Chen provides few details to support his argument that the United States decided to cross the 38th parallel only after Inchon (p. 168). By contrast, he relies mostly on circumstantial evidence to prove that Mao’s decision to intervene dated from the outbreak of the Korean War (pp. 180–81). Chen portrays China as consistently aggressive, while ignoring the continuity in a U.S. policy that had sought to create an independent and democratic Korea since World War II.

Scholars will find much to disagree with in this study. For instance, Chen claims that the Sino-Soviet split started in the Korean War with Joseph Stalin’s “betrayal” (p. 204) in refusing to commit Soviet air power when China intervened. Before that, Chinese leaders allegedly considered the Soviets “true friends” (p. 70), as Chen dismisses over two decades of serious disagreements as “no more than the ones that would sometimes emerge between brothers” (p. 68). American efforts to drive a wedge between Beijing and Moscow actually hastened signing of the Sino-Soviet Treaty of Friendship and Alliance. According to the author, Mao tacitly approved the attack on South Korea after postponing plans for invading Taiwan until July 1951. Few will disagree that Chinese foreign policy was “most tightly and directly controlled by Mao” (p. 39), but left unexplored is the “key role” (p. 183) of Peng Dehuai, who Mao persuaded to silence critics of intervention.

Chen writes with clarity and directness, although he is often analytically repetitive. There is a detailed index and two maps, one of China and another of Korea. But this study has great value because it makes extensive use of previously classified Chinese government documents. Unfortunately, Chen relies heavily on interviews with participants, particularly Mao’s Russian-language interpreter, Shi Zhe, offering numerous speculative judgments to explain conflicting recollections. But most specialists will agree with Chen’s conclusions that military intervention in the Korean War caused the Chinese to replace dependence on the Soviet Union with “self-reliance” (p. 222), reinforce mass mobilization with the cult of personality for political control, and strive to develop “an atomic bomb and other advanced armaments” (p. 223). Whether “China’s entry into the Korean War was determined by concerns much more complicated than safeguarding the Chinese-Korean border” (p. 4) will remain, however, a matter of debate.

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This is one of the most detailed and comprehensive studies of postwar U.S. relations with Taiwan and Hong Kong. From the vantage point of the post–Cold War era and with the benefit of interviews with officials and scholars from both sides of the Taiwan Strait as well as from Hong Kong, Nancy Tucker is able to provide a more balanced account that avoids the pitfalls of left-versus-right dichotomy. Yet, it remains basically an analysis of the postwar
relations from an American perspective, relying mostly on English-language documentation. Her bibliographical essay, however, is helpful especially to those unfamiliar with the subject.

Although the book covers U.S. relations with Taiwan up to 1992, half of that coverage (93 out of 195 pages) is devoted to the study of the pre-1965 era. Tucker observes that the shock of the North Korean army's intrusion into the South "galvanized American policymakers and completely altered the direction of American China policy" (p. 32), from a policy of disengagement to one of containment. And, Taiwan became part of the anti-Communist military alignment, receiving not only military but also economic aid from the United States.

Tucker makes a special argument that Taiwan, like Israel, was not a mere passive beneficiary in the U.S. containment policy but was a "weak player" that had often managed to influence various groups in the United States in ways "against broader American goals" (p. 4). Even when the legendary "China Lobby" failed to prevent the United States from abandoning Taiwan, Tucker asserts that passage of the Taiwan Relations Act demonstrated Taiwan's ability to continue to manipulate the United States (p. 5). Yet, one can easily counter that the Act was less a manipulation by Taiwan than an American initiative to benefit and protect U.S. economic interests. Within the context of overall U.S. strategy, there is little evidence that "weak players" can really manipulate the "strong play" in areas of crucial importance. At best, it is a matter of different perspectives.

Tucker's discussion of U.S. relations with Hong Kong is much shorter but provides many anecdotal details. During the period of 1945-49, the United States, convinced that the day of great empires must end, supported the return of Hong Kong to China (p. 199). But when the Korean War erupted it changed its position and supported the British claims. Between 1949 and 1984, the United States used Hong Kong as its main listening post to monitor development in mainland China. At the same time, its economic presence in the British colony grew. Since the signing of the 1984 Sino-British Joint Declaration reverting Hong Kong's sovereignty to China in 1997, the United States has taken a pro-active role in helping to reinforce the political confidence of the citizens of Hong Kong.

As for future development, Tucker asserts that the destabilizing issue of "two Chinas" "is certain to arise with renewed force in the not-too-distant future" (p. 239) "Should Taiwan . . . declare independence," she observes, "the United States would have to choose between neutrality or assistance to Taipei in the military struggle almost certain to ensue." However, she admits that a solution to this dilemma is "disturbingly out of reach" (p. 240). Tucker also alludes to the growing importance of Greater China and the complexity and challenge it poses to the United States. Using the issue of curbing most-favored-nation trading benefits for China, she demonstrates that a policy that is meant to sanction mainland China may in reality be more disastrous for Taiwan and Hong Kong because of the growing interdependence among these three economies. She further observes that this is a "moment of history driven by tremendous change and fraught with opportunities and perils" (p. 240).