Introduction

Small Powers in World Politics: Asian and African Perspectives

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Background

As the guest editors of this special issue on ‘Small Powers in World Politics: Asian and African Perspectives,’ we are pleased to provide a short introduction to facilitate the readers to better understand the general background, rationale and the selected articles published in this special issue of African and Asian Studies.
This special issue is a collection of the finest among conference papers which were originally presented at the international conference on ‘The Small Powers in World Politics: African and Asian Perspectives,’ held in June 2012 in Hong Kong, China. Whilst the conference was supported by a generous conference grant funded by the Department of Applied Social Studies at the City University of Hong Kong, this publication would not be possible without the sponsorship of the Chief Editor of *African & Asian Studies*, Professor Tukumbi Lumumba-Kasongo. Moreover, the success of the conference, the rigorous peer reviews and revisions of the papers can be attributed to the contributions made by the guest editors and to the efforts of the authors of this special issue. We would like to thank all these individuals and institutions for their generous support, hard work and tremendous efforts.

**Rationale**

This special issue is our response to two global trends. First, while it seems clear that U.S. President Barack Obama’s signature ‘pivot to Asia’ policy launched in 2011 is intended to re-assert America as a ‘Pacific power’ in the midst of a rising China not just in the Pacific rim but also in South Asia and Africa and globally, it also seems plausible that the U.S.’ ‘return to Asia’ is a continued effort to contain China’s rise and development since the end of the Cold War. In the midst of the geopolitical, diplomatic and political-economic competition between the U.S. and China, we wish to shed new theoretical and empirical lights on this trend by examining how the relatively small states/powers in Asia and Africa react to this American initiative. By framing these on-going international dynamics into ‘small power politics,’ we wish to highlight the often-neglected empirical realities and versatile dynamics for which African and Asian small states/powers do not only survive, but also thrive in the midst of great power competition.

The second trend is the de-colonial awakening in post-colonial Hong Kong. The fact that the conference and special issue were firstly conceived in Hong Kong is the result of the continued searches for Hong Kong’s post-colonial identity in the midst of China’s rise. As a century-old semi-peripheral hub effectively connecting the metropolitan states in the Global North with the peripheral states in the Global South, the British Crown Colony of Hong Kong’s colonial characteristics are very much embedded in its efficient administrative bureaucracy and neo-liberal economic order which allow (Northern) global capitals to enter into the (Southern) realm of socialist China since the 1980s when Deng Xiaoping adopted the ‘open door’ policy. However, since 1997 when Hong Kong was handed over from Britain to China, the Hong Kong Special