asia, 47 percent had no

1 Carrie Dann, “In Inaugural Address, [Donald J.] Trump Pledges to Keep America First,” *NBC News*, 20 January 2017, <https://www.nbcnews.com/storyline/inauguration-2017/inaugural-address-trump-pledges-message-america-first-n709691> (accessed 1 January 2021).

2 Edward Ashbee, “We don't drown our partners in a sea of debt: U.S. Policy Responses to China's Belt and Road Initiative,” *Journal of American-East Asian Relations*, 27, no. 4 (2020): 374–400.

confidence in the United States as a strategic partner.³ Stated simply, Trump's foreign policies have made East Asia a far more dangerous and fractured region than it was when he became president.

Trump's policies on other issues have damaged U.S.-East Asian relations, although they have received less notice. For example, in May 2020, he issued a proclamation barring the entry to the United States of Chinese students in graduate-level programs who had an association with the PRC military.⁴ Two months later, Immigration and Customs Enforcement issued a new rule requiring all foreign students at U.S. colleges and universities, three-fourths of whom are from Asia, to leave or face deportation if they enrolled in only online courses during the fall semester.⁵ Although an avalanche of opposition caused Trump to revoke the order, he never has wavered in seeking to fulfill his campaign promise to restrict immigration to the United States, declaring in April 2019 that "our nation is full."⁶ His primary focus has been on closing the U.S. border with Mexico, allocating funds without Congressional authorization to build a border wall and using the pandemic as an excuse to bar anyone's entry from that country. Notably, in August 2019, the Department of Homeland Security issued a new rule greatly expanding the definition of who it would consider a public charge and therefore ineligible to become a lawful permanent resident. Asian immigrants historically have used certain social services, had high rates of limited English proficiency, and relied heavily on the family reunification system to come to the United States.⁷ Trump thus has raised serious barriers for immigrants not only from Central America, but also East Asia.

3 Van Johnston and Hunter Marston, "Trump, Not Biden, Wrecked American Power in the Pacific," *Foreign Policy*, 23 October 2020, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/10/23/election-2020-biden-trump-pacific-asia/> (accessed 1 January 2021).

4 Stuart Anderson, "Inside Trump's Immigration Order to Restrict Chinese Students," *Forbes*, 1 June 2020, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/stuartanderson/2020/06/01/inside-trumps-immigration-order-to-restrict-chinese-students/?sh=1bc9e8ea3bec> (accessed 2 January 2021).

5 Deirdre Shesgreen and Chris Quintana, "Trump Administration Drops Rule Barring Foreign Students from Taking Online-Only Classes," *USA Today*, 14 July 2020, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/2020/07/14/trump-ice-college-student-visa-rule-online-classes-fall-2020/5437654002/> (accessed 1 January 2021).

6 Zeke Miller and Jonathan Lemire, "No Vacancy: Trump Says 'Our Nation is Full,' Migrants Straining System," *The Day*, 5 April 2019, <https://www.theday.com/article/20190405/NWS13/190409615> (accessed 1 January 2021).

7 Kimmy Yam, "Trump's Hard-Line Immigration Rule Could Disproportionately Hurt Asian Immigrants," *NBC News*, 21 October 2019, <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/asian-america/trump-s-hard-line-immigration-rule-could-disproportionately-hurt-asian-n1068406> (accessed 1 January 2021).

One critic of his immigration policies writes that those “willing to cross oceans or deserts, learn a new language, face down rampant discrimination and risk deportation to succeed is precisely the kind of person America should want.”⁸ Ryoko Okamura, in the first article of this issue titled “Untold Stories of Issei Women: Collective Images and Individual Experiences in Japanese American Oral History,” indirectly provides support for this alternate viewpoint.

Examining in detail the oral histories of two first-generation (Issei) women, Okamura shows how the Japanese American community has maintained images of Issei females that differ from their real characteristics. She explains that the traditional conception dating from the Meiji era depicts Issei women “as quiet, modest, and dutiful,” who accepted in silence a subordinate place in a patriarchal society “as obedient and hardworking wives and daughters-in-law who willingly endured personal hardships for the sake of their family.” After briefly describing the arrival of Issei women in the United States after 1924 and relocation of Japanese Americans in World War II, Okamura discusses how, as part of the redress movement beginning in the 1960s, groups such as the Japanese American Citizens League initiated oral history projects to preserve memories of Issei immigration and incarceration experiences. Bilingual second-generation Nisei conducted interviews with Issei women in Japanese, translated the audio recordings into English, and published edited transcripts of them. Both interviewees that Okamura analyzes displayed in their oral responses inner confidence, self-reliance, pride in personal achievement, and resistance to domineering in-laws and husbands. The editors of the transcripts, however, “modified words, phrases, and content” to delete what they “deemed as shameful or dishonorable” in contradicting “idealized images of Issei as the foundation of their ethnic identity.” This divergence reflected a disagreement that had emerged between older Japanese Americans who wanted to portray their history as voluntarily accepting racial subjugation and Nisei and Sansei (third generation) who sought to end silence and openly criticize past injustices. The Japanese American “community’s desire to preserve idealized images of Issei . . .,” Okamura concludes, “reduced the accuracy and nuances in the women’s self-representations and the complexities of family relations.”

Okamura exposes how transcripts of the interviews of two Issei women conveyed “the image that the Japanese American community preferred in representing its official Issei history,” rather than an accurate description of the contents of the oral recordings. Other individuals and groups commonly

8 Michael Chavarria, “Immigrants Play Vital Roles in the American Economy and Deserve Pathway to Citizenship,” *Sacramento Bee*, 27 December 2020, p. 4B.

have engaged in the same behavior, misrepresenting reality for either innocent or malicious reasons. Indeed, former President Trump did so with regularity for four years, most notably insisting after his defeat in the 2020 presidential election on Twitter that “I WON THIS ELECTION, BY A LOT!”⁹ His statements also often contradicted reality regarding his policies in East Asia. For example, Trump’s reports on relations with Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK) often diverged from the truth. When Trump met with DPRK leader Kim Jong Un in Singapore in June 2018, they signed an agreement committing the two nations to achieving complete denuclearization of Korea. “There is no longer a nuclear threat from North Korea,” Trump triumphantly declared upon his return to Washington.¹⁰ Then, in September, he remarked that Kim had sent “beautiful letters” to him. “We fell in love,” he declared.¹¹ Thereafter, the DPRK made it plain that it would not dismantle its nuclear weapons program unless economic sanctions ended. Kim Jong Un’s insistence on meeting this condition when he met with Trump at Hanoi in February 2019 ended the summit. Reality having exposed the failure of his policies, Trump, after an impromptu meeting with Kim at the demilitarized zone in June 2019, was silent about North Korea for the rest of his presidency. However, his flattering treatment had conferred legitimacy on a brutal dictator, bestowing on him an elevated world stature that his predecessors had been unable to achieve on their own, as Nate Kerkhoff explains in this issue’s second article titled “North Korea and the Non-Aligned Movement: From Adulation to Marginalization.”

Kerkhoff begins with a description of the formation of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) in 1961 that united largely developing nations behind the goals of anti-imperialism and hostility to great power politics. At first, DPRK leader Kim Il Sung was not interested in joining the NAM because of its close ties to the United Nations. However, after the failure of the 1972 Joint Communiqué to move the Koreans toward reunification, North Korea began courting non-aligned nations to gain recognition as Korea’s only legitimate government and to isolate South Korea. Initially, P’yŏngyang experienced success, as the NAM used its influence to persuade the United Nations to adopt resolutions

9 Donald J. Trump, Twitter post, 7 November 2020, <https://twitter.com/realdonaldtrump/status/1325099845045071873> (accessed 5 January 2021).

10 “Trump Claims North Korea is ‘No Longer a Nuclear Threat,’” *Reuters*, 13 June 2018, <https://www.cnn.com/2018/06/13/trump-says-north-korea-no-longer-a-nuclear-threat.html> (accessed 5 January 2021).

11 Julie Bykowitz and Farnaz Fassihi, “Trump Says He and Kim Jong Un ‘Fell in Love,’” *Wall Street Journal*, 30 September 2020, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/trump-says-he-and-kim-jong-un-fell-in-love-1538336604> (accessed 5 January 2021).

calling for the withdrawal of U.S. forces from South Korea. Admission to the NAM marked the apex of North Korea's efforts "to use global institutions to become a leader of the . . . Third World," but then it made a "litany of mistakes." In addition to defaulting on loans and smuggling alcohol, its border guards axe murdered two U.S. soldiers at the demilitarized zone and its diplomats obsessively peddled Kim's *juche* ideology. A more important reason for the DPRK's declining influence, as Kerkhoff perceptively explains, was its emphasis on a "guerilla diplomacy" stressing export of arms and ideology to foster revolution, when the priorities of the NAM had shifted to promotion of economic development. As a result, "the Non-Aligned Movement collectively . . . lost interest in the North Korean version of the Korean question," not least because "South Korea was using sustainable commercial diplomacy to build cordial relations." Kerkhoff concludes that North Korea's self-destructive blunders in "Third World relations meant that when crisis did befall its economy, the DPRK had burned many of the bridges that connected it to the international community," leaving it "in a state of stagnated growth and largely shut out of the global diplomatic and financial system."

North Korea's efforts to prevent its isolation in the international community after the fall of the Soviet Union were as unsuccessful as Trump's fanatical attempts to reverse his defeat in the 2020 presidential election. The reaction of leaders in East Asia to this outcome ranged from sighs of relief to signs of disappointment. Japan's Prime Minister Suga Yoshihide immediately congratulated Joseph R. Biden Jr. on his triumph. "I look forward to working with you to further strengthen the Japan-US Alliance and ensure peace, freedom and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific region and beyond," he wrote. So too did Taiwan's President Tsai Ing-wen. "The values on which we have built our relationship," she tweeted, "could not be stronger." While extending congratulations to Biden, Australia's Prime Minister Scott Morrison also expressed to Trump his appreciation for "a very good relationship."¹² In South Korea, President Mun Jae-in immediately congratulated Biden. "Our alliance is strong and the bond between our two countries is rock-solid," he tweeted. Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte, although he had supported Trump's reelection, quickly congratulated Biden and his spokesperson expressed his desire for "warm personal

12 Zena Chamas, "World Leaders React to Joe Biden's Defeat of Donald Trump in the 2020 US Presidential Election," *ABC News*, 8 November 2020, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-11-08/world-leaders-react-to-joe-bidens-us-election-win-donald-trump/12861894> (accessed 5 January 2021).

relations" with him.¹³ Many Vietnamese were distressed that Trump had lost because they welcomed his confrontational policies toward the PRC. Only after a three-week delay did Vietnam's President Nguyen Phu Trong and Prime Minister Nguyen Xuan Phuc congratulate Biden. As for China's leader Xi, he too did not congratulate Biden immediately, waiting more than two weeks to do so.¹⁴ Citizens in each of these nations had differing opinions about Trump and Biden. Jeremy M. Hughes, Brian A. Swanson, and Mary K. Swanson, in a research note in this issue titled "Chinese Perception of U.S. Presidential Candidates," present the results of a poll of Chinese university students recording their views on the 2020 U.S. presidential election.

Hughes, Swanson, and Swanson are faculty members at Fort Hays State University in Kansas who teach courses in Henan, China under a partnership agreement with Zhengzhou Sias University in its School of International Education. During 2020, they conducted a survey with Chinese university students to determine and then assess their perspectives on Trump and Biden as the two primary candidates in the 2020 U.S. presidential election. Most of the 506 voluntary respondents to seventeen questions, both open and closed, "were part of a dual-degree program, earning both a U.S. and a Chinese bachelor's degree." The authors provide at the outset a brief description of the recent rising tensions in Sino-American relations as a consequence of not only mutual imposition of tariffs, but President Trump's threats to revoke Chinese student visas and ban Chinese social media platforms in the United States, as well as his blaming of the PRC for causing the coronavirus pandemic. Nevertheless, the simultaneous huge growth of International Branch Campuses has increased the number of Chinese students pursuing a Western education. The authors identify as factors shaping their viewpoints "news, social media, and

13 David Biller and John Leicester, "Many World Leaders Express Hope, Relief after Biden Win," 7 November 2020, *AP News*, <https://apnews.com/article/election-2020-joe-biden-donald-trump-elections-anne-hidalgo-a4f71db8bab46c4dbco0bf02fe5ef3c1> (accessed 5 January 2021).

14 Pham Thi Thuy Duong and Truong Thuy Quynh, "In Vietnam, Many are Mourning the Downfall of an American Idol," *The Diplomat*, 12 November 2020, <https://thediplomat.com/2020/11/in-vietnam-many-are-mourning-the-downfall-of-an-american-idol/> (accessed 6 January 2021); Du Nhat Dang, "Vietnam's Balancing Act Between Biden and Trump," *The Diplomat*, 10 December 2020, <https://thediplomat.com/2020/12/vietnams-balancing-act-between-biden-and-trump/> (accessed 6 January 2021); John Ruwitch, "China's Xi Jinping Congratulates Biden on Election Win, Urges Cooperation," 25 November 2020, *NPR News*, <https://www.npr.org/sections/biden-transition-updates/2020/11/25/938878075/chinas-xi-jinping-congratulates-biden-on-election-win-urges-cooperation> (accessed 6 January 2021).

opinions of friends and family,” along with government filtered political information in media outlets. After four personal background questions, the fifth determined that 75 percent of the respondents were aware of the 2020 U.S. presidential election. Five tables report results on extent of interest in the election, knowledge of the candidates, factors influencing their opinions, sources of information, and which candidate they favored. A final question asked “How do you think China would be affected if Trump wins again, or if Biden wins?” The authors then insightfully assess the results, frequently quoting student responses. Overall, they conclude that “Chinese student perspectives were surprisingly diverse,” but largely negative about Trump and uncertain regarding Biden.

For several years, the *Journal of American-East Asian Relations* has maintained the practice of publishing at least one theme issue annually. The most recent example appeared in the third issue of 2020 titled “The Korean War Prisoners Choosing Neutral Nations: Their Global Odyssey from China and Korea to India and then Latin America” with David C. Chang, associate professor at Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, serving as guest editor. Continuing this tradition, the next iteration of the *JAEAR* will be a theme issue titled “Rethinking Sino-U.S. Rapprochement: Unconventional Forms of Diplomacy.” Alsu Tagirova, research fellow at East China Normal University, will guest edit three articles that the authors presented virtually in June 2020 at the annual conference of the Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations. The editor-in-chief welcomes the receipt of proposals for future theme issues.